

Philippians 3:4b-14

Dear Friends in Christ,

I've got what might be some hard words for some. They're from the Apostle Peter: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." (2 Pet. 3:10) Peter continues the reality a couple of verses later when he says, "...the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!" (v. 12)

You know those wonderful heirlooms we're saving to pass on to the coming generations who won't remember us anyway? Well...they'll be burned up. You know all those sentimental thoughts and wishes and dreams we have about this world? Well...they'll go away. So, here we go. This morning we're...

## TAKING OUT THE TRASH

### I. What Makes Your Stuff Rubbish.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (vv. 4b-6)

Those are the opening verses of our text, and here's the point: Before his conversion, Paul was a leader of the Jews and persecutor of the early Christians. He had position, power, a certain prominence and, no doubt, comfort with this world. You know? What people of this world want! Above all, he lived believing God loved him and honored him because he was doing the right things. From a worldly point-of-view, he had it all. He had it made....from a worldly point-of-view. And then he says:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as a loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ... (vv. 7-8)

The words that hit are these: "...I have suffered loss of all things and count them as rubbish...". You know the definition of rubbish, but hearing it has a way of messing up the stuff of this world we think important. Listen: "waste material; refuse or litter." Again, Paul says "...I have suffered **loss of all things** and count them as rubbish" - position, power, prominence, worldly comfort. I like the noun "trash" and this definition: "anything worthless, useless, or discarded; rubbish." That stings, especially if we take inventory of all the things of this world we think so important, including what we hoard under our roofs. Some of you will want to argue. I promise: the day will come when you won't!

Paul says, "...whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." It all went away because of his conversion and, with it, the thinking that God loved him because he was so lovable. It all goes away. Forever and ever!

Paul was content with that because he had, as he calls it, "...the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He saw it clearly. Christ died for sinners such as Paul. Christ kept the Commandments perfectly for all people, whereas Paul lived in the delusion that he could keep them. Jesus secured Paul's pardon. Jesus secured Paul's heaven. Paul was granted the greatest miracle that gave Him the greatest possession; the miracle of faith to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, and with that, the greatest possession of everlasting life! By the way, we can substitute Paul's name with ours.

So, let's connect this with the following: The Apostle says . . .

## II. What We Want Above Everything.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith -- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead. (vv. 8b-11)

Everything about this is what we want, isn't it? We want our Lord Jesus. We want Him now and He gives Himself through Word and Sacrament. We want Him on that day when we leave this world. And that's His promise: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (Jn. 14:3) We want to know that He will be with us in this weary, frightening and tearful world. And that's His promise: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (And this is where we live! Right now!), I will fear no evil, for you are with me..." (Ps. 23:4) Promise after promise. We want everything that assures us of Paul's words, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection."

Everything about this is what we want. Everything...except those words, "and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead." Our flesh cringes a bit, doesn't it? *May share in his sufferings.* Yet, it is as the Lord said to us: "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (Jn. 15:19) His love for us leaves no choice.

Commentator Harlyn Kuschel writes:

Believers cannot atone for their own sins by suffering and dying, but they share in the fellowship of Christ's suffering and become like him in his death. They share this when they endure the scorn and ridicule and even at times the physical persecution of the hostile world, when they daily crucify their own sinful and selfish nature with its lusts and desires, and when they joyfully and uncomplainingly follow their Savior on their path of suffering and trouble in this sinful world to the glory of eternal life with him...toward that great goal every believer, including each one of us, also daily strives. (Harlyn J. Kuschel, *The Peoples Bible, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Second Edition, 2000, p. 74)

## III. Forgetting and Pressing.

From that we come to these words of our text:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (vv. 12-14)

The terms hardly need explanation: "press on" - "forgetting what lies behind" (There are some here who really need to look at that one!) - "straining forward to what lies ahead" - "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." You cannot work through Scripture without understanding that everything within its pages directs us to eternity.

I know that the young ones and young adults have difficulties relating to this because of age, expectations of living what is called "a full life" (whatever that means), anticipation of exciting things to

come...maybe. I understand but all that doesn't excuse ignoring what the Holy Spirit impresses upon us through Paul. I must tell you that every time I see a commercial for the Shriners Children's Hospitals or St. Jude's Children's Hospital I am reminded of how quickly things can change. Every time I think of the young ones and young adults we have said our "good-byes" to here I am reminded that excusing our children from understanding the brevity of life and what they have in Christ is no excuse whatsoever. Never!

The words of Jesus must never fade from the hearing of our children and us: "I came that they (the sheep, us, babies through adults) may have life and have it abundantly." (Jn. 10:10b) That abundant life is not what we get out of this world. Of this world Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation." (Jn. 16:33) In fact, Jesus went on to say, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (Jn. 10:11) The laying down of His life was the final payment for every sin of every human. The purpose of that was to overcome the world for us and grant us eternal life. Jesus said "I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33b)

You'll recall that the Holy Spirit had John write:

Do not love the world or the things in the world (You don't sacrifice your spiritual well being for anything - or any person - of this world!). If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life - is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 Jn. 2:15-17)

Those verses apply to God's people - all ages - all circumstances. Our supreme blessing is God's love in Christ. We enjoy the blessings God gives us here - but, make no mistake about it - none: We're in a constant process of ***Taking Out The Trash***.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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*Philippians 3:4b-14:* **“Taking Out the Trash”**

- I. What Makes Your Stuff Rubbish.*
- II. What We Want Above Everything.*
- III. Forgetting and Pressing.*

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