

Solomon Lick was an Arizona Rancher in the Senoran Desert region. He had grown up on this ranch, and now had been running the ranch for years since his father's death. He thought he knew his ranch like the back of his hand, every square foot of it. But one day, as he was searching for some stray cows, he noticed something new to him. He noticed a rather wide crack in a large rock. Curiosity got the best of Solomon and he got down from his horse, and walked over to the rock to examine the crack more closely. It was so dark that he couldn't see into the crack. But the crack was actually wide enough to squeeze his body through and as he was able to look into the opening more carefully he began to realize that this was no ordinary crack in a rock on the side of a hill. Well, Solomon rode back to the ranch house and got himself a lantern. He then went back to that crack in the rock. And when he squeezed himself through that crack with his lantern, he couldn't believe his eyes. This is what Solomon saw. He found 2 subterranean caverns, each more than a mile long. The ceilings were 100 feet high. The rooms were filled with stalagmites and stalactites reaching 60 feet in height.

Solomon came back out into the sunlight with his face as white as a sheet. He knew immediately what his discovery meant. He had found a secret treasure. His property now couldn't even be valued in dollars. But he also knew what his discovery would mean to the public once they found out. And Solomon, who had grown up on this ranch, didn't want thousands of people trampling across his ground with commercial souvenir stands all around. So Solomon Lick decided that he wouldn't tell anyone about his discovery, and he kept that promise to himself for years until his death. On his deathbed, Solomon Lick shared his lifelong secret with his family.

His family members were shocked by Solomon's secret, of course. Here they had lived on this ranch all of their lives with a vast treasure on the other side of crack in a rock that they knew nothing about. Solomon's children had different values than their father. They felt that as wonderful a treasure as their dad had found should not be hoarded but should be shared with others. After their father's funeral, they immediately contacted the Arizona Nature Conservatory. The Conservatory has worked diligently at preserving this marvel of nature in its original setting while still making it available for the admiration of others. Today, thousands of people enjoy touring the mile long cave in its beautiful 2,000 acre Colossal Cave Mountain Park every year.

Solomon Lick and his family members found a model of life itself when they discovered those hidden caves on their ranch. For life is filled with hidden treasures. There are precious treasures that lie, hidden just beneath the surface, waiting for our discovery. These treasures do not usually cry out for our attention, but rather they just wait silently for our discovery. Other pretending treasures are much more obvious to us. They are continuously thrown at us by those in the world who want to profit from them. But as we accept these popularized treasures, we find that they don't really bring us lasting satisfaction and peace. No, it is through our discovery of these precious hidden

treasures, the vast caves that are just beneath the surface, that we find what life is really all about.

We have just begun a series looking at what should be most precious in our lives. Last week, we saw from the teachings of Jesus Christ in Mark 8 that the welfare of our soul should be most precious to us for it is all that we possess that is eternal. What shall it profit a person if he gain the whole world, but lose his soul, Jesus said.

Now, this morning, we want to look at something that God offers to each of us that is most precious indeed. God offers to each one of us a relationship with his son, Jesus Christ. God invites us to have a personal union with him through his son. This personal relationship with God himself will result in a lifetime of fulfillment and growth with an eternity to follow. This precious treasure is not promoted by the world around us, but is rather ridiculed by them. But this is a hidden cave that has the potential of bringing lasting peace and fulfillment to our inner souls.

Philippians 3 is one of the few passages of Scripture in which the Apostle Paul becomes quite reflective and autobiographical. Paul's normal pattern was not to become too personally involved in his writings. This, of course, was under the direction of the Holy Spirit for our good, for the epistles in the Bible become of value to all people, not just as expressions of the personality and preferences of the Apostle Paul. But in this passage, as with just a few others, Paul speaks quite personally. But even here, the values that he expresses which he came to realize as precious in life can be values that we also find to be precious in our own lives as well.

1. Paul begins this paragraph by recalling the former assets of his life that he had deemed to be most precious to him. And we understand exactly what Paul is saying here, for the values that he recounts are those which many people would consider to be some of the highest priorities in life. Paul lists for us 7 assets that he had in 3:4-6. They fall into 2 major categories- those that were inherited and those that he earned.

A. First Paul speaks of his national heritage, that which he inherited:

*he was circumcised the 8th day into a covenantal relationship with the people of Israel. Paul's parents had followed the covenant guidelines that God had given to Abraham. The significance of this, of course, was that this act made Paul a child of the Old Testament covenant. It sealed his identity with the nation of Israel, the covenantal people of God.

*But Paul also says that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was a very special tribe. Benjamin along with Joseph were the 2 sons of Jacob who were born of Rachel. Benjamin was a favorite son of Jacob. As Benjamin's descendants developed into a tribe, they gained the reputation of being courageous and valiant warriors. We are told that in Old Testament times, when the army of Israel was waning in the midst of battle, someone often would cry out "On Benjamin", and the Benjaminite warriors would pick up their fighting a notch bringing new life and vitality to the entire Israeli army. The first king of Israel was from the tribe of Benjamin. Paul was even named after this first king with his given name Saul. Benjaminites were proud of their heritage.

*Paul goes on to say he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. This phrase indicates the purity of his Jewish blood. Paul was not a proselyte, a Gentile who had become Jewish. He was a pure-blooded Jewish man, born of a Jewish

mother and father. He had been a Hebrew from the cradle. And among Paul's circle of influence, this was something that people held to be very valuable.

B. But then Paul goes on to speak of those assets which he earned for himself:

*In regard to the law, a Pharisee. The Pharisees were recognized to be the most faithful of all Jewish sects in their adherence to the Old Testament law. They had even set a hedge about the law constructed of additional commandments- kind of like a buffer so that they might not get close to breaking the law.

*Moreover, Paul was not only a Pharisee, but he was a zealous Pharisee. His zeal is seen in the fact that he was a persecutor of the church. Paul was committed to what he believed to be true, and was even willing to kill others to defend it.

*Paul sums up his assets by saying that he was without fault. In the eyes of his fellow man, Paul could not be blamed. Everyone looked at Paul and admired him for his morality and his courage to defend it.

Now much of what Paul lists here we would all consider to be worthwhile. One's national heritage is something of value giving a sense of identity and security. I am proud to be an American. I am proud of the national heritage that I have been given. And I believe that most of you would echo that sentiment. And for those with us who have other national heritages, I believe each one would likely express his or her pride in that heritage. And rightly so, for it is natural for us to have these feelings. But when we think about it, it is really quite foolish for us to consider our national heritage to be the most precious possession that we have in life. The reason for this is simply the fact that none of us did anything to gain our national heritage. Whatever heritage we have was given to us as a gift, we inherited it. We could just as easily have been born a citizen of another country except for the providential hand of God. So, in reality, we should be humbled and thankful for our national heritage rather than being boastful and proud about it- for we did nothing to merit it. Paul realized this. While others were so boastful about their Israeli heritage, Paul says that he counted his national heritage as loss.

So it is also with our religious heritage. While it is true that we have more of an active part in this, for we must choose our belief system, to place these assets as the most precious in our lives is ultimately putting our trust in ourselves- what we have accomplished, what we have done. Certainly, there is value in our national heritage and our religious heritage. And we must not mistake what Paul is saying here, for he also considered these things to be of some value to him. We could turn to passages in the book of Acts and find where Paul valued his Roman citizenship and his Jewish heritage. But what Paul is saying here is that there is something else that is much more precious to him in life. It is so precious that it makes these other assets look like rubbish in comparison.

2. What was it that Paul came to realize was the most precious to him in life? It was his relationship to Jesus Christ, the son of God.

READ 3:7,8,10

PHP 3:7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ . . . ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

A. Paul first of all says that knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord was most precious to him. The term that Paul used here that is translated "knowing" in verse 8 and "know" in verse 10 is an important one to note. The root meaning of these verbs mean more than just knowing facts about Jesus Christ. There was another Greek term that could have been used for this type of knowledge. No, this term indicates a very personal experiential knowledge that could only come from having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is one thing to know about a person. We can know all about our President. We can read biographies on him, we can study all the magazine and newspaper articles that we can find, we can know all about his hobbies and likes and dislikes, we can even know something of his thinking patterns, what decisions he is likely to make in certain situations. But it is quite another matter to know him in the same way that Laura and his daughters know him. They live with him. And because of that more intimate relationship that they have with him, they can know George Bush in a way that we will never really be able to know him.

And so it is with Jesus Christ. It is one thing to know all about Jesus, to study his life, to examine his teachings, to be able to recall all the miracles that he performed, to even be able to put the doctrines that he taught down in a systematized theology. But it is quite another thing to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. To have the assurance that we are family members together. To know that he lives with us, in our hearts, to have fellowship with him every day as we walk and talk with him. This latter type of knowledge was what Paul wanted to have- and he says that knowing Christ Jesus in this way was so precious to him that it made everything else that people considered to be valuable in life seem like rubbish, garbage in comparison.

B. But Paul goes on to say that he wanted to be found in Christ's righteousness. READ Phil. 3:9 ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

The term "righteousness" means pure or just in the eyes of God. It indicates a state whereby God can declare us to be not guilty of any fault in his sight, that we perfectly satisfy his standards.

Now Paul basically indicates that there are 2 kinds of righteousness that we can have. There is the righteousness of our own that comes from our obedience to the law. This type of righteousness might be satisfactory to other people, they will usually accept this and admire us for having it. When we strive to be good moral people as best we can, others will see our efforts and admire us for them. Paul had this type of righteousness even before he was saved and he says that he was faultless before his colleagues. But it was still only man's righteousness.

The accumulation of human righteousness is like playing the game of Monopoly. The game has properties to buy and money to buy them with. And the game is challenging and enjoyable. But only a fool would take his Monopoly earning and property deeds and try to make them valid in the real world.

So it is with human righteousness. Whereas on a human level, our efforts in righteousness are of value, in God's eyes these human efforts are not valid, because the best that we can do just can't measure up to his perfect standards. Paul realized that God's righteousness that comes only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is of far greater value than man's righteousness that comes by our human efforts to obey the laws that we know to be good. For while we certainly do benefit from human righteousness in the relationships and respect that we gain from it here upon this earth, one day, when we each stand before God on his throne of justice, the only righteousness that will be critically important to us is God's righteousness that is imputed to us by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because that event is of such critical, eternal significance, Paul says in comparing the 2 kinds of righteousness that man's righteousness is like rubbish compared to God's righteousness.

Last century, Harvard University was building a new philosophy building. Plans for the new building came to the desk of the president who was then a Christian man. He soon returned the plans intact, with one seemingly small but very significant change. The original plans had inscribed in stone over the front door of the building the words, " man is the measure of all things." The president sent back the plans with a different quotation. As one enters the building today, he sees written over the door the quotation from Psalm 8:4- What is man, that thou art mindful of him?

The difference in those quotes is the difference in the 2 kinds of righteousness that Paul is speaking of here. In man's righteousness, man is the measure of all things. In God's righteousness, Christ's perfection is the standard. Paul was concerned that he be found before God in Christ's righteousness, not in his own.

C. But Paul not only wanted to know Jesus Christ and to be found in his righteousness, but Paul also wanted to know Christ's power. READ 3:10a

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,

The fact of the Scriptures is that Jesus Christ is a living savior. Yes, he was crucified on a cross as he paid the ransom to redeem us from our sins in the sight of God. And, yes, he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a tomb that was carefully watched and guarded by the Roman soldiers. But after 3 days, just being long enough to fully prove the reality of his death, that grave could no longer hold him. Jesus Christ rose from the dead in power and victory. He today is a living savior.

Now this truth is critical to know and experience. The fact that Jesus Christ is alive means that we can have that intimate knowledge of fellowship with Him. The fact that Jesus Christ is alive means that He can dwell in our hearts and lives, and that we can talk with Him and walk with Him through life. And the fact that Jesus Christ is alive

means that He has conquered the greatest and most powerful enemy that the human race has ever known- that is death. Now if we know the resurrected power in our lives, there is not one enemy that we face in a defenseless manner. Logic alone tells us that if Jesus Christ has defeated the greatest of all human enemies, and that if he makes that resurrected power available to us in our lives, then we will never face any enemy in life without the power to be victorious over it- that is, if we know Christ's resurrected power.

Paul wanted to know that power. He didn't want to know it selfishly- just so he could be a powerful person, for the one who wants to only know Christ's power selfishly will never know it. One of the conditions to knowing Christ's resurrected power is denying ourselves, not trusting in our own righteousness, but experiencing Christ's righteousness. But Paul desired to really experience the resurrected power of Jesus Christ- this was a very high priority in his life.

D. We don't have the time to fully develop the 4th area of knowledge that Paul gives to us- fellowship in the sufferings of Christ- but let me just mention it briefly in closing.

READ 3:10

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Jesus Christ would have never had the opportunity to rise from the dead in power, if he hadn't first gone through the sufferings and agonies of his death. He had to die before he could be raised.

Paul realized that this is usually the pattern in our lives as well. It is through our death to ourselves that we realize the inadequacies of our human flesh. It is through our death to ourselves that we come to the place where we place ourselves totally on the altar for God's service. It is through our death to ourselves that we come to the position where the resurrected power of Jesus Christ can then become a reality in our lives. Death must always precede resurrection. So we come to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and it is so often through this process that we come to a greater knowledge of Christ's resurrected power.

Paul what is most precious to you in life? Is it the great national heritage that you were blessed with at birth? Is it the position and respect that you gained through your hard work in dedicating yourself to your religious beliefs? *No*, Paul answers. These things certainly are of some value, but there is something else that is so valuable in my life that it makes these appear to be rubbish, garbage in comparison. No, what is most important to me is my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I want to really know him, I want to have the confidence that I am a possessor of Christ's righteousness, I want to experience the power of his resurrection, and I want to have the privilege of fellowshiping in the sufferings of Christ. This is what is most precious to me in life.