

### The Quest for the Best

<sup>4</sup> ... If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> 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 on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Of course, you want what is best for you and your family. You take your time at the grocery store comparing prices so you can get the best for your money. You test drive several cars so you can get the best car for your money. It is frustrating if we have to settle for anything less than the best.

The Apostle Paul wanted only what was best when it came to his relationship with God. And for years he thought he had the best until he met Jesus. May we make the same conclusion, that the best you can have is Christ and that we make him our quest for the best.

#### *I. Christ's best is your best.*

The Apostle Paul wanted only the best. And he thought he had it. <sup>4</sup> ... **If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.** Paul was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. Not every Jew could claim that, not even Abraham. Not a drop of Gentile blood flowed through his veins. In fact, he was from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was one of the two tribes to remain faithful to God. When it came to the Old Testament laws, Paul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the professionals. Comparing Pharisees to the rest was like comparing a professional baseball pitcher to the guy who lobs pitches in the over fifty softball league. He immersed himself into his religion. When a new group called Christians popped up, Paul saw them as a threat. First he held everyone's coat so they could stone Stephen to death. Then he went on his own rampage, scouring city after city for Christians to arrest, jail and execute. If you want to paint a picture of the perfect Old Testament person, you would paint Paul.

Paul aimed for the best in his life. There was nothing technically wrong with that. Don't we promote and encourage such things in our lives? Don't we encourage generous giving, don't we teach the commandments so we can offer God a better life, don't we spur each other to do good works? We do, so what is the problem? It was all about Paul. It is all about us and what we do. Where is Jesus in all of this? If you have the cash in the bank, it would be unwise to take out a loan because you already have the money. That's how Paul thought. That is how the devil uses even good things like godly living, offerings, church attendance, etc. to keep us away from Jesus. It keeps our eyes focused on us and not Jesus.

Does it matter? I mean, my 2005 Kia Optima is not the best car out there. It may not even be the best I can afford. But I get into it and it drives and I get to where I am going. Fair enough. But if you asked me to take my Kia out into the fields and pull a trailer behind your combine, how far will it go? It is incapable of doing the job. That is something Paul discovered in our text. He thought he had the best until he met Jesus.

**"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, that I may gain Christ 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 best we can muster in this life isn't good enough. I remember when an ice cream company was sued over tainted ice cream. The ice cream they made was perfectly fine, but the tanker truck that carried it was contaminated. And a contaminated truck meant contaminated ice cream. That's our problem. Like it says in Isaiah, even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags. Even our best has sin attached to it. And what about the times we don't do our best? The world record for long jump is just under thirty feet. That may be the best. But you can't jump the Minnesota river or the Grand Canyon. Our best falls short.

Now compare Jesus' righteousness with our own. It is like comparing a brand new car on the showroom floor to a crushed wreck in the junkyard. It is abundantly clear, though he became true man, Jesus had no sin because he was also true God. The things we should do but don't, he did. The things we shouldn't do but did, he avoided. Why use my Kia in the corn fields when you have a semi or tractor? Why, Paul asks, should we rely on our own flawed, imperfect, insufficient righteousness when God offers us the perfect righteousness of Jesus? That is what Paul realized.

**“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.** Companies and small businesses, even families use balance sheets. A balance sheet is a list of assets and liabilities. Assets are things like how much money you have, the value of your house, etc. Liabilities are bills and debt. When Paul made a spiritual balance sheet of his life, he thought things like how much he gave to church, how many times he attended church, etc. were assets. Then he met Christ. Then he saw the righteousness God gives him, the perfect righteousness of Christ. What did Paul do? He erased all his previous assets and put down Jesus.

I remember visiting a gentlemen the night before serious surgery. He may not come out of it. I asked him if he should die and God asks why he should let him into heaven, what would he say. His answer was, “I went to church often and I pray a lot.” That doesn’t mesh with what Paul just revealed to us. I stayed and shared some passages with him, and when I asked him the question, his answer was, “Jesus and his righteousness.”

That is what Paul did in our text. Earlier his confidence of standing before God was all the things he did. Then he changed his tune. Suddenly, all that mattered was Christ. And what a relief that was to Paul, and is to us. We don’t have to go before the Lord with a flawed righteousness of our own. We stand before him with the perfect righteousness of Christ. We don’t have to go before him with the best we have, which is not enough. We can go before him with the best out there, Christ, which is more than enough.

*II. Don’t settle for anything but the best.*

<sup>10</sup> **I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,** <sup>11</sup> **and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**

There is a lot I want. I want the Tigers to win the World Series someday. I want the Detroit Lions to at least scare their rivals. What do you want? Paul wanted something. He wanted to know Christ and his righteousness. He wanted to know all he could about Jesus so God’s Word was huge to him. He wanted to know Jesus personally as he prayed to him and confessed his sins to him and found comfort in his forgiveness. He also wanted to know the power of Jesus’ resurrection and to become like him in his death. In other words, he had the best in Christ. Now he wanted the best in his life.

We died with Jesus, that is, our sinful nature. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, we rose to a new life. Let’s not settle for anything less than the best in our lives. Husbands, what is the best you can offer your wives? Isn’t it to love your wives as Christ loved the Church? Wives, what is the best you can offer your husbands? Isn’t it to respect him as the Church submits to and respects Christ? Take your family, for example. What is the best you can offer? Is it loads of money and luxuries and the finest education possible? These are nice, but the best you can offer is Christ, not only telling them about Christ, but modeling him as well. What is the best you can offer your neighbor? When it comes to your faith, what is the best you can achieve? Faith as small as a mustard seed is all we need, but why settle for that?

If there is something you really want, you will make sure that nothing gets in the way. You are a running back. You have the ball, but there is a defender between you and the goal line. You don’t stop, take a knee and give up! You will not let that defender keep you from a touchdown. You will run around him or through him if you have to.

**“I want to know Christ,”** Paul says in our text. I am sure you want the same thing. Don’t let anything stop you. Your quest for the best starts and ends with Jesus. Amen.