

This morning I want to take ten minutes to meditate on Paul's words in Philippians 3:1-14, which is always a great text for New Years, and then open it up for testimonies.

Philippians 3:1-14 - Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ 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; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ **But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.** ⁸ 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 ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² **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.** ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul tells the Philippian church to watch out for those who try to convince you that salvation is about grace plus works.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Paul states that if anyone has reason to put confidence in the flesh, it is him. Confidence in the flesh is the belief that we are accepted by God because of something in us: our pedigree, our works, our attitude, our performance. But now he says that whatever was in his profit column is now in the loss column. Everything is a loss that does not help him to know Christ more. Anything that he once boasted of now causes him to trust in himself and not in Christ.

He calls it “skubalon” – rubbish, dog excrement. He just wants to know Christ. And so, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, he presses on.

In Joni Eareckson Tada’s book *“When God weeps: why our sufferings matter to the Almighty,”* she tells of a five year-old boy named Matthew, who volunteered with his parents and his brother at one of Joni’s retreats for disabled people (Joni is a quadriplegic). She writes how at the end of the retreat, Matthew asked his father, “When do I get to have my wheelchair, Daddy?” As Joni puts it:

This little boy doesn’t need a wheelchair. He has no use for one. But try telling him that! A wheelchair, for Matthew, would top his Christmas wish list. A wheelchair means a joy ride. It also means an initiation into a wonderful club: a special group of kids who enjoy a special relationship with Joni. This five-year-old hasn’t a clue about the pain and paralysis, the heartaches and hurdles. He discounts all of that, disregarding the dark side. All he desires is a chance to be among my best friends, a chance to identify with me, be like me, a chance to know me. If it means having a wheelchair, great. He’ll welcome it.

Matthew wanted so much to be like Joni and her friends that if it meant having a wheelchair, then that is what he wanted. That’s laser focus – all that matters is knowing Him, even if it means losing all else.

Like **Matthew 13:44-46** - *"The kingdom of heaven is like **treasure hidden** in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

I think there are two kinds of people this morning:

One looks back in satisfaction

One looks back and sees a lot worth forgetting, like Paul in 1 Timothy:

1 Timothy 1:13-16 - *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love*

that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

To the first: everything is a loss compared to knowing Christ
To the second: forget what is behind and strain towards what is ahead

Let us press on in 2018 to know the Lord.