

**August 30, 2009**  
**Pentecost 13**  
**Philippians Sermon Series**

*“Rejoice in the Lord and His Righteousness”*

**PHILIPPIANS 3:1-9**

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*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup> Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

About a week ago a man from North Carolina, a retired government worker, won a lottery worth 260 million dollars. He did not have much to say about his winning ticket except that he was absolutely sure it would not change his life. Have you ever heard that before? Take an inventory of people who win large sums of money in a lottery and you will find most of them wish they had never seen the money because of all the changes and complications and problems that came into their lives.

Today the Apostle Paul points us to a joy that can never be taken away from us, that is always the same, whether we are rich or poor. He tells us to rejoice in the Lord. Then he draws our attention to the righteousness we have in Jesus our Savior. You may lose your job, you may get bad report from the doctor, you may find yourself facing a low time in your life, people may let you down and disappoint you, but the righteousness you have in Jesus your Savior is always the same. It never changes. It is your pure source of our joy. It is your rock solid assurance that your God dearly loves you and cares about you.

**Watch out for those who want to rob you of your gift of righteousness**

Paul feels compelled by love to warn his dear Christian friends in Philippi that people will try to take this gift of righteousness away from them. “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.” In the original Greek language Paul actually uses the word “watch out” three times. “Watch out for the dogs!” “Watch out for those who do evil!” “Watch out for the mutilators of the flesh!”

"Watch out for the dogs!" The word for dogs is the word used to describe the street dogs that roamed the streets of ancient cities in packs, ate the garbage and killed other animals, and threatened people. Did you hear about the elderly man and his wife from Georgia who were attacked and killed by a pack of wild dogs as they were walking? I see an elderly man walking in our neighborhood and he always carries a stick with him. I wonder why he carries that stick. Paul describes these people as evil doers. He describes them as mutilators of the flesh, people who will hack you to pieces with their false teaching. What is worse robbing banks, and killing people, or teaching them they need to add their own good works to what Christ has done so they can be sure their sins are forgiven?

Paul tells these dear Christians they have this gift of righteousness and they should not let anyone take it from them. "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—" It seems that where ever Paul went teaching people that we are saved by Christ alone, religious fanatics would try to tell Gentile Christians they had to be circumcised or follow certain Old Testament rules to be a true believer and to be loved by God. Paul says, "We are the circumcision." "The Lord has cut into our hearts and changed us. He has led us to worship in the Spirit and to glory in Christ and to put no confidence in our ability to save ourselves."

Let me try to illustrate this with some water bottles. Imagine for a moment that I filled this water bottle with water from an open sewer and I live my life every day thinking it is the best water in the world, but I cannot understand why I am sick all the time. That is how I am born into the world, thinking that the good I do in life will someone be able to save me on judgment day by outweighing the bad I have done. Then someone teaches me the truth about my life. I am led to realize all my goodness is worthless in the eyes of God and that it will fail me on judgment day. Someone tells me about Jesus, the water of life. I find out I am saved entirely by his righteousness, his perfect life, his perfect sacrifice for my sin, and his resurrection from the dead. (Show bottle of pure water) It is the greatest joy that could ever come into our lives. Then another person says that it is not good enough to believe in Jesus and his righteousness. You must add your own righteousness to what Jesus has done. What happens to Jesus' pure righteousness? It is then polluted and destroyed. (Pour bad water into good)

Did you hear about the 15 year old boy who dug a deep hole along the beach on the East Coast? The hole collapsed on him and the sand completely covered him. His father frantically tried to dig the sand with his hand, and the first thing his hands touched were his son's face. He was still alive. Emergency rescue teams gave him oxygen, because the weight of sand kept him from breathing. They dug frantically for an hour and then pulled him free. Can you imagine the father telling his son: "That was too easy for you? We are going to bury you again and this time you need to do more to rescue yourself."

There was fourteen year old girl who was invited to go to a Christian camp at Hume Lake. The girls in her cabin insisted she was not a Christian because did not have a religious experience where she stood up in the congregation and accepted Christ into her heart. She insisted she believed in Jesus, even quoted from John 3:16, but to no avail. Those girls were like vicious dogs surrounding her in the cabin. They wept and cried for her as they insisted she had to do more than just believe in Jesus for her salvation.

Paul knew from first hand experience what it was like to put confidence in the flesh, or his

own attempts to try to save himself. "...though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. If ever there was a man who had a resume of religious zeal it was the Apostle Paul. His Jewish bloodline was pure. He knew the Old Testament backwards and forwards. He kept the laws of the religious fanatics meticulously. He even studied under the great rabbi Gamaliel. He persecuted Christians. It was all done by Paul to save himself and make himself acceptable to God

We once had a lady sing here in this church who grew up in Spain and was quite well known for her beautiful singing voice. Then she met a man from the US, was married, and joined the Lutheran church. She told the story about growing up believing that singing in churches and singing religious songs for people would save her. She thought she had a beautiful resume that would certainly guarantee her a place in heaven. Her dear mother even told that she was so good that someday she would go to heaven with her shoes on. Then she said she came to understand how all of her righteousness was worthless in God's sight and she needed the gift of Jesus' righteousness to be saved. Her whole was changed when she came to see that she was saved by grace, grace alone, faith in Christ and not in herself.

### **Treasure the righteousness you have in Christ**

To help us treasure this righteousness we have in Christ, Paul writes about throwing out the beautiful resume of his religious works and totally destroying it. He writes, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Let's go back to that man who won the lottery. See him standing in front of the camera, tearing up the 260 million dollar lottery ticket, and then burning it. Paul did the same thing with all the religious zeal and religious works he had accumulated in his lifetime. He said he considered them as loss. That word for loss is a word used in the book of Acts for describing how a ship is sunk and lost. He came to believe all his religious assets were totally worthless. I am holding in my hand a bag full of money. Yet the money is worthless. It won't buy you a package of gum. It is paper money from Monopoly. All our personal works are worthless in God's sight. We can tear them up and throw them away.

Paul gets rather graphic at describing how worthless these works are compared to knowing Christ. "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ." Paul considers them as rubbish. The Greek word for this is "skubala." The KJV translates this with the word "dung." The prophet Isaiah says that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the sight of God. In Romans 3 Paul writes about the futility of putting any trust in our righteousness with these words, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law, rather through the law we become conscious of sin."

Look into yourself and you will see nothing that can save you. Look into Christ and you will see everything you need to be saved. "And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." Paul wants to be found not trusting

in his righteousness but trusting instead in Christ and his righteousness. On judgment day the Lord will find people, where ever they are. You cannot try to hide under the bushes as Adam and Eve did or to sew fig leaves for a covering as they did. "It is appointed unto man once to die and then comes the judgment." When God finds you, how do you want him to find you? Do you want him to find you trusting in the rags of your unrighteousness? No, you want to be found and clothed and covered with Jesus' righteousness.

When Susan's mother was dying from cancer, we gathered around her bed shortly before she passed away, and sang to her the hymn that we just sang for our opening of worship, "Jesus Your blood and Righteousness." Her eyes were closed as we sang four verses, but then she opened them and said, "Isn't there one more verse." We sang on:

*"Jesus, be worshiped endlessly!*

*Your boundless mercy has for me,*

*For me and all your hands have made,*

*An everlasting ransom paid."*

Rejoice in the Lord and his righteousness, not just when death comes, but when you face the challenges of life as you are doing again this week. Amen.