

would they be? A respected position in the community? A nice-sounding job title? A good salary? Growing popularity among your peers? A fine automobile? A closet full of elegant and stylishly expensive clothes? A nice home? Those are all wonderful things in life.

I officiated over quite a few funerals and memorial services for beloved brothers and sisters in Christ in past years. Every memorial service was a heart breaking experience for me, as well as for the family members. But one asset that turned their funeral into a service of hope and even joy was their relationship with Jesus Christ. I mean no one said, "They died, but that's okay because they had a great career." None of the friends of family comforted themselves with the knowledge that they came from a great family or owned a nice home. No, the one fact we all clung to was the fact that they knew Jesus personally. You see death changes the calculation, the way to count. Whatever seems so important during life, job or money or house or success, none of these things matter when life ends. At that point all that counts is whether or not we knew Jesus Christ. Only that relationship has any real value.

I invite you to have a good relationship with Jesus Christ. Make sure that you really know Jesus, not just know about Him. The Bible warns that at the end of time when we all stand before Jesus some people will expect to enter heaven, but to the other He will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." Since you do know Jesus, you may feel a need to know Him more, to walk more closely with Him through life. You may want to rededicate yourself to building that all-important relationship. This morning Paul tells us how we count and what we count for. Let us count the relationship with Jesus and commit to Jesus for God's kingdom as our priority in life. Then we get joy, give joy, and share our faith with others.

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Philippians 8: Learning How to Count

Philippians 3:1-11

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"A dog is a faithful animal." This is one of the sentences where I learned about articles in English grammar. I learned that the article "a" doesn't just mean "one," but it means "all." I think generally speaking this is true. The dog is one of most favorite and faithful animals. There are many wonderful stories regarding dogs.

However, in Paul's day dogs were more likely to be dirty, disease-carrying scavengers that roamed the streets of the city. These animals lived in garbage dumps and attacked everyone who crossed their path. This is what Paul had in mind when he says to the Philippians, "Beware of these guys, 'these dogs.'" Interestingly enough, when a Jew of Paul's day really wanted to insult someone who wasn't a Jew, he would call him a dog. These Jews believed that obeying the laws would somehow make them sinless in God's eyes. Paul was upset because all their false teachings were not leading people to the righteousness that is found in Jesus, but away from it. Paul believed that righteousness could only be obtained from the inside out, not by human works, but by our humble acceptance of the grace of God. So, he was saying to these Jewish Christians, "You are the ones who are 'dogs,' for you have defamed the name of God and have distorted the Law of God."

In today's text, defending the attacks of the Jewish Christians who emphasized the laws for righteousness, Paul recalls his life how he had changed the way he looked at life. The key word in today's text is 'count.' In Greek it means to evaluate or assess. Paul reminded the Philippians that he had once been like those people. There was a time when Paul valued the things they valued and counted on the things they counted on.

1. First of all, he had once counted on his race or family heritage. In verse 5 Paul says, I was *“circumcised on the eighth day.”* He stresses the fact here that he had been born into the Jewish faith and had known its privileges, and observed its ceremonies since his birth, for only pure-blooded Jews, like Paul, were circumcised on the eighth day. By calling himself an Israelite, Paul was stressing the absolute purity of his race and his ancestors.

Paul also said that his roots could be traced back to the tribe of Benjamin. Not only was he an Israelite, but Paul belonged to the elite of Israel. He was a product of the right family. Not only was he a Jew, he was the best of the best when it came to the Jewish race.

2. The second thing he once treasured was his religion. In verse 5 Paul says I once was a “Pharisee.” Now, usually we associate negative thoughts with that title, but they didn’t do that in Paul’s day. Pharisees were admired. They only went to the finest schools. There were not very many of them at that time. They were few and selected elite people and they were proud. Their name means ‘The Separated Ones’ and they separated themselves off from all common life and from all common tasks in order to keep every smallest detail of the Law. So it is Paul’s claim that he had devoted his whole life to the most rigorous and unbending observance of that religion. He treasured his religion.

3. Third, he used to value his reputation. In verse 6 Paul says, *“...as to zeal: persecuting the church...”* Paul says, “I was a high achiever.” And he was. He militantly opposed any threat to the Hebrew faith. He helped in the stoning of Stephen. He also sought out, arrested, and imprisoned or executed Christians who in his Pharisaical mind set were disobeying or threatening the Law of God. He was very zealous in doing his job.

At the end of verse 6 Paul says that, *“As to the righteousness which is the Law, he was found blameless.”* He had a spotless reputation. The actions of his life were so closely aligned with the expectations of the law. He knew the law and he obeyed that law. So, when Paul

evaluated his life from the perspective of the world, he focused on his race, his religion, and his reputation.

But something had happened in Paul’s life to change his way of counting. On the road to Damascus Paul first met Jesus, the Christ, and learned firsthand what God’s righteousness really looked like. Before he met Jesus, Paul thought that he attained righteousness by keeping the law. But when he saw Christ and got his first glimpse of truly, perfect righteousness, he realized that all his works-based righteousness was worth less than filthy rags or rubbish. So in verse 7 Paul says, *“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”* At that point, Paul re-evaluated the things his world considered important and he decided these had no real value at all.

After his encounter on the Damascus road, Paul realized that the only thing that had true value was knowing Jesus Christ. In verse 8 Paul says that knowing Jesus Christ has surpassing value. Unfortunately there are a lot of people out there who know about Jesus. There is a great difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus: Talking to Him, relating to Him, listening to Him, and obeying His voice. This relationship, this kind of knowing, has infinite value. Paul discovered that his friendship with Jesus provided him with true righteousness, for through His death on the cross Jesus took our sinfulness on Himself. (10)

Paul saw the infinite value of this relationship with Jesus, the day-to-day fellowship with our Lord. Knowing Jesus, relating to Him, became the consuming ambition of his life. Rather than being driven by confidence in the flesh, Paul’s consuming passion was to spend his time and days on earth knowing Christ more intimately, drawing upon His resurrection power more increasingly, entering into His sufferings more personally, and being conformed to His image more completely.

What about you? If you were to evaluate your life, if you were to look back and list those things you count as being valuable, what