

## Phil 3:8-14

Today's Epistle lesson speaks of our walk with Christ. Forgetting what is 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. We are to walk with a single-minded-ness, focused not on Earthly things but on Heavenly. One of my favorite movies is City slickers. It is a movie about three men from the city going through mid-life crises... trying to get in touch with their youth. They decide to do this by riding on a cattle drive. The trail boss is a tough grizzled old man named Curly. Curly says to Mitch,

“You city folk, you worry about a lot of junk, don't ya? You spend about 50 weeks getting knots in your rope and you think two weeks up here can untie it for ya. You just don't get it, do ya?”

Curly leans toward the young men. “You know what the secret of life is?” He puts up his index finger.

“This! One thing. Just one thing. Find the one thing which is most important to you. You stick to that and everything else don't mean nothing.”

The rest of the movie consists of Mitch's search for the “one thing” the one thing which will give him purpose in life which will give him peace. As Christians, we know what that ONE thing is. It is God. It is Jesus.

Yet even amongst Christians, we have confused ones. Have you ever talked to someone who didn't think it was important to come to church or didn't think it was important to do bible study...? “All that this Church and bible study stuff it's good but... a lot of times it just doesn't seem relevant to real life. What's so important about constantly having to learn more about Christ? I mean Don't I know everything I need to know about Christ? I know that I am saved through faith in Christ. I know that I will go to heaven because Jesus died on the cross for me. Isn't that enough? ---- In one sense, ‘yes, it's kinda true.’ But in another sense, there is so much we can learn which IS meaningful to our daily lives. Think of the words of St. Paul to the Philippians. *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* Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, he had all the right lineage, he wore all the right clothes and had all the right jobs. Paul was a person of great respect, yet when he became a Christian, he gave all that up. If there was anyone who came close to doing everything perfectly, it was Paul. Yet, he gave all that up. Instead, he says... “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his

sufferings.” He not only thought that “knowing Christ” far surpassed anything of this world, but he also wanted to share in Christ’s sufferings, here on Earth as well.

‘Sharing in Christ’s suffering’ was more than just wanting to know that He was going to Heaven after he died. Paul knew that how you lived was almost as important as how you died. Paul speaks of wanting to share in Christ’s suffering, while he is here on Earth. What’s he mean by that?? What’s so special about suffering? First of all, Jesus suffered because the people of this world were God’s enemies. Jesus suffered because He was a Godly man in an ungodly world. Paul could rejoice in the sufferings of Christ, precisely because it marked him as being one of Christ’s disciples. All those who follow Christ, will be enemies of this world... and they will suffer. Christ does not promise us easy lives. Quite the opposite, he promises that our lives will not be easy. In fact, He tells us that our lives will be marked with trial. It will be filled with struggle and trial, precisely because we live by a different set of values from the world’s. In other words, we suffer because we are God’s people. We suffer because we are Godly people in an ungodly world. We will endure disrespect because we are Christlike people in an un-Christlike world. As Paul says, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,” I want to share in His sufferings I want to suffer for Jesus’ sake because our suffering marks us as being one of Christ’s disciples. It is a mark. It is a badge. In this life, it marks us as ones with an eternal life.

But it is even more than a mark or symbol. Our suffering is a way of life. Our understanding of suffering helps us deal with the problems of life. We now endure suffering, not like the world does, doing all it can to relieve earthly suffering. Rather, we act like people who have eternal lives. We endure suffering here on earth because we see our lives with an eternal viewpoint. Furthermore, St. Paul says he **DESIRE**s the fellowship of suffering. What does he mean by that? Jesus knows and has experienced suffering in all its human forms. Even though Jesus was God..., at Gethsemane. he struggled with his fear, the fear of abuse, the fear of pain, the fear dying. Even though He was God Jesus had to deal with the loneliness of having his closest friends leave him when he got in trouble. He was called a liar and made fun of by everyone who did not believe he was a king. Jesus knows injustice. He was punished for something he didn’t do. He was crucified on the cross, not for his sins but for ours. Jesus knows about suffering. Jesus suffered because he allowed himself to experience it in all its forms. It was precisely **BECAUSE** Jesus suffered... we can know that He knows and understands all **OUR** suffering. When we experience suffering We know that God knows our suffering. He knows it only as someone who has shared in that

suffering can know. We have a compassionate God. Yet it is important to remember that the person sharing in our suffering, is not powerless. The person sharing in our suffering is our almighty father in Heaven.

It is precisely because Jesus is now with us in our suffering, that we know that God can bring good, even out of a bad situation. that God WILL bring good even out of a bad situation. For this reason, Jesus' suffering brings us hope. But not only does it bring us hope... but it brings us growth too. George Barna says that the times of greatest spiritual growth occurs during times of suffering. Everyone suffers. But not everyone grows because of it. There is nothing we can do to stop suffering because it is a part of this sinful world. It is out of our control. But Paul's message tells us "What we can do." "What we can control" is... "how we deal with suffering." We can control our response to suffering. Our attitude toward suffering and loss can eliminate its power over us. When we see how Jesus dealt with suffering, we can learn how to deal with suffering within our own lives. We too can come to the point where we can say. "I consider all else rubbish compared to the surpassing glory of knowing Jesus Christ." Having said this, we must be very careful however to learn the right lesson, from Jesus' suffering. For example, sometimes when I think of the suffering of Christ, I may feel guilty. I sometimes feel like I should try to do something to make up for the suffering which Christ did for my sake. So, I may think I should strive to be a better person. I may think I should be obedient because my disobedience causes him pain. The problem is that no matter how hard I try, I find that I still do things which displease God. I let other things besides God be more important in my life. I do not love others as myself. I do not put their well-being before my own. I fail to live up to the standards Which God has commanded. I am unable to do what Jesus did. All the more am I disappointed when I fail. This is not the way to look at Jesus' suffering. We do not look at Jesus' suffering for the purpose of trying to make up for it. The problem is that I've focused on the wrong lesson. My problem is that I am focusing my thoughts upon MY actions. The focus should not be on me, on what "I have done," but rather it should be on what "JESUS has done... what "JESUS has already done." Jesus bled and died on the cross and received the punishment that was held originally for us. This is the pivot point of the Gospel.

As we look upon Christ's suffering and the awful penalty which Christ had to pay, we are driven to see the impossibility of paying the price ourselves. For you see, Scripture tells us that the wages of sin is death. Because of our sinfulness we deserved death. Yet if we were to pay for our sins through our own death, there would be nothing left behind. We were in a catch-22. a no-win situation. I am so grateful that God did not leave us in our predicament. Because He loved us, He

sent his Son, Jesus, down to Earth as a man, a man. who, because of his total purity and sinlessness, did not deserve death. Yet, somehow, Jesus was able to take the punishment of death our death, onto himself. You saw the movie The Passion, that was a real event. that suffering was real. We deserved THAT because of our sin. He did that for us. He did that for us, because he loved us. So now, when I see that my attitude is changed. When I see the terrible price of sin, I want to be a different person a better person. I reject sin and devil and all his ways. I desire to be obedient to God not out of guilty feelings or need to make it up to God, but rather because of a thankful heart for what He has done for me. When the reality of what Jesus has done for me sets in I want to change my attitude. I want to be a different person. As I see how Jesus dealt with suffering, my attitude toward suffering changes. Jesus is relevant to us today, because he can change our attitudes towards this world. As we see Jesus at Gethsemane struggling with fear, we learn to deal with our own fear in fervent prayer. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too are able to pray to God the father, "Thy will be done." As we see Jesus dealing with the loneliness and abandonment by his closest friends we remember that even when we abandon Christ, when we fail to be obedient to Christ, God will always be faithful to us and will never abandon us, and that if we confess our sins God will be faithful and just and will forgive our sins for Jesus sake. As we see Jesus being mocked, as we see Jesus punished unfairly for our sake, we are able to accept the sufferings and injustices we receive in this world for we know that we have received a far greater thing through Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins and with it, eternal life. Thus, here on Earth we are better able to bear the crosses which come our way.

Jesus is relevant to us today. And finally. as we view the suffering of Christ, though we know he had to suffer death, we know that, that was not the end of the story. Jesus is relevant to us, tomorrow and the future, as well. For scripture tells us that the Christ who saved us, overcame death. And having overcome sin and death, we can look at our own death with hope. 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, forgetting what is 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.