

Philippians 3:7-14

Leroy Satchel Paige was a phenomenal base ball player. He has been ranked among the 20 best players of all time. Paige entered the major leagues as a pitcher in his forties. When asked one of the secrets for staying young, Paige said, "Don't look back, something might be gaining on you." "Don't Look Back" became the title of a made for television movie on Paige's life. Those words are also good advice for the Christian. The theme of our sermon for today is "Don't look Back; Look Ahead to Heaven..

In the Word of God we are looking at St. Paul gives His philosophy of life . He wrote, "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.."

The Christian church has been troubled by false teachers from the very beginning. Paul had an ongoing battle with false teachers called Judaizers. They were called that because, though they claimed to be followers of Christ, they maintained that beside faith in Christ people still had to observe the Old Testament Laws of Moses. In order to be saved a man had to be circumcised and people had to avoid certain foods and. observe certain rules to gain God's favor.

Paul preached the true Gospel, which says that Christ alone is the Savior and that person's works do not in the least save him. On the other hand, the Judaizers boasted of their deeds and claimed that they were closer to God because of who they were. St. Paul answered them, "Okay, if you want to play that game, if anyone else thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. I was circumcised on the eight day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, in regard to the Law a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

We still have Judaizers today. There are people who put their trust in the flesh. They believe that they will go to heaven because their grandparents were believers, or because they were regular in their church attendance or because of their generosity, or the fact that they are good parents. You would be surprised how quickly those who have fallen away come to put their trust in worldly things rather than Christ.

St. Paul said of his past life that none of what he was or did amounted to a hill of beans. He said, "I count it all loss- less than nothing compared to the super greatness of knowing Christ Jesus His Lord. Jesus had become Paul's dearest treasure.

Paul had first come to know Christ as his Savior under most unlikely circumstances. He hated Christ and he hated Christians. He was on a crusade to stamp out Christianity when Jesus appeared to him on the way to Damascus. Paul was converted and came to believe on Jesus as his Savior from sin.

After coming to know Jesus Paul's life was turned upside down. Instead of a self righteous Pharisee, he saw himself as an unworthy sinner. Instead of trusting in his deeds for salvation, he trusted in Jesus blood and merit. Paul gave up everything he had once trusted in and saw it all as useless and a hindrance for the sake of knowing Christ.

After Paul was converted, he believed that Jesus had lived and died for Him. He believed that Jesus had risen from the dead and that because of Jesus' saving work he was accepted by God and had the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. Jesus was Paul's dearest treasure.

The Apostle said, " "I consider all things garbage, (he uses a stronger word- manure) that I may gain Christ and be found in Him." To be sure, there are many fine things in this life, things such as family and friends, beauty and accomplishments but

Paul was willing to give everything up if he had to make a choice between them and Christ. To know the love of Christ, to know Him as his Savior and to be found trusting in Christ was the only thing that truly mattered.

What mattered was that Paul be found righteous in the judgment. Righteousness is being right, innocent, in God's eyes. Paul was a good man. He tried to do what was right in his own eyes but he learned that he was not good enough to deserve anything from God but punishment. God led him to give up on his own righteousness. Paul placed His hope of passing God's judgment on the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul placed his faith in Jesus Christ. He believed that Jesus lived a righteous life, that He kept God's law to perfection, and that Jesus paid for all Paul's sins by His innocent sufferings and death. Paul believed that God declared sinners justified when He raised Jesus from the dead and that one lays hold of that righteousness and is declared righteous by faith in what Jesus did. The righteousness that makes one acceptable before God is not one that the sinner produces. Jesus worked a great exchange. He took people's sins upon Himself and gave them His goodness. This goodness this innocence that Paul trusted in was a foreign righteousness that God produced by Christ and it is claimed by faith.

The knowledge that Jesus saved him turned Paul's life around. He said, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering becoming like Him in His death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Paul wanted to know Christ Not only did he want to know that Christ existed but that He might know His Savior's love more and more. He wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection. He wanted to experience more and more the power of the resurrected Christ in his life. He wanted to live for Jesus- living as Jesus would have him live. Paul was willing to share in the suffering for Jesus' sake. Paul would also pass through death as Jesus did but then as Jesus arise to live with Him forever.

The Apostle was willing to leave all behind and not give it a second thought. He would say with the hymn writer. "Take the world and give me Jesus."

The Apostle Paul knew that Christ had saved him and had earned a home in heaven for him but he was not there yet. "He wrote, "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 took hold of me." In this life the Christian never attains perfection. Though he wants to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord, he wants to behave like a saint, he always falls short. The Christian life is a race. It is a struggle and it will be as long as one is this side of heaven. There is the danger of becoming over confident and neglecting one's faith. There is the danger of surrendering to sin and to taking one's faith for granted. Jesus called Paul and worked faith in his heart by the Gospel. He did this so that Paul might share heaven with Him. So it was that Paul put all his effort into getting there. He did nothing to earn heaven but Paul knew that he could lose it. In 1 Corinthians he wrote, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" and he wrote, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. " As long as you look to Christ, you are safe. He will keep you in the faith but should you rely on your own powers or turn away from Jesus you cal lose what He has gained for you.

Paul says, “Brothers, I do not consider my self yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do; forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul pictured himself in a race for the gold. God by Christ had prepared a place for him in heaven and Paul was not going to let anything take that prize away from him. A runner can lose a race if he turns around and looks back. Paul would not look back at past sins, they were forgiven nor past accomplishments; they were worthless. He would not allow sins, cares or riches get in his way.

Dear Friends you and I are in the race. God has called us to faith in Christ and has set the heavenly prize before us. Don't be distracted, don't drop out, don't get bored, and don't become weary. Cling to Christ, live in Christ. Continue to draw life from His word and sacrament. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was like a merchant man who when he had found a pearl of great price went and sold all that he had and bought it. In Christ you have everlasting life. Hold fast to it. Amen.