

Philippians 3:8-14

Those of you who have small children are keenly aware of the question, “Why?” Little children are **continually** asking, “**Why** does this do what it does? - **Why** did that happen? - **Why** does the sun shine? - **Why** are there stars? - **Why** can’t I have a little brother? - Or just plain, **Why**?” These children are searching for **information** - information which they can soak up like **sponges**, retain in their **memories**, and then **use** later on in the course of their lives. They probably don’t **understand** why they ask so many questions, but the **fact** is that they are always asking **why** because they **know** so **little**. And the quickest and easiest way to find things out, is to ask a **question**. **Children Want To Know.**

Many of you have probably also read **stories** about young men and women who had been **adopted** as babies. When they learned that they had been adopted, they started out on a **quest** to **find** their biological parents. They felt there was a **need** to learn about their biological background, as a **supplement** to the life and upbringing which they had received from their **adoptive** parents. Once again, **Children Want To Know.**

The Apostle Paul **also** had questions - but **his** questions delved into a much **deeper** realm of life - the **spiritual** realm. In our text we hear Paul cry out, “*I want to know **Christ**, and the power of His **resurrection**, and the fellowship of sharing in His **sufferings**.*” **Those** are the things which **Paul**, as a child of **God**, wanted to know. They are things which **we** want to know as well, and perhaps we’ll be able to understand them a little better after we consider the thoughts found in today’s text.

As we **begin** Paul wrote, “*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**.*” Paul’s desire to **know Christ** was very intense, but it hadn’t **always** been that way. Paul had formerly been known as **Saul** of Tarsus - a Pharisee of the highest degree, and an avid **persecutor** of the followers of Jesus. He had received his education from **Gamaliel** - a famous teacher in his day, and he faced a promising and successful future in the religious ranks of the **Pharisees**. Saul had a lot of things **going** for him - his **ancestry**, his **orthodoxy**, his pride of **tradition**, and his outward conformity to the **laws** - but he gave them all **up**, in order to **know Christ**.

Basically, it happened **overnight**. Saul's conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus led him to re-evaluate his entire life - his past **experiences**, his **desires**, his **goals** for the future. Once he had come to realize how precious **Jesus** is, Saul no longer **worried** about the things which **used** to be so important to him. Christ became **all**, and everything else become **nothing**. Remember however, that this is only in comparison with **Christ**. For example, there are many **strikingly** beautiful things in God's creation. The **stars** would be a good **example** of that. On a clear night, they can hold your attention for **hours**, as you contemplate how **big** they must be, and how far **away** they must be, and scores of **other** thoughts reflecting your wonder and awe. However, at **sunrise**, the same stars which held us **spellbound**, simply **fade away** and remain unseen. They are as **nothing** in comparison with the dazzling brightness of the **sun**. In a similar way, the fellowship of **Jesus** eclipses everything else. All the wonders and glories which this **world** has to offer simply **fade away** when they are compared to the glory of our **Savior**.

That's the way **Paul** viewed his Lord. And I think it's **significant** that his attitude didn't **change** after his beliefs had become more **seasoned**, and he had more time to **consider** his actions at length. Rather, Paul continually worked to know Jesus **better** and **better**. He was willing to lose **everything else** - to possess virtually **nothing** to speak of - if only he could continue to be found in the righteousness of **Christ**. How well would **we** be able to carry out that thought in **our** lives? It's difficult to even **imagine** our lives apart from the **blessings** which we have received from the LORD - but just **try** it for a moment. Imagine your life **without** your most highly treasured earthly blessings. For me, that's my **wife**, and my **children**, and the members of this **congregation**, and the privilege of serving my Lord as a **pastor**. It's **tough** to think of my life **without** any of those blessings - yet, if the LORD would decide to take them all **away** from me, and leave me with **only** the righteousness of **Christ**, I would have **everything** I need for time and for eternity. On the other hand, if I continued to have **all** of those earthly blessings and even **more**, and did **not** have the righteousness of Christ - in reality, I would have **nothing** at all.

Dear friends, we **have** that righteousness of Christ, and therefore we possess a **treasure** which will accompany us **beyond** the grave. It's a treasure which continues to become **richer** and **richer** - as we **share** it with **others**. Others want to know Christ too, and **we** can see to it that they have the **opportunity** to **learn** about Him. Over the years this congregation has done a **lot** to share the Gospel of

Jesus with others. Much of our time, talent, and treasure goes toward the work of **reaching out** with the Word - whether it is to those in foreign lands and distant parts of our country (through the financial support which we provide for our Synod), or whether it is to the **Hmong** families in our community (through Pastor Lee), or whether it is to the **children** of our congregation (through our Lutheran Elementary School and other educational agencies), or whether it is to those who have been **straying** from the LORD within our own congregation, young and old alike (through the work of our Board for Spiritual Welfare). Our Evangelism Committee is also reaching out to unchurched families in our community with events like Easter for Kids (on March 27th). We've done a **lot**, but we dare not pat ourselves on the back, and consider what a good congregation **we** are in comparison with so many **others**. Because **we** don't deserve the **glory** - **God** does. **He** is the one who deserves **all** the glory, because **He** is the one who has made our work **possible** through the **resurrection** of His Son. Paul said, "*I want to know the power of His resurrection!*" Christ's resurrection from the dead is **truly** powerful, because it turns **death** into **life**. The Bible tells us that because of His **resurrection**, all those who **believe** in Jesus will **also** rise. Through our **baptism**, we became partakers of Christ's **death**. When we were **baptized** we **drowned** our Old Adam with his sinful lusts and desires. We **died** with Jesus. And if we **died** with Him, then we most certainly will also **rise** with Him.

It's **impossible** for us to fully understand how all this will take place - but it's pretty **easy** for us to understand that **we** would have been unable to **gain** eternal life through our **own** actions. Therefore, we are **grateful** that God placed this marvelous blessing for us in the **resurrection** of His Son. He **alone** has the unsurpassable **power** which is necessary to **save** us.

But not only do we share in the **death** and **resurrection** of Christ, Paul also goes on to say, "*I want to know the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings.*" Nobody in their right mind enjoys **suffering** - and neither did **Paul**. But then again, if we are **practical** about the matter, we'll realize that **suffering** is a part of **life**. It's a part of the **race** we run. Now, I'm using the term **race** in the same sense that **Paul** described it when he wrote, "*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.*"

Notice Paul's **attitude** in this race. He doesn't take the **overconfident** position which says, "I'm a **sure winner** no matter what I do." That frame of mind would end up just like the **hare** in the fable, The Tortoise and the Hare. Rather,

Paul **exerts** himself, using persistent **concentration** and much **effort**. He pushes all earthly **distractions** away, so those things will not **hinder** him from his goal. Those of you who **drive** know how disastrous **distractions** can be. Letting your mind drift while you are behind the wheel could **easily** lead to a **fatal** accident. The same thing can be true on the road which leads to **heaven**. Don't let the distractions of this life - the **wealth**, the **leisure time**, the **things** of this world - don't let them prevent you from reaching **your** spiritual goal.

The final advice which Paul gives us today is, "*Don't look **back**.*" Looking back while running forward is always **dangerous**. Looking back in a race causes a runner to lose **speed**, **direction**, and in many cases the race **itself**. Constantly looking **back** in our **lives** is dangerous too. The past is **gone** - it's forgiven and forgotten - and it will never be important again. What **is** important is what lies **ahead** for us. So, keep your attention riveted on the **goal**. Strive toward that goal with all your **might** - with every ounce of strength you can muster - and at the end of the race God will give you eternal **life**. It won't be a prize which you have **won**, but it **will** be a prize which is **yours** because of **Jesus** - a prize which **cannot** be taken away from you. Continue to be like the Apostle Paul who said, "*I want to know **Christ**, and the power of His **resurrection**, and the fellowship of sharing in His **sufferings***" - because as long as we know **Jesus**, and possess His righteousness, there is nothing else we need to know. Amen.