

**SERMON Philippians 3:4b-14**  
**FORGET THE RUBBISH! PRESS ON FOR THE PRIZE!**

*If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Remember David and Goliath. Which one had every reason to be self-confident for the showdown? Goliath! He had the size, the strength, the weapons, and the experience! But how helpful were all these things? Rubbish! It was David, stepping forward with trust in the Lord, using but a slingshot and a stone, who was given the victory! The same is true for you. In the battle to get “CONDEMNATION FOR SIN” off your back, to be righteous enough to get to heaven, how much value do your efforts, your experience, your knowledge, and your cleverness have? None. Like David, you need God's help.

The honorable Apostle Paul, the Lord's messenger and missionary, who wrote half of the twenty-seven New Testament books, and this text, also had had a battle, striving to win God's favor and to gain acceptance into heaven. He had at first, like Goliath, trusted in his own abilities. His confidence was in what his own flesh could do to merit acceptance from God. We are like that, by nature. Everyone strives to appease an angry parent, teacher, boss, spouse, policeman, judge. “I'll stand on my head if I have to, to win their favor.” Paul thought he had succeeded in doing that with God. *If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.* Such a list!

In the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham, his son Ishmael—son Isaac was not yet born—and all his household, God commanded that the males were to be circumcised; thereafter, on the eighth day from birth. The word “circumcision” means “to cut around.” It involved the cutting around—cutting away of—part of the skin of the anatomy which makes baby-boys, boys. By this God marked them as His own and made them members of His kingdom and nation. Uncircumcised males were not part of the Old Testament nation of Israel. Circumcision was both a physical and a spiritual act—physically, cutting away of the skin of the flesh; spiritually, through God's Promise of the coming Savior, a cutting away of the sin and unbelief of the heart. Similarly, New Testament baptism, ushers us into God's kingdom. It does not simply wet the body with physical water, but through the Word of Good News in Christ the crucified and risen Savior, it washes the heart clean from sin by faith. Old Testament circumcision looked ahead to the “separating” and rescuing work of the Savior. Its purpose and its spiritual value was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ. It was not a requirement for salvation in Christ (Acts 15). Real circumcision is not of the flesh, but of the heart (Romans 2:28-29). Today, physical circumcision has no spiritual value.

Nevertheless Paul, originally named Saul, at first had viewed circumcision as a physical act by which one was qualified for God's Kingdom. Many of his forefathers and contemporaries thought the same. In addition, Paul had a whole “bank account” of reasons why he was acceptable before God. *Circumcised the eighth day*—exactly as God had said. *Of the stock of Israel*—not any non-Israelite blood in his line. *Of the tribe of Benjamin*—the same tribe from which Israel's first king had come, and the tribe which, together with Judah, survived the captivity in Babylon. *A Hebrew of the Hebrews*—by heredity and descent, a true son of Abraham. *Concerning the law, a “Pharisee”*—a “separatist” who lived in very exact keeping of the Old Testament and its rules. *Concerning zeal, persecuting the church*—he proudly had persecuted the followers of Jesus of Nazareth! *Concerning the*

righteousness which is in the law, blameless—flat out self-righteous and confident, acceptable to God. Self-confident like Goliath, Paul felt he had the upper hand in being acceptable and pleasing to God.

But before Paul had gotten too far in his self-righteousness, God in His mercy and grace showed Paul the disfavor he was earning before the Lord, and also showed him His Son Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, slain on the altar of the cross for Paul's and the world's unacceptable record. In Jesus alone forgiveness, mercy, and victory were granted as a gift of God's love. Paul realized the useless status that his flesh and deeds had won for him, and into which he had put his confidence. *But what things were gain to me, I have counted loss for Christ.* It was all a "loss." The word translated "loss" depicts "that which is imposed as a penalty in court." Any money, land, business etc., involved, must be given up, forfeited, lost! Paul now realized that all these things in which he had trusted were "loss"—like a penalty imposed in a court—useless to hold onto. In Christ alone he had something far better!—God's forgiveness, righteousness, and acceptance, resurrection from the grave to new life—eternal life—all through Him who died for him and rose in victory.

Paul writes, *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ—useless, to be forfeited, gone. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—nothing comes close to the value and the confidence of God's favor that I/we have in Christ. For whom [for Him] I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. Count them as "rubbish"—an alternate and legitimate translation used in the Old King James Translation is "dung," animal manure. All those things in which Paul had taken so much pride and into which he had put so much confidence for winning God's favor, he rightly now saw as being fit for the manure pile. I count them as dung that I may be found in Him [Jesus], not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.* His confidence was now in Jesus the crucified and risen Savior, Son of God and Son of Man. *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.* In Jesus He knew and was confident of the otherwise-impossible resurrection to a new and perfect life! By faith he clasp onto Christ's victory, which was won by Jesus' suffering apparent defeat on the cross. In a wondrous way, beyond sin-warped understanding and logic, Paul had God's approval in Christ and the victory over Satan and over CONDEMNATION FOR SIN—death forever in hell—sins completely forgiven, and new life forever! Like David, who trusted in the Lord for victory, Paul put his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, not himself.

How does the devil tempt you to trust self? "Lord, I come from a long history of believers in Christ, I come from a long history of Lutheran believers in Christ, conservative Lutheran believes. My family was instrumental in congregations X, Y, or Z, or even here at St. Luke's, and in the CLC. I was baptized in infancy, duly confirmed as a young adult, I attended services, I help when needed, I have led my children to know forgiveness in Christ from a young age, I sent/send them to confirmation class, I don't live in the bar, I don't smoke." Etc. --- Do you know what? It's all rubbish, it's dung! It accomplishes nothing for you. In Christ alone you have acceptance before the Father. Your many sins?? They are forgiven. Your sins of the past that plague your mind, your sins of the present that keep trapping you again, are washed away in Jesus. . The guilt that is on your heart and mind this morning, has been dealt with by Jesus. Here is the real treasure for now and forever.

*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* Paul says, forget about those things of this life, on which you imagine you have confidence before God. Those are all fatal distractions. Like a runner in a race, keep pressing on to the goal. Keep your eyes fixed on the goal. Don't get side-tracked. Run straight ahead. Don't turn your head aside to visit. Don't look back to see how far you have come. Press on to the goal. Pursue the goal, nothing else.

Thus, put aside all the many things that fill your days and heart which distract you from Christ: Work-work-work—but who gives you ability to work? Money-money-money—but who gives you your wealth and daily bread? Fun-fun-fun—but how satisfying really is it? Do not lounge in the same old sins—"it's all forgiven anyway." Strive! for the real goal—salvation in Christ. Nourish your soul with His Word. Live for Him each day in your priorities, in your dealing with other people, in your speech, in your free time, in your handling reversal, in "letting go" into the hands of death when hat time comes. Christ has mastered all for you. *Press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!* That is the prize! The rest is rubbish. Press on with David, not Goliath. Press on with Paul. Trust in the Lord!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---