

I was not great in pine car derbies. I didn't have the fastest cars and I never seemed to win best design either. Not to throw my dad under the bus, but it's largely his fault. I got unhandy genes. My dad readily admits he's not the handiest person. Our garage wasn't filled with the whole suite of tools. Our paint and brushes selection at home was weak. I don't even know if my dad ever made a pine car. He didn't seem to understand weights, aerodynamics, or sweet design which he then couldn't pass to me. And there wasn't Google.

So when I brought home a first place trophy it felt awesome. I was so proud, smiling from ear to ear. That trophy went up on my shelf right next to a third place trophy I received the following year. They sat there until my mom packed up things I didn't have with me at college. Those were great accomplishments for someone with limited tools and limited help.

If someone tried to tell me not to accept or give the trophy back I would've called them crazy. I couldn't sacrifice that trophy. I worked hard for it, why would I give it back or not take it? And that's not just an attitude in children. You don't go to your boss and say "please pay me less, I'm making too much." You don't sacrifice that way willingly. Paul had accomplishments and accolades. He had it all. His reaction is what he puts forward in the second lesson. We use it to understand our third topic in this sermon series...

**Love speaks sacrificially
Consider everything a loss
Only to be found in Christ**

Paul had three things going for him that he had nothing to do with. Like being born into royalty or riches, Paul was born with benefits. **"Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews."** From birth Paul was destined for greatness. His pedigree and family tree were immaculate. He was deeply a part of the Israelite nation. He had no mix in his genes. He was perfectly set up to be a winner.

He also had three things he did have a choice about, choices he made perfectly in line with his lineage. **"In regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."** Every choice Paul made, from his profession as a Pharisee, to his decision to go after those who were religiously opposed to him, every decision was spot on. Paul was the model Jew, someone other Jews wanted to be, someone Jewish moms wished their sons would be like. Compared to the laws people were supposed to keep, Paul was basically perfect and righteous. He had every reason for confidence in himself. He achieved select status. If heaven were awarded based on earthly life Paul was guaranteed a spot.

At first Paul bet his future on his legacy and abilities. These were achievements to take pride in. Why would he want to humble himself and not accept the praise for a life well lived according to the law? Yet everything changed. **"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."** Completely opposite. Those things that were profit, something to hang the hat on, now those very same things were loss. These were supposed to give him a great relationship with God. Now he recognized they kept him from any relationship with God. What caused this sudden change, this ability to sacrifice everything he once held dear? Christ Jesus. Anything that didn't help his relationship with Jesus was less than worthless, **"I consider them rubbish"** Paul said. Something to be eliminated.

To a fourth grader the trophy validated me. I put in work on my pine car, and the trophy made me proud for something I accomplished. Why would I ever give back a sign that I was somebody? No matter fourth grade or forty years old if you project that something is so important that the world thinks it's probably more important than God to you, you've got a problem. It might be seeing your denomination membership or the fact that you were baptized and confirmed at the same church. You might look with pride on these things. Suddenly they become more important than the relationship with God they're meant to strengthen. Or you might be looking for credit you think you deserve. Maybe you've accomplished great things but no one recognizes. No one compliments you for the way you handled a meeting, talked a client into a new sale, or answered a really difficult question in class. No recognition might make you mad or look to get even.

Run through your accomplishments. Your job, the money, your position in the community. Think of how you brag about your kids, their athleticism, musical ability, or popularity. Which of these would you be willing to stake your eternal life on? What was reason for God to like you and have a relationship with you might just be the thing that pulls you away from God instead. In fact it might just be toxic and kill. Not one of these contributes to your getting into heaven. **"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."** Everything a loss, lost all things, consider them rubbish. Strong words for some really great accomplishments. But that's the major reversal that's needed.

And God provides it. He takes you from self-centered to Christ centered. He shows you Jesus and what he's done for you. There's no bigger sacrifice than the love Jesus showed. He gave his life to gain your righteousness. Jesus leads you to a connection to him, understanding of him, everything done in love so you know Christ. God works it so these are important now. Anything that looks away from Jesus is worthless, something to eliminate. Anything you once sinfully considered profit is actually loss. They're sacrificed in Jesus so you can be saved and only found in Christ.

God didn't promise us righteousness from ourselves. It's important for us to hear the promises we already have in Christ alone. We're found in him and we have righteousness through him. **"Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ."** That's real righteousness. Jesus' perfection now credited to you and me. Jesus won that, he achieved with a perfect life a perfect score for us. This righteousness before God is given to us freely, as Christ's gift to us to bring us to God. His divine power brings about this amazing turnaround, a transformation. God has done just that in each of you through Christ.

After the turnaround we share the new life of the risen Christ. **"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."** The closer we are in our relationship to Christ the more we become like him now. Closeness with Christ allows us to share in his new life. We suffer, but not to pay God back for our salvation. The more we are like Christ the more we suffer because we're so different from the world. Finally we become like him in death. We're already promised resurrection from the dead guaranteed for us in Christ. We still hope and strive till that day when it happens physically. To accomplish that is to remain in Christ Jesus alone. To be found in no one else and nothing else but him.

This transformation in Jesus changes everything for us. The resurrection promises remove doubt, fear, or stress. Knowledge of Jesus allows us to speak with love sacrificially. We sacrifice all things so we can hold on to Christ and speak of his great love. We make commitments to dig into the Word in Bible study and Sunday school. We commit to coming on Wednesdays to Faith & Fellowship night for even more study of the Word. We commit to bringing kids to confirmation class, and having devotion time. We promise to sacrifice financially to give to God's work through our offerings. Motivated by Christ's resurrection we speak in love and sacrifice things that really don't matter so we can keep the goal in mind. We have eternal life and we want others to have it too through Jesus.

I don't have that trophy anymore...honest. It isn't worth anything to me anymore...again honest. When compared to the promise of eternal life my Savior gives me, it is worthless and I'm happy to sacrifice my pride and my accomplishments so that I'm found in him. I know you are too, sacrificing earthly things so you have the guaranteed heavenly promise from Christ given in love. And that's what motivates you to speak. Love speaks sacrificially.