

The Goal of Life: Philippians 4b. – 14

- 4b. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:
5. circumcised the eighth day, of the nation 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 the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.
7. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
8. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss, of all things, and count them but rubbish, so that I may gain Christ,
9. and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,
10. that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
11. in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.
12. Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Jesus Christ.
13. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*; forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,
14. I press on toward the goal for one prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

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May my lips speak of the works of God and may our hearts be opened to the love of the Holy Spirit and the deliverance of Jesus Christ.

A M E N . . .

H O M I L Y

2 October 2005

In to-day's lesson which I have just read, Paul is telling the Philippians how successful and orthodox his life was, before he became Christ's apostle: By society's standards his credentials were impeccable: both by faith and birth. Paul was a Jew of the 12th tribe, that of Benjamin, whom Moses called, ". . . the beloved of the LORD . . . who shields him all the day . . . "1.

He was a Pharisee, the Jewish denomination whose scribes and scholars stressed devotion of the heart in the worship of God, and taught that the individual had an obligation to go beyond the letter of the law.

Paul was a loyal Roman citizen and civil servant.

¹ Deuteronomy 33:12

Paul was a successful man, beneficiary of the earthly rewards and recognition.

Yet in this letter that I have just read, Paul reminds his readers that all that means NOTHING.

Of all the Apostles, Paul was the most unusual: called to serve not during Christ's lifetime, but in a most dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus when he was famously thrown from his donkey and blinded. This unique conversion was life changing.

No longer could he serve his Roman masters.

No longer could he accept the animosity of the rabbinical leadership to the followers of Christ.

No longer could he collect taxes to support those who had crucified his Lord.

However, this most famous of the writers of the Bible, was never really accepted by many followers of the risen Lord.

WHY? . . . because Paul had persecuted them. Paul had supported those who stoned the first martyr, Stephen. But even as Stephen died, he prayed that his worst enemies would know forgiveness in Christ.

And that is what happened most clearly in Paul's conversion.

Throughout Paul's life he remained in conflict with the other apostles . . . a loner . . . pitted against Peter and the other leaders of the church in Jerusalem² . . . but all the time relentlessly telling and

² Stephen Reynolds, compiler, For All the Saints, Prayers and Readings for Saints' Days, (ABC, 1994) Toronto, p.208

retelling the story of Christ and the promise of salvation.

To offset his bad reputation, Paul frequently presented his credentials in his writings. In his Epistle to the Romans he presents his beliefs to demonstrate his energy and orthodoxy. In to-day's letter, Paul presents his professional and family connections . . . showing his worldly status and the success that he **knew** . . . before he **knew** Christ.

But after he knew Christ, his world had changed forever.

It was a new world.

A world in which nothing that came before meant anything. Because Christ had chosen him and he had

accepted Christ's call. All that went before was past.

All that went before had been forgiven.

Throughout Paul's life others judged him by his past. But Paul knew that Christ judged him by his faithfulness, his loyalty to the one God.

As Paul taught us, by his own example . . .

Where we come from DOES NOT matter.

What we have done in the past DOES NOT matter.

When we commit . . . ourselves and our lives, to follow Jesus, THAT IS ALL THAT MATTERS.

We do not become perfect. Others do not have their memories of our past transgressions wiped away. In this life, we may continue to pay for the errors of our past . . . but our future is secure.

WHY? Because heaven's gates are always open for those who commit themselves to Jesus. Even though we fall from the path . . . even though we fail in our commitment . . . or even though we offend against God's laws: IF, we REALLY mean it, when we search our hearts and say each Sunday morning . . . "we do heartily repent and are truly sorry for these our misdoings . . . ".

God's response is to give us constant and growing enlightenment, like Paul, as we travel on our own road to Damascus.

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