

## Philippians 3:8-14

Those of you who spend a lot of time around young children or grandchildren 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 Jewish 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 became **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**, my **children** and **grandchildren**, 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 families in our **community** and the surrounding area, or whether it is to the **children** of our congregation through our Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, or whether it is to those who have been **straying** from the LORD through the

work of our Board of **Elders**. 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're **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**, or **texting** 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.