

## **Self-Esteem Self-Account**

Sermon October 4, 2020

**Scripture reading:** Acts 9:1-9 and Philippians 3:1-21

**Golden verse:** “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:14

Did you ever listen to highly successful people’s stories? Some of them are astonishing and can have an enormous impact on our lives.

One of the best stories about a successful life I heard is the Apostle’s Paul story. His grandparents and parents, probably for business, moved from Israel to a city called Tarsus, in Turkey, 1,000 kilometers north of Jerusalem. At that time, the Middle East was occupied by Romans and was part of the Romans Empire. Those who were born in the Roman Empire became Roman citizens by birth. Paul was born into a Jewish family that lived in the city of Tarsus within the province of Cilicia (Acts 22:3). Although he was a Jew, his birth in the city granted him citizenship. He was a very smart, and intelligent young man. His private teacher was a well-known Jewish rabbi in Jerusalem, called Gamaliel.

A person could become a Roman citizen by either birth or buying the privilege. The Roman Empire was so large that only about 10% of the population enjoyed the privilege of being Romans citizens. They had special rights as citizens. They had the freedom from beatings without trial, the right to be tried before the emperor rather than in a local court of law, and the right to not be executed by crucifixion.

During his journey in Philippi, Paul was arrested and jailed for preaching about Christ. For this, Paul and his friend Silas were beaten up in jail. The next day, they wanted to release them, hoping that they learned their lesson. However, Paul refused to be just released. He insisted that the magistrates should come to the jail to talk to him in person. Paul messaged to those leaders saying: “We are Roman citizens, and you have beaten us and jailed us without cause.” The officers in charge were fear struck upon learning that they had violated the sacred civil rights of two Roman citizens, an action which could have subjected the rulers to severe personal penalties, perhaps up to and including execution. The magistrates deeply apologized, and requested that the two abused men quietly leave the city, without submitting a complaint against them. During his entire life, Paul insisted vigorously that his civil rights be respected and not violated.

The Apostle Paul’s original name was Saul from Tarsus. He was named after the first King of Israel: SAUL. As a young man, he was already a big guy, with broad shoulders and with huge, overgrown self-esteem. When the Christian community grew in Damascus, he decided to go against them, chain them, and jail them in Jerusalem.

Traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus, there was a great turning point in Saul’s life. Jesus met him, as we heard from our scripture reading. At that moment, he experienced something that shifted his whole life into a different direction like when a switch is flipped and the train continues to roll in other directions. Until then, he walked against Jesus as his enemy. From then, he followed his whole life journey with Jesus, his Lord.

In the Bible, we read that this great turn was followed by years of silence. He stayed in Arabia for three years, then through Damascus and Jerusalem, went back to his hometown of Tarsus and was there for a while. From there, later, Barnabas called him to help build the church in Antioch.

What did Paul do in silence? He took a long inventory. I don't know who is used to doing an inventory. We do it once or twice every year. We throw out what we don't need anymore, or if something is damaged, we will try to fix it. Paul did the same in silence. He went through his whole life, and he threw out of his life everything worthless and useless to Jesus and put Jesus himself in the main place.

There is a term in psychology: a value pyramid (Maslow's pyramid). We all have a value pyramid. There is a peak value in every person's life that is most important to him or her, which also determines the relative value of everything else, and to which everything else we accumulate in this pyramid is subordinated.

For Paul, until he met Jesus, the law was the pinnacle. After he met the Lord, Jesus Christ became the pinnacle. Jesus became the absolute authority, Jesus became his sovereign commanding Lord. Jesus commanded the rest of his life. His whole life depended on Jesus.

In our scripture reading, we read about the result of Paul's inventory. *"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."* (Philippians 3:7-8)

He confessed that in Christ he received unimaginable wealth and, in comparison, all those values he had before were considered garbage. Yet we saw that there were many precious things in his life, such as his family and his schooling. He was already in high political circles at a young age. His career had curved sharply upward. But after he embraced Christ, everything lost its value. He did not continue to build his life, his career, on those values anymore, and he did not consider himself more than others. As a blessed instrument of Christ, he says about himself that *"I am the first among sinners."* (1 Timothy 1:15)

Paul calls Jesus THE TREASURE. Not A treasure, but THE treasure. (2 Corinthians 4:7) Also, he calls himself an empty vessel. *"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."* (Acts 9:15 - Kings James version) "He is a vessel of election unto me." He was chosen or ordained of God unto the work of the apostleship. In NIV the translation is "*chosen instrument*" but the original text says that Paul is God's chosen bowl, in which Christ will pour him out, so Paul should take this bowl as food or aroma to others.

Before he met Christ, Paul had boasted about what kind of family he came from, and now he was grateful that God accepted him into His great family. Before, it was valuable to him to be a Roman citizen, born into this privileged position, which meant a lot, but now he is enthusiastic that our civil rights are in heaven, from where we expect the returning Jesus Christ. And from this moment, he always described his position IN Christ. If we would try to characterize

ourselves, our situation, our spiritual position, would we describe ourselves that we are IN Christ?

Although he was such a wonderful servant, a vessel of Christ, he says that: *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3:12-14)

Let's pause here for a moment, and let us see where we are at this time and stage of our lives. Where is the fine line between self-expectation and self-criticism? I raise this question because often we have issues in how much we are expecting from ourselves, or we are overrating ourselves, thus creating and nurturing the wrong self-esteem in us.

Let's see what God is expecting from me, from you, from His children.

- We have to be His vessel.
- His glory and His power should shine in us and through us.
- We have to be salt and light in this world.

Every time, even now, when I am faced with God's expectation from me, and how much more I should do for Him, I start to tremble, because I know that I am not even close to reaching Christ's expectations. I often blame myself because I cannot do as much as I would like to. It is a frightening position to be Christ's soldier.

I see that often some people get disappointed with me, with us as Christians, because of our weaknesses. We cannot always act in such a powerful way, to bring Him glory. Sometimes people are getting disappointed in God, just because we as God's children misbehave. People want to know God from our lives and actions. Jesus said, that we should act and behave so that those who are watching us would come to faith and glorify God.

I have to tell you that, in every Christian person, we can find shortcomings. None of us is perfect. I am not perfect either. I confess with Paul: *“I do not consider that I have made it my own.”* (Philippians 3:13)

I am very thankful for Paul, for being so honest in these verses, because it helps me not to be discouraged about myself. I am admiring Paul. I am looking up to him. So many blessings came into this world through Paul, although he says that he is not perfect either, and he still did not reach the point where he would like to be.

We have to accept that even Christians are sinners, and we often can be weak. Sometimes God allows us to make mistakes, to show us that we are ONLY humans, and we need Him, we need His strength, we need to hold His hand, we have to humble ourselves asking for His forgiveness. In every Christian person, we can find something that would disappoint us. If we would not make mistakes, we would not see that we are imperfect, and we might think that we are perfect, and we don't need Christ and His cross, and we don't have to have communion.

The devil does work everywhere. I did not see a much worse sin than Christian conceit, self-pride, when people are full of themselves and they think that nobody is as perfect and great as they are, nobody does so many awesome things as they do.

Dear beloved, please consider, that although we are not perfect, God still wants to use us as His vessel, and God still wants to show His glory through us in this world. God is not searching for perfect people but for humble people to do His work in this world. Please accept yourself, because God accepted you already in Christ.

If you can accept yourself, please accept others as they are. The other person is not perfect. I am not perfect either, so I should not raise unnecessary expectations from the other person. Let us be more understanding, and let us be more tolerant of each other. Let us not criticize each other.

Once a Christian criticized another Christian saying: “He is so ugly.” Then I said: “He would be much uglier if he would not be a Christian, fighting honestly day by day with his temper in order to change.”

Dear sister, dear brother, you are not perfect, so please do not expect your Christian fellows to be perfect. Do not raise unnecessary expectations, that you cannot reach either. Let's not paralyze each other with our senseless and unrealistic expectations. Rather, we should respect, love, and help each other in our journey.

Paul knew that he was not perfect, but this did not make him depressed. On the contrary, it empowered him to continue to walk with Christ, and he made more effort to serve Him. We all should say: “this is who I am, but God loves me, and every day I do my very best to love Him and to serve Him more really.”

God did not give us perfect personalities, but we have to work on ourselves. Please look up to Jesus and no to your fellow Christians. Do not measure up yourself to another Christian person, but measure up yourself to Christ, because you have to be like Christ. Make Christ visible in your words and actions. Give to Christ your heart, your way of thinking, and even your money, so people should see in you, Christ.

Then, we should not get lazy, saying that the other person is weak as well. We should start every day realizing, that God is calling us to act and I should do all my work as those should be worship services to my Lord's glory. If somebody will ask for your help, please realize that God sent him or her to you to practice love and patience and to share what you received. Realize that God placed you in a congregation to build that community. God placed you around your co-workers to show them that you are honest, and they can ask you for help.

Paul mentioned that a Christian life will be praised by God. That value is the most precious one. We are not perfect but let us continue as Paul says: “*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*”. (Philippians 3:13b-14) Let us be perfect in endeavouring to reach our final destination. Amen