

Greetings,

I hope this letter finds you all well.

The passage I am reflecting on this week is Philippians 3:4b-14;

⁴ even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

I am sure for a number of us this last week, particularly the weekend, has been tough. We find ourselves again in a situation of lockdown where some of the freedoms we had only just started to experience again after the first lockdown have been curtailed. On top of that we see nationally the daily cases of this illness increasing. It is completely understandable then that we may have entered this week feeling down hearted and even a bit anxious about what is in store for us over the coming months.

I personally have experienced a great sense of loss both professionally and personally. I had plans to try to start shaping my ministry into something that resembled what I was doing before the start of the pandemic, but these have had to be put on hold. Sarah and I had also planned to spend last weekend with her parents but when they arrived on Friday we watched the news and heard about the lockdown; as a result, instead of staying with us for the weekend, they stayed the night and left the next day.

As I came to the reading for this week, I find myself drawn to what Paul has lost, (verses 4-7). Paul had come from a prestigious family background, he was a Pharisee respected for his learning in the law and devotion to it. He was considered righteous because of his observance of the law and a zealot because of how he pursued and persecuted the church. He was a wealthy man who in his culture was well respected and looked up to. However, when he came face to face with Jesus, he gave all that up to know and follow him. Moreover, in verse 8 he states that he counts everything as loss compared to knowing Jesus. Here Paul shows that he gave up even more and would continue to do so to draw closer to Jesus and to place him at the centre of his life. In verse 9 he continues this desire for closeness by sharing how he wants to be found in Christ. This speaks of how Paul saw his faith in Jesus and relationship with him as a place of refuge. All this Paul recognises as righteousness - not like the kind that was attributed to him before by man, but a righteousness that can only come through faith.

Paul's loss in this passage is quite different to our own. He chose to give up his reputation, his career, and his standing in society to follow Jesus. Although I do suppose you could make the argument that when you

come face to face with Jesus the way Paul did it would be very hard if not impossible to deny him. What we have lost over the last eight months and again more recently with the local lockdown is not through our own choosing. It has been forced upon us for our own good and the good of the community we live in. Perhaps we can learn from Paul's response to loss. Whenever Paul felt a loss he pushed forward in his relationship with Christ: he made Jesus the centre of his life and his only focus, so much so that Jesus became a place of shelter and refuge so that anything Paul did lose felt insignificant compared to the Love of God and his relationship with Him.

The same love God had for Paul He has for us. The same relationship Paul had with Jesus we can have. While we have lost a lot there is one thing that we still have and that is God, as Romans 8:38-39 states,

"³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

My prayer for myself and for you is this: that as we search for answers, search for hope and assurance, may we find Jesus. May we push deeper into our relationship with him so that like Paul we may be found in him and he in us. In Jesus may we find our hope and our strength and may our sorrows turn to joy as we press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Finally, as we enter the week, I would encourage you to reflect on the words of Hymn 489 in Singing the Faith, *All I once Held Dear*. I have attached the lyrics to the song in this letter. May the peace of God be with you this week.

God Bless

Chris Coleman

All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this

Chorus

*Knowing you, Jesus
Knowing you, there is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more
To be found in you and known as yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn
All-surpassing gift of righteousness

Oh, to know the power of your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like you in your death, my Lord
So with you to live and never die