

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Fifth Sunday of Lent – April 3, 2022

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”

–Philippians 3:7–

Paul’s “resume of righteousness” stood to impress the most ardent follower of God. If anyone measured up to God’s standard it was Paul: circumcised on the eighth day, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee who scrupulously followed the letter of the law; “blameless” (v. 6). Certainly, when it came to righteousness before God, it seemed Paul had everything going for him.

Paul, however, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, discovered otherwise. He realized that whatever he accomplished in life; whatever credentials he thought he earned; whatever strides he made toward righteousness; whatever his social status and reputation; whatever intellectual prowess; whatever moral or religious standing he attained were actually nothing but losses. Nothing on his list came even remotely close to achieving righteousness and, thus, right-standing with God. Paul realized only one word belonged in the gains column of his righteousness tally sheet: Christ. Christ plus nothing. Christ alone (*solus Christus*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) by grace alone (*sola gratia*) to the glory of God alone (*solus Deo gloria*). Paul understood that only a complete reliance on Jesus brings us into right relationship with God and, thus, eternal life. Faith in anything less, Paul taught, amounts to putting one’s faith in “rubbish” (v. 8). The extreme contrast Paul paints could not be any greater: Christ versus rubbish. When stated like that, it seems the right choice could not be any more obvious. But, in our humanity, we can all too often forget and end up exchanging Christ for rubbish. We do this when we start to believe very important disciplines and Christ-like behaviors like good deeds somehow earn right standing with God. They never did, and they never will.

So, Christ versus rubbish. Which one will we choose? Like the extreme contrast between these two options, the result of our choice is also an extreme contrast: eternal life versus death. Choosing to live by faith in Christ alone results in intimacy with him that changes everything. It results in a transformed identity, changed desires, perspectives, and motivations. It results in a life lived in Christ and led by the power of his Holy Spirit. Truly, it results in abundant life (see John 10:10).