

5th S. in Lent 3/13/16
Philippians 3:4b-14 C

IF ANYONE ELSE THINKS HE HAS REASON FOR CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH, I HAVE MORE: CIRCUMCISED ON THE 8TH DAY, OF THE PEOPLE OF ISREAL, OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN, A HEBREW OF HEBREWS; AS TO THE LAW, A PHARISEE; AS TO ZEAL, A PERSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH; AS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, UNDER THE LAW BLAMELESS. BUT WHATEVER GAIN I HAD, I COUNTED AS LOSS FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST.

Today is the 5th Sunday in Lent, which means that we are 28 days into the season of Lent (and it is 28 by the way, because we don't count the Sundays in the season of Lent as being part of the 40 days of Lent). And that means that if gave something up for Lent, there have been 28 days of no coffee, no soda, no sweets, no chocolate, no beer. For others, it has been 28 days of no TV, no texting, no Facebook. You gave something up for Lent, and you've made it 28 days.

Or perhaps, you decided to go the other direction and, instead of giving up something for Lent, you took on something for Lent – extra devotion, longer time in prayer, greater contribution to missions or the congregation.

Giving something up for Lent or taking on something for the Lent is not commanded nor forbidden in Scripture. It is a matter of Christian freedom. And when you give up something up or take something on for Lent, it is done in a spirit of remembrance and thanksgiving of what Christ Jesus has done for us -- His humiliation, His passion, His death upon the cross. These activities can be quite a blessing to us.

But often times, the blessing is completely missed. And the reason the blessing is missed is because we naval gaze. Instead of looking at Jesus, we look at ourselves, the works of our flesh. I'm making a huge

sacrifice for God. I'm doing something great for God. And, we develop confidence in the flesh, faith in what we do. We stand before God and say, "God, look at me. Look at how I've sacrificed for you, look at all I do for you, look at how faithful I am to you. God, you need to be pleased with me because of everything I've done for you." That's confidence in the flesh.

And its not just Lent that inspires this type of confidence in the flesh. If you found yourself flipping through the channels on the TV or in the "Christian" section of the bookstore, you will find all kinds of preachers and authors that want to make you a "complete" disciple, a "real" follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will tell you all kinds of things you should be doing and sacrifices you should be making. You need to pray for a certain blessing in your life for 30 days. You need to follow the seven basic principles of discipleship, the 5 Bible principles for a happy marriage, the 10 principles for raising children, and on and on it goes. These all build confidence in the flesh, so that you naval gaze and say, "Look at all I've done. Look at all I've sacrificed for God. I must be right and holy before God because of me and all I've done.

But, before you put your confidence in the flesh, I suggest you take a look at a true expert – Paul. "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh I have more!" And look at why he has more confidence in the flesh -- "circumcised on the 8th day, of the people of Israel." Israel was God's chosen people and Paul was one of God's chosen people. And he was circumcised on the very day that God said to be circumcised – the 8th day. He could say that he had done exactly what God commanded to be done. Look at what else Paul could say – he was of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. You know what that means, right? Of Jacob's 12 sons, Benjamin was the only one born in the

Promised Land. And, he was the son born to Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Saul, Israel's first king, was from the tribe of Benjamin. And, Paul was, you will remember, named "Saul," after that first king. And, which tribe remained loyal to David when the kingdom fell apart? In whose tribal land was Jerusalem and the Temple? When all the pagan influences came upon the Israelites, guess which tribe said, "no, we are not going to follow after false idols"? Want to guess ... Benjamin? If you did guess, "Benjamin," you would be correct.

If you're going to be a bear, be a grizzly, right? Admit it, that's a lot more impressive than giving up coffee or TV for 28 days. Paul was, "as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless".

So, behold the man. Behold the man who looks at God's 10 Commandments and says, "I've done it all. When it comes to zeal, I've persecuted the church. Under the Law, I am blameless. God, look at how faithful and loyal I am to you. You most certainly must be pleased with me because of all I've done and sacrificed for you." That is Paul, the man who certainly could have confidence in the flesh more than anyone.

And now behold the man one more time. After he naval gazes and looks at all he has done, he says this,

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

So much for thinking that no coffee, no chocolate, no Facebook, more time reading your Bible, giving more money to the church, will make you right

before God. So much for thinking that you can follow so many principles and make sacrifices to make yourself right with God.

Indeed, none of these works that come from the flesh does anything to make you right with God. Isaiah describes us well, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away” (Is 64:6). In other words, we can have no confidence in the flesh in our standing before God. Rather, we follow in the footsteps of Paul and count it all as loss, rubbish, and replace it with faith in Jesus, for we can have great confidence in His flesh and what He has accomplished in His flesh for us.

To make us righteous and blameless and holy before God, Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us. He was circumcised on the 8th day. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, His mom was a Hebrew and His Dad was the one who called the Hebrews into existence. When it comes to the Law, He was blameless. He kept every iota, dot, of the law. As for zeal – He was zealous, zealous to take away all our sins so that you would be right and blameless and holy before God. And, He did it by fulfilling all the demands of the law for you.

And, He also did it by taking upon His flesh your own sin, so that “By His wounds you are healed.” The wounds that came to Him by flogging, a crown of thorns, beating by soldiers, the nails that pierced His hands and feet, and the spear that pierced His side. His wounds in His flesh brought about His death and His death upon the cross brought about your righteousness, your holiness, before God.

That is the righteousness, blamelessness, holiness that He gives you when you have confidence in His flesh. And that confidence in His flesh is

called faith. That faith given to you when your flesh was washed clean by the water and the Word; when your fleshly ears gladly heard and learned the good news that Christ Jesus died and rose for you and, because He did that for you, all of your sins are forgiven; when in your mouth comes His very body and blood with the bread and wine to be eaten and drank for the forgiveness of your sins.

All that gives you confidence in Jesus' flesh. A confidence that is borne not of your work but is borne of God faith in Christ Jesus.

A confidence in the flesh of Jesus to stand before God and say, "Look at Jesus. Look at how faithful and loyal He is to you. Look at all Jesus sacrificed for me. Look at all Jesus took on for me. Lord, I know that you are pleased and happy with me because of all Jesus has done for me in His flesh." That's true confidence in the flesh, not in your flesh, but Jesus' flesh.