

Gain Through Loss

*“What things were
gain to me, those
I counted loss
for Christ.”
—Philippians 3:7*

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN church organized in Europe by the Apostle Paul was at Philippi, in the region of Macedonia. In our studies of the Philippian epistle, which Paul wrote years later while a prisoner in Rome, we learn that he especially loved this church. We know also of the sweet fellowship the new converts enjoyed as they held meetings in the home of Lydia.—Phil. 1:3-5; Acts 16:14,15

The Apostle Paul and his companions in the ministry left Philippi under difficult circumstances, as recorded in Acts 16:16-40. The following paragraphs contain the scriptural record of these experiences, and though they were very trying to the flesh, they had a most blessed outcome according to the Spirit, in which the brethren rejoiced.

“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same (Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”—Acts 16:16-18

“And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers. ... And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bands were loosed.”—vss. 19,22-26

“And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word

of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”—vss. 27-34

“And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. ... And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.”—vss. 35,36,39,40

The foregoing is a heart-stirring account of the events which concluded Paul’s ministry in Philippi. It would be most interesting to consider these experiences at length, if space permitted. Indeed, Paul would not have had the opportunity to bring salvation to the jailer and his household except through the trouble that brought them in contact with each other, and by the miraculous deliverance accorded through the providence of God. With this background of Paul’s experiences while in Philippi, we now wish to examine in detail some of the lessons the Apostle provided in his epistle to this beloved ecclesia, with a focus primarily on Philippians chapter 3.

REJOICE

Verse 1 of chapter 3 reads: “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.”

(New American Standard Bible) One of the primary instructions in this letter is that every follower of Christ should “rejoice in the Lord.” The word “rejoice” in its various forms appears twelve times in this epistle, more than in any other of Paul’s writings. To rejoice is sometimes not easy. Indeed, when things go our way we can rejoice without difficulty, but in trials and tests it can be challenging. In this epistle, however, we are told to be “always” in an attitude of rejoicing.—Phil. 4:4

The secret of rejoicing in tribulation, in sorrow, in all things, and being cheerful in the hard and difficult experiences, is that the Christian has hope. We know this is the key to our rejoicing and cheerfulness, for Paul tells us so. He says that we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:2-5) If our hope is strong we will be able to “rejoice in the Lord” and be cheerful in every experience which he knows is necessary to prepare us for the fruition of that “hope for the glory of God.”

JUDAIZING TEACHERS

Philippians 3:2,3 read: “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Even in Philippi, which was a long distance from Jerusalem, it did not take long for Judaizing teachers to find the new converts to

Christianity. These Judaizers were a group who accepted Jesus as the Savior, but only of Israel. Thus, they insisted that a Gentile could be saved only by entering divine favor through the gate of the Jewish Law. As part of this, they taught that only circumcised converts could be accepted by God.

This group is mentioned in Acts 15:1,2: “Certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.”

It is not surprising that Paul was the object of their animosity, for he disagreed with their teaching. Paul taught the real circumcision of the heart through Christ, and that the circumcision of the flesh was of no importance to the Christian’s salvation. “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” —Rom. 2:28,29

Paul’s point in these verses is that only those fully consecrated to God, whether Jew or Gentile by birth, are the truly circumcised, the truly clean, the truly justified, in their hearts. Such circumcision is not according to the “letter,” but the “spirit” of God’s law, and comes to us only through the merit of Christ’s redemptive work. This is why Paul said in the verse quoted earlier that we “rejoice in

Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil. 3:3) That is, we have no confidence in fleshly things such as circumcision in order to attain salvation, but our confidence is only in Christ Jesus. Hence, our rejoicing is in him.

PAUL’S HERITAGE

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more.” (Phil. 3:4) Because Paul did not agree with the Judaizers, it would appear that they challenged his birth, some perhaps even insisting that he was a Gentile or, at best, not fully of Jewish heritage. He therefore answers their charges, and most categorically, as shown in the portions of verse 5 quoted below.

Paul said he was “circumcised the eighth day.” Why the eighth day? Converts to Judaism were circumcised after they became converts. Ishmaelites, who were sons of Abraham, but not Jews, were circumcised at thirteen years of age. Unconverted heathen or Gentiles were not circumcised at all. By stating that he was circumcised the eighth day the Apostle was proving that he was born a Jew.—Gen. 17:12,25; 21:4

“Of the stock of Israel,” Paul continued. Had he said, “Of the stock of Abraham,” that could mean he might have been an Ishmaelite, but “the stock of Israel” was pure Jewish stock. Thus, he was not a proselyte, nor an Ishmaelite, but an Israelite. Furthermore, he was “of the tribe of Benjamin.” Israel’s King Saul was from this tribe, and Paul, whose original name was “Saul, of Tarsus,” was likely named after him. (I Sam. 9:1,2; Acts 9:11)

The tribe of Benjamin, along with the tribe of Judah, were also more favored by God.

“An Hebrew of the Hebrews.” That is, Paul was a Hebrew from Hebrew parents. He spoke Greek, but he also spoke Hebrew as proven by the account found in Acts 21:40 and 22:2 in which is recorded that he spoke “in the Hebrew tongue” to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. “As touching the law, a Pharisee.” Those who criticized Paul often claimed that they were upholding the validity of the Law. None professed to uphold the Law more than did the Pharisees, and so he emphasized that he was a Pharisee. In Acts 23:6, Paul further confirmed this, saying, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.”

GAIN THROUGH LOSS

After presenting these proofs of his Jewish heritage, Paul said in effect, “Yes, I am circumcised, and of Israelitish stock, from the tribe of Benjamin, but none of this matters.” We note his exact words, recorded in Philippians 3:7,8: “Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”—*NASB*

As followers of Christ we also must learn the lesson of “gain” through “loss.” Our relationship with God may mean the loss of worldly friends, aims and ambitions. However, it also means the gain of fellowship with our Heavenly Father and with his Son, Christ Jesus, and with our brethren in the

Lord's spiritual family. (I John 1:3) The Apostle's words to the brethren at Philippi indicate that all of this has to do with how we measure values. The Christian's sense of values is one thing; the world's sense of values is quite another.

RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH COMES FROM GOD

In Philippians 3:9, Paul continues his personal testimony, stating his desire to "be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Bible students have come to understand that the words "righteousness" and "justification," as used in the New Testament, imply a similar thought. The apostle taught that Christians are "justified by faith" in the blood of Christ. (Rom. 5:1,8,9) This means, then, that justification is not through one's own righteousness. Similarly, for Paul, and other Jewish believers of his day, justification was not through the Mosaic Law, for no one could keep it since all were imperfect. Indeed, then as well as today, there are "none righteous," neither Jew nor Gentile, for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."—Rom. 3:10,23

The Apostle Paul desired to be "found in him." The thought is to be found in union with Christ. This would not be possible through his own righteousness, the apostle said, but only through faith in the righteousness of Christ. To have the Lord's righteousness as the basis for his justification, Paul could be in union with Christ, "found in him." All of this, the apostle concluded, was based on the workings of the Heavenly Father—it was "of God

by faith.” In another place Paul stated much the same thing, saying, “It is God that justifieth.” (Rom. 8:33) Certainly we can rejoice with Paul in the knowledge that such a standing belongs to the consecrated of God.

“THAT I MAY KNOW HIM”

Paul’s earnest desire was to know the Heavenly Father and his Son Christ Jesus as fully as possible. He expresses it in this way to the Philippian brethren: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (Phil. 3:10,11) Note the result of having this justification or righteousness from God through faith in Jesus: “That I might know him.” Unless one is reconciled to God, it is not possible to really know him or his beloved Son.

The apostle also wanted to know and participate in the “fellowship” of Christ’s sufferings. All the consecrated followers of the Lord have the privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. (Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:24) To be made “conformable” to Jesus’ death, as Paul adds, does not necessarily mean undergoing physical death in the same manner that he did, nor that we must suffer physical martyrdom. Rather, it denotes conformity to the spirit of our Lord’s sacrificial death resulting from his unselfish love and complete devotion to his Heavenly Father.

This is the same thought expressed by the Apostle Peter: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as

ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (I Pet. 4:12,13) It is interesting to know that all this comes to the followers of Christ as a result of having the righteousness, or justification, which is from God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul desired, too, to know the full power of Christ's resurrection, the "first resurrection," which would include being made "priests of God and of Christ," and reigning with him in his Messianic kingdom for the purpose of blessing the entire world of mankind. (Rev. 20:6; 21:2-4) The *Rotherham Emphasized Bible* translation of Philippians 3:11 seems to convey the full import of the apostle's desire: "If by any means I may advance to the earlier resurrection, which is from among the dead."

PRESSING TOWARD THE MARK

The Apostle Paul makes it clear in our lesson that he did not consider himself to have reached the goal of his consecration. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12-14) *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott* translates verse 14 using these words: "I press along the line, towards the prize of the high calling of God by Christ Jesus."

Here a racecourse is pictured, which has parallel lines to mark the area where a person should run. Thus, the Apostle said he ran and pressed along the line of full devotion to God, toward the “mark” of mature Christian love. Only by doing this, unto death, could he reach the prize of the high, heavenly calling—the prize of an incorruptible crown of life.—James 1:12; Rev. 2:10

The prize is bound up with the calling. It is promised when the call is issued and given after the call is complied with and fulfilled in the first resurrection. Quoting again Philippians 3:13,14 from the *Rotherham* translation: “The things behind forgetting, and unto the things before, eagerly reaching out, With the goal in view, I press on for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

WALKING PROPERLY

Not only does Paul liken our life in Christ to a racecourse, but he also speaks of it as a “walk.” He states, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” (Phil. 3:15-17) Paul’s reference to “as many as be perfect” refers to maturity in Christ. (see *Rotherham* and *Weymouth New Testament* translations) Let us grasp the lesson of this exhortation and seek to be “followers together” of the apostle, imitating and walking according to the example he set for us, just as he walked and followed after Christ.—I Cor. 11:1

We must be vigilant and ever watchful in our walk. “Many walk,” Paul says, “of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”—Phil. 3:18,19

Here is another exhortation. Let us never oppose the Truth, and let us not exalt self. Those who do are enemies of the cross of Christ. Let us also not focus on earthly things. Rather, as Jesus said, let us “seek ... first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” and all the things needful to our flesh—our food, our clothing and our shelter—will be added unto us through the overruling providences of God’s care.—Matt. 6:33

OUR CITIZENSHIP

The concluding words of Philippians chapter 3 are these: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”—vss. 20,21, *NASB*

In order to attain maturity in Christ, we must remember that our “country,” the commonwealth of which we are citizens, is in heaven. Keeping that in mind will be of great assistance to us as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, for that is where his citizenship lay. (John 17:16; 18:36) Let us rejoice in the privileges of this status and make sure that our full allegiance is towards our heavenly country.

It is our Lord Jesus who will “change the body of our humble state.” Our present body is humble in the sense that it is a body of imperfection, disesteem, and inadequate ability to glorify God as we would like. If faithful, however, think of what our change will be, for the Apostle Paul says: “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”—I Cor. 15:42-44

Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians, and also to us, is this: If we are mature Christians, if we are faithful to our citizenship, the body of our humiliation will someday have served its purpose, and ere long we will have a body in “conformity with the body of His glory.” The Apostle John presents the matter using these encouraging words: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:1,2

In the last verse of our lesson, Philippians 3:21, the apostle says that the work of God, through Christ, is not merely to transform us into the image of his Son, but also to subdue, or make subject, “all things to himself.” The *James Moffatt* translation states that the Lord will “transform the body that belongs to our low estate till it resembles the body of his Glory, by the same power that enables him to make everything subject to himself.” This includes not only the work of subjecting the body of Christ,

the church, but also that of eventually subjecting “all things,” in heaven and on earth, to his rule of righteousness. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” (Eph. 1:10) We thank our Heavenly Father for the messages given to us by him through the Apostles of Jesus Christ! ■