

Philippians 3:8-14

April 5, 2009 – PALM SUNDAY

Press on Toward the Goal† **Garbage out (vv.8,9)**† **Glory in (vv.10-14)**

In the name of Jesus, King of all Creation, our Savior and our Friend, dearly redeemed disciples:

Was Paul there in Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, studying under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel? (Cf. Acts 22:3) Or did he only hear about it later? Back then they called him Saul of Tarsus. And Saul had a serious problem with that Rabbi from Nazareth known as Jesus, whom some dared to call Christ, or Messiah. If Saul had been there, he would have totally agreed with *some of the Pharisees in the crowd [who] said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”* (Luke 19:39 NIV)

Saul still has plenty of supporters. In our society mention any other religion, it’s okay. But some people get angry if you say, “Jesus Christ.” Some scholars are so offended by that Name that they changed the designations B.C. and A.D. to B.C.E. and C.E. to mean “Before the Common Era” and “Common Era.” They will not say, “Before Christ,” or “Anno Domine,” “In the year of our Lord.” Somehow they miss the fact that all of history is still revolving around His story of life and death and resurrection. Fortunately, the Triune God is very determined. Many Jewish Pharisees did repent and turn to Jesus as Lord and Christ. And nearly thirty years later for Saul? It’s amazing how a few decades of God’s Word in extreme suffering can raise to life a new man Paul to **Press on Toward the Goal**.

† **Garbage out (vv.8,9)**

By the time Paul is writing to his dear Philippians Christians, he’s probably under house arrest in his first Roman imprisonment. He has a few things to say about his old way of life under Judaism. Looking back on his once self-righteous persecution of Christians, you get the impression Paul wishes he had a front end loader to haul it all away. You’d have to walk behind a huge elephant to get the full scope of what he’s saying here. Our English wants to sanitize it. Paul wants us to smell it.

He used to be so proud of himself. But now Paul says in the verse just before our text: *“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”* There’s a new attitude! But Paul goes on: *“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....”* More accurately, “I have a whole different ruling on my old way of life. It’s a dirty heap of dung.” Paul took his old life and scooped it up for the **Garbage** dump.

What does this mean for us, this **Garbage out**? Paul is talking about the way you and I look down on others for not being as good as we are. Some do it inside the church, others from the outside. You know the old saying, “If you think the church is too full of hypocrites, don’t worry. There’s always room for one more.” It’s not that any of us want it that way, but the Good Book says, *“Let God be true, and every man a liar....As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’”* (Romans 3:4,10-12 NIV) If we really believed that we would argue less and listen more. We would admit that our attitude stinks like Saul’s in his younger days. There really is no hiding under the floodlights of God’s law – self-righteous pride.

That’s where most of the world’s religions and many of the radio preachers lead you and leave you: “Amen – end of sermon.” But not this sermon. Paul will not drop us in hopeless depression. We’ll let the dear Holy Spirit finish with what He inspired Paul to write: *“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—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”*

When he throws his work-righteous **Garbage out**, Paul wants to take in *“the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”* That’s the other righteousness. Not what you do or don’t do, it’s what Christ did. Christ Jesus lived a holy life on this sin cursed earth with all the difficult temptations young people face today. Don’t say that because Jesus never raised a family or struggled through old age that He doesn’t understand. *“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”* (Hebrews 2:18 NIV) The way He helps is not only to show us our sin in the light of God’s law, but best of all, He brings Good News as He spoke to that paralyzed man on his mat, *“Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven.”* (Matthew 9:2 TPA) So much good from God in Christ. Time for **Garbage out** and ...

✠ **Glory in (vv.10-14)**

Some people try to keep their Savior at arm’s length. They want to be Christians, but they don’t want too many people to know, or at least not to think about it much. They go to church because it makes them feel good, but it really doesn’t make a dent on their way of life or the way they treat people. It was just the opposite with Paul. He says, *“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, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”* Paul wants that up-close-and-personal *knowledge of experience* that dies with Christ every day and rises with Him daily too. That means saying, “No!” to the sinful desires of your heart, and, “Yes!” only to what pleases God. Try it; it feels like dying. But in Christ it’s all about living your Baptism that drowns the old sinful nature and refreshes the new nature to love God and serve your fellow man. But it’s not a matter of mind control. Our minds and hearts are set free by the powerful new life message of Christ’s resurrection.

What Paul says about *“sharing in his sufferings”* would be very meaningful to veteran legionnaires of the Roman Empire who settled in Philippi. They knew all about the shared suffering on long marches into battle to achieve victory together. Veterans of our own armed forces speak of a camaraderie which most of us will never know by experience except in a much tinier way from athletic teams suffering all the way to a tough championship. But our best earthly victories can never really touch the life and death struggle for eternal souls that we share with Christ as we daily pick up our cross and follow Him. He already won the victory over sin, death and hell by His death and resurrection. So our daily battles are like mop-up skirmishes. But that only makes the triumph all the sweeter to know by experience this fellowship of suffering with Christ for the Gospel – under the cross here...to glory there.

Paul has a clear focus from imprisonment for Christ: *“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. 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 on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* See how he speaks of runners in a race?

Freshman year in high school one of my classmates was much faster than the rest of us. But as I watched from the cloud of dust behind him, I noticed he flailed a lot when he ran. Some body parts were headed one direction, some another. He also made lots of noise when he ran. Clomping feet waste energy. Paul’s athletic clarity in passages like this convinced me that anyone could be a better runner with quiet disciplined running that would waste no energy, but aim everything at the finish line. It wasn’t long before our classmate was flailing away behind the rest of us.

Paul did not flail. He did not clomp. Christ was His life. Paul says, “He reached down and took hold of me, calling me heavenward through the Good News that even my wretched sins are all forgiven! I want nothing more than to take hold of Him.” Christ rode humbly into Jerusalem as our Palm Sunday King to suffer and die for all. *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:2 NIV) Dear friends, this victorious life transcends everything here. The past is gone. Your sins are all forgiven. **Press on to Glory** in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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