

LSB Philippians 3:1 - 11 Gaining Christ. Having Jesus.

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

2 Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilation! 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own which is from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God upon faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

If someone was forcing me to pick a single favorite passage of scripture in the Bible this would certainly be a top contender. And you beloved faithful people have listened to me quote parts of this passage so often you may be thinking to yourselves, haven't we already studied this passage? Is there an echo in the room. We've heard this before. I hope that may be the case.

We ended last week with a statement I repeated two times. And we will begin this morning with the same statement, because that's what this

passage is all about.

It has been stated, brilliantly, and it's absolutely positively true, that there are only 2 religions in the world. Only 2, categorically.

The religion of human achievement, and the religion of divine accomplishment. I'm going to say that again. Listen this time.

It has been stated, brilliantly, and it's absolutely positively true, that there are only 2 religions in the world. Only 2, categorically. The religion of human achievement, and the religion of divine accomplishment.

The religion of human achievement is any system where man is working his way back to God.

The religion of divine accomplishment is the single humble acknowledgement that we are bankrupt helpless sinners and God reached down and saved us by what He did, not by anything . . . at all . . . that we do.

In our passage this morning, Paul takes us on a comparison journey that looks at both systems and chooses a clear winner. Someone who was at the pinnacle of both possibilities tells us which is better.

Now I have to tell you, and many of you already know this about me, I'm naturally disposed to be somewhat of a horse trader. I have kept the same wife for 50 years but everything else is static. It all comes and goes.

And since it pleased God to not make me wealthy in a relative way, in our culture, that means if I wanted Z, I usually had to sell X and Y to raise the necessary capital to buy it. It was never a case of just keep X and Y and also buy Z. Thus the horse trading.

I wanted the Model T coupe so I traded the '38 coupe for it and the '41 Mercury. Pam says; not one of my better horse trades. She's usually right.

But I couldn't have both, and the Model T was on my bucket list to do.

God understands horse trading. Jesus gave us two examples of horse trading in the parables in Matthew 13. They ring perfectly true with what Paul is going to tell us about his experience horse trading. Except these horse trades involve eternity. And not just eternity, where **you will be** IN eternity.

Turn with me, or maybe just listen, to Matthew 13. Vss. 44 - 46

44 *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

I totally get this. This guy is just like me! He's walking through a field and trips over something. It's a ledge sticking up slightly that he didn't see. And he dusts himself off and looks at what tripped him and discovers it's a ledge of solid gold. Probably a billion dollars just laying there hidden in that field.

So what does he do? First things first, you kick some dust and loose dirt over that ledge so no one else will see it. Then you go to the Court house and see who owns that field. Then you buy THAT field.

But this guy is just like me. He doesn't have two nickels to rub together. So he sells everything he owns, right down to his shoe laces, to get the money to buy THAT field. Why? Because it's infinitely more valuable than any of the junk he sold in order to buy it.

Jesus told the same story twice. It must be important!

45 *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

Identical situation. The guy finds a pearl better than any other pearl and he has to have THAT pearl so he sells all that he has and buys it.

Both of those parables describe exactly virtual situations which parallel exactly to what Paul experienced in real time. Parables are metaphor's. Picture stories that help us resolve an idea. What Paul shares is a real time experience of the identical concept.

And if you think about it a little bit, Jesus Himself is a horse trader. He left His home in glory, with His Father, and came to earth to purchase us, with the cost of His own blood and life.

He left all and suffered here in order to gain us. That was a huge, costly, horse trade. But He paid the price to purchase us! Apparently the value of His church can be arrived at on a cost basis. Think about that one for a while.

And while we're on the subject of horse trading, let's get the elephant in the room out and talk about the obvious, shall we; Mark 8:

35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and for the gospel will save it. 36 What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?...

This is the ultimate horse trade. Do you get all you can get here, because this is all there is, or do you believe what this book says about existing . . . somewhere . . . for eternity.

Because, there is a difference. It doesn't take people very long to figure out, I'm a square peg in a round hole. At work or wherever, it becomes sort of evident, I'm not really part of this world. I'm different. I don't do a lot of the stuff that the world thinks it's OK to do.

Christians are different. We have to be. We are distinct in this world. Like

salt is distinct in anything it is put in. If you aren't distinct, like salt, Jesus says you aren't a christian. Salt that has lost it's distinctive flavor is only good for pavement. If you traded this world and walked away from it, in order to have Jesus, there will be evidence. Christians are different.

So, then, getting back to Paul and what he writes to the Philippians, and by extension to us in 2025, there is a backstory that frames what Paul is going to say.

Paul is exceptional. He is a natural high achiever. One of those people that, whatever it is he's doing, you probably can't achieve what he did. It's just how God made Paul. He's one of those guys.

And the backstory here is that a group, a movement led by false teachers, has hounded Paul, following everywhere Paul has gone planting churches, and they disrupt the churches by introducing dangerous heresy.

In a nutshell, here is the heretical false teaching. It would have sounded something like this. "Jesus did in fact die for your sins and did in fact rise from the dead, but Paul didn't get the full memo. Paul's gospel is short.

Jesus can only save you if you embrace judaism first. You have to convert to judaism, and be circumcised, and follow the laws of Moses, (all of them, the full ceremonial system) in order to be qualified for any salvation by Jesus."

In other words, faith isn't enough. You need to do works in order to be saved. Jesus only saves jews and jewish proselytes. So become a jew and then He will save you. Get busy and work for your salvation.

That's what Paul is fighting against in this passage. Any system, this one Paul is fighting against, or any other one like it, that requires human achievement in some form or another to attain to salvation, is a false heretical teaching.

Not only that, it's dangerous. Eternal life or death dangerous. Paul tells the Galatians; *5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, stand firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace!*

Yikes! That sounds like you can lose your salvation! It's one of those passages that Josh was pointing out at last Friday night's bible study dinner that is hard to reconcile.

I'm not going to try to reconcile that issue but I am going to say, these two realities are mutually exclusive. Either you are in some kind of works system keeping laws and jumping through religious hoops and keeping sacraments in order to be saved, in order to earn your salvation by some partial human merit, or you are trusting in faith alone, in the completed work of Jesus on the cross alone, to save you from sins.

You can't have both. It's one or the other. That's what Paul makes shockingly clear to the Galatians. Pick one. Slavery under works. Or freedom, in Christ, by faith alone.

You say, well isn't some overlap allowed. Can't someone be sort of both. And Paul says, absolutely not. If you fall back into working for your own righteousness by doing religious stuff to achieve salvation, you are severed from Christ. Human merit salvation and divine salvation by grace are mutually exclusive.

So Paul is going to compare the two possibilities. And he does it from the perspective of being at the pinnacle of both systems.

He's arguing against these judaizers who say you have to be a Jew for God to like you and save you. And Paul says, Oh, you think being a Jew has value to God? For salvation? Let's compare.

You gentiles want to become jews? Take it from a superjew. You could never begin to achieve the jewishness that I once had! He says, if salvation was even remotely possible from being Jewish, I'm a million miles further down THAT road than you'll ever be!!

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

Paul's going to unload credentials in the jewish religious club that no gentile convert could ever come close to. He says if **that** road to heaven and God, by accomplishing jewish works of righteousness, was a possibility, I was way beyond where you gentiles could ever achieve.

He's going to unload seven credentials, four of which are from birthright that no gentile can ever claim, at all, and 3 of which he surpassed all the other jews in the club. Lets see if being jewish accomplishes acceptance with God.

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;

Hey, you want to play jew. Beat this.

In the literal greek he says, I'm an eighth dayer. Born into this. Circumcised on the eighth day of my life, by my parents who are jews. If circumcision has value, I'm an eighth dayer. Born a jew.

of the nation of Israel . . . He says I can trace my blood line back to Jacob, who wrestled with an angel, who had his name changed, by God, to Israel. I'm a blood descendant, not of Abraham. All the arabs can claim that. Not of Esau either. The edomites are descended from Abraham and Esau.

Paul says, I'm the true jew. Descended from Israel.

of the tribe of Benjamin, . . . Benjamin was considered to be one of the two most noble tribes of Israel. When the 10 northern tribes were summarily dismissed into captivity, never to return, Judah and Benjamin remained true to David's kingdom in Israel.

We separate by the 10 northern tribes who split off from David and had their own kings, apart from the two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, who remained true to judaism. You can't get any more jewish than being of the noble tribe of benjamin.

Throughout the captivity in babylon, these two tribes kept their geneologies pure. Most jews, even by Paul's time, had lost their geneological records. Not Paul. He is pure jew. Of the tribe of benjamin.

a Hebrew of Hebrews; . . . You've got your hebrews, and you've got your H E B R E Ws. There are similar terms today. He's a real man's man. It means head and shoulders above ordinary men. Paul was a hebrew's hebrew. You simply couldn't get any more jewish than Paul. His parents accomplished that much for him. No gentile convert could get close.

Then he goes into what he accomplished. Himself. His merits in the works of judaism.

as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Three more pinnacles of jewishness you gentile converts could only dream of. You can never achieve the jewishness of Paul.

as to the Law, a Pharisee Initially, in the intertestamental period, the 400 years between the last prophet, Malachi, and John the baptist, the pharisees were a group of men who were the fundamentalists.

They taught that the Bible should be interpreted literally. They were men of the book. A good movement. Back to basics. Back to God's book. Theirs was the most conservative movement in Judaism.

But of course they went off the rails, straining at gnats. Still, from a book perspective better than the other choices. Book people who worked hard studying God's book. So Paul says from a positional perspective not just a Jew, a Pharisee. The most conservative sect in Judaism.

In Acts chapter 22, when Paul was in Jerusalem a riot ensued because all the Jewish Jews in the Jew Club in Jerusalem thought Paul was a Gentile or some kind of half Jew bringing Gentiles into the temple and causing a defilement.

So they would have killed Paul, but the Roman soldiers got in the middle of it and stopped the riot and hauled Paul off to the Roman garrison by the temple grounds.

We learn a bunch about just how Jewish Paul is in the account of his arrest. He is hauled into the Roman garrison but he asks permission to speak to the Jews who were rioting.

Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, "Men, brothers, and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you." 2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even quieter; and he said, 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but having been brought up in this city, having been instructed at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strictness of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today, 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brothers, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

Paul was impeccably Jewish. Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in Jerusalem. He spoke to them in the hebrew language which brought a hush to the crowd. No one realised who they were rioting against. When he speaks perfect hebrew they quiet down to a hush and listen.

Then he tells them he sat at the feet of Gamaliel. One of the most notable and famous of all jewish teachers. Like a physicist saying, I studied under Albert Einstein, or a photographer who says, I learned the craft working as an assistant to Ansel Adams. Gamaliel was a big deal, for the jewish club.

Back to our passage then, in Philippians, he goes into detail about the level of commitment to the jewish cause.

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; I'm THAT guy. Famous for my persecution of the way. The Way was an early name for christians. And Paul was traversing the earth killing those guys. That's the level of his zeal for judaism. Christian killer. Paul was there when Stephen was being stoned. The first christian martyr.

Oh, and one more thing; *as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.*

And, oh by the way, if salvation can be procured by righteousness of keeping the law, I'm there. Blameless. Pure as the wind driven snow, as far as righteousness available by keeping Moses laws.

Are you seeing a pattern here. You gentiles think it would be cool, or necessary, to be a jewish convert so God will like you enough to save you. Paul says, I'm a million miles further than you could ever possibly get down that road.

But here comes the value comparison of works righteousness versus grace purchased by Christ's shed blood.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ

This is just the hidden treasure story all over again. But it's in real life. This the account of someone who lived exactly what Jesus laid out in his metaphor. Found a treasure. Had to sell all I had in order to buy the field. Paul lived it.

Paul speaks to us hear with accounting terms. This is corporate accountant speak. First century numbers cruncher talk. Two columns, profit and loss to get to the final value.

I do this all the time. But I'm terrible at it. Buy something on ebay that's broken. Because I can fix stuff. Gonna make a profit. So I waste a bunch of time, apparently my time is almost worthless, but I fix it and then I sell it for a profit. Then I add up all the columns. Original cost. Plus shipping. Plus whatever else I had to buy to do the repairs needed. Then I subtract the ebay sellers fees. And the shipping. Simple ordinary accounting. Profit and loss. Usually after all the fees I broke even, fixed the thing for free and got my money back. Stupid me. I do a lot better just working for wages for Tim.

Paul's adding up his columns. He has jewishness you can never even get close to. He has human achievement self righteousness found in the law. He has more zeal than any other jew anywhere for the jewish cause.

He adds all that up in one column and in the other column is Christ. Spiritual life. Friendship with the Creator of everything. Life forever in eternity with treasures that there are no words for him to describe.

Then he looks at the profit and loss columns, because it's pick one, these two are mutually exclusive. Can't be the out front leader in the Jewishness

club AND have Jesus and all he offers. Add up the values and pick one.

And Paul says, none of the false religion stuff had any value compared to having Jesus. The word he uses is scubalon. All of his jewishness is waste. Trash. No value. It was the word for animal waste. Dung. Or, if you're British, rubbish.

He was at the pinnacle of man made religion, and it was rubbish. Waste. Everybody seems to like the word "toxic" these days. That's the idea. Man made religion is toxic waste.

*7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, **for whom I have suffered the loss of all things**, and count them but dung so that I may gain Christ*

All of the stuff on the mega jew column was gone. Paul walked away from all of it. So much so that his own countrymen were going to kill him. The obvious heir to the highest possible office in judaism, turns and walks away. Why?

Because you can't have both, and Jesus is a million times better than anything this world can offer you. Paul goes home to Jerusalem and the other jewish club members want to kill him. That's how far he's removed from his old life.

Well, you say, Paul paid a lot. It cost him everything to choose Christ. What did he get in exchange for all that he lost?

More than that, I count all things to be loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord

Paul gave up the pinnacle of what this world could offer, for a relationship. The value that surpassed all that he had, was to be in an intimate friendship

with the Creator of the universes.

The language is relational. It's intimate. Paul is friends with Jesus, and Jesus is friends with Paul. Paul says, Hey, I walked away from judaism, but now I'm friends with a guy who tells the wind and the waves to hush, and they do. I'm friends with a guy who took 2 fish and 3 loaves and fed 5,000 families.

It was no big deal for Him, because He's the same guy who spoke this planet into existence . . . from nothing. And friendship with Him has more value than anything this world can offer.

Yesterday morning at breakfast, Harry Whipperman was telling us that he had been a Mason, and that it is a religion, like mormonism and others, and he said he walked away from a religion into a relationship. With Jesus.

And I said, Harry, you're preaching tomorrow morning's sermon for me.

Whatever it is you are, in this world, that's giving you your identity, another popular word in our culture, Jesus is better. We all walk away from this world, in order to have Jesus.

In some sense, usually not so dramatic as Paul's, but in some sense, all real christians discovered Jesus, recognized the surpassing value of having Him, and walked away from whatever else it was in this world that was necessary, to follow Him.

If Sundays are for sleeping in, and then watching a game, or if there isn't any good games, maybe washing the car, if you feel like it, and you tell me you're a christian . . . I'm dubious.

We have hundreds of those christians. In Tonopah. But I'm having a hard time believing they recognized the treasure and would trade their very lives to have a relationship with Him. Those columns aren't adding up.

When you're walking through this world and discover Jesus, you'll sell everything, in order to have Him. 5 minutes with Him is worth more than 5 lifetimes of being king of this garbage heap.