

Philippians 3:4b-14

“From Nothing comes Everything”

19th Sunday af. Pentecost

October 4, 2015

Our Redeemer

Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] Pop Quiz!

How much is nothing worth? Silly question—nothing! Right?

And how much is everything worth? Again, a silly question—everything! Right?

Or, so it would seem.

Zeroes are worth nothing, but we would never give up those “nothings” when they appear on our \$20 or \$100 dollar bills.

Since God’s ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts (Is 55:8),
nothing is not always worth nothing,
nor is everything really worth everything.

In fact, God wants to give you the nothing that is everything.

In Christ, God Replaces the Nothingness of Self with the Everything of Himself—

Let me say that again!

In Christ, God Replaces the Nothingness of Self with the Everything of Himself—
the Very Righteousness of Christ and All Its Benefits.

[Everything] We strive to “have it all”—everything.

“Having it all” in our world focuses on

one’s life, possessions, experiences, and accomplishments,
while giving little thought to one’s relationship with God.

A beer commercial from several years ago asked,

“Who says you can’t have it all?”

We’d like to think that, when push comes to shove, people would admit how exaggerated is the claim that anything earthly could supply life’s “everything.”

But the fact that the claim is even made—for beer, of all things—

shows that the human heart truly does look
for the fullness of life in the “stuff” of this world.

The ones “Having it all” in Paul’s world—or trying to—were the Judaizers.

The Judaizers took great “confidence in the flesh”—their achievements under law (both the Law of Moses and their own invented embellishments of it).

Hear Paul’s warning in Philippians 3:2–3

²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

Paul shows how, if that were truly reason for confidence, he had matched and surpassed them.

Paul says:

“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.” (vv 4–6)

The attitude of our day seems much different from that of the Judaizers. You might even be thinking, “Come on pastor. Be more relevant.”

[*Relevant*]

Okay. Paul’s world was more consciously “religious.”

Even if their religions were false or erring,
people knew they were accountable to “Law,”
whether God’s true Law (natural or revealed) or
the invented laws of religious man.

To them, “having it all” focused not-so-much on material possessions and experiences, but on one’s relationship with God.

Still, it was generally presumed that, if you were “right with God,” material blessings and earthly experiences would follow.

Now it is true. Our world is more secular.

More and more, people sense little if any accountability to God.
Materialism and experience have even become gods,
even though we do not have the honesty to name them as such.

So “having it all” in terms of our world is less overtly religious.
But both worlds, in the end, are focused on self.

Paul's world (and specifically the Judaizers) focused on self-righteousness, how the self could earn God's favor.	Our world focuses on gratifying the self through materialism and experience.
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[Not Enough]

And yet the reality is that in Paul's world or ours, "having it all" is never enough.

In terms of worldly possessions or experiences, "having it all" is never enough—which means that "all" is not everything.

How many toys did we as children think we "just had to have"?
And where are they now?

How many items of fashionable clothing did we as high schoolers "just have to have"?
And where are they now?

How often do we as adults convince ourselves that
 this car, that house, such-and-such an experience,
 will make life complete,
 only to learn—sometimes very quickly—
 that we had set our hearts on things not capable of
 delivering lasting contentment?

In terms of human righteousness
 —earning God's favor by our own goodness (Paul's day or ours!)
 —to think we "have it all" is dangerous self-delusion.

Witness: The Judaizers and Pharisees, who molded and recast "the Law" to
 convince themselves they had kept it.

Witness: Paul, who as a Pharisee excelled in righteousness when judged from a
 human viewpoint (vv 5–6; cf. Gal 1:14).

Witness: Holy Scripture—"All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Is
 64:6).

Whether "having it all" means materialism and experience or personal merit before God,
 "having it all" is never nearly enough.

[*Good News*]

And that my friends is good news!

God gives us the loss of everything

so that in our nothingness we can know the all-sufficiency of Christ.

Christ Jesus had “made [us] his own” (v 12) and caused us to suffer “the loss of all things” (v 8).

On the Damascus road (Acts 9),

Christ graciously caused Paul to “*know him and the power of his resurrection and [to] share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*”

(v 10)—even the death of the cross!

In Baptism, dying and rising with Christ,

we are united with the power of his resurrection

and joined to the fellowship of his sufferings,

not as payment for sin (Christ did that),

but at the hands of the world, where Christ is still on trial.

Emptied of self and of every claim of “mine,”

grace fills us with the “surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus [our] Lord” (v 8).

We know his resurrection’s power (v 10).

We know the fellowship of his sufferings, “becoming like him in his death” (v 8).

Thus by grace, our nothingness becomes everything.

From nothing comes everything!

We “*press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (v 14).

[*Conclusion*]

We will be celebrating the Reformation at the end of this month.

On that day, we will sing with Luther, from his classic hymn:

“And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife,

Though these all be gone, Our vict’ry has been won” (*LSB* 656:4).

Will we mean it? Faith will!

Faith hears in these words the baptismal call to die anew, to be emptied of self so that Christ is all in all. In him, “The Kingdom ours remaineth.” Amen.