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Pursuing the Prize Philippians 3:12-16 Part 3

We have been studying Philippians 3. In Philippians 3:1-3 Paul talked about his zero tolerance of the Judaizers message of faith plus works. The reason why he was so intolerant of this message was because of his own personal experience with the futility of works in respect to gaining salvation.

In Philippians 3:4-6 he gives a fairly detailed list of all his credentials and substantial former accomplishments which he had believed would secure for him a right standing before God but he later discovered that his confidence had been terribly misplaced.

When did he discover the worthlessness of all the things that he once valued? He discovered the worthlessness of all these things when he was confronted by the living resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus.

He had been thinking that all of his credentials and accomplishments were really something and that all those things would certainly put him in the good graces of God but when he found himself prostrated before the Lord of glory and realized that the Lord of glory was Jesus he came to fully and completely understand that salvation is not about works but about a personal relationship with Christ.

And what is so amazing for us to consider is the fact that while he was lying prostrated before the Lord, Paul was able to establish a personal relationship with Him totally apart from any works.

How did this happen? **Philippians 3:7-8** explains all of this for us. He at that moment in time while lying prostrate before the Lord of glory, as an expression of his faith, made an adjustment in his spiritual ledger. He transferred everything that he ever felt was important or valuable to his loss column and Christ who he had at one point in his life considered worse than worthless he transferred to his gain column. This adjustment to his spiritual ledger, as an expression of his faith in effect resulted in him embracing Christ as his Lord and Savior. At that moment he entered into a personal relationship with Christ.

Paul spells out four different benefits of this adjustment in **Philippians 3:8-10**. We have already covered those benefits so we won't consider them again. But we do need to point out to you that each of these four benefits did in fact point toward one single overarching goal for his life. And what was that goal?

We find this goal in **Philippians 3:11** when he says, “**in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**” Paul because of the adjustment he had made in his spiritual ledger as an expression of his faith was enjoying a whole lot of things but he not yet experienced the ultimate benefit of his faith. And what was that ultimate benefit? Being a participant in the resurrection from the dead, or in other words, the resurrection of life.

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The resurrection from the dead or the resurrection of life is referring to the resurrection that is associated with the coming of Christ for His church. It is commonly referred to as the rapture. The reason why this is so important to Paul is because he will not be perfectly conformed to Christ until this event takes place, which is his magnificent obsession.

Because this is so important to Paul and because Paul was not going to take anything for granted, he introduces to us a number of essentials that need to be present if we are going to assured that we in fact will be a participant in the resurrection.

The first essential in giving professing believers the continuing assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection is dissatisfaction. We saw this in **Philippians 3:12**, “**Not that I have already obtained it (the resurrection from the dead) or have already become perfect (or in other words have already become perfectly conformed to Christ), 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, knowing that he had not yet achieved his one singular overarching goal which was being a participant in the resurrection from the dead, found himself very dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction served as an assurance to Paul that he would in fact one day be a participant in the very resurrection that he was pressing toward.

Hopefully we have seen and continue to see that same kind of dissatisfaction within our own lives as we continue to press forward toward the same singular overarching goal with its accompanying benefit of being perfectly conformed to Christ, and as this dissatisfaction is continually seen we can continue to be assured, like Paul, that we will in fact one day achieve that goal.

The second essential in giving professing believers the assurance of ultimate success in achieving the goal of the resurrection is a focused direction. After Paul states his dissatisfaction with not yet having achieved the resurrection from the dead or the “it” in **Philippians 3:12**, he repeats his dissatisfaction of not yet having obtained that goal at the beginning of **Philippians 3:13** when he says, “**Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet....**” (Again referring to the **resurrection from the dead**). But Paul this time spells out for us what this dissatisfaction led him to do? Let us continue to read the verse, “**Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do**” Paul’s dissatisfaction led him to establish a focused direction. And what was that focused direction? The resurrection from the dead or in other words the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus which we read about in **Philippians 3:14**.

Hopefully we will follow in the footsteps of Paul. Hopefully our dissatisfaction will lead us to have a focused direction. Hopefully we will not be spiritual fuzz balls that are being pushed here and there by whatever urgent thing that might be pressing upon lives on any particular day. Hopefully our goal of being a participant in the resurrection from the dead and enjoying perfect conformity to Christ will mold and shape our lives rather than the pressing matters of everyday life.

But we not only need to be careful that urgent matters in the present do not distract us from a focused direction, but we must be careful that things from our past do not distract us as well. Let us again look at **Philippians 3:13**, “**Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind**”

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Yes, the urgent pressing matters of the present can be a distraction for us in our pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus but Paul in **Philippians 3:13** is choosing to highlight the threat from our past more so than from our present.

Let us consider the past of the Apostle Paul for a moment and consider how his past might have been a threat to him maintaining a focused direction.

One of the things that will immediately come to our minds is the fact that Paul in his past was a persecutor of the church. We know a number of things about those persecutions. We know that Paul was clearly responsible for the arrest of Christians. This was the very thing that he was in the process of doing when he was confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus. But there is much more for us to understand about the personal dynamics of Paul as he went about making those arrests. He was not taking Christians into custody in a respectful manner. In **Acts 8:3** it tells us that Paul was entering house after house and dragging Christians off to prison. This was not just the men but the women according to **Acts 22:3-4**. These arrests were violent. Then we read in **Acts 26:11** that after he had drug the Christians off to prison he would then seek to force them to blaspheme Christ. This would I believe be a euphemism for torture. And if torture was not effective then he would put them on trial and seek their execution. We see this in **Acts 26:10**. One of those people who was executed for their faith was Stephen. Not only did Paul give hearty approval to his execution according to **Acts 8:1** but he had a front row seat according to **Acts 7:58**. And what did Paul witness in the course of that execution. He witnessed Stephen, while on trial and probably knowing that he was about to die, bearing witness to his faith and as the stones were crushing Stephen's body Paul witnessed Stephen called out saying, **“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”** and then with his final breath he cried out with a loud voice, **“Lord do not hold this sin against them.”** And having said this the Bible says that he fell asleep.

Paul had many bad memories from his past. The Apostle Paul had many very unpleasant memories from his past and those memories were still with him. Listen to **1 Timothy 1:15** **“It is a trustworthy statement, acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.”** When Paul is talking about “forgetting what lies behind” he is not talking about our memories being wiped away. He is talking about not having those memories distract us from the one single overarching goal of our lives.

But how can those memories of past sins not distract us. They will not distract us if we will by faith allow God to use those past sins to highlight his infinite, abounding, matchless grace.

Listen to **1 Corinthians 15:9-10**, **“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”**

There may be people here this morning that in your past have done some terrible things. Perhaps in your past you may have been sexually promiscuous, perhaps in your past you may have cheated on your spouse, perhaps in your past you have neglected your family because of drug and alcohol abuse, perhaps in your past you have had an abortion.

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There are a lot of things in each of our pasts I am sure that we are not proud of, but by the grace of God we have become His children and as the children of God we have set before us the resurrection from the dead and perfect conformity to Christ to look forward to. Let us focus on this single overarching goal of our lives.

We cannot allow our past sin to distract us from our focused direction (1 Corinthians 15:9-10). But there was something else in Paul's life that could also distract him from his focused direction and what might that be?

We cannot allow our past spiritual credentials and accomplishments to distract us from our focused direction (Philippians 3:4-7). Yes the past sins can be distracting if we let them be. But our spiritual accomplishments can be as well. In fact this has been Paul's emphasis in **Philippians 3:4-7**. Hopefully this will not be true for any of us.

There may be people here today who may not be distracted by their past sin but they may be distracted by their past credentials and accomplishments. Perhaps because they were a Sunday school teacher in 1985 or because they were on a church board in 1990 or because they gave 10% of their income in 1995 they might think they can somehow rest on those past credentials and accomplishments. This would be a mistake. What does Paul say? **“Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.”** We can never be satisfied we must continue to maintain our focused direction of being a participant in the resurrection from the dead not allowing anything to distract us from that focus and certainly not anything from our past whether that is past sin or past spiritual credentials or accomplishments.

We have now covered two of the three essentials that need to be present in our lives if we are going to be continually assured of being a participant in the resurrection. The first essential was dissatisfaction. The second essential was a focused direction

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

Just because we may be dissatisfied with our current state, knowing that we have not yet become a participant in the resurrection from the dead and just because this dissatisfaction has led us to adopt a focused direction we still need to discipline ourselves to be obedient to the whole counsel of the word of God as we understand it if we are going to be assure ourselves that we in fact will be a participant in the resurrection from the dead.

Let us go back to **Philippians 3** but this time we will read **Philippians 3:15-16**, **“Let us therefore, as many as are perfect** Paul identifies himself with a select group of people that he identifies as “perfect.” This adjective might seem to be in contradiction with the verb Paul used in **Philippians 3:12** when he said, **“not that I have already become perfect”** but this is obviously not a contradiction at all. He is simply using the same word to refer to two different things. This is a word that refers to a conclusion of a process. The first time he used the word in **Philippians 3:12** he used it to refer to the end of a process that would result in him being perfectly conformed to Christ. Obviously that had not yet happened.

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So that is why he says, “**not that I have already become perfect.**” But when he uses the word “perfect” in **Philippians 3:15** to refer to a particular group of people it has a different meaning. The “perfect” (TELEIOI) in Philippians 3:15 refers to those who have come to see themselves over time as mature or in other words as spiritually healthy.

If you are here this weekend and consider yourself to be spiritually healthy or mature then Paul goes on to give this exhortation in **Philippians 3:15..... “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect (or mature or in other words spiritually healthy), have this attitude.....”**. And what is that attitude?

The attitude that Paul is talking about is the attitude that he himself has indicated was true in respect to his own personal experience. Those who make the claim that they are spiritually healthy or mature need to possess a similar dissatisfaction and focused direction as Paul.

Hopefully most, if not all of us here this weekend would be able to say along with Paul that this is in fact true of our lives.

If you have considered yourself spiritually healthy or mature but after studying this passage you don’t know if you can confidently say that you have a similar attitude as Paul in respect to his intense dissatisfaction and a very well defined and focused direction, don’t panic. Why? Let us continue to read the verse, “**Let us therefore, as many as are perfect (or in other words who consider ourselves spiritually healthy or mature) have this attitude (the same attitude of dissatisfaction and focused direction as the apostle Paul) ... and if anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you.**” Those who want to grow and to become more like Christ who see themselves as being spiritually healthy and who truly want to have the same attitude as Paul will not be disappointed. God is faithful. Whatever shortcomings that we might presently have in terms of a subdued dissatisfaction with our current spiritual state or a lack of clarity in respect to having a focused direction will be revealed to us. Praise the Lord!

But even though God will be very active in the lives of the spiritually mature we must not let this reality lessen our own commitment to obeying the whole counsel of the word of God.

Let us read **Philippians 3:16, “However (in spite of what the Lord is doing) let us keep living by the same standard to which we have attained.”**

The word “living” (STOICHEO) literally means “following in line” and was originally a military term meaning “to stand in line” or “to march in line.” Paul is calling all those who consider themselves to be spiritually mature and who possess the attitude of Paul, to some degree in respect to their dissatisfaction and focused direction, to march in line to a certain standard. He is calling them to discipline themselves for the a specific purpose. Let us look again at the verse “**However (in spite of what the Lord is doing) let us keeping living (or marching in line) to the same standard to which we have attained.**”

The Philippians were being called to march according to the same standard to which they had been marching. The “standard” to which the Philippians had been marching were the instructions that Paul had given them over the course their relationship.

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The Philippians were striving to a life pleasing to the Lord Paul is calling to discipline themselves to continue that striving.

CONCLUSION

We may say that we are dissatisfied, we may say that we have a focused direction, but if we do not have the discipline to live a life consistent with what we say we believe then all our words we have uttered should be considered meaningless.

If you want to have the assurance of being a participant in the resurrection from the dead then hopefully you will see these three essentials..... dissatisfaction, a focused direction, and a disciplined life.