

The Sunday School Lesson

By Bessie Wilbon

INTRODUCTION:

Paul's former career offered self-satisfaction status, influence, and security; but that wasn't enough! He had advanced in the Jews' religion more than many of his peers but God had something better for him in Christ. Paul came to recognize that his family connections, his clean moral record, and his religious zeal could not earn God's favor. All these things, in fact, became liabilities, since they blinded him to the need for dependence on God's grace and forgiveness in Christ. So he abandoned them and accepted God's Son as his sole hope and basis for God's approval. He gave himself completely to serving Christ.

As a result of that service he was now a prisoner in Rome, writing to his fellow Christians at Philippi. The Philippian church showed very few faults. But it seems that some were urging the brethren to turn to dependence on Old Testament Law for their standing with God. The opening verses of Philippians 3 gives Paul's warnings against this kind of teaching.

THE LESSON:

"But all those things that I might count as profit I now reckon as loss for Christ's sake. Not only those things; I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have thrown everything away, I consider it all as mere garbage so that I may gain Christ and be completely united with him. I no longer have a righteousness of my own, the kind that is gained by obeying the Law. I now have the righteousness that is given through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God and is based on faith. All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life.

I do not claim that I have already won me to himself. Of course, my brothers, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above. All of us who are spiritually mature should have this same attitude. But if some of you have a different attitude, God will make this clear to you. However that may be, let us go forward according to the same rules we have followed until now. Keep on imitating me, my brothers. Pay attention to those who follow the right example that we have set for you. I have told you this many times before, and now I repeat it with tears: there are many whose lives make them enemies of Christ's death on the cross. They are going to end up in hell because their god is their bodily desires. They are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and they think only on things that belong to this world. We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body, using that power by which He is able to bring all things under his rule. (Philippians 3: 7-21)

The knowledge of Christ begins with learning who He is, what He thinks and says and does, and what He desires for us. It goes on to that personal and intimate acquaintance that comes from living with Him and for Him, and leads us to rejoice in the prospect of being with Him forever. That knowledge is the pearl of great price, justifying the sale of all else one may possess in order to have it.

The Christian attitude and Christian life were foreign to the Gentiles. They could best understand the way of Christ by seeing it demonstrated, both in the lives of individuals and in community settings such as the church. Paul's offer of himself as a role model in his following of Christ was not boastful; it was brave. He had to provide the necessary demonstration. It is frightening enough to know that any one of us is an example to others; but deliberately to invite that public examination is heroic.

Even Paul was not willing to stand alone in that spotlight. He urged the Philippians to "take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." Pay attention to the good! Take full advantage of the right kind of peer influence. It is still there.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote of the discipline necessary for an athlete to complete successfully (1 Cor. 9: 24-27); to Timothy He urged the need to follow the rules of the game (2 Timothy 2:5). Hebrews 12: 1,2 speaks of the persistence and strength required of a participant in a long race. In today's text we have seen the intense concentration and exertion that is necessary for a successful runner.

Paul's readers knew that his real message was not about sports; it was about Jesus and the Christians' commitment to Him. "Train yourselves to be godly," he exhorted Timothy. "For physical training is of the same value, but godliness has value for all things holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." The grand prize in godliness is not limited to any one competitor, nor to any one kind of person. At the conclusion of life's race Paul excluded. "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. The winners' circle is limited only by the participants' willingness to press on to the goal in Christ.

Father, we thank and praise you, our Father, for all who help us in our approach to you. Amen.

Spring Has Sprung

By J. M. Little

As the saying goes: "SPRING HAS SPRUNG." The trees, flowers, grasses, etc., that were killed in the winter by the cold, wintry blasts are being resurrected now. And how beautiful is the handiwork of the Lord, in His resurrection of His earthly creation. The coming and passing of the seasons also testify of the faithfulness of God. God promised Noah that there would be the coming and passing of the seasons (Gen. 8:22). Spring testifies of the resurrection of Christ, and also the resurrection of a dead sinner. Yes, every sinner by nature is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Man is a trinity; body, soul, and spirit.

In the Fall, man died, spiritually. Adam stood for us all, so when he died spiritually there in the Garden of Eden, we all died (Rom. 5:12). Man did not evolve as infidel scientists and teachers teach, man devolved. Every sinner is dead and polluted in his own blood, but God in His great love sends the Holy Spirit to breathe on that dead sinner and He says: "LIVE." And that sinner is made alive in Christ (Ezekiel 16:6; Eph. 2:1).

Now the question I am asking you; have you been made alive in Christ? Just as the warm winds of spring have blown across the fields and made the plants spring up, new buds are seen, then the blossoms, and new blades of grass spring forth. So it is in grace. The blessed Holy Spirit breathes on dead sinners, awakening them to their lost condition. And then you see that you are lost.

You were lost all the days of your religious profession; but didn't know it. I remember one time when I was under conviction I made this statement to a godly soul; it seems the gulf becomes wider. And she replied, "It has been there all the time but you didn't know it." My friends, I realize that it is not a pleasant thing to be awakened to your lost condition, seeing that you are out of Christ.

What if you had gone out into eternity thinking that you were saved and you were not? It would have been the loss of your poor soul in Hell. As in nature, some flowers and grasses spring up immediately, so it is in grace. Some sinners are awakened and have a greater knowledge of their awful, ruined condition than others. Some are very slothful, as was Lot in leaving Sodom (Gen. 19). Some are hungering more after Christ, while others who say they are lost are dilly-dallying by the wayside with the thought; "If I belong to the Lord He is going to get me, so I'll go on and enjoy myself now." What a tragedy! I know such a soul who took that attitude several years ago, she is still lost today. Some of you here told me you all are still not saved! What is the trouble, my friends? You said you knew you were lost, but you have gone away backwards. To what! What was there for you to turn back to? You were warned not to rife with your convictions, and I know some of you had impressions, but now you are hardened. I told a man here more than once if he didn't turn to the Lord, there would come a time and day when he would not let me talk to him about Christ. The last time I talked to that man he had joined a false cult. How sad! A sinner's resurrection to new life in Christ begins with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5).

Please continue to listen to our late Pastor, L. R. Shelton, with THE VOICE OF TRUTH BROADCAST each Sunday morning at 7:30 over WAGI-FM, 105.3 Mc and at 8:00 over WAGL-AM, 1560 Kc.

The Prophet's Column is a paid advertisement. ###



Despite the fact that it rained last Saturday, member of the Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., of Johnson C. Smith University, participated in the citywide Glad-Bag-A-Thon. They are shown

above cleaning up areas of Beatties Ford Road. Pictured (l-r): Andy Muriel, Bill Wyatt, Maurice Flowers, Marvin Bartee, William Ford and Edward House.

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