

ChristReformationChurch

Tillamook, Oregon

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Looking to Christ in a New Year

December 31, 2017

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3

In just a few hours, a new year will begin. New Year's day always reminds us of the relentless marching on of *time*. The years go by quickly and seem to do so faster and faster the older we grow.

One of the benefits of the iphone era is that you can carry with you, for instant viewing, all those old photographs you took years ago, or which were handed down to you in a big box of unorganized black and whites your parents kept in the closet. So they are much more easily viewed. As you look at them, your mind of course goes back to the past and hopefully to many good memories that you are thankful for. (For many people, the memories are anything but good).

We have spoken before about the past and about how we must take care that

we don't live in it in such a way that we forget to keep our eyes fixed ahead and upward on that eternal home we are headed for. The past is passed. Gone, never to return, and longing for it unduly is to try to grasp a vapor. We can never go back there. BUT we can look to the place Christ has for us and know that we will see it.

The Apostle Paul, in his earlier life as Saul of Tarsus, had gained everything a Jew could ask for:

Php 3:4-6 (4) though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: (5) circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; (6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

We are not told anywhere in Scripture what the details of Paul's early life were – his father and mother, if he had siblings, the particular school he went to, friends he had and so on. We get a

morsel from him here:

Act 26:4-5 "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. (5) They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.

And here:

Gal 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. (14) And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Of all this, after being met by Christ, he says:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the**

righteousness from God that depends on faith—

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Php 3:7-11)

Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss....For his sake I have suffered loss of all thing...in order that I may gain Christ. See it? Paul's focus is ahead, not behind.

What gain did you have in your life? What profit? What good things? I can think of some of my own:

- Aunts and uncles, grandparents, parents, who are all gone now
- Favorite places I used to go
- Fun times enjoyed with friends or family that you still remember with fondness
- Faithful pets I used to have
- My children when they were children
- Christmas mornings of long ago

And on and on the list could go. You could make a similar list too.

What does Paul mean when he says that of such things, he has *counted them as loss*? I think he means far

more than simply that they belong to the past and cannot be re-lived. No, he says that he has “suffered the loss of all things.” Suffered. He means that *following Christ has cost him everything.* He would have been disowned by family in that Jewish society. The boy who mom and dad were so proud of as he advanced in his career as a Pharisee – now had gone off the deep end, become a heretic, and was dead to them. All of his classmates and friends. All the privileges that went with his position. All loss. All of it. But, says Paul:

Following Christ has cost me everything I once treasured, but it turns out that in comparison to the treasures gained in Christ, those things were mere rubbish.

For most all of us, you see, the very same thing is true – it certainly is true of every genuine Christian. Because *as pleasant as those old memories are that sweep over me sometimes when I am looking at those old photos, I am reminded that back in those days I did not know Christ. I lived a life of self-righteousness, in a mindset of worldly focus, headed for eternal loss.* And even AFTER I came to know Christ, back in those early years I did not see Him as clearly as I do now, I still had much more of my sinful flesh to die to than I do now. The same is true of you if you know Christ. In other words, all

that was “gain” to me back then was in reality “loss.” It was, as Paul says, “rubbish.” Knowing Christ is real treasure of “surpassing worth.”

And so it turns out that the life we lived before we knew Christ was not so wonderful as those old pictures might make it seem. I look at old pictures of myself and I don’t find them appealing because I remember who and what I was then. *And I would never want to go back there.* I never want to be who I was then. I never want to think the things I thought back then. I count those things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ my Lord, which is of far surpassing worth. *Even the best of times past are not worth going back to even if we could. Because even the Christian will find, if he is honest, that in the past he looked more to a righteousness of his own rather than to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.*

When we come to know Christ, we die to the person we once were.

That is why Jesus announced:

Mat 10:37-39 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it,

and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

That is what Paul is telling us here. *That he has lost his life for the sake of Christ and as a result, he has found his true life.*

And now Paul gets to the real core of it-

not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

This is the treasure. Paul puts things in eternal perspective for us here. The fact is that in the past, before, back “then,” the “righteousness” we possessed was rubbish. And thus our whole life was rubbish, no matter how valuable it outwardly appeared to be. That career. That physical health and strength. That popularity. It was all bound up in a life that was lived apart from Christ, and therefore without true value, because *it was based on a counterfeit righteousness.*

The Counterfeit

Let’s illustrate. Think of a \$100 bill. Or even a whole stack of \$100 bills. There it is. What you could do with that much money! You could pay off your mortgage, pay off other debts,

build a new house in a place you always wanted to live...and you could even do lots of “good” things with it like helping your children and your friends, helping people in genuine need, and so on.

But then, what if it turned out that *the entire pile of bills consisted of counterfeit \$100 notes?* What then? It would have no value at all and could do no good at all.

Paul is telling us that his life before he knew Christ was just like that pile of counterfeit bills. It all looked like treasure, but it was worthless. In contrast, what he found when he was found by Christ is that he lost the rubbish and gained a pile of \$1000 bills, and more!

And that is precisely what is true of us, of every real Christian. We once lived in and cherished a righteousness of our own that comes from the law. Talk to anyone who does not know Christ. Whether they be religious or totally pagan. You will find at the center and root of their mentality that they embrace this man-made, and therefore counterfeit, righteousness.

Let’s think this through carefully. Righteousness. What is that? Righteousness is that quality of being “right” in God’s judgment. By God’s measure, not our own. Man’s problem,

due to his sin (which is also called “unrighteousness”) is that he is not right in God’s judgment. But man insists that he is, or that even his unrighteousness can be corrected by himself. By his own doings. By his own “works.” This lie is at the base of every single false religion in the world. It began in Eden:

Gen 3:4-5 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. (5) For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

This was the devil’s lie and it remains his lie today. “You can make yourself like God.” That is what was driving Paul’s entire life before he was met by Christ. He was, by his own religious doings and not-doings, making himself right with God, acceptable to God, gaining merit before God so that God would have to enter a verdict of “justified” on the day of Judgment. He was pursuing a righteousness of his own that was from the law. *And it was worthless. Counterfeit.* Even though he treasured it above all things in those days. You see then why Paul used a strong word to describe it. *Rubbish.*

6.225 σκύβαλον, ου η: worthless or unwanted material that is rejected and normally thrown out - 'rubbish, litter, trash.' και ηγοῦμαι σκύβαλα ἵνα

Χριστὸν κερδήσω 'I consider it all rubbish in order that I may gain Christ' Php 3.8.

Think of the garbage can in your kitchen. It builds up as you throw all kinds of rejected stuff into it. Then it starts to stink until you have to haul it outside to the big trash can, take off the lid, get hit with a blast of stench, and throw it in. Then you go back inside, put a new liner in the can, and start filling it all over again.

That is the life lived without Christ. That is what it looks like to pursue righteousness without Christ through your own works. It stinks. It is worthless. It can never, ever make a person right with God and He will never pronounce such a person *justified.*

The Real Righteousness

not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

In contrast to the counterfeit, Paul points us to the real treasure. THIS is what we want to keep our eyes set upon this new year. Notice Paul’s forward emphasis in this:

Php 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (13) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is justified before God through faith in Christ. And yet, he presses ahead, looking at what is coming, knowing he is headed for “the prize” that is his and which is every Christian’s. The New Earth. Being with Christ. The resurrection. All of it!

These are excellent verses for us to think often about, and I use them to remind myself to stop dwelling on the past, stop craving what I can never have again, stop crying over spilt rubbish, and strain forward to what lies ahead!

Let’s talk a bit more about this righteousness that is genuine:

...which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Here is the very heart of the gospel, and these few words expose every heresy put to us. The ONLY way to be

justified before God and by God *comes to us through faith in Christ. By this faith, the perfect life and perfect atonement of Christ is made to be ours. Credited to our account. Imputed to us.*

And notice carefully, *this righteousness which is the only righteousness God accepts, is from God, not from man.* FROM God. That is what Paul meant when he wrote:

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Free gift. A righteousness not earned by us and therefore created by us, but a righteousness which is from God, dispensed as a gift, through faith.

Php 3:8-11 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

(9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

(10) that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may

share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

(11) that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Christ you see. Christ is everything. Christ is our treasure in 2018. By faith alone we are joined to Christ, and everything He is becomes ours. In Him, WE –

- Are righteous and therefore justified
- Know Him
- Have the power of His resurrection in us by His Spirit, new creations with new life
- Benefit from His sufferings which become ours sufferings
- Die to ourselves and grow increasingly like Christ
- One day will be raised

And that is the proper direction to set our thoughts upon this new year, realizing that perhaps this year will be the one in which Christ comes for us.