

March 17, 2013
Lent 5

“Throwing Out the Trash and Pressing On”

PHILIPPIANS 3:8-14

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 ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Every Wednesday morning I wheel out the trash container and place it on the edge of the sidewalk in front of our home. When I come home for lunch the trash container is empty. One day the trash truck came when I was home for lunch. I watched as the truck stopped, reached out its strong mechanical arms, lifted the container and dumped its smelly contents into its cavern with other smelly trash. The Degner trash was on its way to the land fill.

The Apostle Paul uses the illustration of garbage or trash as he tells us how his former trust in his own righteousness for salvation was like rubbish compared to the blessing of being saved by Christ and his righteousness. He says, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord....I consider them rubbish."

I am holding in my hand a container used to store food in the refrigerator. Imagine that this container has some old beans that have been in the back of the refrigerator for several months. When you open the container the most awful smell comes to you. The Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see how nasty it is to believe you can be saved by your own righteousness. The Holy Spirit also leads you to believe you are saved by a righteousness that is yours as a free gift through Christ. With this blessing of Christ's righteousness comes a zeal to press on and live your life for Christ. Today we want to speak to you about throwing out the trash and pressing on to live for Christ and his glory.

Throwing out the trash

In this great letter to the Philippians Paul is almost beside himself with joy as he writes the blessing of being saved by Christ's righteousness instead of trying to achieve acceptance by God with his own righteousness. "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 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.”

Have you ever lost something? Your keys, your wallet, or precious money you put into a bad investment? There are losses that are bad for us, but also losses that can be good for us. If the doctor can remove a cancerous tumor and you are declared cancer free that is a loss that becomes a huge blessing. When the Lord leads you to lose all hope in yourself for eternal life with God that loss becomes the greatest blessing you can ever have in your life.

Satan will do everything in his power to trick people into thinking it is not enough to have Christ and his righteousness for their salvation. He will raise up leaders in the church who say that you need to add something to what Christ has done. Earlier in this chapter Paul warns about false teachers whom he calls dogs. He uses the word for dirty and vicious street dogs that roam the streets and attack people. He recalls how he was once one of these people who put his confidence in his flesh. He relied on what he could produce in his flesh or his life to make himself acceptable to God. He took pride in being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, even a persecutor of Christians. All of these things he once tried to do in the flesh to make himself worthy he calls trash or rubbish.

God’s Word leads you to see that even your best attempts at trying to please God are really rubbish in his eyes because they are tainted with sin. The human heart is very twisted and evil as we are told in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” The human heart can lead you to justify sin in your life. It can also lead you to think you can justify yourself before God by trying to improve your life and do better in the future. It is rubbish to live with his false hope that efforts at improving myself in the future will somehow compensate for the bad I have done in the past. The Lord says that he searches the heart. If he finds any evil, he must by his very nature as God punish that sin with eternal death and punishment.

Are you sad when the trash man comes and hauls your trash away? No you are happy! Are you sad when God’s Word takes from you all hope of trusting in yourself to be righteous before God? No, you are happy because that was a false hope that would lead you to eternal death and punishment. With Paul you joyfully say, “I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish 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 is through faith in Christ.”

Without Christ you had nothing in your account. With Christ you now have his righteousness in your account that allows you to be pure and holy and perfect before God.

Paul wants to be found in Christ not having a righteousness of his own but that which comes from Christ. The prophet Isaiah tells us that we can dance around for joy because Jesus covers us with his righteousness. “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.” In the Revelation John sees the saints of God standing around the throne with white robes and palm branches in their hands. He asks who they are. The

answer is given, "These are they who have come out of great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Galatians 3 says, "You are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ."

If the Lord returns this week on clouds of glory are you ready to meet him? Are you ready to be found in him not having a righteousness that comes through the law but the righteousness that is yours in Christ? Throw out the trash. Get rid of all hope in yourself. Join with Paul in saying, "I want to be found in Christ and in his righteousness."

If the Lord does not return this week to take you home, then dear Christian we have a race to run with Christ not to earn his righteousness but because his righteousness was given to us a free gift.

This past week someone sent me an e-mail referencing an article from Forbes magazine with the title, "The But You Are Free Effect." The article began by saying "When you ask someone to do something be sure to include the statement that they are free to choose to do it or not." Marketing psychologists say such a statement produces better results. The freedom we have in Christ and his righteousness is at the highest level. It creates in us a tremendous desire and yearning to do our best for Jesus not to be saved, but because we already are saved.

Pressing on

Paul speaks for all of us when he says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, become like him in his death and so, somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead." We want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. We want to live up to what the resurrection of Jesus means for us. When we see the nail prints in the hands of Jesus that assure us of our forgiveness we want to do everything possible to glorify Christ for what he has done for us. I want to attain to the resurrection. I want the resurrection to pump strength through my daily life, just as the heart pumps blood to the cells of my body. I want to be like Jesus in his death. I want to carry a cross out of love for him as I die to myself and live for him. 100,000 Christians have left Egypt to escape the rising power of Muslim radicals. If the time comes for me to be persecuted, then I want to share in Christ and his suffering.

It will always be a struggle to live for Christ even as we rejoice minute by minute in his righteousness that covers us. "Not that I have already obtained all of this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." The Greek word used here means to grab on to something strongly. Jesus took hold of you. He tells us in John 15, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." He took hold of us by his grace. He rescued us from something very awful for something very special. He rescued us and took hold of us for the high honor and privilege of living for him before he calls us home. He gives us the strength to press on.

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press for the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ." Heaven is already yours. Your salvation

is complete. But the work of living for Christ is not yet complete. There is so much to do. Think of all the prayers you have not yet prayed, the people that need your witness to your faith, the example you need to be at your job, the strengthening you need each day from God's Word. We forget what is behind. The past is forgiven. The future is guaranteed. The present is exciting. We feel the rush of adrenalin. The endorphins are kicking in. The sweat is pouring down the face. You can make it to the prize. You can make it to the next marker post. One more mile. One more day to live for Jesus. Your lungs breathe in the free air of eternal life in heaven.

In the 1976 Olympics in Los Angeles an athlete by the name of Bruce Jenner was competing in the Decathlon. He was expected to win, but no one every thought after nine events he had already accumulated enough points to win the gold. All he had to do was trot around the track for the final 800 meter race and he would easily win. Instead he ran the best 800 race of his life. He ran the race with a smiling face. The gold was his.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the final victory is already yours. You have trashed all hope in your righteousness. Your confidence is now in Christ and his righteousness. Press on this week to glorify your Savior who has done everything necessary to bring you to glory. Amen.