

*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.

What if tomorrow morning the radio greeted you with this news: “The dollar has no value. American property has no value. Your daily work has no value. The money they will pay you for your labor this week will buy nothing. It is only paper. But your mortgage has been transferred into German marks. Your taxes will be due in Japanese yen.”?

What if the bankruptcy laws disappeared overnight? No protection, they can take everything. Nothing you have or can do counts. Only the debts you owe remain.

When the stock market fell back in the thirties it was like that for some - wealthy beyond imagining one moment - in hopeless poverty the next.

Once a man set off for a place called Damascus. He journeyed clothed in confidence. He wore his heritage like a businessman might wear a finely tailored suit. Eighth generation American, Harvard educated, a member of Augusta National Country Club. CEO of a fortune five hundred corporation, vacation homes in Hilton Head and Palm Beach.

Only our Damascus traveler had different names for his credentials: 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, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But in a moment of time he was stripped of everything. The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ stopped him in his tracks. This was the Jesus who had been condemned under the law

that was Saul's pride. This was the Jesus who had been rejected by the people that were Saul's heritage. This was the Jesus Saul had despised.

Saul died there. Everything that once mattered before Jesus, now mattered no more. And in faith a new person Paul was born.

*Whatever gains I had I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 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 regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and 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 of God based on faith.*

The fine suits and the Harvard education and the family pedigree and country club membership all thrown in the trash when something far more valuable is encountered.

Everything regarded as rubbish, discarded, thrown away, let go of in order to be found in Christ.

This is death: exactly how it will be. Just what will you take with you as you stand naked before the one Luther calls the naked God. Will the naked God be impressed with a sixty-hour work week? Or with the confession, I did my best? Will the naked God admire the cut of your clothing, or the newest style of your hair? Will pictures of the house you built impress the naked God? Or your children's successes? Just what will you offer the naked God that will matter to God at all? Once Saul recognized that his Lord was the very one he had been intent to persecute he knew just how naked and empty handed he was.

But is it sorrow that we hear in Paul's words of loss? No – instead we hear joy, hope.

He is like a two year old I saw at the airport. Her mother brought her out to meet her father's plane. "There's daddy," the mother said. But the child could not see his face in all the people moving around her. "There's Daddy," the mother said once more. Still the child's eyes only searched. But then she saw. And she was transformed and dropped her toys and raced to those arms.

That is Paul. Seeing Christ and letting everything else go. Gladly.

You stand naked before God, stripped of everything, but then you see Jesus. You take him into yourself, his body and his blood, and everything you would bring before God matters no more. Christ who died for you is yours, and you are his. Now you are clothed in his righteousness alone. Everything else is rubbish.

And Paul's confession is yours: *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death if somehow I may attain the resurrection of the dead. 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.*

Christ has made you his own. Come, receive him who loves you and gave his life for you. Amen.