

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Lent – Year C

March 21, 2010

Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Philippians 3:7-14

Pastor Paul Horn

## **In Him We Have the Prize**

### **I. An Eternal Life**

### **II. A Temporary Cross**

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> 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 <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

For our guests this morning, I should preface this sermon by saying one of our longstanding members died on Thursday morning. His name was John Wright Sr. Now that you've embraced the reality of death this past weekend, have you thought about what you want to do before you die? Like many people, perhaps you have a bucket list; things I want to do before I kick the bucket. "If I do this (sky dive), accomplish this (pay off the house), travel here (Holy Land), forgive that person, then I will be ready to die." What if you had to choose just one of those items on your bucket list, which one would it be? What you couldn't choose any of those? Would you still be ready to die? Or maybe you don't have a bucket list. Perhaps you would like to leave a legacy behind. Perhaps you would like to be known as someone who left a majority of their estate to the church so that the work of the gospel would continue long after you were gone. Maybe you would like to be known as someone who cared or was generous. Could I suggest something else? What if the only thing you were known for, the only thing people remembered about you was this: that you said, "**I want to know Christ. I want to be found in Christ.**"

That's what Paul wanted to be known for, that he was in Christ, that's all that mattered. Now of all people, Paul had every reason to boast about his life. He says in the verses preceding our

lesson, **“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 legalistic righteousness, faultless.”** As far as Jews went, he was top dog! But that’s not what was important to him at the end of his life. Instead of reveling in his past accomplishments and his heritage, he rejoices in the prize Jesus had won for him. Will you not also rejoice in your prize today? Paul also rejoices in his cross. Will you not also rejoice in your cross? Today, through Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we will see that **“In Him We Have the Prize; an eternal life and a temporary cross.”**

Allow me to present a brief history lesson on the Apostle Paul. As he said before, Paul was a Pharisee. Pharisees were very zealous for God’s laws. So much so that they even added more rules to God’s laws. They wanted to show God that they went over and above what he demanded. They felt that their exceeding devotion to him would cause God to look with favor on them and someone earn the prize of heaven. So zealous were the Pharisees for the law, that they even persecuted Christians. They had heard that this new religion was teaching that this Jesus of Nazareth had done away with the law. The Pharisees didn’t like that so much. Paul even secured authority from the chief priests to travel up to Damascus from Jerusalem to root out the Christians there. But on the road north, Paul discovered some things...

When the Lord Jesus himself appeared to Paul in a blinding display of light, Paul realized that he was not doing God a favor by exterminating Christians. In fact, he was hindering the Lord’s work. Secondly, Paul realized that he was not on the path to heaven, but the fast track to hell. His good works and self-righteousness meant nothing to God. Thirdly, Paul realized that God does give eternal gifts to those who even stubbornly refused him in the past. Finally, Paul realized that in vs12, “I was laid hold of by Christ.” This was a good thing, because it was obvious that Paul had not nor would ever in the future choose Christ... unless Christ first took hold of him through his Word and Sacrament.

The reason I share this brief history lesson with you because it really is a history lesson about you and me. Sinful by nature, you and I would never have taken hold of Christ. By nature, we are spiritually ignorant. We see the only way to winning favor with God is to work for that prize, to strive with all our might to win eternal life, and like Paul, we end up traveling on the wrong road, although we think we are. That sinful nature also prohibits us from choosing Christ, if given the decision, we would choose the path the hell every time, unless Christ took hold of us by his Word and Sacrament first. Thank God that he has!

Even now as Christians, we see that the sinful nature still takes hold of us and influences us to choose the ways of this sinful world, to tightly grasp worldly things, and to hang loosely onto the prize of heaven

In this season of Lent, we have the privilege of looking to Christ and see him taking our sin from us, and holding on to our sin. Christ took hold of our sin all through his life, bearing burden of your sins, trying to live a life free from sin, to win the prize of heaven as your substitute. He tried, and he succeeded! He was perfect! His good works were flawless in his Father’s sight, not something we could ever accomplish. Jesus won the prize; the life God requires for eternal life. Christ took hold your sin and carried it to the cross. There in his body

he allowed his Father to put to death your sin with his body. There they both died. And so by his death Christ won the prize of payment for sin, which God requires for entrance to the gates of heaven.

What more would you want at the end of your life than to **“know Christ, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection.”** In the original language of the NT Paul is saying, “I want to experience Christ’s life, death and resurrection.” He had. Christ had given Paul the prize through his baptism. Christ has also taken hold of you at your baptism. Through the washing with water and the Word, Christ Jesus took a hold of your sin and washed it away. Through baptism he has given you the prize that he has won, an eternal life in heaven.

Since Christ has won the prize for you, and has so graciously given you this prize, you will confess with the Apostle, **“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss. I consider it rubbish.”** My good works, my self-righteousness, my sinful pride, are all worthy of the dung heap. As Paul said, **“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.”** Since Christ has won the prize of eternal life for me, I leave all things worldly behind, and press on to take hold of Jesus. In a little while we will sing, “What is the world to me? Jesus is my treasure.” Since he won the prize of heaven for me, He is what I will hold on to; for Christ Jesus is the source of the forgiveness of my sins, he has won the freedom from guilt of my sins, the burden is lifted, and the fear of death is gone. Instead we rejoice in death, because it means victory for those who have held on to the prize.

So what do you want to be remembered for on this earth? I would suggest that you knew Christ and his death, resurrection, that in him you have the prize, a life eternal with your Savior and all the saints. But with that life, comes the cross.

Paul joyfully says in vs10, **“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 has the prize and now he wants the cross? What does that mean? Do you remember when Jesus said, **“If you truly want to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.”** To follow Christ, to be his disciple, to be a believer in him, he says that we must humbly admit that we are nothing, and that we are willing to endure the troubles, persecution, humiliation, mockery for our Christian faith, even to the point of death – that’s why he said, “Take up your cross.” Would he utter those words in the 21<sup>st</sup> century he would say, “Take up your firing squad rifle, your noose, your executioner’s sword, and follow me.”

This does not make sense to your sinful flesh. Why would you want to willingly take up hardships? There’s no glory in that! Our sinful flesh is satisfied with the joy it can dredge from this earth. Even if the sinful flesh would see some benefit in the blessings God promises, it would quickly turn away from God on account of the cross. No blessing from God is worth the cross, it says. But we who have seen the true prize of salvation understand the futility of chasing after the blowing chaff of the world. Life’s riches are fleeting! Life’s riches are limited in their ability to satisfy.

You don’t have to play video games to appreciate this lesson from the generation of gaming. Every game has a “space of possibility.” It’s the sum of all the possible moves within a game. A

game can be very fun and exciting until the gamer reaches this limit of possibility. Then the game is boring; he's done all the game will allow.

King Solomon did this in real life. He was able to enjoy life so completely that he hit the walls of possibility in real life. And what did he do then? He wrote the book of Ecclesiastes saying, "Everything is meaningless." Solomon discovered what our sinful flesh does not understand. Our flesh chases after the things of this world thinking they are what life is all about. Solomon noted that the things of this world are meaningless.

Your new man knows this and chases after Christ and his prize instead. Your new man knows that your life as a Christian will include the cross. We will suffer on account of the Word. But that suffering is a momentary trouble compared to the surpassing greatness of the prize we have in Christ. So we must suffer? Well, bring it on! We have the prize! And as Paul says in Romans, **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us."**

We rejoice in the cross, part of the prize, forgetting what is behind, our pursuit of all things worldly, we put behind us the past persecutions because of our faith, and press on to the future.

Before he died on Thursday morning, John Wright told his wife, "I want to be known as someone who cared." For those who knew John, you could say that he did. But for all of John's acts of charity, and they were many, for all of his care and concern for other people, they are not what saved John. Rather, I can confidently say, that after speaking to him in the last hours of his life, John saw all of his works as rubbish. He had put those things behind him, and at the end of his life, John was looking ahead. He was reaching for the prize. He said, "Pastor, I want to go home." John was looking forward to enjoying that eternal glory which Christ had won for him, for me, for you! May we all, like John, like the Apostle Paul, take hold of the prize. We will say at the end of our lives, "I have the prize... because I am in Christ." To God alone be the glory! Amen!