



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 15, 2010  
Released on Wednesday, August 11, 2010**

**“Living into the Future”**

**Lesson Text:** Philippians 3:7-16

**Background Scripture:** Philippians 3:1 - 4:1

**Devotional Reading:** 1 John 4:7-12

**Philippians 3:7-16**

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

**LESSON AIMS**

**Facts:** to see how Paul moved from self-righteousness under the law to reliance on the imparted righteousness of Christ through faith.

**Principle:** to be aware that the power of Christ’s resurrection is what is lifting us toward the high mark of being like Him.

**Application:** to challenge all believers to fulfill their daily responsibility to become more and more Christlike.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Failure vs. Success**

An old lesson in business asks the question, "How many attempts does it take to be successful?" Answer: "Only one, but it may take many failures." City histories are littered with restaurants that closed quickly, shops that folded within a few months, and even megastores that shut down. One estimate is that, sadly, half of small business start-ups fail within the first four years.

Older adults can look back on their careers and see failures and successes. Most people follow several career paths in a lifetime, and often a change makes a huge difference. Maybe a person did poorly in school but flourished in business. Perhaps one languished as a salaried employee but excelled in running her own business. Some who flounder in the for-profit world thrive with a nonprofit organization.

The story is reversed for many, however. People who achieve early success may fail repeatedly later in life. The music industry speaks of "one-hit wonders," artists who have a highly ranked song that propels them to prominence but are never able to repeat that success. Literary critics can point to authors who produce a profound, important novel but never write a comparable book again.

If we evaluate the career of the apostle Paul objectively, we would say that he had both successes and failures. In Ephesus, his preaching was so popular that he moved to a better location and stayed there for two more years (Acts 19:9, 10). In Athens, though, Paul's debut before the philosophers received a mixed reception, and he seems to have left the city without having founded a church (Acts 17:32–18:1).

Paul was not driven by the goal of personal success. He never changed the essence of his preaching or his basic methods in order to get better results. He preached whether it was popular or unpopular (see 2 Timothy 4:2). Paul says that his ministry was based on "forgetting those things which are behind" (Philippians 3:13). His goal was simple: serving Jesus by spreading the gospel. His measure of success was equally basic: to remain faithful to his calling (Philippians 3:14).

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Time: A.D. 61

Place: from Rome

We wish we knew more about Paul's background. As recorded in Acts 9, Paul had a dramatic, personal encounter with the risen Christ. We think that Paul was in his early or mid-twenties when this happened. He came out of this experience with both faith in Christ and a divine appointment to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16–18). But what were the dynamics of his life that had brought him to this point? We have only bits and pieces of this information scattered throughout several New Testament books.

When Paul addressed the crowd of Jerusalem on a stairway near the temple, he asserted that he had been born in Tarsus (Acts 22:3). Tarsus was an important city roughly 400 miles north of Jerusalem and 125 miles west of Antioch. Tarsus was known in the ancient world as a center of learning and philosophy, but not for having a large Jewish presence. We assume that Paul's family was engaged in the business of tent manufacture and distribution, for this was the trade he knew (Acts 18:3). This could be lucrative, although the sewing of large tents from leather was arduous

work. Paul seems to have been something of a child prodigy, and his desire for learning soon outstripped the resources available to a Jewish boy in Tarsus. Therefore, he was sent to Jerusalem to study under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). This was because Gamaliel was a leading teacher of the day among a group of the Jews called Pharisees (Acts 5:34).

Paul's father had been a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Mentioned frequently in the New Testament, the Pharisees were a super sect among the Jews of Paul's time. They had an outsized influence in proportion to their relatively small numbers. Scholars today estimate that there were no more than 10,000–20,000 Pharisees during this period.

The Pharisees were scrupulous in keeping the Jewish law and traditions that had built up around it. This emphasis meant they were not as tied to the temple as were their rivals, the Sadducees. Because of this, when the temple was demolished by the Romans in ad 70, the Pharisaic type of Judaism survived, eventually to become Talmudic Judaism (which persists to this day).

By today's standards, Pharisees were highly educated laypersons. To study successfully under a great teacher such as Gamaliel was the equivalent of doing doctoral work at a famous university. We surmise that Paul was one of the most educated people in all of Judaism, even in the entire Roman world (see Acts 26:24).

When Paul was called by Christ on the road to Damascus, he was already on the high road to grand success in the Jewish world. Doors were open to him for unrivaled fame and much wealth. When he submitted to the will of God to serve Christ, he turned his back on all of this potential but brought along his great intellect and education.

## **COUNTING THE COST (Philippians 3:7-10)**

### **1. When did Paul realize that his religious merits were of no value to him? (Philippians 3:7)**

The privileged ethnic and religious status that Paul had counted to his credit (vs. 5,6), he now counted, or regarded, as a loss for Christ. Those things could give a person cause to possess religious self-confidence, but Paul now regarded them as useless. He had reached this conclusion in the past and was still of the same mind nearly thirty years later as he wrote to the Philippians.

The point when Paul realized decisively and dramatically that his religious merits were of no value was when Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-6). A sudden and formidable change took place in which all his religious merits were reversed. They became totally useless to him. Paul recognized himself as a self-righteous sinner, totally bankrupt in his legalism. He counted his legal attainments as a loss for justification before God in Christ alone.

### **2. What did Paul gain in Christ? (v. 8)**

Paul does not cruise through life based on his great education and heritage. Instead, *all* his accomplishments and privileges he has *counted loss for Christ*. This does not mean he is trivializing or dismissing these things; after all, he just listed them! It means that even the greatest honors of human life are of small value in comparison to his driving passion: *the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*. Paul is not talking about knowing *about* Jesus—the knowledge that might come if one were to

read every book written about Christ. Paul is concerned with *knowing* Jesus, being in an intimate relationship with Him.

For Paul, this means serving Christ as his *Lord* and gladly offering up any abilities or advantages he might have in this service. Paul uses unusually strong language here, saying that his previous life is of no value (politely translated here as *dung*). This is hyperbole, but drives home his point. He is no more concerned with his past life than he is with yesterday's garbage. His focus is on the present, his ministry for Christ.

The wording here may be confusing if we are not careful. When it says that Paul *suffered the loss of all things*, we should recognize that this is an older use of the English word *suffer*, which can mean "permit." Paul is not claiming that he has suffered in his commitment to ministry for Christ. He may have suffered because of his ministry, but he has willingly released hold on his previous life's accomplishments. Paul does not broodingly resent the hardships he endures for Christ. He rejoices over these things as a privilege (Colossians 1:24).

### **3. How should faith in Christ be evidenced? (v. 9)**

Paul had been raised to understand *righteousness* as a legitimate outcome of good works according to the Jewish *law*. He was "a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6). Paul knows that no one can accumulate enough good works to be truly righteous (Romans 3:10). Righteousness is reckoned according to one's *faith*, one's commitment and trust in God (Romans 4:24,25).

The central feature of this faith is the *resurrection*. This is the source of *power* for Paul's ministry. He is utterly convinced that Christ was risen from the dead and that the price for sin has been paid. Jesus' crucifixion was done in weakness and vulnerability. Jesus' resurrection was a mighty deed of power (2 Corinthians 13:4). The followers of Christ share in both weakness through *sufferings* and, therefore, His *death*, and in His power through His resurrection. Personal power is not found in accomplishment or pedigree, but in absolute surrender to Christ.

### **4. We know that righteousness that comes from the law and that which comes by faith are different. One is an earned righteousness, from doing good things; the other is an imputed righteousness, having it credited by God's grace. But what, if any, is the difference in action?**

Paul expects the one who understands that righteousness is by faith to be very active. Our love and gratitude to God spur us to good deeds. But the one who seeks to be righteous by doing good deeds may do as much or even more than the one who knows righteousness is by faith. They may work at a frenetic pace, but they have no confidence. Ever doing more but constantly aware of personal failings, they may become depressed. At the other extreme is the error of the Pharisees. The person attempting to be righteous by works begins to compare himself with others. He or she becomes legalistic, pointing out others' sins to achieve self-justification. Sometimes those who believe in a righteousness of faith and not works slip into the error of license. Since works do not earn salvation, they say, then works don't matter. Paul would have none of that!

### **SETTING THE GOALS (Philippians 3:11,12)**

## **5. What did Paul say about attaining the resurrection? (vs. 11,12)**

Paul now picks up his earlier imagery of being a runner for Christ (Philippians 2:16). He humbly looks forward to the greatest prize of all: *resurrection* from *the dead*. If this life is all there is, if there is no resurrection, then our selfless service to Christ and His church is pathetic and ridiculous. We might as well live selfishly, seeking only our own pleasures (see 1 Corinthians 15:32). We need not run any races. Let's just go to the tavern on the side of the race road and have a jolly old time!

But Paul will have none of that. He is committed never to swerve from the course or abandon the race. This is ensured by his desire to *follow after* Christ, to pursue the path Christ has already traversed.

Paul makes his point here with a play on words. He says he is *apprehended of Christ Jesus*. The word *apprehend* is not referring to taking a criminal into custody. Here it has the sense of "make something one's possession." Paul has been apprehended by Christ. He is Christ's own, Christ's possession. But part of this process is Paul's apprehension or capture of himself. Here, he knows that his efforts are not complete. He has *not* fully *apprehended* himself. His job is not done, and his life is not *perfect*. He still has some race to run.

## **6. Paul made it clear that he had not yet completed his journey in Christ. Why is it important not to convey an attitude that "we've arrived" when it comes to full spiritual maturity in Christ?**

It is important for two reasons. First, it's important because we never want to become arrogant in our walk with Christ. The longer we walk with Christ, the greater should be our awareness of how far short we fall from being like Him. Instead of feeling as if we have arrived, we should be ever straining ahead like a runner approaching the tape. Second, this is important for those who see our witness. If we get a self-satisfied air about us, we will hinder our witness for the Lord. In us people need to see Jesus. If we appear to have "arrived," we'll obscure the view of Jesus, and people will see only us.

## **7. How is Christ's resurrection power made a reality for a believer?**

As we learn more about Christ, we are encouraged to worship and commune with Him, to rely upon Him by faith, to obey and commit ourselves to His purpose for us, and to witness to others. As we know Christ more personally and intimately, He becomes more than the historic Saviour in whom we have placed our trust for salvation. He becomes the Saviour with whom we fellowship directly and personally (1 John 1:3). This is also what it means to abide in Christ's love (John 14:23; 15:4-10).

Paul desired to know the power of Christ's resurrection in his life. Because Christ arose in newness of life, believers have an all-sufficient supply of spiritual power that flows from Him (Rom. 6:4). We are transformed by His resurrection power, which is infused into our lives by the Holy Spirit (8:9-11). We experience this spiritual power as we are led (Gal. 5:16, 18) and controlled (Eph. 5:18) by the Holy Spirit.

## **PRESSING FORWARD (Philippians 3:13-16)**

### **8. How did Paul press toward the goal that was set before him? (vs. 13,14)**

Paul continues to make his point by using the analogy of a footrace. The great runners do not look back to see where they have been. Their focus is dead ahead, on the *mark*, the goal and the *prize* that awaits the winner. As Christ said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

The thing to remember is that this is not a quick sprint but a marathon, a life race. It is not a competitive race, a matter of beating other runners. It only matters that you finish the race. Paul makes his race imagery more vivid by picturing Christ at the finish line, calling us home. This is a *high calling*, a calling from above, a call to our heavenly home. We finish this race at the end of our lives. We have crossed the finish line and remain eligible for the prize if we remain faithful to this call.

### **9. What did Paul want believers to share with him? (vs. 15,16)**

Paul wanted his readers to share this pursuit with him. Believers need to move forward to the goal of ultimate spiritual maturity and not be lax in their spiritual growth. As we mature in Christ, we must maintain the attitude that we have not arrived as yet.

If there is a question on some minor point regarding the attainment of completeness in Christ, God has given believers instructions on spiritual growth and development in His Word (Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 5:15,16). At the same time, believers are to live consistently by the biblical principles of spiritual growth that have brought them to their present level. These same principles will take them forward to the goal for which Christ called them. Believers are to live in the future today.

## **PRACTICAL POINTS**

- 1.** If we claim Christ as our Lord, we cannot cling to the things of this world (Philippians 3:7-9).
- 2.** Following Christ is a guarantee that we will suffer (Phil. 3:10; cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).
- 3.** There is no room for complacency in the Christian life (Phil. 3:11,12).
- 4.** If we live in the past, we will never fulfill our calling in Christ (vs. 13,14).
- 5.** If we are submissive to God, He will see that we understand and conform to His will (v. 15).
- 6.** We may not know everything, but we must obey everything we do know (v.16).

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Goals and Prizes**

Today's Olympic athletes compete for gold, silver, and bronze medals. Outside the games, however, many of these athletes receive rich monetary rewards. Some receive cash payments from their government for winning. Others reap the benefits of celebrity through product endorsements and personal appearance fees.

In the ancient version of these games (the type that was familiar to Paul), the athletes competed for honor and a laurel wreath worn as a crown. To win was to receive one's "laurels." If handled carefully, these organic crowns probably lasted for a long time, but they had no cash value. Yet the potential of being honored as a

victor in an Olympic event caused many to undergo strict training and preparation leading up to the games. To win was their goal, and to be honored was their prize.

Most people have many goals in their lives. Some are short term. In times of great hardship, the goal might be to make it through another week or another day. The prize is that life usually improves; things do get better. A longer personal goal might be to lose 10 pounds or to pay off a credit card. The prize comes from better physical and fiscal health. Still longer term might be the goal of early retirement. Personal goals change over the years, and the attraction of various prizes shifts as we mature.

My primary goals in life have not changed for many years, though. Each year, I want to know Christ more fully (Philippians 3:10). I have chased this goal, and while I have made progress, there is still more track to run. I want to live in service to Christ in such a way that people will look at me and say, "That was a life well lived." And when I die, I want to hear the words, "Well done, faithful servant, enter into my joy" (see Matthew 25:23). That is my goal. May my prize be to be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord, serving You comes at a cost. We must give up things that the world thinks are important. May You give the strength to run Your race, through Your gate, down Your straight and narrow road, for all of our lives. May we run and not grow weary. May we finally attain the prize of the high calling that is found only in serving Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Our past failures and successes become less important as we know Christ more fully.

### **ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "**Growing in Joy and Peace**" in which we find Paul's view of his problems and how he managed to handle them. We can transpose this to our modern world and benefit from his spiritual insight. Study Philippians 4:2-14.

### **LESSON SUMMARIZED BY:**

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