

**Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 7, 2019**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

Philippians 3:8-14 (NIV)

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, that I may gain Christ 9) 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. 10) 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, 11) and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12) 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. 13) 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, 14) I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

Friends in Christ,

I'm sure that you have heard the saying, one man's trash is another's treasure. That seems to be the philosophy that makes garage sales work. Some of the things that have become worthless to us for one reason or another are often regarded as a real find by those who come to shop at our garage sales.

That's true in a spiritual sense as well. Some people boast of their own strength and abilities. Others boast in Christ. Some give their plans a priority; others leave things in the Lord's hands. So what is real treasure? And what is real trash? In our text today the apostle Paul helps us to sort things out when it comes to our personal goals and priorities reminding us to

**Keep the Trash and the Treasure Separate**

- 1) Set Aside the Trash**
- 2) Press on to claim the Treasure**

Paul begins by telling us that if we want to gain anything of eternal value, we must lose everything. So, let's begin by taking stock of our lives and our goals. We all pretty much have the same plans with a few minor variations. First, we make plans to get a decent education. From early on many parents begin saving for their children's college education or encouraging their children to do so. As soon as we enter high school, we begin planning courses that will prepare us for the next step of our journey – more education or a job. High school juniors and seniors spend hours trying to decide on a school and career, filling out entrance applications and scholarship forms. Why do we go to college or technical school? We want to get good jobs. Some want jobs that will earn a lot of money. Others want a job that will earn respect or status. Still others want to help people. While we're working, we also need to plan for retirement. We all know that Social Security alone won't take care of us in the way we want. So, we try to contribute as much as we can to our IRAs and our 401ks. We want to be sure to have enough money to enjoy the time off we've earned after working so hard at our good jobs. Somewhere along the line, marriage and family came into the picture and we want enough time to spend with the families we raised too.

These are our plans for the future. They include education, work, and retirement. Only one thing is missing: eternity. Most, if not all, of our plans are only for our time on this earth. That is why Paul encourages us to lose them.

Not one of those goals will help us get to heaven. What is the eternal good of being the smartest person in the class? What is the eternal good of having a job that pays hundreds of thousands of dollars? What is the eternal good of a job that only helps people physically? What is the eternal good of taking it easy in retirement? The answer is none. There is no eternal good in any of those things. In fact, each one of those goals disappears like smoke at the moment of death.

Of course, that doesn't mean we will completely discard all of those things. After all, the Lord does command us to work for a living, to use his gifts wisely and to care for our families. It does mean that they won't be our ultimate life goal, our long-range plan for the future. It means that they will not be the first priority, the final goal, or the most valuable prize.

We will only value those goals as long as they are associated with THE goal. What is THE goal? It is to gain Christ. Listen to Paul's words in verse eight, *"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 that I might gain Christ."* THE goal is to gain Christ.

That's our most valuable treasure. That's the only goal that lasts for eternity. Set your goal on Christ. What does it mean to gain Christ? First, to gain Christ means to know what he offers. Paul tells us that Christ offers righteousness. What a precious commodity! Righteousness is the very thing God demands for eternity. The righteous or holy or perfect will live forever. Now as Paul acknowledges, we know that we do not have our own righteousness that comes from the law.

To get it we would have to live holy lives, without sin. It's too late for that; we have already sinned. We will never be holy on our own. So, we end up regarding our acts as trash – recognizing that they can gain us nothing of eternal value. But, through faith in Christ God gives us righteousness. Jesus did live a holy life. Through faith, God declares us righteous or holy on the basis of Christ. This is the education we need. This is education that has eternal value. Every day we need to learn again that we are sinners without righteousness deserving only hell. Every day we need to learn again that because of Christ God forgives our sins and gives us righteousness through faith. If we don't daily receive that education, we have learned nothing.

Second, to gain Christ means to experience what he offers. In verse ten Paul said, *"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."* Paul didn't just want to "know" Christ in his head; he wanted to know Christ in his heart and in his life. Paul wanted to share in Christ's death. He wanted to die with Christ. That's exactly what happens through our baptisms; we die with Christ. Our baptisms so closely connect us with Christ that his death counts for us. When we daily confess our sins, we die to sin and receive forgiveness. In the same way, our baptisms allow us to know the power of Christ's resurrection. When we receive forgiveness for our sins, it's as if we have been raised from the dead. Our dead, condemned souls come alive. This then is our work, if you will. Every day we "work" to confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness through faith.

Finally, to know Christ means to receive his reward. This is our true retirement. Paul said in verse eleven that he wants to know Christ and to share in his life and death, *"and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."* When we know what Christ offers and through faith share in Christ, we can be sure that we will attain to the resurrection from the dead. Through faith God not only offers us Christ's righteousness, his death for forgiveness of sins, and his resurrection for new life; he also offers us eternal life. Right now, we share in Jesus' resurrection. We are living as God's children. One day Jesus will raise us from the dead. We will have our own personal resurrection. Then we will enter eternal rest. In heaven, we will truly be able to live the good life. There we will be gathered around the throne of our Shepherd, and he will lead us to springs of living water. There will be no more death, no more crying, no more pain. What a retirement!

These are the goals God has set for us. These are goals with eternal good. To gain Christ is to know the righteousness he offers, to share in the forgiveness and life he grants and to receive his reward of eternal life. Christ has already attained all of these goals for us. He has already offered them to us in his Word and given them to us by faith. What will we do to hold on to them? I pray that we will strain, struggle and strive to seize the prize – setting aside the trash and pursuing the treasure.

Along with Paul, we can all acknowledge that we have not yet obtained all this. We have not already been made perfect. We have not yet taken hold of everything. We have not fully gained Christ. And, we won't as long as we live on this earth. We are sinful people living sinful lives. We regularly misplace our priorities. We undervalue what it means to gain Christ. We take him for granted. We spend our time on earthly goals. We make excuses for why we can't get a better eternal education, work at an eternal job, or plan for an eternal retirement. Nevertheless, Jesus takes hold of us. Even when we aren't reaching out for him, he is holding onto us. He is always ready to teach us, always ready to offer forgiveness, always ready to give us another chance.

Of course, because we are sinful people, we can never earn our way to heaven. Heaven is not a goal we can achieve. That's why we need to gain Christ. He is the only one who can achieve such goals in our place. At the same time, once we have received these goals through faith, we can work to hold onto them. Paul says, "*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me,*" (v.12).

Paul also tells us how to take hold Christ and his blessings. Press on. Strain, struggle and strive. Press on by forgetting what is behind. Change your way of thinking. Set new goals. We don't have to abandon our education, career or retirement to gain Christ. But, we do need to reprioritize. We need to put all of those goals into proper perspective. We need to realize that they don't have eternal value unless they help us gain Christ. So, forgetting what is behind, press on by straining toward what is ahead. Keep your head up and your eyes focused on eternity. Reach ahead for Christ. Learn more about what he has to offer. Find more ways to experience what his blessings. Refuse to let anything get in the way of your eternal retirement. Make Christ your number one priority all of the time for all of your life.

I'd like to hold out a challenge to you. I challenge you to make one new plan for the future that will help you gain Christ. Make it a regular part of your schedule. You can plan to know him better by attending a new Bible study or starting a new devotion at home. You can plan to experience his forgiveness by planning a daily time for confession. You can experience the joy of service by volunteering for a new task. You figure it out and then do it.

It won't be easy. That's why I used three words to press on. We will have to strain, struggle and strive to seize the prize. Our sinful natures will constantly fight against anything that connects us to Christ. But, Christ will take hold of us. The more contact we have with Christ through his word, the more strength we will have to take hold of the prize he offers.

Like Paul, we will want to press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus, (v.14). To gain Christ is the goal; nothing is more important. The hardest part has already been done. Christ has already earned forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He has already begun to share them with us through our baptisms. He will also give us the strength to press on until he calls us heavenward! Amen.