

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Pursuing the Prize Philippians 3:12-16 Part 2

Many years ago there was a book circulating in our church called “The Tyranny of the Urgent.” The premise of the book was simply this: Christians cannot afford to allow the urgent pressing matters of everyday life to distract from matters of eternal significance. I thought that the book was extremely relevant then, and I believe that the book is extremely relevant now. There are too many professing Christians whose lives are being shaped by their circumstances rather than by their faith.

Certainly this was not true of the Apostle Paul. Everything in His life was pointing to one singular goal. And this one singular goal is spelled out for us very clearly in **Philippians 3:1-11**.

Let me quickly break this passage down for you. In **Philippians 3:1-3** Paul warns the Philippians about a group of people known as the Judaizers. The Judaizers were preaching a false gospel. It was a false gospel because they were saying that certain good works were necessary in order to be saved. This inclusion of works as a necessary element for salvation destroyed the message of the true gospel which was a message of grace. What does the Scripture teach? **“For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is a gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast.”**

Paul at one point in his life might have been sympathetic to a message that emphasized works as a necessary element of salvation but any sympathy he might have felt in his past had turned into complete intolerance as a result of his own personal experience.

Hopefully you are all familiar with his testimony. No one persecuted Christians as fiercely as the Apostle Paul. And in his zeal to persecute the church he decided to go to Damascus to arrest Christians in order to bring them back to Jerusalem for trial.

He believed that he was a faithful servant of God and that he was doing the work of God and on the basis of that work he was quite confident that everything between him and the Lord was fine. He believed that his many good works including the persecution of the church made him a friend of God.

But this assurance was suddenly obliterated when he encountered the living resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus. All of a sudden he realized that in spite of all his efforts, in spite of all his supposed good works he was a sinner. All of a sudden he realized that everything that he had ever valued was in fact worse than worthless and that Christ was the only thing in life that truly mattered and the only thing in life that he truly needed.

This dramatic change in his thinking led him to make a very important adjustment in his spiritual ledger. What was that adjustment? He transferred everything that was in his gain column, everything that he had ever thought was valuable or important to his loss column. And Christ who he had at one time considered worse than worthless he transferred to his gain column.

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This adjustment to his spiritual ledger was the necessary expression of saving faith. And when this faith was exercised Paul in effect reached out and embraced Christ as His Lord and Savior. This change in thinking and the subsequent adjustment in his spiritual ledger is recorded for us in **Philippians 3:7-8**.

This very dramatic change in thinking and adjustment in Paul's spiritual ledger resulted in him enjoying some wonderful benefits which are recorded for us in **Philippians 3:8-11**. First and foremost he came to "know Christ," or in other words, he entered into a personal relationship with Christ and having entered into a personal relationship with Christ he took possession of the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. Those two things are inseparable. We can't have one without the other.

Entering into a relationship with Christ and taking possession of the righteousness of God led Paul, quite naturally to want to know Christ better. And this meant that he wanted to come to know Him better in respect to the power of His resurrection and also wanted to know Him better in respect to the fellowship of His sufferings. But each of these four benefits that I have listed for you in **Philippians 3:8-10** was leading up to the one singular overarching goal of his life. And what was that goal? Let us read **Philippians 3:11**, "**in order that I might attain to the resurrection from the dead**" or in other words "**the resurrection of life**" with all of its accompanying benefits. Everything Paul believed that he enjoyed in Christ and was seeking to enjoy through Christ was pointing to this one singular event.

And when will this one singular event take place? The resurrection of life will take place at the rapture when the church is caught up to be with Christ. This event could take place at any time. Obviously the resurrection from the dead that Paul is looking forward to in **Philippians 3:11** and which will take place at the rapture is an incredibly important event for the Apostle Paul.

How important is the rapture to you? How important is it for you to be a participant in the resurrection of life? How important is it for you to be conformed to Christ perfectly? Hopefully you see it as extremely important.

What good is it for us to live well in this world as the world might define living well and then not participate in the resurrection of life? What good is it for us to live well in this world and assume, based on our past experiences that we are going to participate in the resurrection of life and then tragically come to discover that we were wrong. Paul understood this and therefore he chose as the one singular overarching goal of his life to continually do everything that he could in order to assure himself that he would in fact be a participant in the resurrection of life. This is what we have seen in **Philippians 3:1-11**.

But even though the importance of this goal was communicated very clearly in **Philippians 3:1-11** Paul is not yet done emphasizing how important that goal is to him. Let us now read **Philippians 3:12-16** "**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,**

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(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.”

Hopefully we, just like the Apostle Paul, have established our participation in the resurrection as our one singular overarching goal for our lives. And hopefully we just like the Apostle Paul are not going to take anything for granted. But hopefully, not taking anything for granted, we will be interested in doing everything that is essential in order to continually assure ourselves that we will participate in this event.

The passage that we have just read will help us explore a few of those essentials. What are the essentials that will give us the assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection? We have already considered the first of three different essentials.

The first essential in giving professing believers the continuing assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection is dissatisfaction. 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 I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.**” This verse wreaks of dissatisfaction. He wants to make it abundantly clear to the Philippians that though he believed that he was enjoying all the benefits that he outlined for us in Philippians 3:8-10 he had not yet arrived at the “it” and therefore he was continuing to press on. What does the “it” in **Philippians 3:12** refer to? The “it” refers back to that final benefit that he was looking forward to in **Philippians 3:11**, “**the resurrection from the dead.**”

This event is so extremely important to Paul because it is not until the resurrection from the dead that he will realize “perfection” or in other words, in light of our immediate context, it is not until the resurrection of the dead that Paul will come to know Christ fully or perfectly which is Paul’s magnificent obsession.

If you want to continually assure yourself that you will in fact be a participant in the resurrection of life and realize your magnificent obsession you need to see this same kind of dissatisfaction in your life. It is essential. Hopefully you do!!! And hopefully this dissatisfaction will lead us to press forward and not be satisfied as long as we are alive, but we need to be careful how we are pressing forward toward that goal. This leads us to the second essential.

The second essential in giving professing believers the assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection is a focused direction. The key word that I used is “focused.” Hopefully the importance of a focused direction will be very clear to us in **Philippians 3:13**. Let us read the very first phrase “**Brethren, I do not regard myself as laying hold of it yet....**” What is the “it?” Nothing has changed, the “it” of **verse 13** is the “it” of **verse 12**. And what is the “it” of **verse 12** referring back to? It refers back to **Philippians 3:11** and “the resurrection from the dead” or in other words “the resurrection of life.” It is referring to that event when the Church will be caught up to be with Christ in their glorified resurrected bodies and perfectly conformed to Him.

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Paul is in essence repeating what he had said earlier in **Philippians 3:12** when he said, “**Not that I have already obtained it.....**” He is again relating his dissatisfaction with where he is at, in relationship to his stated goal of being a participant in the resurrection of life, just as he did in **Verse 12** but this time he goes further with his thought and shows how his personal dissatisfaction has impacted him.

Let us continue to read the verse, “**Brethren, I do not regard myself as laying hold of it as yet (the resurrection from the dead and all the benefits that accompany that resurrection) but one thing I do**”

Paul’s response to his dissatisfaction of not yet having obtained the goal of the resurrection from the dead was to focus on “one thing.” “One thing” is a phrase that is important to the Christian life. What did Jesus say to the self righteous rich young ruler in **Mark 10:21**, “**one thing thou lackest?**” What did Jesus explain to busy Martha when she criticized her sister in **Luke 10:42**, “**One thing is needful?**” What did the man exclaim who had received his sight by the power of Christ in **John 9:25**, “**One thing I know?**” What did King David declare in **Psalms 27:4** “**One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after?**” Progress is all about focusing on “one thing” rather than on “many things”.

You might say how can anyone focus on one thing. There are so many things that are pressing in on our lives. There are so many urgent things. We have things that come up with our wives or husbands that we need to deal with. We have things that come up with our children that we need to deal with. We have things that are come up with friends and even acquaintances that we need to deal with. We have things that come up at work that we need to deal with. There are things that happen at home that we need to deal with. There are things outside of our home that we need to deal with. There are health issues that we may need to deal with. There are many, many things pressing in on all of our lives all the time.

But when I share with you that progress is all about focusing on “one thing” rather than on “ many things” I am not saying to you that we should not be concerned about the cares of this world but the cares of this world must not be allowed to choke out our pursuit of knowing Christ better and ultimately perfectly. We cannot allow our wife to choke out our pursuit of this goal. We cannot allow our husband to choke off this pursuit. We cannot allow our children to choke off this pursuit. We cannot allow our work to choke off this pursuit. We cannot allow anything to choke off our pursuit of knowing Christ better and ultimately perfectly.

Paul had one overarching goal in his life and he would not be satisfied in this life until he had reached it. This dissatisfaction led Paul to focus on one thing. We need to follow that same example.

But having said this let me make very sure you are not confused. We are not saved because we are seeking to know Christ better and ultimately perfectly. We are seeking to know Christ better and ultimately perfectly because we are saved.

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Because it is natural for those who have established a personal relationship with Christ to want to get to know Him better and because God is faithful to complete the work that He has begun this message should resonate with every truly born again person in this room. If you have come in here this weekend focused and directed, striving after one thing I would hope that you would take tremendous encouragement in the words of Paul and offer up a prayer of thanksgiving since the Lord has blessed you in this wonderful way..... If however you have come in here this weekend not terribly focused nor directed, knowing that you could not say with Paul “**this one thing I do**” I would believe that you would be moved in your spirit to offer up a prayer of confession. This is what we would expect from truly born again individuals.

If you are moved neither to a prayer of thanksgiving nor to a prayer of confession but simply concerned about getting out of here in a timely manner so you can pursue all your other more important goals. If all the urgent things that have little or not eternal value then I would say that any assurance of your participation in the resurrection of life should be personally questioned.

Paul rightfully anticipates that as he continues to focus on this one singular goal of being a participant in the resurrection of life by seeking to know Christ better he will receive the prize. Let me read for you **Philippians 3:13-14**, “**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 toward the goal for the prize.....**”

What is the prize? Again, it is the “it” of **Philippians 3:12**. It is the “it” of **Philippians 3:13**. And what does the “it” of **Philippians 3:12-13** refer back to? The resurrection from the dead, the one singular goal of Paul’s life which he spells out for us in **Philippians 3:11**. The goal and the prize are the same thing. If we will focus on the one single overarching goal of being a participant in the resurrection of Christ by seeking to know Christ better which we should expect from a truly born again individual we can like Paul be very well assured that we will receive the prize.

Let me ask you this question. Would you say as of this moment in time that Paul has accomplished his one singular overarching goal for his life and received his prize? The answer would have to be what? No! Why? Because he has not yet participated in the resurrection from the dead and therefore he has not yet come to know Christ perfectly.

It is true that Paul’s spirit is in the presence of God. What does **2 Corinthians 5:9** say, “**Absent from the body present with the Lord.**” It is also true that in his present spiritual state he is free from sin. If this were not true then he would not be able to be in the presence of God because it is impossible for God to look upon evil. Paul has come a long way in accomplishing his goal and receiving the prize but at this particular point in time he still has not reached his goal or in other words obtained his prize.

Does this mean that Paul is still striving, pressing, and running toward that goal? No! He has entered into his heavenly rest according to **Hebrews 4**. He has crossed the finish line. He is simply now waiting for the prize to be bestowed upon Him by Christ.

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Paul has not yet reached his goal nor received the prize. This will not happen until the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:50-57). But though he has not yet reached his goal nor received his prize he could receive it at any moment. Just as we could receive it at any moment. All true Christians will receive the prize on the same day. All through Christians will reach their goal and receive their prize on the day of the upward call.

Look again at **Philippians 3:14**, **“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”** There is a number of ways to understand this upward call of Christ Jesus. It could refer to the origin of the call, “from above.” It could refer to the nature of the call as being “heavenly or divine.” It could refer to the quality of the call as “being high and lofty.” But I believe that the upward call of God in Christ Jesus is directional and refers to the rapture when Christ calls the church upward to Himself (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Certainly throughout Philippians 3 there has been a strong emphasis on the resurrection of which will not take place until Christ’s call.

Let me read for you the description of this call in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**, **“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.”**

CONCLUSION

Hopefully because we know that we have not yet reached our goal nor received the prize we will dissatisfied, and hopefully this dissatisfaction will lead to embrace a focused direction.

If someone were to come up to you this afternoon and were to ask you, “What are you doing” I would hope because of the time that we have spent together this weekend and because of the close attention you paid to this message that you might be tempted to respond, “..... this one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”