

Pentecost 19 / October 4, 2026

Philippians 3:7

*"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."*

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What have lost because of your faith in Christ? What would you have gained if you were not a follower of Christ? Perhaps you have never thought of it, because that has never been an issue in your life. But for some people the call to follow Christ comes at the cost of professional or academic advancement. Sometimes it comes at the cost of family and friends. A person from a family or culture that worships another God, would become an outsider in their family and larger community for following Christ. A person from a family where belief in any god is considered foolish would become an outcast for following the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus," as Paul puts it in our text. A person who puts their faith in Christ and seeks to follow Him in faithfulness would be rejected by their social group, when they no longer wanted to engage in activities considered normal for them, but sinful by God. The rich young man who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, declined to follow when Jesus said, *"Sell your possessions and give them to the poor and follow me."* Sadly, he decided that whatever he might have gained following Christ was not worth the loss of his wealth.

Jesus challenged His disciples to count the cost of following Him and to weigh the cost against the benefit of knowing Him as their God and Saviour. He challenged them to do this, because He knew that no matter what the cost in worldly benefits, nothing can compare with the eternal benefit of knowing Him as our God and Saviour. In the gospel of Mark, He said whoever saves his life in time by denying Him will lose their life in eternity, while the one who loses their life in time for His sake will save their life for eternity. Pain and loss in time is nothing in comparison to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ in time and being with Him fully and forever in eternity. Peter came to Jesus and asked point blank what gain they as disciples would have for following Him. He said, *"We have left everything to follow you."* Jesus said that no one who has left the things of this world, fields, family and friends would fail to receive countless blessings of friends, family, fellowship, everything necessary for life in time and most importantly, in eternity receive eternal life. Whatever we may have lost or failed to gain because of our association with Jesus, there is nothing of more value in time and in eternity than the blessing

of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and receiving through Him, the righteousness of God that gives eternal life. In Jesus there is blessing in time and eternity.

St. Paul was a passionate man. He never did anything half heartedly. As a devotee of Judaism he was a pharisee, what he called the strictest sect of Judaism. As a pharisee he was the best pharisee he could possibly be. He was so devoted to Judaism and such an exceptional pharisee that he persecuted fellow Jews who confessed Jesus as the Messiah and sought to destroy them. He approved the stoning death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He went through the synagogues of Judea and Jerusalem rooting out and arresting followers of the Way. So zealous was he for the traditions of his fathers that he took the show on the road, receiving letters from the high priest in Jerusalem to access the synagogues of Damascus, looking for followers of Jesus to have them kicked out and cast into prison. In all of Judaism there was no one more admired than Paul.

But then of course he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and was changed from a persecutor to a believer, from a denier to a confessor of Jesus as the Messiah. In a moment his status as a pharisee and everything he gained as a devoted follower of Judaism was lost. He went from the most admired man among the Jews to the most hated man in Judaism. Years later the fury among the Jews hadn't abated. In Jerusalem a mob assaulted him in the temple precincts. Nevertheless, whatever he lost and whatever he suffered for the sake of Christ Jesus was more than made up for with the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord and receiving in Him the righteousness of God that forgives sins, covers over sinfulness and gives eternal life. There is nothing of greater value than the righteousness of God. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus as Saviour. In Him and through faith in Him, we receive the righteousness of God that gives forgiveness and peace in time and life in eternity.

Paul speaks sarcastically about his former life in Judaism, reciting his Jewish pedigree, in order to show that no matter how religious or pious we may be, we bring nothing to God that He should reward us, give us forgiveness and eternal life. Even the most righteous human life, the life Paul lived as a devout Pharisee is worthless in the sight of God to forgive sin, cover over sinfulness and give eternal life. Even more so in comparison with the righteousness of Christ, who earned our salvation through His sinless life and sacrificial death. Paul spoke this way, because there were people in the church who were saying that Christ's sacrifice was not all sufficient, but there were still sacrifices we have to make. There were people in the

church who were saying that faith and grace, as great as they were, were not enough to guarantee acceptance by God and admission into His kingdom. They said we must also please God with our works of obedience to His law. There are always people who say those things. Paul offers himself as living proof of the futility of trying to approach and appease God on the basis of our goodness and acts of righteousness. No Jew in Judaism could compare with Paul in terms of human righteousness and religious obedience. Nevertheless, everything he thought he had gained as a devout Jew and a religious Pharisee was garbage in comparison with the righteous of God, received through faith in Jesus Christ.

Friends, God certainly wants us to please Him with our lives in harmony with His righteousness expressed in His Holy Law. But He doesn't want us to do this in order to receive His mercy, but as a willing, joyous, spontaneous response to His mercy; received by His grace for the sake of the perfect obedience and holy work of Jesus, who earned our salvation through His sinless life and paid our debt of sin through the sacrifice of His cross. There is a world of difference between doing something to earn a prize and doing something out of thankfulness because you have been given the prize. We receive the prize of forgiveness and eternal life as a gift of grace for the sake of Jesus. He earned the prize through His life and death. We live lives of love in thankful response for the gift of grace and the righteousness we receive simply through faith in Jesus as our God and Saviour. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus as our God and Saviour. There is nothing of greater value than the righteousness of God received as a gift of grace through faith in Jesus.

There will come a time when our lives will end. All that we have received and earned in life will be turned over to others. The only thing we will carry into the next life is the one thing that carries us through this life, the righteousness of God received through faith in Jesus Christ. When we stand in the judgement of God, Jesus' blood and righteousness will be our only beauty and our only dress. Consider Jesus' parable of the wedding guests. The banquet hall is filled with guests wearing garments provided by the host, except for one man wearing garments of his own choosing. That man, cast out of the banquet hall, represents all who seek to enter in and stand in the presence of God on the basis of their own goodness and good works. Their goodness may be beautiful in the eyes of the world, but they are rubbish and worthless in the eyes of God in comparison with His divine righteousness.

Those who enter into the banquet hall and stand in the presence of God are those, who having confessed their sin and sinfulness, have cast aside the garments of their own righteousness and are clothed in the garments of Christ's righteousness, received through faith in Him as God and Saviour. Truly we sing, "Jesus Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress." To receive Jesus' righteousness all we need is to believe! All we need to believe is to receive what God gives freely in the gospel through the working of His Spirit; grace, mercy and peace for the sake of Jesus our Saviour.

The Holy Spirit open our ears to hear the gospel, our hearts to receive Jesus our Saviour and our lips to confess the surpassing worth of knowing Him and receiving from Him the righteousness of God that gives eternal life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.