

Philippians—The Joyful Letter

Part 6

“Paul’s Passionate Pursuit”

Last time we closed looking at the Apostle Paul’s great desire to know Jesus better and better, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.

Now as we begin with verse 12, the great Apostle continues with a description of his daily goal in life:

3:12 “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

Paul’s memory of the day Jesus Christ revealed himself to him remains a vivid snapshot in his mind. Everything changed that day. On his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians, Paul was knocked to the ground by a bright light and unforgettable voice—the voice of Jesus, whom he had persecuted.

For Paul, that was the day he was arrested, apprehended, seized, captured by the love of God, and also for a purpose on earth.

God's purpose for him was, "that for which I was apprehended."

He wasn't just apprehended to go to heaven one day; he was apprehended to write much of the NT, to reach the Gentile world for Christ, to testify of Christ to Caesar, and to serve as essentially the architect of the local church as revealed in his epistles.

So for Paul, fulfilling that calling became the number one goal of his life.

3:13 "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,"

Here Paul gives a crucial key to fulfilling God's call for all of us—forgetting and reaching.

We must first *forget* some things. Interestingly, the word forget here means "to neglect to focus on." In other words, Paul is saying that he has chosen to neglect focusing on past blessings, past achievements, even past sins. His burning focus is on what lies ahead!

I wrote a book entitled "The Windshield is Bigger than the Rearview Mirror." The title says it all—as we follow Jesus, what

is ahead of us is so much brighter and focus worthy than the past!

Satan is master at turning our focus backward to past sins, past failures, past relationships, past successes at the expense of future focus. But Paul says, “My faith is focused on what lies ahead.

This attitude allowed him to use the second key to achieving God’s purpose—*reaching forward*.

The word *reach* means to “stretch intensely toward” like a runner stretches toward the finish tape to be the first one across. Paul says, “I’m stretching with all my might toward the goal of finishing “that” for which Jesus Christ laid hold of me.

Paul goes on to say in verse 14:

3:14 “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Throughout this entire intense passage we see Paul as a man running a race. His head is thrust forward, his expression is fixed in fiercely determined lines, his body is straining forward, every nerve is heightened, his whole being is reaching toward what he calls “the prize.”

What is the prize? It is the "high calling of God," it is the "that" for which Jesus laid His nail pierced hand on him!

This is supreme dedication to the max!

I wonder where we stand in comparison? Are we dedicated supremely to the purpose for which Jesus laid hold of us? Do we seek Him as to His will for our lives?

Do we wake up and say, "Lord, what do you want me to do today? Where am I to serve? What spiritual gift have you placed in me? How can I make my life count for God? Lead me, Lord, in your purpose for me this day."

Paul next gives an exhortation:

3:15-16 "Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind."

Here Paul is encouraging every Christian to come out of the bleachers and get in the game. If we claim to be spiritually mature, we will have the same attitude he did. And if our attitude is otherwise, God will graciously show it to us!

He reminds us that you never “arrive” spiritually. But to whatever degree we’ve grown, we should still walk by the same rule—forgetting and reaching, forgetting and reaching, forgetting and reaching—till the day we go home to heaven!

Next, Paul encourages them to follow legitimate spiritual leadership, starting with himself:

3:17 “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”

The Philippian Christians had Paul and other spiritual leaders as living examples. They weren’t perfect, but they were sincere, and had reached high levels of spiritual maturity.

Paul was not being egotistic. As long as they pursued the same goals of forgetting what lay behind and reaching for the prize that lay ahead, they would do well.

True humility is not a matter of pretending we don’t have gifts that we know we have and everyone else knows we have. It’s not false deprecation, or running down our attainments to avoid looking proud. To pretend we can’t do something we can do is dishonesty.

Humility is a matter of acknowledging what God has done in our lives and giving Him the glory and praise! A chef who is an

expert cook is not being proud when he invites aspiring chefs to watch his work as an example of great cooking. A great painter is not an egotist if he invites aspiring painters to watch how he does it.

Likewise, Paul was the greatest practitioner of Christianity in his time, so to invite younger Christians to model themselves after him was only sensible, not egotistical.

Next, the Apostle takes a somber turn toward false brethren. First, their number:

3:18-19 "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ:"

Paul had soon learned after planting a few churches that the enemy moved quickly with a counterattack. Typically, Jewish men would follow him into towns and pounce on new converts with false teaching and confusion.

Hence, Paul realized that wherever he went he would have to warn his new converts about false brethren. So in his letter to the Philippians he sounds the warning.

In the next verse he first describes their fate:

3:19a “whose end *is* destruction,”

The word *destruction* is used by Jesus in Matt. 7:13 in describing hell: “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many choose that road.”

Paul literally weeps, not for friends or acquaintance, but for these men, his enemies. He knows their fate, worse than death. Hell awaits with all its horrors. Of all the things they could have chosen to be the enemies of, the Cross of Christ is the worst!

Then he describes their nature:

3:19b “whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.”

Whose god is their belly is a reference to living a sensual, materialistic life. They were all about self-indulgence while pretending to be religious teachers.

These religious teachers would travel far and wide to undo what they called the false teaching of Paul. They fancied themselves righteous deliverers of the deceived.

If along the way they were hospitably received and royally entertained, they considered themselves “laborers worthy of

their hire” and gladly took the food, lodging, and money offered them.

But it was they who were the false teachers, turning the simple away from the salvation they’d received by faith in Jesus alone. These false teachers made their living off of fleecing the flock.

It’s no different today. There are many truly honest, good, and noble ministers whose hearts are to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and want only the rewards to be given out at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

But there are others that are false teachers, twisting the Word of God in order to extract money from the simple. Paul called them:

“people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Tim. 6:5 NIV).

“They think religion is a way to make a fast buck.” (The Message)

Today there are those who teach that Christianity equates into financial prosperity. That if you obey the Lord, you will become financially prosperous. The only problem with that is the NT doesn’t say any such thing.

Paul refers to the Macedonian churches that had been gloriously saved, yet they were living in poverty. And even in their poverty they gave “above what they were able” to the needs of others.

James wrote, “Listen to me, dear brothers: God has chosen poor people to be rich in faith, and the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs, for that is the gift God has promised to all those who love him” (2:5 LB).

The church in Smyrna was poor, but it is the only church out of seven that Jesus does not correct in the Book of Revelation:

“I know how much you suffer for the Lord, and I know all about your poverty (but you have heavenly riches!)”—Rev. 2:9

On the flip side, the wealthiest church, the church of Laodicea, is the one that receives the greatest chastisement from the Lord:

“You say, ‘I am rich, with everything I want; I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that spiritually you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (3:17 LB).

Jesus ALWAYS looked to one’s spiritual condition as the best indicator of their faith, NEVER their money or possessions.

In closing out the chapter, Paul talks about our *position in Christ*:

3:20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”

We Christians in this sanctuary are citizens of the United States. But we are also citizens of of heaven. In our country the streets are paved with gold, the walls are built of Jasper, and the gates are made of pearl.

It is filled with mansions constructed by Jesus Himself. There is a rainbow-encircled throne, a crystal stream, foundations sparkling with gems, and the Tree of Life.

In our glorious heavenly country there is no sickness, pain, guilt, fear, doubt....no hospitals, prisons, or retirement homes!

No sobs are ever heard, no cries, no sighs; only endless praise and worship echo throughout it’s glorious streets. Thank God that He will soon make “all things new!”

Paul closes with his favorite topic—the resurrection of our bodies:

3:21a “who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body,”

Along with a perfect city, we will have a perfect body—free from sin, disease, weakness, pain, and imperfection.

And Paul tells us how God will do all this for us:

3:21b “according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

It is Jesus Paul speaks of as the Resurrector. Paul confidently affirms, “He is able” to raise the dead. The same Jesus that raised Lazarus, the widow’s son, and Jairus’s daughter will raise us up. Jesus promised:

“For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:40 NLT).

What a mighty God we serve!

