

## **"Paul's Legacy: Priorities"**

Philippians 3:4b - 17

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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It's good to be home with you here in Kingwood. As most of you know, I spent most of the last two weeks including the last two Sundays in Seattle enjoying their summer weather and teaching a grad school course on the Gospel of Mark for Fuller Seminary. The highest temperature I experienced in those two weeks was 79 degrees! And I noticed in our latest forecast that's the overnight low here in Houston!

In fact, it's been so hot and so dry that someone in our congregation sent me an email this week to welcome me back to Texas, and tell me about what's been happening in churches here while I've been away. The email made me laugh out loud, so I thought I'd share it with you.

Apparently it's been so hot and so dry that churches are even changing the way they do baptisms. Baptist churches, the email said, are now sprinkling people instead of immersing them. Methodists are using a wet washcloth. Presbyterians are giving out rain checks. But there may be some relief in sight, because at communion Catholics are praying God will turn the wine back to water!

So when we come to our communion prayer this morning ... no, we won't be praying God will turn the wine back to water. But we will be praying, as we always do that God would take the elements on the table and set them apart from their common use to a sacred purpose. And often, when we say that sentence in our prayer before communion, I think about the way that God can rearrange the value of things in our lives.

The life of Paul is a perfect example. Paul's one of my personal favorites when it comes to biblical characters. And there are many reasons why. But one of the main ones has to do with Paul's willingness to put his own life on display in his letters with both pride and humility.

This morning's lesson's a prime example. For in Philippians 3, Paul writes first about his pride. He's proud of his circumcision. It was done as it should be done, he says. He was circumcised on the eighth day. He's proud of his nationality.

He's an Israelite. He's proud of his genealogy. He belongs to the tribe of Benjamin. He's proud of the way he was raised. He comes from a family that spoke Hebrew and kept Hebrew customs. He's proud of the Torah. He's a Pharisee. He's proud of his passion, even though it led him or a while to persecute the church. And he's proud of his desire to do the right thing. In fact, he says, in that regard, he can't think of a time in his life where he can remember trying to do anything else.

But then in humility he writes that whatever he gained in these ways, "I now count as loss for the sake of Christ. What's more I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ..."

"Everybody loves Raymond" was a TV sitcom. It was on CBS from 1996 to 2005. It was the one of the longest running and one of the most watched sitcoms on television in the last twenty years. And it starred a comedian named Ray Ramano.

Ray Ramano grew up in an Italian Catholic family in the borough of Queens in New York. And after working hard for almost 30 years to become successful in his profession he spent almost a decade at the top of his profession. Everybody loved Raymond. But then Ray Ramano let God rearrange the values in his life.

He decided to end his TV series. And on the last that the show was filmed, he stood in front of a studio audience and explained to them why he had decided not to do another season. He pulled a note out of his pocket. He told the audience it was a note his brother had stuck in his suitcase the day he moved from New York to Hollywood.

Then he said, "My older brother Richard wrote these words to me, 'What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul?'" And Ray Ramano looked up, and through a few tears, he said to his audience, "It's time. I'm going to go to work on my soul."

"The time has come," Jesus says in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, "the time has come and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel." In other words, Jesus is saying to those who are listening "it's time, time start letting God's values be your values. So turn around, and start trusting the truth about who God is and what God wants you to do."

Tell me this morning, my friends. Have you heard Jesus say that to you. Has he told you it's time? Has he told you it's time to rearrange the values in your life. Has that time come for you yet?

It's come for some people in this church. It's true. In fact for some people back here with us this morning, the time came just in the last two weeks. For during the last two weeks a group of men and women from our church decided to let God rearrange their priorities. So they gave up a week or two of vacation time, personal time and turned it into missional time. They decided to make a personal investment in the mission of God.

And that's what the word missional really means. Living a missional life as a Christian means making the mission of God personal. It means making a personal investment in the work of building God's kingdom. And all this year we've been looking at examples of men and women in the Bible who knew it was time for them to do that.

Somehow they heard God saying to them, "it's time." "It's time for you. It's time for you to rearrange your life and your priorities. It's time for you to get personally involved with me in my mission in your world."

Abraham heard God. He heard God tell him it was time to do that. So did Moses. He heard God say it too. Esther heard God say that to her when Mordecai spoke to her. And four fishermen, named Simon and Andrew and James and John heard God tell them it was time for them when a man called Jesus said to them, "Follow me!" Paul heard God tell him it was time when he was praying together with Barnabas and the church in Antioch according to the Book of Acts.

And if all of those people heard God tell them it was time, then the question becomes have you heard God tell you yet? It is time for you yet. Have you heard God telling you "it's time."

If you haven't, I know you will soon. And when you hear God's Spirit speak those words to your soul, I hope you won't ignore them. Because the truth is God wants to get personal with you. And God wants to get missional with you. God wants to call every single one of us, you and me, all of us who believe in Him to get personally involved alongside Him in His mission in our world.

And when we do, well amazing things can still happen. Want me to show you? Well just watch this ...