

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Pursuing the Prize Philippians 3:12-16 Part 1

This past Wednesday our country marked the one year anniversary of the tragic events surrounding September 11, 2001. The very next day our president addressed the United Nations calling them to issue an ultimatum to Iraq that could very well result in a military action if Iraq fails to respond in a positive way to that ultimatum.

These are unsettled times, but hopefully there will not be a person here today who professes to be a Christian who will allow the threat of any unpleasant event or the event itself, if it were to happen, to distract us from our goal. What is that goal? It is the goal of participating in the resurrection of life. The Scriptures tell us that everyone who dies will ultimately be resurrected. Either they will participate in the resurrection of life and enjoy an eternity of bliss in heaven, or they will participate in the resurrection of judgment and ultimately be thrown in the lake of fire and experience an eternity of torment. Therefore, considering the importance of participating in the resurrection of life rather than the resurrection of judgment we need to make our participation in the resurrection of life our one singular overarching goal, and nothing in this life that happens around us or to us should distract us from the pursuit of this goal.

Certainly this was true of the Apostle Paul. Everything in his life was pointing to this one singular goal. Let us again read **Philippians 3:1-3, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord, to write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. (2) Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; (3) for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.** “In these verses Paul warns the Philippian church about the Judaizers. The Judaizers who were a group of people who were teaching that people could be saved by faith plus works. This was a false message. So he goes on to show it to be a false message from his own experience. Let us read **Philippians 3:4-6, “Although I myself might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: (5) circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; (6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”** Paul basically is saying if anyone is going to think that good works can do anything to help get them to heaven it should have been him. But even though this may have been the way he used to think his thinking was dramatically changed. We see this in **Philippians 3:7-9.** Let me read this for you, **“but whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. (9) and be found in Him not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”**

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Paul in these three very brief verses essentially was saying that if anyone is going to be saved it is not about them and who they are or what they might have done, but it is all about whether or not they have a personal relationship with Christ and in order to secure a personal relationship with Christ it requires that everything that we might have valued or thought important must, as an expression of our faith, take a back seat to Jesus.

Once this relationship with Christ is established it should have an impact on the way we live our lives. Let us read **Philippians 3:10**, “**that I may know Him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death.**” Paul is telling us that if we have in fact entered into a relationship with Christ by grace through faith and personally know Him we will want to know Him better not only in the power of his resurrection, but also in the fellowship of His sufferings. All of this is wonderful and I hope that everyone here would say that this has been and continues to be your experience.

But let me ask you this. Why did Paul totally change his thinking about Jesus and the role Jesus needed to play in his life? Why did Paul want this change confirmed by his continuing desire to get to know Christ better? All of this Paul saw as necessary if he was going to be assured that he would ultimately experience the resurrection from the dead or in other words that he would be a participant in the resurrection of life. Let me read for you **Philippians 3:11**, “**in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead**” Or in other words that he might attain to the resurrection of life.

This was Paul’s singular overarching goal of his life. And it needs to be the singular overarching goal of our lives. If we fail to attain this goal our suffering will be extreme. But if we can obtain this goal blessedness of our lives will also be extreme.

These are unsettled times, but hopefully there will not be a person here today who professes to be a Christian who will allow the threat of any unpleasant event or the event itself, if it were to happen, to distract us from our goal. What is that goal? Being a participant in the resurrection of life. This should be our singular focus. We learned this from **Philippians 3:1-11**.

We are now moving on to another section of Scripture in **Philippians 3:12-16** which is intimately connected with **Philippians 3:9-11**. Let me read for you these verses “**Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; (16) however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.**”

I am sure that all of us want to pursue the goal that has been set before us, the goal of the resurrection of life, in a way that will assure ultimate success How must this pursuit begin? It begins by establishing a personal relationship with Christ by grace through faith. This relationship will then be confirmed by our continuing desire to get to know Christ better.

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But this is still not enough there are other essentials that are necessary in order that this appetite to know Christ better will not only be maintained but flourish and will continue to confirm that we indeed have established a personal relationship with Christ. So the question that I would like to begin to answer to weekend is: What are the essentials that will give us the assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection?

The first essential in giving professing believers the assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection is dissatisfaction.

Some professing believers are much too comfortable with who they are and with what they are doing. It is almost as if they believe that they have somehow arrived. Because they are not committing any of the big sins and because they are able to once in a while get themselves to church they feel pretty good about themselves. This sense of personal satisfaction with who they are and what they have been able to do in the pursuit of spiritual things should not be in any way reassuring to them that they will be a participant in the resurrection of life. But rather the professing believer who is never fully satisfied with themselves in respect to their moral excellence or in respect to everything that still can be done in their service to Christ is the one who should find assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection.

Let us read **Philippians 3:12**, “**Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.**”..... Paul is dissatisfied.

How does the **Philippians 3:12** begin? It begins with the words, “**not that I have already obtained it ...**”. What specifically is he referring to when he refers to “it?” When Paul says that he had not obtained “it,” he is referring to the “resurrection from the dead” or more specifically to the “resurrection of life.” Let us one more time go back and read Paul’s initial phrase that he uses in **verse 12** but this time let us read what has come before this phrase beginning in **Philippians 3:8**, “**More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, (9) and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. (10) that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; (11) in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (12) Not that I have already obtained it ...**” What? “**The resurrection from the dead.**” We now know what he is referring to when he says that he had not “obtained it.”

But he lists something else he had not yet experienced. Not only had he not experienced the “it” or the resurrection of life he also had not experienced perfection. Let us again look at **Philippians 3:12** but this time let us read a little bit further, “**Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect.....**” What does he mean when he speaks of not having “**already become perfect?**” You might immediately think that he is referring to sinless perfection. And certainly it is true that at the resurrection of life sinless perfection will be enjoyed by all who participate in it and certainly sinless perfection is tied in with what Paul is saying, but I believe that Paul has something else specifically in mind.

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The word translated “perfect” (TELEIOO) means “to bring to an end by completing or perfecting.” It is emphasizing something that is taking place over time but will eventually be completed or culminated. It is true that genuine believers will steadfastly make progress toward the goal of sinless perfection which will ultimately be culminated at the resurrection but this is not the emphasis of Paul in **Philippians 3:8-11**. What is Paul’s emphasis in **Philippians 3:8-11**? It is getting to know Christ better. Therefore it is best, I believe, to conclude that when Paul says that he had not already become perfect he is referring to the fact that he had not yet come to know Christ fully. He had not yet realized his magnificent obsession.

These two phrases at the beginning of **Philippians 3:12** are parallel. The first phrase points to the resurrection of life which is the overarching goal of his life, and the second phrase spells out for us what he is expecting to experience at that event. But what does he say about these things? He tells us that he had not yet experienced either of them.

Why does Paul begin **Philippians 3:12** in this way? Paul begins Philippians 3:12 as he does to make sure they understand that the present goal of pursuing the resurrection of life must continue to be their goal until it is obtained

Sometimes when people see that they are making progress toward a particular goal they can very easily assume that they will continue to see progress toward that goal even if they begin to slack off and no longer put out the energy that they once did. But this is a flawed assumption which can lead to major disappointments.

If you set a goal of making an “A” in a particular class and you start out well does this mean that you can ease up or even stop working all together and still achieve your goal? If you set a goal of establishing a successful business and you happen to get off to a good start does this mean that you can ease up or even stop working all together and still achieve your goal? If you set a goal of building a good marriage and you happen to get off to a good start does this mean that you can ease up or even stop working all together and think you are going to achieve your goal? If you follow sports how many times have you seen athletic teams get off to a good start only to see them falter for the simple reason they relaxed? This can be true of Christians as well.

Paul was not one of those kind of people. Paul was not taking anything for granted. Yes it is true that Paul had experienced a dramatic change in his thinking which he believed had produced an adjustment in his spiritual ledger resulting in him coming to know Christ and taking possession of the righteousness of God by faith. And it was also true that the validity of what Paul believed about himself was being confirmed by his desire to get to know Christ better. And it is also true that this validation led him to personally embrace a confident expectation that he would be a participant in the resurrection from the dead or in other words the resurrection of life. But even though all this was true this did not any way lead Paul to think that somehow he could relax.

Let us read the rest of the verse, **“but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”**

If our goal, if the one overarching goal of our life is the resurrection of life and to know Christ fully then we need to persevere to the end in the same way that we should persevere to the end in the pursuit of any other goal that we believe is important.

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Persevering to the end is not optional in respect to achieving the goal of the resurrection of life (Matthew 10:22). What does **Matthew 10:22** tell us? **“Those who persevere to the end will be saved.”**

How long do I have to do this? Until I reach 55 years old, 62 years old, or 65 years old. No! I must persevere to the end. I must persevere until I obtain until the one overarching goal of my life has been realized.

Do we see this kind of persevering commitment from the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:12? And the answer would have to be yes. Look again the **Philippians 3:12** but this time let us read a little bit further, **“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on.”**

The word translated “press on” (DIOKO) means to “push, drive, set in motion” and metaphorically is used for “striving hard after.” Paul had been striving hard since the day of his conversion and he has purposed himself to continue to strive hard until he draws his last breath and obtains his goal. There is no quit in the Apostle Paul and there should be no quit in any professing believer who is seeking as the overarching goal of his life to be a participant in the resurrection of life.

Was this an important message for the Philippians? The Philippians had professed to have made the same kind of adjustment to their spiritual ledger as Paul. The Philippians were having the validity of adjustment confirmed as they continually found themselves tapping into the power that raised Christ from continually participating with Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings. All this was true and they were certainly headed in a good direction. But if the message of the Judaizers was embraced it would no longer be true. Rather than tapping into the power that raised Christ from the dead in their pursuit of a holy life they would be in checking off religious boxes in the power of their own flesh.

Paul certainly does not anticipate this, but in order to help them along the way he is repeatedly in his own personal testimony to the Philippians reiterating the importance of perseverance in the pursuit of the one overarching goal of his life.

Yes perseverance is absolutely necessary if we are going to ultimately achieve our goal but we are not alone. In fact Christ is ultimately responsibility and gets all the credit for getting us started along this path to the resurrection of life.

Let us again look at **Philippians 3:12**, **“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”** The word “lay hold of” (KATALAMBANO) is a compound verb and conveys a very graphic picture of someone or something being grasped tightly.

Paul sees himself while on the road to Damascus as having been seized by Christ in order that he might become the apostle to the Gentiles, this is true but more importantly Paul sees himself being grasped by Christ on the road to Damascus that he might become a participant in the resurrection from the dead.

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Paul's perseverance in striving after the goal of the resurrection of life with all of it's inherent benefits was not initiated by Paul, but by Christ.

And what is Paul's response to Christ having taken a hold of him on the Damascus road? Paul believing that Christ had taken hold of him for the purpose of being a participant in the resurrection has made that his goal also and will not let it go.

CONCLUSION

The first essential in giving professing believers the assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection is dissatisfaction. Some professing believers are much too comfortable with who they are and with what they are doing. It is almost as if they believe that they have somehow arrived. WE HAVE NOT ARRIVED. WE HAVE NOT ATTAINED TO THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD AND NEITHER HAVE WE OBTAINED PERFECTION. THEREFORE LET US JOIN WITH PAUL IN PRESSING ON IN ORDER THAT WE MAY LAY HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH ALSO WE WERE LAID HOLD OF BY CHRIST JESUS.