

DUMPING TRASH AND DISCOVERING TREASURE – PHILIPPIANS 3:4B-11

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If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

How many of you have heard the phrase, “One man’s trash, is another man’s treasure?” It seems like most of you have. It’s the idea that has resulted in 2nd hand stores and garage sales. It’s the idea that if you don’t like something, chances are somebody else will. It’s the idea that something that somebody else doesn’t like will be valuable to you. There are exceptions of course, I can remember a commercial spoof on this saying which had a kid getting rid of his old PB&J sandwich on the internet because another child wanted it.

But in all seriousness now. Every now and again, it would be good for you to go through all of your stuff and ask yourself if you need to keep it. Most often this happens with clothes. One of the projects Kristin and I have been going through in recent months has been trying to get rid of all of our old clothes that we don’t wear anymore. But if you’re anything like me, this can be difficult. You remember the fond memories you had wearing that ratty old T-Shirt, you remember when you bought that pair of shiny red shoes. It’s difficult to part with items like that. What makes it a little easier is when you are able to get a little bit of money for something you weren’t even using in the first place.

An even better feeling is when you walk into one of those second hand stores, or up to a garage sale and you find something that you have always been looking for, something that you would use or wear all the time, and you are able to get a great deal on it. It gives you a feeling of joy. It’s that type of joy that Paul is talking about in the letter he wrote to the Philippians. He is talking about the joy of DUMPING TRASH AND DISCOVERING TREASURE. Listen to Paul describe:

1. Getting rid of his junk
2. Finding his treasure

(1)

Paul had visited the Philippian congregation to whom he is writing on his second missionary journey. Philippi was a fairly prominent city in the area, on the northern edge of the Aegean Sea, modern day Greece. But at the time Paul arrived, there was not much of a Jewish

presence. So Paul set about telling people about the message of Jesus Christ, and a church was born. He left Luke, the guy who wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts there to build up the faith of these young Christians. Like he did with many of the places he visited, he wrote them letters – sometimes letters of encouragement, sometimes letters of rebuke, but always letters which would strengthen their relationship with their Savior. This particular letter that Paul wrote was from prison, likely when he was awaiting trial before Caesar in Rome.

But despite being in prison, Paul still had reason for joy, and it was this joy that he would share with the Philippian congregation. To set the stage for Paul's joy, in chapter three of Philippians, where our 2nd lesson comes from, he starts off by condemning a problem that was spreading through the Christian church at the time. What was this problem? Let me tell you about it. Jesus was a Jew, his disciples were Jews, and many of the early Christians were also Jews. As Jews, these people were eagerly awaiting a Messiah which God had promised. They also had been faithfully observing the commands God had given them in the Old Testament – commands like resting on the Sabbath, or Saturday. They did not eat pork. Their baby boys were circumcised on the 8th day. And when these Christian Jews began to believe that Jesus was this Messiah, they naturally continued serving God in the only way they had ever known.

Now, this wasn't the problem. The problem came when Gentiles, or non-Jews, began to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. For the most part, the Jewish Christians tolerated the non-Jewish Christians, even though from a human standpoint, they were a little different. But soon, some of these Jewish Christians began insisting that the Gentiles keep all of the Jewish laws they were used to keeping – resting on the Sabbath, not eating pork, circumcising their male offspring. This may not seem like that big of a deal, but basically what these Jews were saying was, "Faith in Jesus isn't enough to save you." You need to believe in Jesus plus do all these other things. They taught your hope for heaven is based on what you do, and not what was done for you. It is this notion that Paul is condemning in the first part of chapter three.

If anyone thought they could get to heaven by what they had done, Paul had them beat. **"If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless."** Yes, Paul: Had been born of the right race, tribe and family. He had been born in the right place – Israel. He had lived the right kind of life – faultless. He even had the right kind of heart – zealous.

And yes, for a time, this is what gave Paul the warm and fuzzy's inside. This is what he took pride in, it is what gave him joy. This was where he found his treasure. But one day, Paul realized that all this was not treasure at all, but rather that it was junk. He explains, **"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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."**

So why did Paul suddenly change his mind, and consider his treasure like garbage? It's because Paul stepped in front of the mirror, the mirror of God's law and saw himself. God's law showed him that the clothes he had been dressed in were all stained and wrinkled, stained and wrinkled with his sins. He realized there was no laundry detergent, no bleach that could remove

those stains. And he also realized that God wasn't going to let him into the formal black-tie celebration that was in heaven wearing those clothes. Yes, the mirror of God's law showed Paul that his treasure was in fact trash and needed to be discarded in the dumpster.

Basically speaking, Paul is saying that all human produced treasure is trash in the eyes of our holy God. I'm sure like Paul, every one of us can look to things that we have been proud of, things that we may count as our treasures. "I'm a Christian. I've lived a pretty good life. I go to church on Sundays. I'm a member of Grace Lutheran Church." This list can go on and on. Now there's not anything wrong with any of that, just like there was nothing wrong with Paul being a Jew. But all human produced treasure will always be stained with sin. All human produced treasure will never be able to push open the doors of heaven. And all human produced treasure cannot be trusted as a ticket to eternal life. Like Paul, we must consider all that we are, and all that we do, all that we treasure as trash in God's eyes.

(2)

But the interesting thing in Paul's case is when he realized his treasure was in fact trash, he also realized that what he thought was trash before was really a great treasure. Paul is talking about Jesus Christ as his treasure. What a turn around. Before, Paul thought he was doing God's will by persecuting Christians and locking them up. But then God came to him in a bright light on the way to Damascus and changed his whole world around. This caused Paul to realize the very person he was trying to destroy, Jesus, was the long promised Messiah he had waited for. And Paul can talk about, **"the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."**

And why is Jesus such a treasure? It's not just because he died on the cross, or he died on the cross for my sins, or even dying on the cross as punishment for all sins of all time. The other thing that makes Jesus such a great treasure is the holy life he lived. Never once sinning, always perfectly obeying the will of his heavenly Father. It's the fact that he gives this holy, perfect life he lived to every believer, so that in God's eyes, every believer is truly perfect, righteous and holy. Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure, he is the only treasure that saves.

Imagine that you went to a rummage sale, and there on the clothes rack you found an elegant Armani suit in just your size, or an expensive Versaci dress that flattered you to no end. And imagine the price was just five bucks. You would snap up that suit or that dress in a heartbeat, and would feel great every time you wore it – not only because it made you feel like a million bucks, but also because it only cost five bucks.

Each one of us has a garment like that, don't we? The robe of righteousness made by the master clothing designer Jesus Christ. In that robe we don't just look like a million bucks, we are sinless, holy, perfect, fit for heaven. Better yet, that robe didn't cost us anything, not even a nickel. It was a free gift. Best of all we didn't have to go out looking for that robe, it found us.

My friends, no wonder the Apostle Paul was so full of joy: He realized that what he treasured – who he was and what he did – was trash and got rid of it. But more than that, he realized that he had considered trash – Jesus Christ – was the greatest treasure of all and hung on to him with both arms. Likewise let each one of us throw in the dumpster any idea that we are saved by who we are and what we do. Rather let us every day put on the greatest treasure a person can possess, the robe of righteousness of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.