

## Resetting Life's Compass

Philippians 3:4-14

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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Recently we've read in the news about commercial jets which have landed at the wrong airports. Scary, huh? I remember the old story that had the flight attendant speaking to the passengers on a plane: "Due to the malfunction of our instruments, we are temporarily lost. But it might interest you to know, we are making excellent time." Maybe that defines our culture. We don't know where we are going. But we're going there fast. Jim Collins, the author of the much-read book *Good To Great*, says that it is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful one. Is your life meaningful? Do you know where you are going? Do you have a purpose?

The Apostle Paul is telling his life story in our text. He is basically telling us that before he met Christ, his life had lots of speed and action, but not much direction. In vv. 5-6 he tells us he had been in the right church since he was a baby (circumcised on the eighth day, according to Jewish law); born to the right nation (Israel), born in the right region of the country (tribe of Benjamin). He was connected to the right group (Pharisee), spoke the right language (Hebrew) and kept all the right rules (blameless). As Paul says in v. 4, if anyone could brag about self-help religion, about getting into God's heaven or God's favor by working at it, it was Paul! But...but...there is this dramatic break, a pause, between vv. 6 and 7. Why?

Before I answer that, let me ask you another question. Have you ever been lost? I mean, really lost? In a huge city, far from home? In the woods? I remember one time my mother and I were checking cattle and we were missing one young cow and her baby calf. We went deep into the woods of a pasture we were renting. And we realized we couldn't figure out true north. Have you ever been lost and realized your compass wasn't working correctly? Suddenly, what you thought was north wasn't? Once you figure out true north, everything changes! That's Paul. That's this dramatic pause between vv. 6 and 7.

Once Paul figured out true north, reset his compass, he came to see all those gains (plural) as actually one big loss (singular), v. 7. You see, we don't get right with God by our pious acts of worship or our good deeds in the community. We don't get to heaven based on good works. We do not find purpose in life through moral achievement. Or through mental achievement. It is not intellectual attainment. No moral achievement (v. 9). It is a relationship of the heart and will. Look at v. 8: "...the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Not knowing about Christ, but knowing Christ.

A skeptic once asked a believer how he knew Jesus is alive. "Because I just talked with him this morning," came the reply. Here's the thing. A doubter can refute books, and even refute the

Bible. We can even argue about facts of history. But there is no refuting human experience. "This happened to me." This is Paul's story. And it's mine. And yours. Jesus is alive!

And on this Easter Sunday, 2014, we need to really hear what Paul is saying and remember that the resurrection is about more than going to heaven when we die. Oh, don't get me wrong. I am so thankful that Christ has conquered death and the grave, that as we face that final enemy, we know Christ has conquered. But is that all? Is Easter just about what one writer called that final "rocket launch into eternity"? [Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, p. 67]. The resurrection is also about how that eternity washes back into time and fills this life with meaning and purpose. Resets life's compass.

A chaplain was once aboard a troop ship, headed back home from Japan to America after WWII was over. The chaplain was invited to lead a small Bible study group on board ship. After studying John 11 (the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead), one Marine approached the chaplain. "Everything in that passage was pointing to me. I've been in hell the last six months. I've been in bad trouble--nobody knows except God." He believed his life was ruined and he could never face his family again. In short, he said, he felt like a dead man. But after encountering the living Christ in that Bible study, he said, "I'm alive again. I know this resurrection is here and now."

One pastor put it this way: His encounter with the Christian gospel is all about two things: 1) An eternal truth, something that is always true and has been for a long time, not needing to be invented, merely discovered (sounds like a true north compass heading, right?); 2) New horizons that I may enter without fear [Helmut Thielicke, *Notes From a Wayfarer*]. Now read vv. 13b-14 again. "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." Do you hear the Easter good news this morning? The old does not have to hold us anymore. Christ gives us power to break from the decaying, dying, destructive world. Christ opens the way to the new. We are called to leave that old stuff back in the tomb, with Jesus and to follow Jesus into the new.

I used to think it was my job on Easter morning to prove the resurrection. Nonsense. It cannot be proven and that's not my job. And really, do we want to worship a God so small that we can contain that God in our pea-sized brains? People everywhere are longing, aching for a God who cannot be explained. God can't be contained. God is let loose in our world. He is risen! And that changes everything.