

4b If anyone else thinks that he has grounds for 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 in regard to zeal, persecuting the church; in regard to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

7 But, whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. 8 But even more than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith. 10 I do this so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, 11 in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Dear Friends, who are running to reach the finish line,

Good works and deeds play an important role in our world. The good works I am speaking of are good in God's eyes and helpful to our fellow human beings.

Some people believe that doing good is the way to gain access to salvation and eternal life. Saul, the Pharisee, was one such person. In the book of Acts, chapter 9, everything changed for Saul. Jesus Christ appeared on the road to Damascus and asked, "**Saul, why are you persecuting me?**"

THE
CONVERSION
OF
ST. PAUL



ACTS 9:1-19

Saul thought he was doing good, however he was fighting God. Jesus converted him to a believer.

In his letter to the Philippians, he is much older. Saul now goes by the name Paul. This apostle of Jesus writes to his friends in the city of Philippi. What we have is **An Old Pharisee's Confession: The Treasure is in the "Trash."** Paul understood what the real treasure of salvation was not in his good works, but in what Jesus, the Christ, did for him. The apostle wants us to remember this and to live accordingly.

1. Paul didn't see the real treasure until he saw Christ.

In his early days Paul was, like most people, was trying to live a meaningful life. He found his meaning in religion. He thought his treasure and his future were tied to serving God. He thought he was doing well as a dedicated pharisee. Then, Jesus met him on the road of life and informed him that he had it all backwards. Paul did not see the real treasure and real life until he saw Christ. Paul wants us to see this too.

A. He is concerned because, some false teachers in Philippi were trying to get the Philippians to go down the old road of serving God in order to win salvation. These men were called Judaizers. They believed in Jesus, but they also believed in their own good works. It was the same road that Paul had been down years earlier.

There are religious teachers today who invite us to go down this road. *"There are certain things you have to do to please God and win salvation."* Paul wants us to know it doesn't lead to treasure, it leads to trash.

1. When Paul was a pharisee he had many rules. His confidence was in doing a good job keeping the rules. He wants us to know if this were a treasure, he would be rich. He brags: **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 in regard to zeal, persecuting the church; in regard to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.** No one had been better at working for salvation than Paul.

Did it work?

2. He confesses all that dedicated work was a loss. Jesus appeared to him on

the road to Damascus. Everything he was doing was wrong. Later on St. Paul would write to the Galatian Christians, "**We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.**" (Galatians 2:16)

You and I know Jesus Christ, but the idea that we have to do our part is tempting. Think about the phrase, "*I believe in Jesus, and I must show up to church regularly.*" Most people would say that it is correct, but it isn't. "*I believe in Jesus, and I show up to church regularly because I want to know more of him and my salvation.*" That is correct. Showing up to church is not done to earn salvation, but to engage in the salvation that God has already given me freely in Jesus. Paul refers to his efforts to earn salvation as "rubbish." Our own such efforts are trash. The treasure is found in Jesus.

B. Paul found real treasure knowing Christ. What is so important about Christ? Paul states in verse 9, "**and be found in him.**" The apostle wanted to be identified with Christ. He understood Jesus was his Savior. He continues, "**not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law...**" Righteousness is not from us. His faith instead is in Christ. "**but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith.**" Christ kept the laws and rules of God. Beyond even that he allowed the Israelites to treat him like trash and put him outside God's vineyard, Jerusalem, on a cross. In the Parable in Luke 20 Jesus was referring to his crucifixion. Jesus was trash to the Pharisees, but he is a treasure to Paul. Jesus made us right with God through his perfect life and sacrifice. Nothing more was required of Paul for salvation. It was finished.

Lent and Holy Week is a time when many Christians will go to church. I hope you do too. At the heart of our remembrance is Jesus. Jesus is our treasure we put our confidence in his life, death and resurrection. Your good works are trash, but not his. Our death would be meaningless, but because of his death and victory, our death has meaning. As you come to see Jesus this Holy Week, understand you are coming to hear about your greatest treasure.

C. Paul has another revelation. There is more treasure to be found in Christ.

He mentions the power of Christ's resurrection. That power will help.

1. Paul was sharing in Jesus' sufferings. When Paul went around telling everyone that Jesus was NOT TRASH, but TREASURE, he made some powerful enemies. First it was the Judaizers, but later the Roman Empire joined in. Officials persecuted Paul and tried to kill him. God's power sustained him until the end when his work was done.

2. His death was victory too, Paul's hope was to arrive at the resurrection of the dead. Paul expected the power of the resurrection to raise him too. This happens because God does not lie, but keeps his word.

3. So often people are invited in our world to "be different" and "stand out from the crowd." We Christians can do this. When all the world calls good works for salvation "treasure," we call them "trash." When the world calls Jesus "trash," we call him "treasure." In doing so you have powerful enemies. Christ is your confidence. He will make sure you finish your race, and he will bring you to his fellowship above.

2. Paul focused on running with the real treasure once he knew Christ.

Runners do not want to be distracted for their race. A good example of a distracted Olympic runner is Hansle Parchment, a Jamaican hurdler who took the wrong bus to his semifinal race due to being distracted while listening to music, potentially missing his race, but was later helped by a volunteer to get to the race. Her name is Trijana Stojkovic.



<https://www.npr.org/2021/08/13/1027385999/a-gold-medalist-returned-to-thank-the-volunteer-who-helped-him-make-his-race-on>

St. Paul pictures himself as a man running a race. The finish line is heaven. What motivates him? Christ! **12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me.** What can we learn from the apostle so we can run a good race?

A. He focused on finishing the race. Verse 13, **"Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet..."** It is important to give a full effort



until the end. Last June (2024) there was a track and field story from the European Championships. Spanish race walker Laura García-Caro lost her bronze medal when she raised her arms and began celebrating. Another competitor passed her with 2 meters or about six feet to the finish line. As we live by faith we can enjoy life now, but we understand we are not at the end of the race. We need to keep running hard.

B. Therefore, Paul focused on straining ahead. Runners often will memorize the racecourse. They will prepare their bodies with food and exercise. Then they can give a focused effort. We do the same through God’s Word and the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit feeds and helps us to understand the racecourse. Then we can run successfully.

C. Focused on the prize that God is calling us up to himself. No mere laurel wreath on the head of the champion at the games. This is the call to join God in heaven and wear the crown of eternal life.

This is very helpful when we are going through hard times. When we suffer loss, we know this isn’t the end. This is only the journey through a vale of tears. The best is yet to come. We press on toward the goal. He is calling us upward.

Conclusion: Some of you come from churches where lists of rules were provided. Everything depended on following the rules. Some of us have not known such an experience. There is a temptation for all of us to want a simple set of rules that makes our Christian race easy.

We learn from Paul that the race isn’t easy, but we can run with confidence. Jesus is our treasure. He ran his race perfectly and won our salvation. We are simply running to take hold of that for which Jesus took hold us. His power, the power of the resurrection is great to help us. Therefore, leave behind the “trash” and put your trust in him, our treasure. Amen.