

The question of our identity as people who are right with God:

- Is it in our ethnicity? Our commitment to his commands?

The Good News:

- Christ Jesus gives us a right standing with God:
- As we trust in him we are free in humility to acknowledge
- That we are on a path to a goal we have not yet reached:
- The heavenly calling we have from God.

Here's how the reading starts: If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

- The target audience: those who trust in these markers
- To establish their identity as God's people:
- And who would insist on them for others: for gentiles.

St Paul can more than compete:

- On those things which he received: circumcision
- The people; the tribe; the language / culture.
- On those things for which he strove:
- Being a Pharisee; persecuting the church; keeping the law.

But listen to what he says: Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

- The point is the comparison
- Jesus talks about it this way:
 - 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. Matthew 13
- In comparison to what is gained, all else is rubbish.
- And what has St Pau gained?

- Jesus the Christ – the Messiah: the fulfillment of the promise.

St Paul puts it more strongly: For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard 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 one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

- 'Rubbish' a euphemism
- A righteousness not from ethnicity
- Or from keeping God's rules
- But from faith in Christ
- Perhaps better: Christ's faithfulness to us:
- That he has kept the law, that he has conquered death.

So for St Paul, Christ is his focus: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

- To share in all things that are Christ's
- His death and resurrection: in his baptism (Romans 6)
- And as he lives by faith.

In this there is humility: Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

- The goal: resurrection
- Pressing on because Christ Jesus made him his own

St Paul shares with us his way of thinking: Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

- Forgetting what lies behind: not being hampered
- Straining forward: note: to the goal
- God draws us to himself by the gift that he gives.
- Our identity: a gift
- Our goal: a gift
- Thanks to God, who gives us his righteousness
- Through Christ Jesus his Son!