

Pressing On

Philippians 3:4-15

12/30/06

Intro

Being that the end of the year is upon us, this is a time when a lot of people like to “take stock” of their lives. It’s a time to reflect on the past year and think about the possibilities of the New Year.

As we come to the scriptures, there are insights we can gain as we look into what Paul set as his goals. I couldn’t help but think, what would have been the New Year’s resolutions for the Apostle Paul? What would his outlook be for this upcoming year? What should ours be?

Verse 13 will be our key verse: “but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.”

Paul gives us an example that we should follow after and a good perspective for the New Year.

I. Forget what lies behind

- Paul shares his illustrious past in vv. 4-6. Yet these things were of the world, they were carnal and self-justifying.

A. In worldly things

- Paul explains he had to “forget” the things that he had valued so much.

- The confidence that he had in his self-righteousness served as a barrier to keep him from coming to Jesus. It stands in stark contrast to Christ emptying himself in chapter 2.
- Paul declares in verse 7 that the things he counted as “gain” he now counted as “loss.” Why the sudden change? Because he had met Jesus on the Damascus road. See Acts 9:1-6
- Jesus Christ brings perspective in our lives. Once he comes in he sets new standards, new goals, those goals are set in light of His authority in our lives.
- Paul says in v. 13 that he forgot all of the things that he once valued so much.

App - We too must forget or leave behind the things of the world; we must not allow them to take authority of Jesus.

- Look at the story of Lot’s wife:

Turn to Genesis 19:14-17, 26

- She looked back with a longing for the things of the world, she couldn’t let it go. Just like the rich young ruler who went away sorrowful from Jesus’ presence because he had great possessions, she chose to “gain” the things of the world, rather than gain Christ.

Illus - The story about Daryl Barkley and his vision of hell.

I’m reminded of a quote from Jim Elliot, a missionary martyr:

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

B. In our past failures

- Paul admits to his own persecution of the church, and it is recorded in Acts:

Acts 8:1-3: And Saul [Paul] approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

- Paul had a lot to be ashamed about, but he did not dwell upon this, nor did he allow it to hold him back from growing in the Lord.

App - We too must forget the past, not dwelling on our failures and sin and not allowing them to keep us from growing in the Lord.

Gal. 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Lam. 3:22-23 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

- We can learn a lot from our failures, I'm not saying we forget the lessons we learn.

Illus – Much like an inventor who might design several flawed models before he is able to refine it. He doesn't quit on the first try.

- So you and I are on a path of sanctification, we are not perfect yet.
- It's comforting to see that even Paul recognized this about himself in v.12.
- Paul knew that it wasn't his righteousness that had made him right with God (v. 9), it was a righteousness based on faith, not works of the Law.

App - Don't let the past failures hold you back from growing in the Lord today. God works in the present, He desires to move forward with you in relationship, He desires for us to walk forward with Him, not gaze regretfully in the past. We can't move forward by looking backward

Ifs there is anything that is hindering you or me from growing in the Lord today? Let us set it aside...

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

C. In our past success

- Not only did Paul forget about the past failures, but he didn't depend on the past success either.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on...”

- It is good to look back and remember the faithfulness of God, but we can't live off of yesterday's manna.
- We are to be daily renewed in the things of the Lord.
- What is God doing in your life now? As Chuck Smith put it, “The past experiences are only valid as they have been translated into the present experience.” How has it affected you today?

II. Press toward the Goal

So what would Paul's New Year's resolution be? Press toward the Goal!

A. By persuing Jesus

- Paul said “that I might know him” (v. 10), he wanted to experientially know the Lord, that is what the word in Greek means “to know by experience.”
- Even if that meant partaking of the sufferings of Christ, which he did, he “suffered the loss of all things.”

- Look at the words in verse 13: “reaching forward”, this Greek word was also used to describe a runner leaning forward at the finish line in the Olympic games.

Illus – Being told to lean, but not doing it... last varsity track meet in high school, getting out-leaned in the mile.

Not that we are competing against one another, rather, we are giving our utmost, all of our effort to pursue after Christ Jesus.

Paul uses this illustration in other places:

1 Cor 9:24-27: Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

- It’s in this pursuing that our hearts and lives are changed, God changes us on the inside out to make us more like Christ.

B. By living with purpose

- In verse 12 Paul states that he wants to accomplish the purpose that Christ has apprehended him for.

App – God has “apprehended” you for a reason, He’s got a purpose for your life, are you pursuing that?

- Paul was called to be an apostle, but not all are called to be apostles. Whatever He has called you to, whether raising kids or being an auto-mechanic, do it for the Lord, do it as unto the Lord.

App – We all want to hear the Lord declare “Well done good and faithful servant.” So run with purpose, and not aimlessly.

B. By being mature in mind

- The word “perfect” is better understood “mature” or “complete.”
- Paul concludes that we
- How we think determines how we live. So let us have this same mind in us and follow after the example of Paul.

Conclusion

Let us look with expectation to what the Lord will do today and tomorrow. You think that He has done great things in the past, they can’t be compared to what He desires to do in your life today and tomorrow.

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and

**in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever
and ever. Amen.**