

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

I CONSIDER, I WANT TO KNOW, I PRESS ON

Philippians 3:7-16

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Today's message has three points:

- Paul considered his life before Christ as mere garbage.
- Paul wanted to know the power of the resurrection.
- Paul pressed on toward the goal.

Last week, the message in this series from the book of Philippians was about the virtues of Timothy and Epaphroditus and the vices of the Judaizers, those who believed that salvation in Jesus alone was not good enough but that one had to also follow the Old Testament law. Paul wrote that if anyone could put confidence in the flesh -- and by that he meant pride for following the works required of the Old Testament law -- it was him, because he had been a most righteous person by the standards of the law. But when he met Christ, he realized that Christ and the power of the resurrection was all he needed. Then Paul set out to share this new Gospel with the world.

## **PAUL CONSIDERED HIS LIFE BEFORE CHRIST AS MERE GARBAGE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 3:7-9

*But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, 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 on the basis of faith.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul had many gains in his life before Christ. He was held in high regard by the Jewish people and it appears that he was well off. He certainly

didn't have any financial concerns that we know of. But now, none of that mattered to him.

We are going to have a little exercise. I want to suggest that you do a couple of things here. In verses 7 and 8, we are going to circle and underline some words and phrases so you'll see the flow of his reasoning. First, in verse 7, circle *loss*. Verse 8: *loss, lost, garbage*. Now, in verse 7, underline *for the sake of Christ*. In verse 8, underline *because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. In the next sentence, underline *that I may gain Christ*.

Paul penned a simple contrast, a trade off, if you will, between his life before Christ and his life after Christ. What exactly he gave up, we can only speculate: prestige, money, position, power, the accolades of people. These are things that people spend their whole lives working for – in a manner of speaking, he climbed the religious company ladder quite well. Then something happened. The Damascus Road experience turned Paul's world upside down.

Let's go to Acts 9 and take another look at the experience that changes Paul's life forever.

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 9:1-31

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.<sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

<sup>5</sup> *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

*"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.<sup>6</sup> "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

<sup>7</sup> *The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.<sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.<sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

<sup>10</sup> *In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”*

*“Yes, Lord,” he answered.*

<sup>11</sup> *The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”*

<sup>13</sup> *“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”*

<sup>15</sup> *But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”*

<sup>17</sup> *Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.*

*Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

<sup>23</sup> *After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, <sup>24</sup> but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. <sup>25</sup> But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.*

<sup>26</sup> *When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and*

*brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup> He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

*<sup>31</sup> Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.*

Paul's experience was so profound and his new life in Christ was so meaningful that he considered his previous life garbage.

**APPLICATION:** Consider the things you are working for today. What are they? We are living in an incredible economic time in our country. If you want a better job, it's highly likely you can get one. If you want better benefits, it's highly likely you can get them. If you want to take out a loan to buy a newer car or a bigger house, in today's economy you can probably do it. Now imagine being almost there, or let's say you are already there, you've worked all your life and now have whatever things you wanted as well as the position you've worked for. Then something happens – not a tragedy but something really good – and all of a sudden, those things don't matter anymore. That's what happened to Paul.

**APPLICATION:** I want to point out that we can't all live like Paul. Paul lived a nomadic lifestyle, going from place to place, living with different people or in the wilderness. He didn't have a family to take care of, and he didn't have other responsibilities. What we can learn from Paul, however, is that no matter what comes our way, we must maintain the bearing that the only thing with any real value is Christ. Everything else we can count as loss in comparison.

## **PAUL WANTED TO KNOW THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION**

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 3:10-11

*I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul wasn't satisfied with just knowing about Christ. He wasn't satisfied with merely knowing the historical Jesus that lived on this earth. He wanted to know the power of his resurrection, and he knew the only way he could do that was to participate in his sufferings. He knew that ultimately the only way he could truly experience the power of the resurrection is to die himself and to live after he had died.

I'm afraid most people only want to know a little bit about Christ, just enough to get by, just enough to appear spiritual, just enough --- look out now --- to get into heaven.

Paul wasn't satisfied with trivial knowledge. When Paul said he wanted to know -- he used the word γινῶναι (gnōnai), the root word of which is γινώσκω (ginóskó) which means "to come to know through personal experience." He wanted to experience Jesus, the risen Lord. He didn't just want to know about him!

**ILLUSTRATION:** Children learn objectively. They learn facts. A bright child will say the letters of the alphabet and proudly count numbers. Eventually they'll be able to rattle off the names of continents and states and capitals. They'll tell you how many planets are in the solar system. A typical child will be able to state objective facts about dozens of topics. Young people are like sponges, soaking in facts. But objective learning, the memorization of facts, is just the beginning. As they get older, they'll be challenged to do something with those facts—interpretation, analysis, application and so on. Eventually, they'll be attracted to particular subjects and will focus their life's career on those subjects.

**APPLICATION:** Let's take this model of learning and look at it from the perspective of knowing Christ. The average person knows very little about him, so let's take it up a notch, to the person who knows a little more than the average person. Let's look at the person learning about this man named Jesus for the first time. Entry level facts would be about the birth of Jesus, the shepherds, the wise men, and so on. A bit above entry-level facts would be knowledge of the crucifixion and the resurrection. Even a bit higher would be learning about the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, his calling of the disciples, and his ministry on this earth.

For the maturing believer, somewhere in the midst of learning about objective facts, a deeper understanding of Jesus should begin. It starts with an understanding of the

redemptive mission of Jesus, the Messiah who came to save us from our sins. But even then, it shouldn't stop there. We should learn about the way Jesus related to the government, the way Jesus related to women and all kinds of different people. The knowledge that Paul wrote about... the deeper knowledge that helps us better know, understand, and experience... this is the knowledge we should take on. When Paul says he wanted to know Christ, what he means by "Christ" is the "risen Lord". He wanted to know the power of the resurrection.

**APPLICATION:** Here's the simplest way I can say it: Accurate facts are a necessary foundation, but to really know Christ as Paul talks about, you must move beyond mere facts. The way Paul describes it in other scriptures is "to put on Christ."

## **PAUL PRESSED ON TOWARD THE GOAL**

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 3:12-14

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, 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, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul was humble enough to admit that he knew that he had not completed everything the Lord wanted him to complete. His language states he knew it wasn't possible for him to fully realize everything the Lord had for him in this life.

Paul's writing here warns against the threat of false perfection, as one author puts it.

*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.* Paul writes in 2 Corinthians about his thorn in the flesh. It was something that nagged him and held him back at times, but he never tells us what it is. I've heard various speculations on this, including Paul's bad eyesight which he mentions.

I think Paul's thorn in the flesh was his past. Don't we all wish we could go back and undo something? Paul, the incredible person that he was, was once a persecutor of Christians. He was there while Stephen was stoned in Acts chapter 7.

I believe Paul's past troubled him more than poor eyesight. Many times, Paul talks about putting away the past. But he doesn't dwell on his past, does he? No. He forgets what is behind and strains toward what is ahead.

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 3:15-16

*All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

Good advice from Paul to all Christians everywhere. We should maintain Paul's perspective of things. "Let us live up to what we have already attained."

What had the believers in Philippi attained? What have we attained?

1. We have been saved so let's live up to the spiritual goals and disciplines that come with that. Let's stay confessed up; let's stay at peace with others.
2. We have left our past lifestyles behind so let's not go back to them. Have you ever wondered what your life would be like if you had never been saved? If you didn't know scripture? If you had never prayed or sensed God's presence in your life?

Paul was saying, we have come from all these varied backgrounds, let's leave all of that behind and remember that Christ is all that matters.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA