

March 27, 2016

Finding Peace in a Troubled World

"I have learned the secret of being content in every situation...I can do all things through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:11-13

"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..." Philippians 3:7-8

"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, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." Philippians 3:10-11

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press to toward the goal on win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:12-14

On this Easter Sunday, we are reminded of the great cost that our Father paid through his Son for our contentment. Our Father wants us to be at peace, he wants us to have lives filled with joy, and he wants us to live in perfect contentment trusting that he is at work in our lives. He did so much to make this happen for us, but few of us every find his peace, or joy, or contentment for very long.

Why not? Paul identifies the main roadblock to our peace, joy, and contentment in our context for today. He writes, ***"If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh..."*** The obstacle that trips all of us up is this...we won't give up ***"putting our confidence in the flesh..."*** Our Father tells us over and over again through his word that grace is our only road to salvation and that his grace is free to us. On this day we celebrate this very thing. We talk about being saved by grace as if grace-based salvation were true in our lives, and then we turn back to our rules keeping as a way to earn our salvation.

Don't get me wrong, our Father has rules for us to follow. He is a perfect parent and so, of course, he has rules. But his rules are not a burden, they are not unfair, and their intent is always to protect us. And most importantly our Father's rules will never be used to create a performance-based salvation. Our Father loves us and provided the way for us to be his children long before we did anything. Our Father's love for us is never based on our performance. He loves us, as all great parents do, because we are and never because of what we do or don't do right.

We are not righteous because we live righteous lives. We are righteous because we have a righteous Father and as his children we are made righteous. Paul gets it. He tells us that if "righteous acts" could make us righteous, then he would win, hands down. But he goes on to assure us that he counts these things as loss or rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ.

The Apostle wants us to understand that the ***"...surpassing greatness or knowing Christ Jesus my Lord..."*** is so much more important. He writes, ***"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."*** He longs to ***"...somehow...attain to the resurrection from the dead."***

And what is the Apostle prepared to do in his own life to achieve this level of deep, deep fellowship with Jesus? He explains, ***"Forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is***

ahead I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Like obedient children you and I need to follow the rules. But our Father will love us even when we fail to follow them perfectly. Like all great parents our heavenly Father loves us when we do well and he loves us when we mess up. His love for us will never depend on our perfection. As our Father, God wants us to live as obedient lives. He wants to do what he says and go where he sends. He wants that for our good. But he will not love us less if we get it wrong or mess it up.

God does not dwell on our past and he does not want us to either. We cannot merit the prize of salvation through our own perfect obedience. Our obedience is never going to be perfect. To focus on the past is to run the wrong direction. The prize is up ahead and not behind. We must focus on the finish line, we must lean into the tape marking the end of the course, and even if we are dead last we must finish the race.

