



Looking Back and Looking Forward

Ready or not it is time to go back to school. It may or may not have been years since you last sat in a school desk, but I believe God has much to teach us as we memorize and apply our mind and heart to Philippians 3:7-21. Keep in mind, you won't be packing a lunch and sitting in a desk, but as you move through these next 12 weeks the Bible will be your textbook and your heart and mind can be the classroom where God instructs you in transforming ways.

Before we get started, let me give you some background information on the book of Philippians. Philippians was written by Paul. It is widely believed that he wrote it from a prison cell and that it is the most personal of all of his writings. In prison, he had time to reflect, time to ponder, and time to listen to the Spirit and write as God moved His hand along. Philippians 3:7-21 is definitely representative of that kind of writing. It is a powerful passage.

When I was growing up, each year as I headed back to school, we seemed to receive the same assignment on the first day of class. Perhaps you were assigned the same one; I imagine you were. We were asked to write an essay about what we did that summer and about what we were looking forward to doing in the coming school year. Looking back and looking forward, we wrote out our story.

This past summer I met a pastor who preached an incredible message. His message detailed many life stories and how God had transformed them. Later as I spoke with him, he explained his conviction that every Christian needs to know their story, where they have been and where they are going. Looking back and looking forward; sounds familiar doesn't it?

This same idea is familiar as well when we take our first look at Philippians 3:7-8. In viewing this carefully, we find Paul looking back and looking forward too. In the verses preceding verse 7, we see Paul looking backward. He names all of his personal accomplishments that would have been considered successful in that time to the Jewish people. Although they may not mean much to us, in that culture, he did have reason to boast of some pretty impressive stuff.

But something happened; Paul had an encounter with Jesus that changed everything. (see Acts 9, noting that Paul at that time was called Saul) And now as he looks back, he has a different perspective that he shares with us in verses 7-8a:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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...

Those things that gave Paul value, those things that gave him position, those things that gave him power and pleasure and those things that gave him a pseudo peace and satisfaction are now in his past. He is no longer reaching for them, pursuing them, finding identity and purpose in them. He looks back and counts them a loss, counts them as trash. Why? Because he encountered something

more important, more valuable, more peace giving and more satisfying to look toward in his future. He finishes out verse 8 by saying:

...I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ.

What does he mean by that? The original Greek word for gain here is "kerdaino". This kind of gain is a gain arising from shunning or escaping from evil. We know that as we walk away from evil and away from sinful thinking and behavior patterns, we walk more in the Truth of what Christ created us for. The world and Paul's culture had called his past "success". Christ had looked at Paul's past and said something very different, He had basically called Paul's past "evil". In fact Christ had asked him "Why are you persecuting me?" (see Acts 9:4)

So as Paul sits in prison, writing what we are now memorizing, he is reflecting on his past in the light of Truth. He is basically saying, "How could I have ever been so deceived to think those things were a good path for me, a good life for me? Even if there was any value in them, compared to all that I gain through knowing Christ, even the things that might have held some value are but trash compared to what I have and am yet to still discover in Christ."

So... this week as we memorize these verses, what do they mean for us? As we look backward, hopefully we each, like Paul, have had moments of transformation with Christ; moments where He has pointed out things that we have counted as valuable and He has shown us their poverty. Our moments may not have been as dramatic as Christ appearing to us as a light on a dusty road, but I hope we can spot some significant times where Christ has brightened our thinking with His life-giving perspective. Can you look back and identify those places? Try to do that right now.

As I consider that question myself, I can identify them and I am so thankful that Christ has transformed my thinking in certain areas. I am so thankful I can look at those places as my past. But you know what? I can also identify some other things that Christ has pointed out to me. Concerning these other things, if I am honest, I have to say I know I haven't totally agreed with Him about those things yet. I haven't been ready to throw them in the "garbage" just yet. But I need to. Why? Because in looking forward, I know that what I will gain in Christ by doing so will have more value to me. Perhaps you have some places like that as well. I encourage you to stop and identify them now too and have some conversation with Christ about them before you read on.

These verses are so good for us to meditate on. They can be a motivator for us to walk away from sinful patterns in our life. They can also do much more.

Think about it this way... when we set even the "good stuff" of this world alongside the value of knowing Christ it doesn't even compare. But... we all know we have to discipline our minds to think like that. This world and all its trappings can be very alluring to us can't it? There is an old hymn that says "*I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today*". The Truth is there is nothing more valuable than knowing Jesus. The deeper we know Him, the more we recognize and experience the wealth He brings into every area of our life, spiritually, emotionally, physically. The value of knowing Jesus is far beyond what we can even imagine.

So... I believe these verses are an encouragement to us. They encourage me and I hope they are encouraging you, let's not let anything hold us back from knowing Him! Let's look ahead to a deeper knowing of Him, leaving the stuff of this world in the distant background.

Blessings to you beyond measure as you memorize these Truths!

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