

Lent 5  
April 7, 2019  
\*CW-S – “What Grace Is This!”

Philippians 3:8-14  
402-715\*-114/123-345

It's Neat To Be a Christian!

- I. And to have Jesus' righteousness.
- II. And to know the power of Jesus' resurrection.

Dear Christian friends,

It's been said that the ONLY BIBLE an **unbeliever reads** is the Christian's daily life. So let's pretend I'm an unbeliever READING THE BIBLE of **your** life. Looking at you – listening to you – seeing how you **handle** things - WHAT DO I LEARN about **being a Christian**? Do I find out Jesus is really NO BIG DEAL to you - more a BOTHER and a nuisance in your life? Or do I SEE IN YOU the joy – the peace – the contentment of being a Christian? **Just from watching** do I get the feeling you that IT'S NEAT to be a Christian?

**Neat doesn't mean** that IT'S EASY to be a Christian. **Today's readings rule that out.** In the OT reading God's people were depressed and **discouraged**. They thought their GLORY DAYS were **in the past** and that they had nothing more to **look forward** to. The **gospel** reading shows the hatred and **hostility against God's servants** and ULTIMATELY **against Jesus** Himself. Paul here talks about **“sharing in Christ's sufferings.”**

Yet Paul's NOT DOWN but **up**. For Paul it was **“the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”** Or to be a little more colloquial – IT'S NEAT TO BE A CHRISTIAN! Let's REVIEW that for our own good and **so that others may see** that in our lives. IT'S NEAT to be a Christian 1)and to have Jesus' righteousness and 2)to know the power of Jesus' **resurrection**.

**I. And to have Jesus' righteousness.**

To bring out HOW NEAT it is **to be a Christian** Paul does a BEFORE AND AFTER **comparison**. Paul compares what he's GAINED and **lost** in being a Christian. Let's be honest. Many people see being a Christian as a LOSS – as something NEGATIVE. **As they look** at it God is SO DEMANDING. **Perhaps better** than many Christians the unbeliever understands that God wants TOTAL CONTROL of our lives. **So they see being a Christian** as DEGRADING. You even lose the right to USE YOUR BRAIN and think for yourself.

**To be honest** we do lose some things in being Christians. WHAT'S NEAT is that what we lose ISN'T WORTH KEEPING. Paul calls it **“rubbish”** – garbage. All it did was STINK things up. It NEEDED to be thrown away.

Right before this Paul **had been talking** about BRAGGERS in the church. He made the point that in any BRAGGING CONTEST he had plenty to **brag** about. He as a pure-blooded Jew – faithful – **devout** – **dedicated**. Today it would be like saying, “I'm a LIFELONG MEMBER of the church. I'm in church every week. I go to Bible class. I went to a **Christian** grade school and high school. I'm involved at church.”

**“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”** All that stuff is a LOSS if that's what we base our hope of heaven on. **Those things** are a LOSS if they're the basis of our relationship with God. Those things are all wonderful blessings but we are not to PUT OUR CONFIDENCE in them. Paul tosses them all out like garbage so they WON'T INTERFERE – so they won't come between him and his Jesus.

It was a LOSS for Paul to try to have a **“a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law.”** Righteousness is always doing what's RIGHT ACCORDING to God's definition of right and wrong. IF

we always do everything right THEN everything is ALL RIGHT between God and us. **Then** we are **“righteous”** in God’s sight. THAT’S the main point of Paul’s **comparison**. Is it going to be UP TO ME or **up to Jesus** to make things right between God and me? If it’s up to us then we’re a LOST CAUSE. We can’t live a life where **we always do** what’s right. So Paul gave up on himself. He gave up on the DELUSION that we are **basically good, decent** people. We’re not.

What then did Paul gain that **made it** SO NEAT to be a Christian? Paul’s own words are – **“that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.”**

Paul gave up on himself and **so should we**. But God didn’t give up on us! That’s the GOOD NEWS of the gospel. **Yes, our relationship** with God was IN A MESS. **Yes, we are guilty sinners** who should die and go to hell forever. But LOOK WHAT GOD DID for us! God sent His Son to be **“our Righteousness.”** Jesus came to MAKE THINGS RIGHT between God and us. Jesus took our place under God’s law and always did what’s right in God’s eyes. Jesus never sinned IN ANY WAY.

We’ve heard it so many times before but it’s SO NEAT to hear it again. We get the credit for **Jesus’ righteousness** and Jesus TOOK THE BLAME for all our sins. Let’s be clear about Good Friday. On the cross Jesus was punished for the sins of the whole world. Jesus endured the hell we had coming. Jesus shed His precious blood to **“cleanse us from all sin”** and to establish that **“new covenant”** of forgiveness full and free. JESUS PAID for **all** our sins with His own innocent death.

Being Christians we GAIN CHRIST and **His righteousness**. A Christian is not someone whose NAME is on the church books – who was confirmed once upon a time. A Christian is **someone** who TRUSTS IN Jesus to save him from sin and hell. A **Christian relies on Jesus** to MAKE THINGS RIGHT between God and us. **Christians** PUT THEIR CONFIDENCE in Jesus and **all He’s done** and not in ourselves and what **we might do** for God.

That’s why it’s SO NEAT to be a Christian. **As Christians** we can BE ABSOLUTELY SURE all our sins are forgiven. We can be absolutely sure everything is all right between God and us. We can be absolutely sure we are going straight to heaven when we die. We can be absolutely sure because it ALL DEPENDS on Jesus and **not us**. NEAT, isn’t it?

## II. And to know the power of Jesus’ resurrection.

Paul continues, **“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.”** Paul’s making another NEAT POINT about being a Christian. **Our Christian faith** is not simply that Jesus was “CRUCIFIED, died and was buried.” THANK God that’s true but THANK GOD that it’s also just as true that “ON THE THIRD DAY Jesus rose again **according** to the Scriptures.” Jesus came out of His grave ALIVE and victorious. Our **Christian faith doesn’t end** with **Good Friday** but it goes on to **Easter morning** and beyond. A still dead Jesus does us no good.

IT’S NEAT being a Christian **because** we have Easter and Jesus risen from the dead. **Easter assures us** that Jesus is the almighty Son of God. **Easter** is God the Father’s STAMP OF APPROVAL on all that Jesus did for us. **Easter** is the PROOF POSITIVE that God has forgiven all our sins. **Easter** is God’s promise to us of eternal life in heaven when we die. **Easter** is the rock on which we build our hope of “THE RESURRECTION of the body and the life everlasting.”

That’s the **“surpassing greatness of knowing Christ ...and the power of His resurrection.”** UNLESS our Lord returns soon we will all one day die. Exactly WHERE – WHEN or HOW we don’t know. But WITH JESUS as our Savior we don’t need to fear it. AS CHRISTIANS we already know now EXACTLY WHAT will happen to us when we die. With Jesus as our Savior **“death has been swallowed up in victory.”** With Jesus as our Savior death becomes a wonderful blessing. Our body is freed from all the **pains and problems** of this life. Our soul immediately joins Jesus in heaven’s

glory. Come the Last Day our bodies will experience ***“the power of Christ’s resurrection”*** when Jesus raises all the dead back to life and takes us Christians glorified body and soul to heaven. IT’S NEAT to **be a Christian** because we have eternal life in heaven. It’s NEAT to **be a Christian** because with Jesus we TRIUMPH over death and the grave. It’s NEAT to be a Christian pastor and preach that glorious fact!

It’s NEAT to **be a Christian** and have ***“the power of Christ’s resurrection”*** in our lives. But let’s be careful NOT TO LIMIT that power to deathbeds and funerals. The power of Easter is FOR EVERY DAY of our lives.

Paul brings up his DAY-TO-DAY Christian life. ***“Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal,”*** is Paul’s evaluation of his life. Paul wasn’t perfect and he was MAN ENOUGH to **admit** it. Paul WASN’T CONTENT with that either. Paul wanted to be a BETTER Christian. Paul wanted to live CLOSER to his Savior and MORE LIKE his Savior. Right after this Paul added, ***“all of us who are mature should take such a view of things.”***

Like Paul EACH ONE of us should regularly evaluate our Christian lives. **Like Paul** each one of us must admit, ***“I have not already reached the goal.”*** The QUESTION is – what are we **going to do** about that? Are we going to focus on OTHER PEOPLE’S **faults** and **shortcomings** so we don’t have to face up to our **own pet sins**? Are we going to BE CONTENT and argue God will have to be satisfied with us just the way we are? Will we try using God’s FORGIVENESS as His PERMISSION to **keep on** sinning?

OR will we be like Paul? ***“But there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** We can learn from our past but we can’t live in the past. Our past shouldn’t be an EXCUSE for giving up and **not trying again**. To keep looking back only DISTRACTS us from **what’s ahead**. The GOOD OLD DAYS weren’t as good as they **seem** to be – and they aren’t as good as things **will be**. WHAT’S NEAT about **being a Christian** is that the best is YET TO COME! We are to move on in our Christian lives **because** we are moving on to HEAVEN. That’s our GOAL. **That’s** our MOTIVATION.

That’s ***“the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”*** It IS NEAT to **be a Christian!** God help US TO SEE that. God grant that OTHERS SEE it **in our lives**. Amen.

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