

Gain & Loss [sermon notes] Phil 3:1-11

Religion - faith, belief, conviction, creed, profession, doctrine, dogma.

A Coventry man claims to have seen the Virgin Mary in a packet of pork scratchings bought in a local pub. Aaron Dodgson from the Earlsdon area of the city was drinking in the Royal Oak pub when he spotted a snack shaped in the image of the Madonna and Baby Jesus. Mr Dodgson, 26, says he is amazed at the fuss, but he will keep the holy snack in a safe place. Recently an image of the Virgin was seen in a puddle in a Mexican station. BBC Ceefax 2/7/97

"Every day people are straying away from the Church and going back to God."

"Hands off the Church of England -its the only thing that stands between us and Christianity! - an MP in a Commons debate.

Religious - no I'm a Christian.

Paul says watch out for the dogs! He is referring to a group of Jewish Christians (Judaisers) who wanted to make all gentile Christians adopt Judaism. Paul calls them dogs! pretty strong. Dogs was what Jews called Gentiles and now Paul is saying - look who are the real dogs! These religious people - he condemns them.

Religion? Paul is condemning religion? - yes really and he gives his reasons. You couldn't have got someone more religious than Paul. He was everything the law required circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

He was the religious machine - no-one was more pious than he was - it brought him importance, fame, fortune and the rest of it - the only trouble was that he was not doing what God wanted him to do.

Oh the danger of religion - when people say I'm right because God had told me to do this and that. They are the most dangerous people on earth! They are also some of the most self seeking and wealthy people on earth - American TV evangelists.

In Paul's day, the Judaisers took great pleasure in seeing him in difficulties - he mentions this in chapter 1.

What has this got to do with us? I suppose I could talk about some Churches that have an outward display of pomp and ceremony. I could refer to sects like the JW that control their people by fear.

But I'm not going to talk about them - I'm going to talk about good old evangelical Churches - the people who think they've got it right! I think that it is just as easy for us to fall into the religiosity trap - to show outwardly how zealous and religious we are, we go to Church, we serve the Church.

And there is nothing wrong with that - all those are noble things. All that Paul did as a Jew were noble things but WHY did he do them?

He did them for himself, for Judaism, for HIS own notion of what true spirituality was - and he never bothered to stop and say "IS THIS WHAT GOD WANTS?" - it was all confidence in the flesh as he says in verse 3.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, 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.

What has this got to do with us. It' s about what we consider to be the most valuable thing in our lives. Is Jesus so important as he was with Paul? I could give you some personal testimony but this passage isn' t for wannabe Christian workers. It is for the Church.

Paul is reflecting back on the past - and he says things have changed - whatever the glories or mistakes of Judaism, they' re gone because what' s more important is Christ and that' s why they are there.

And its the same for us. In the past few weeks we' ve seen encouraging things. When we started here we believed God wanted to do great things here - and we still believe that.

To do that we' ve got to cast off the past - whatever, glories there were, whatever mistakes there were - they no longer belong, they no longer have a place - they are all loss - whatever our motives for being here before - they are ALL loss - God wants to take us forward in him and to do that we can' t look back

Luke 9:62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Finally Paul' s only aim was one thing - verse 10 - JESUS

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Say how the resurrection empowers people

Why are churches small, struggling - focus wrong - petty factions, strong characters - their focus isn' t on Jesus, its on themselves!

What is our motive for being here - is it because we always have been coming here, because we feel we have a duty to be here, because of past or present friendships. What is our main motive for the Church - to see the club increased? To protect structures and ideas that applied in the past?

Or is it to follow Jesus, to see him glorified? If it' s the latter - if we cast off the past as loss then we are heading in the kind of direction Paul was going and wanted his followers to go.

I was trying to think of a closing piece that would crystallise this in the best way possible. Then I found that two centuries ago, this passage inspired Isaac Watts to write his best known hymn and I' m going to read it before we sing it.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.

**See from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e' er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?**

**Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**



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