

The Joyful Pursuit of Christ
Philippians 3:12-16
Sunday, May 5th, 2019
By Ryan Perry

Scripture

Philippians 3:12-16:

[12] Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. [13] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining 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 those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. [16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Let's Pray

Introduction

How many of you like winning prizes? I know I do.

When we think of winning a prize we normally think of things like raffle drawings, bingo, or possibly the dreaded claw machine that will inevitably eat every last dollar bill you have on you without ever giving you a prize...

Unless you're my wife, because she seems to be a claw machine pro.

But there are other kinds of prizes as well.

There are prizes in sports. When teams win a championship, they get a trophy and the accolades that go along with being the best. There are gold medals and money that await Olympic athletes as they win their individual events in things like swimming, running, gymnastics, skiing, or figure skating.

But there are still other kinds of prizes that may not come in the form of a raffle, claw machine, championship, or medal.

Instead they are self-imposed rewards that people give themselves or others to help them meet certain goals.

- Someone rewards themselves with ice cream when they stick with their diet for an entire week.
- Parents give their children money for every "A" they get in school.
- You might splurge on a night out as a reward for saving your money well over the past 3 months.

- A boss might give his/her employees a bonus or some other form of reward for meeting sales goals.

But why do people do this? Why do we often need these kinds of rewards?

Because the work and effort often required to meet a goal is hard, and the reward or incentive for completing the goal helps us to keep going, **to reach the finish line.**

If you were here last week, you will remember that we looked at Paul's warning and testimony in Philippians 3:1-11, which culminates in his desire for himself his readers **to know and experience Christ fully.**

He tells us that if we want to experience Christ we must boast in Christ, not ourselves (V. 1-3). We must daily count all of our works as rubbish and waste (V. 3-9).

And if we want to know or experience Christ we must live like Christ, sharing in his sufferings and become like him in his death (V. 10-11).

...meaning, we must become humble, selfless, sacrificial, servants as we follow the example of Christ given to us in Philippians 2:5-8.

But that feels hard doesn't it? I mean this isn't a week-long diet or some monthly company goal.

This is a lifelong process of dying to ourselves daily and being conformed to the image of Christ.

How on earth can we make it, and what rewards and incentives are there to keep us going so that we don't give up and lose heart in this pursuit?

By God's grace, Paul is not silent on this topic. In fact, in our text this morning he gives us three amazing incentives for pressing on in our pursuit of Christ. They are as follows:

- 1. We can joyfully pursue Christ by remembering we are owned by Christ. (V. 12)**
- 2. We can joyfully pursue Christ by focusing on our future with Christ. (V. 13-14)**
- 3. We can joyfully pursue Christ by realizing that we are not yet complete in Christ. (V. 15-16)**

However, unlike a prize that one gets if they win a race, these incentives, rewards, or prizes are already ours.

Though they all are not yet fully realized, we can and should receive these truths and rewards this morning with joy and hope because they have been secured for us through Christ.

So, may God use these blood bought rewards this morning to help us press on in our pursuit of joyfully knowing and becoming like Christ.

1. We can joyfully pursue Christ by remembering we are owned by Christ. (V. 12)

[12] Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

This might feel like a weird starting point for some of you because you realize that there is no direct object in this sentence. Paul is writing about something that he only refers to when he says, “*not that I have already obtained this...*” and when he says “*but I press on to make it my own...*”

So, what in the world are the “*this*” and “*it*” to which Paul is referring?

The answer lies within the previous verses. Paul says in Philippians 3:10-11:

[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The thing that Paul has not attained, and the thing he presses on to make his own is the **resurrection from the dead.**

But it is important here to realize that Paul is not just talking about the event of being resurrected. He has already made clear his overarching desire which is to **know and experience Christ.**

So, when Paul talks about attaining the resurrection from the dead he is looking to the day when he will be with Christ forever and will know and experience him fully.

As he writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:17:

[17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Paul is looking forward to the relational experience of being with Christ and fully knowing Christ, as he is fully known by him when he returns.

This, according to Paul, is what he has not yet perfectly attained or gained

But instead of feeling defeated about what he doesn't fully have, he instead presses on, **which literally means that he is in hot pursuit.**

The idea of pressing on or being in hot pursuit means that he is using every faculty he has: heart, soul, mind, and strength in running toward the goal of knowing Christ fully (attaining the resurrection).

This includes his daily pursuit of boasting in Christ, counting his works as rubbish, and conforming his thoughts, words, and deeds to that of Christ.

“But Pastor Ryan, this again, still feels like you’re putting too heavy of an emphasis on what Paul is doing to gain Christ, as if he is earning his salvation.”

To answer that I would first turn to John 14:15 where Jesus says:

[15] “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Jesus, and the whole of scripture, has always and will always put an emphasis on how we live.

Why?

Because how we live is the confirmation of what we believe, **and to whom we belong.**

In this way our joyful pursuit of Christ is not our way to earn Christ, but it is in response to the reality that he has already bought us and made us his own.

As Paul writes in the second half of Philippians 3:12

“...but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

This is similar to what Paul writes of Christ in Titus 2:14:

[14] ...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

We are redeemed by Christ, set free from sin and the law, and owned by Christ, for the purpose of knowing and becoming like Christ..

This is not something we do on our own, but it is something that we have been empowered **to do by Christ** specifically because we are now **owned by Christ.**

As Paul says in Philippians 2:13:

[13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So take heart, and be encouraged.

You can boldly and joyfully pursue Christ with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, not as a means to earn Christ, but in response to the reality that you have been **bought by Christ**, you belong to him.

And he is joyously working within you that you would know him, becoming like him in his death (verse 10), knowing that one day you will attain the resurrection of the dead (V. 11)...**you will know him fully.**

And the reality of **knowing him fully** leads us to our second point this morning.

2. We can joyfully pursue Christ by focusing on our future with Christ. (V. 13-14)

Philippians 3:13-14:

[13] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

At the beginning of this sermon I talked about how Olympians work for a prize, which usually includes a medal and an amount of money.

Paul picks up that same idea here in verse 13-14. He starts off by repeating the idea that he has not made it his own. **Meaning, he has not attained perfection, or a full knowledge or experience of Christ.**

It is important that Paul continues to tell the Philippians this because it serves as a continual warning against the Judaizers who think they are blameless before Christ because of what they do.

Perfection, or a full experience of Christ is not something we can earn on our own, nor is it something we can achieve in this life.

He then repeats the idea of pressing on or hotly pursuing Christ by putting it in the framework of a race.

He says that he forgets what lies behind him, but strains forward to what lies ahead...**the prize.**

In the same way, Olympic runners don't care about what's behind them. They don't look to see where the other racers are, nor do they ever turn around. **They have a single-minded pursuit that causes them to run, strain forward, and exhaust themselves.**

That pursuit is the prize, the medal, the wreath in those days, and even the money and fame that comes along with winning.

Now this might be the analogy Paul uses, but this isn't the goal or prize that Paul envisions in verse 14.

No, Paul is willing to leave behind everything of his former life, anything that he once called gain, and is straining forward, and pressing on, as hard as he can, because he knows that the prize at the end is the far greater than earthly pleasure or treasure.

The prize at the end of his race, and ours is the **upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

It is the culmination of everything that Paul is living for, which is becoming like Christ in his death that he would know Christ fully when he returns.

He has not fixed his gaze on an earthly hope, but on a forever future hope with Christ, which, is his because he is called by God, and as we said earlier, he is owned by Christ.

This means that though it hasn't happened yet, Paul has 100% confidence that it will happen.

So how does that help us to joyously pursue Christ?

It helps us by reminding us that this isn't our home.

As Paul writes a few verses later in Philippians 3:20:

[20] But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

But why do we need this reminder?

Think about buying a home: When you buy a home, you want to live in it, fill it with stuff, and make it as comfortable as you can.

For many of us, we want our homes to feel like sanctuaries of rest and relaxation that give us pleasure.

As a side note: If some of us are honest, this is one of the reasons we struggle to be hospitable, because we don't want to mess up our earthly sanctuary. But that's for another sermon.

Now, I'm not saying making your home like this is bad, but I think it is a small example of how we often live our whole lives.

We live as if this world is our home or sanctuary, and if we have the right job, right kids, right car, right church, right friends, the right life balance, and if we can keep ourselves and our families from pain and suffering then we will be happy.

And if we're not careful we become more about experiencing the comforts and pleasures of this world that don't last, than we do about living for Christ.

Paul warns against becoming these kinds of people when he writes in Philippians 3:18-19:

[18] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

His point? People who live with our thoughts, passions, desires and appetites set on earthly things are enemies of the cross.

Why? Because they desire the pleasures of the world more than Christ, and in the end, those pleasures become their god.

They stop running the race and lose sight of the forever prize, **a forever life and fellowship with Christ.**

If this is who we become, we will inevitably stop boasting in Christ, we will trust too much in our works, and we will be unwilling to suffer for Christ and become like him in his death.

And the result will be a form of godliness, like that of the Judaizers, that has no power, and misses out on the eternal pleasure that David talks about in Psalm 16:11:

[11] You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

I honestly believe that this is the reason why so many people live in a way that doesn't exalt or make much of the name of Christ.

We have lost sight of our citizenship and in so doing we have lost sight of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the eternal riches and pleasures that we can experience now in part, but will experience fully when he returns.

Instead, we are too easily satisfied with our earthly comforts which, at best, give us a fleeting glimpse of eternal joy.

So, my charge to all of us is to not look back. Let's not get caught up in the comforts of this world. But instead, let's use all the strength God has given us to pursue Christ as we focus on the prize:

Our forever fellowship with Christ, the well-spring of our eternal life, joy, and pleasure.

3. We can joyfully pursue Christ by realizing that we are not yet complete in Christ. (V. 15-16)

Philippians 3:15-16:

[15] Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. [16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

This is Paul's way of telling us that we need to remember we haven't arrived yet.

On the one hand, a mature Christian remembers that they are not perfect, they are in need of God's daily grace and power in their lives to be able to pursue Christ at all.

As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:10:

[10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Any gains we have in this life, in our pursuit of fully knowing Christ and being like him in his death (likeness), come to us **by the grace of God.**

Do we all still struggle with the flesh? Absolutely! But we have a God and Savior who is pouring his daily grace upon us and is working to conform us to his image.

This is why Paul writes to the Philippians in 3:15: *...and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.*

He knows that God, through Christ, is the one who owns us, he is the one who grows us, and he is the one who, **continually reveals his truth to us that we would walk in it by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

So, if you are struggling and fighting against sin, and working hard to pursue Christ, and you find yourself growing weary don't lose heart, you haven't arrived yet, and God doesn't expect you to be perfect in this life.

He instead gives us a promise. As Paul writes in Philippians 1:6:

[6] And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

You haven't arrived yet, you aren't a finished, but You do have a God and Savior, who by his grace, will bring his good work in you to completion. It is fixed and he will do it.

However, on the other hand, if we want to joyfully pursue knowing and experiencing Christ, Paul tells us that we need to walk according to what we already know and have attained.

As he says in Philippians 3:16:

[16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

“Hey Philippians, hey church, you haven’t arrived yet, you haven’t been perfected yet, so don’t stop running. Are you going to do this perfectly? No, but you must live in accordance with the truth you already know.”

This is Paul’s way of reiterating what he said to them in Philippians 1:27:

[27] Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

Hears the truth we all need to realize. We all often know what God is calling us to do, and on a basic day to day level we know how he is calling us to live, but very often we choose the opposite.

But Paul wants us to see that when we do that we are not living up to what we already know. We are short circuiting our joyful pursuit of Christ and we will not have a joy-filled experience of him.

Now is he asking us to be perfect? No.

But when we put together all that we have learned from Paul:

1. That we are owned by Christ
2. That we have an eternal prize of knowing and experiencing Christ fully, that is ours through Christ.
3. The reality that we are not complete, but by his grace, we are being conformed to the image of Christ.
4. The truth that one day he will complete his good work in us.

We should realize that God has given us all that we need, through Christ, to passionately and joyfully pursue him, run after him, live for him. **We all have what we need to life in a manner worthy of what we already know, the gospel.**

This means we need to stop wallowing in sin and walking in disobedience. Instead remember that we have the power, by God’s grace, to walk in joy-filled obedience.

This is Paul's command to us, and it will keep us on the path to a joy-filled experience of Christ.

Conclusion:

So then, let's end by putting this all together. How do we endure in our joyful pursuit of knowing and experiencing Christ?

1. We remember that he has made us his own.
2. We keep our eyes on the eternal prize of a joy-filled and forever fellowship with him.
3. We remember that we are not there yet.
4. By God's grace we live in a manner worthy of the gospel.

And we do all of this as we humbly realize that he is the one working in us to will and act according to his purposes, and he is the one who will complete his good and glorious work in us.

Let's Pray