

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (29-3-1992 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 3:3c-9

Additional Bible reading: Luke 18:9-14

Introduction

In Paul's letters, he often portrays himself in various robes or occupations as he describes what it means to be a Christian – a sportsman, ambassador, herald, slave, or king. Here the picture is of Paul the business man or the accountant. A business man looking over his accounts, assessing the credits and debits, gains and losses, assets and liabilities, being in the black and being in the red.

Conversion to Christ turned his accounting system upside down. He tells us about that change, which happened 30 years earlier. After reviewing it, he comes to the conclusion he is glad he made the change. Finally he comes to his greatest asset, the great gift which he has been given as he made the change.

The change which God made in Paul's accounting system

Paul looks over his shoulder, and sees the ledger at his desk, the ledger of his life. On the left hand side of the page are the gains, assets, credits, and on the right hand side the losses, liabilities and debits. Then he takes a pen and puts a line through everything in the credits columns, and puts each item down in the debit column. And in the credit column he writes just one word, Christ.

He begins with the ledger as it stood before he met Christ (Philippians 3:5,6). There were many items in the gains column. He felt he had a lot to be proud of, and a lot going for him, plenty he could show and impress God with. If anyone felt he had reasons to be proud of himself, Paul had more. He was circumcised on the eighth day, the exact day prescribed by the law, not late in life like proselytes (Gentiles who became Jews). He came from the stock of Israel, not a Gentile convert. He had pure Jewish blood, there were no mixed marriages in his line. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe which according to Moses was beloved of the Lord (Benjamin was the child of Rachel, whom Jacob loved the most). The first king, Saul, came from Benjamin, and even when other tribes revolted, Benjamin was always loyal to David's royal house. So Paul was as Hebrew as they come, the cream of the cream, the purest of the pure. When lots of Jews forgot their Hebrew tongue, Paul always spoke it and kept it up.

Paul was also a Pharisee, a separated one, that sect most anxious to keep Jewish law, the extremists. They tithed everything they had, and fasted twice a week (other Jews only fasted once a year). Paul was particularly zealous for his religion, and persecuted the early Christians because their leader, Jesus, was an imposter. He had seen Stephen stoned to death, and carried the High Priest's letter to Damascus to put more Christians in prison. Paul was blameless before the law. On the outside, he kept it perfectly. In every point of ritual, he left nothing undone. These were Paul's boasts, the things that he had previously counted as to his credit.

Then something occurred which completely upset his calculations. He met Christ on the way to Damascus. Suddenly it dawned on him, he had been wrong, and Christ was right all the time. These credits and gains, which he had trusted to save him, were no use. They could not take his sins away. His only hope was Christ. So he had to alter his ledger. "Gains" were now "losses", and the only thing worthy of counting as a gain was Christ. He gave up his religion to find salvation. He gave up all his precious pearls to possess a pearl of great price.

Paul had made the same mistake that everyone makes until the truth of the Gospel dawns. People put their trust in things which cannot save. Paul trusted in three things – what he had had done to him by religious parents; what he had received from his parents; what he had achieved himself. Millions today rely on what they had done to them in religious ceremonies in infancy. Infant baptism has led thousands down the broad road, which leads to destruction. Others have erroneously trusted what they received from their parents – a Christian upbringing and teaching, being taught to say prayers and go to church on Sundays. Others trust what they have achieved themselves – being good neighbours, kind and helpful, good church-goers, service to the community.

But the Christian Gospel teaches that these things, though good in themselves, will not save you. Our way of reasoning must be turned on its head. Salvation means putting a line through all these things, and recognizing that they belong in the losses column, as things which cannot save. The only thing that belongs in the gains column is Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life. There is salvation in no other. Our only hope is in His death at Calvary. If we trust anything else, we will be lost.

Paul is the clearest evidence of this. No one had a better case, no one was more qualified, had all the boxes ticked, to get to heaven. He was streets ahead of everyone else. Yet all his gains and credits could not save him, and neither will ours.

*“Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil thy law’s demands.
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone.
Thou must save, and thou alone.”*

“He is no fool, who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose” (Jim Eliot). Paul would say “amen” to that.

Present review of situation, thirty years later

How does Paul view the situation thirty years on? Many look back over thirty years and regret that they made a disastrous mistake, which has led them down the wrong path for life, something which they were sure of at the time, but in hindsight see it as the biggest mistake they could have made. If they had their time again, they would do things differently.

But not Paul! He looks back on what happened thirty years ago, and decides it was the best days work he ever did! His conclusion: **I consider everything loss for the sake**

of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8). Paul gave up relying on everything else but Christ thirty years ago, and still feels exactly the same way. Christ was all in all then, and He still is all in all now. Paul's testimony was up to date, and Christ was as real and as vital now as then.

A lot may have happened in your life since conversion. Are you as clear now as you were then of your dependence for salvation on Christ alone? Your life has changed, you have grown in Christian holiness, you have read your Bible, served the Lord, preached sermons, visited many people. Are you still clear that these are not the things to depend upon for salvation? It is not Christ plus all these other things. Are you still depending on Christ alone?

When McLaren of Tolbooth Church in Edinburgh was dying, he spoke of having collected together all his sermons, prayers, good works and bad works, and thrown them overboard. He was "swimming on the plank of free grace to heaven". We may live to the age of Methuselah, but our dependence for salvation remains this one person, Christ alone.

Does Christ mean more to you than ever before? Is He more adorable and wonderful than ever? As we learn more of our sinful and corrupt nature, so Christ should be more precious than ever before. Do you still lean your full weight on Him? Is He still in control? Do you know you are complete in Christ? Do you boast and glory in Christ?

The vital and indispensable gift which Paul received from Christ

If we are going to stand before God and be accepted by Him, we need two things – forgiveness of sins and perfect righteousness. We only gain this through Christ. Only God can bestow these two gifts. People hope they can achieve these things, but they cannot. No matter how good a life we live, we can never wipe away our past. Even if we promise to go straight from now on, our righteousness is imperfect. We fail constantly. Even though we may look all right on the outside, no one would dare to have his thoughts, desires and what goes on in his heart disclosed.

Everyone is trying to climb up the ladder to God by doing their best. The good news is that God has come down the ladder to us, in Christ, to give us all that we need. In His Son He has taken our sins upon Himself. On the Cross, our sins were punished, and the penalty borne. Justice has been done. This is the only way we can be delivered from eternal death and separation – by accepting that great gift, forgiveness of sins.

But we also need true and real righteousness to stand before God and be accepted by Him. Only then can He bestow on us blessings He gives to righteous men. We must be not only pardoned criminals, but truly righteous. Where do we get that from? This is the second gift God holds out for us to take. He offers us the life of Christ, perfectly righteous. Every minute of every day, He was absolutely sinless, and obeyed perfectly God's law. He never thought or said or did anything wrong. God takes His Son's righteousness and gives it to us. He treats us as though it were we who had perfectly obeyed His law ("justified – just as if I'd never sinned"), and He blesses us accordingly.

We can receive these two gifts, but we must receive them with empty hands, by faith. This is the great doctrine of justification by faith, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, as our sin is imputed to Him.

*“My hope is build on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness”*

*“No condemnation now I dread.
Jesus and all in Him is mine.
Alive in Him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine.”*

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God, and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness (Romans 10:3). Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). God mad Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). 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 (Philippians 3:9).

The Gospel has the answer to the age-old question: How can I be forgiven and accepted as righteous before God? The Gospel says it has nothing to do with us. It is possible because of two amazing and thrilling gifts. So often we preach only forgiveness of sins. But we are also made perfectly righteous in God's sight. This is absolutely safe and secure.

George Whitefield (who preached 18,000 sermons in 34 years) was a great open air preacher. He began at 25 years of age, preaching at Kingswood, Bristol. He went on to preach to coal miners, who were neglected, untouched by the Gospel, because they never went into a church. In a letter to a friend, Whitefield wrote, “Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they are glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend to the tax-collector, who called not the righteous but sinners to repentance. The Gospel preached cause white gutters, made by tears which plentifully flowed down black cheeks as they came out of the coal pits.” Whitefield constantly preached to them about forgiveness, and offered them Christ's righteousness. He often found himself saying, “Oh, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Excuse me if I mention it in almost all my sermons.”

Conclusion

Everyone is relying on one of two things to save them. Either their own righteousness, what we do, what we have had done to us etc, or Christ, and His forgiveness and righteousness.

If you are relying on your own righteousness, you are in a sad, tragic and dangerous plight. You might have enough righteousness to keep you out of trouble in this life, but you do not have enough righteousness to get you into heaven. For you, it is a depressing and hopeless uphill struggle to stand in the presence of God. You need to

take your eyes off self, and on to the Cross. See your sins, which were punished in Jesus, and have His righteousness imputed to you. This is the only ground for peace with God, peace of conscience, rest and security. All is in Christ.

In the sixteenth century, English ships were to be found on the high seas, laden with cargo. When a Spanish galleon came into sight, which would be piled high with gold and silver, the English ships would gladly throw overboard their cargo, make extra speed, catch up with the galleon, capture it, and take all the precious metal and jewels. This booty made amends for all they had thrown overboard. They lost a little to gain a lot.

So we must throw overboard our trust and confidence in our own righteousness, and get the perfect and complete righteousness, which is in God alone. We need to come with empty hands, recognizing that we have nothing, and Christ has all.

“Just as I am, without one plea”

In India there is the practice of catching monkeys by putting nuts in a narrow necked jar. When the monkey has got a handful, and holds them in his fist, he cannot withdraw his hand and escape. Thus he gets caught. Like the monkey, we need to release what we hold onto in order to gain freedom.