

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: PHILIPPIANS 3:4B - 14



All law keeping, accomplishments, and merit are rubbish compared to Christ.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

All religious works are worthless apart from Christ. Paul had every reason to boast about his religious accomplishments. Not only was he born a Jew, but he also followed the law given by God almost perfectly. He was a man so full of zeal that he persecuted Christians, who he believed threatened to undermine the Jewish traditions given by God.

Once God opened his eyes to see how inadequate his works really were in comparison to the work of Christ, Paul gladly gave up everything he was counting on for salvation. He considered it a loss. He basically gave up his occupation as a Jewish religious leader on the spot. In its place he gained a much greater calling. Instead of being an instructor of legalism, Paul became an instructor of grace!

All accomplishments are rubbish compared to gaining Christ. Paul didn't stop with his religious works. He went on to say that he considered everything a loss compared to knowing Jesus. Often we find our identity and motivation in our gifts, knowledge, or accomplishments in life. If a person is a good football player, for instance, he might be tempted to think he is something special because of his ability to play well. Paul realized, though that our boasting in anything but Christ is sinful. It is not that our gifts, talents or accomplishments are bad, but they should not define us. Compared to Christ, Paul tells us they are rubbish. The word for "rubbish" means the scraps thrown to the dogs at the end of a feast.

All of our future is defined by pursuing Christ. Paul's greatest desire was to know more about Jesus. He left all his accomplishments behind and pressed forward toward Christ. Our prize is heaven with Jesus. So we should live in such a way that we keep our destination, heaven with Christ, in view. When we keep heaven in view, earthly accomplishments and treasures do not easily tempt us. Paul was quick to mention that he was not perfect. Like us, he still struggled with sin. Paul pressed on to know Christ, realizing that one day he would see Jesus.

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WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

Paul speaks as one who has endured much suffering for the sake of Christ. Rather than complain at the end of his days, Paul sees his own struggle through the lens of the gospel. Jesus suffered and died, and then He rose again. Paul reverses this order, placing resurrection before suffering. This is the path of all believers. First, we experience the joy of being saved to newness of life before we share in the sufferings of our Lord. We, like Paul, should not be surprised at suffering. It is a part of the path of every Christian - some certainly greater than others. Christ is the focus of Paul's life, and we only need to read a few sentences of Paul's letter to the Philippians to see the message of the gospel woven in again and again.

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

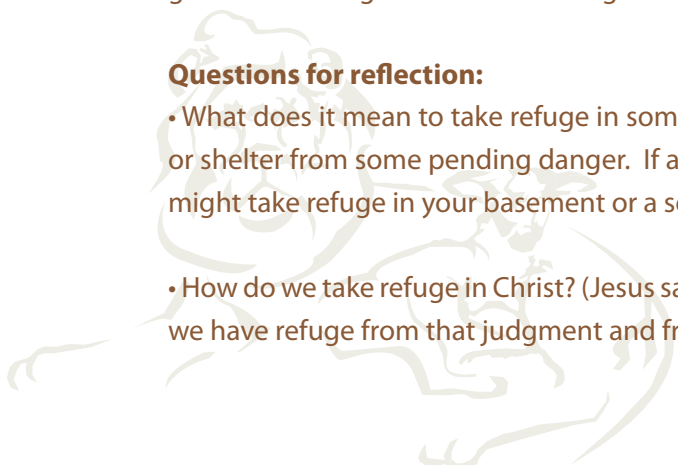
Bible Passage: Psalm 34:8

Connecting the passage to Christ:

Peter quotes this verse (1 Peter 2:3) as a way to describe our conversion. Jesus is our refuge from sin, and when we place our trust and hope in Him, we find refuge from judgment and death. In Christ we have life, joy, peace, and hope everlasting. By trusting in Christ we have forgiveness. There could be no greater taste of goodness than being freed from the punishment we deserve.

Questions for reflection:

- What does it mean to take refuge in something? (When we take refuge, we are looking for protection or shelter from some pending danger. If a tornado were reported to be traveling in your direction, you might take refuge in your basement or a secure room in the middle of your home.)
- How do we take refuge in Christ? (Jesus saves us from the wrath of God we deserve for our sin. In Christ we have refuge from that judgment and from eternal death and hell.)



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SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

THE GREATEST

Supplies:

white board and markers

Ask the class who they think is the greatest basketball player, the greatest president, the greatest musician, and the greatest football player. Put their first, second, and third choices up on the board. Then ask them who they would most want to be like and why.

Listen to their answers and then write Jesus Christ on the board. Ask them who they most want to be like now. They should all say Jesus. Ask them why they gave that response as some might not know why.

Read through Paul's reasoning and then draw out the class as to why we should want to be like Jesus. Help the children see just how much our culture celebrates earthly accomplishments and people. Paul considered them all rubbish compared to Christ.



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CHRIST'S GREAT WORTH

Supplies:

- penny
- nickel
- dime
- quarter
- small chocolate bar
- small snack bag of pretzels
- pack of gum
- large bag of chocolate candy

The object is to show how value is set by what is most valuable. This is an illustration of Christ being most valuable. We might highly value earthly things until we understand the value of Christ. Then all things pale in comparison. That is what happened to Paul.

Lay out a penny, nickel and a dime on a table. Ask for a volunteer and invite them to take one of the three to keep. They will, of course, choose the dime because it is worth more. Ask them why they took the dime and if they are satisfied with their choice. Ask them if they feel good about getting a free dime. They are likely to say yes.

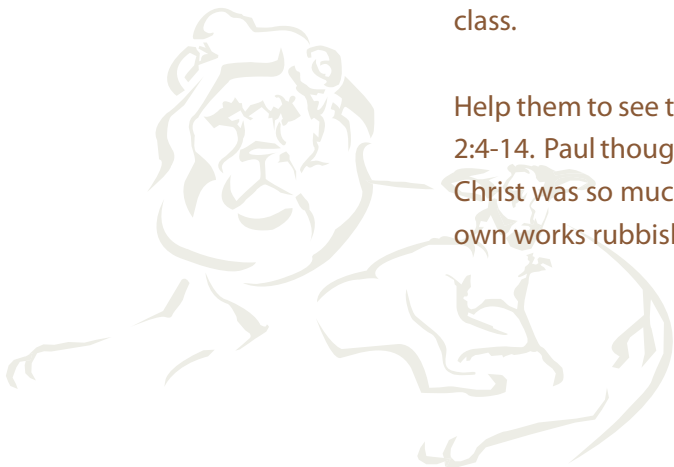
Take the penny and nickel away and put a quarter, a small chocolate bar, a bag of pretzels, and a pack of gum on the table. Invite a new volunteer to come up and make a similar choice.

Go back to your first volunteer and ask her if her thoughts about her dime are changing. She is likely to say yes. Ask her if she might like to trade in her dime. If she says yes, ask her why. She is likely to say that the items now available are better than the dime. Help her to see how her affections for the dime have changed as well as her understanding of its value.

Give her the opportunity to trade. Now take out the large bag of candy and place it on the table. The class should get very excited and you should have many children trying to volunteer. Draw them out as to why they are so excited to volunteer and what they would pick if they had the chance.

Choose one more volunteer. This time tell him he can choose one item to share with the class. He or she should pick the bag of candy to the delight of all the class.

Help them to see the connection to Paul's message to the Philippians in Philippians 2:4-14. Paul thought his works were valuable until he understood the work of Christ. Christ was so much more excellent than Paul's accomplishments that he called his own works rubbish. That is like the large bag of candy compared to the penny.



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RUBBISH

Supplies:

- Bring in your family leftovers from a baked chicken and place them in a foil pan with a foil cover. (Make sure you refrigerate them so they do not become infected with bacteria.)
- Bring in an alternate snack like a bag of pretzels to give to your class.
- Bring in a stack of plates to add to the drama

This is to illustrate rubbish and the powerful word choice Paul used to describe all our accomplishments compared to Christ.

Ask the class if anyone is hungry and would like a snack. After the whole class raises their hands, open up the foil tray and tilt it to show them the leftover chicken. Tell them you kept the scraps from last night. Pick up a plate and put some of the bones on it and take it to one of the students in the front row. Play this out for a while. Draw out the class about why they changed their minds. Read the passage for today and point out Paul's choice of words. Compared to Christ, Paul counted everything rubbish. What does that say about Paul's love for Christ?

PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

Draw a picture of a runner in full sprint. Write the words: Christ is the prize for which we run.



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FOR THE OLDER GRADES

LISTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Supplies:

Paper and pencils

At the start of class ask the students to list all of their accomplishments on the left side of their paper. Next to each one rate how valuable they think that accomplishment is (of little value, of great value, or of extremely great value). Give them a few examples: Learning how to ride a two wheel bike, finishing 4th grade, babysitting someone by themselves etc.

When they are finished, have them share some of their accomplishments. Ask the class to vote on who has the greatest accomplishments. If someone mentions giving their lives to Christ, go ahead and include it.

Then read what Paul wrote to the Philippians - that he considers everything a loss for the sake of Christ and that he considers everything rubbish compared to knowing Christ.

Ask the class how Paul's passion for Christ affects them and the choices they made. Would they choose something different now?

Ask them what accomplishments the world exalts and celebrates. Then help them to see that we should be more excited about Christ than those things the world celebrates.



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A LITTLE BIT MORE

Legalistic righteousness – Paul is referring to the many laws written to determine righteousness. In addition to the law God gave Moses, the Pharisees added even more laws to ensure a person could remain righteous. There were laws about how far a person was allowed to travel on the Sabbath so as to make sure he was not working. The Pharisees prided themselves on keeping these in addition to the Law of Moses. If a person could keep all the laws, he was without fault.

Jesus exploded the myth of attaining righteousness by the law when He explained that even sin in our hearts disqualifies us before God. Even anger in our hearts toward our brother breaks the law against murdering our brother.

Christ was the only man who kept the law perfectly, both outwardly and in His heart. Though He was tempted, Jesus did not sin. Paul came to realize that all his efforts to work toward righteousness were worthless. In Christ, however, Paul was given righteousness freely by grace. In the end, he pursued Christ with an even greater zeal than he did in his pursuit of the law.

