

Forget the Past, Reach for the Future

Let our tombstones read, "Here rests a man who never rested here"

Philippians 3.12–14

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • July 8, In the year of our Lord, 2018

Scripture Reader and Reading: Jacob Noveske – Philippians 3.12–14

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – Higher Ground (234)

Prelude:

I. A man asked John Wesley how he got the crowds.

"I set myself on fire, and the people come to see me burn."

A. How did Paul get the crowds?

1. He set himself on fire.
2. Philippians 3 shows that the fire is Christ.

II. If Paul had a tombstone:

"Here rests a man who never rested here."

III. In Philippians 3,

- A. Paul spoke of counting everything as rubbish
- B. so that he might attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Persuasion:

I. Philippians 3.12 – Pressing On

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me (Phi 3.12).

A. Paul recognized his need for continued improvement!

1. Most people recognize their need for improvement, but
2. Paul did something about it.
 - a) He was not content with himself spiritually, but

- b) he was content with himself materialistically.
- B. Therefore, he wrote, “but I press on.”
- 1. He was not discouraged.
 - 2. He did not conclude,
 - a) “This is just the way that I am and
 - b) you have to accept it!”
 - 3. Knowing that he had not
 - a) already attained or
 - b) had not already been perfected,
 - (1) he gave his all, because
 - (2) he did not want to miss out
 - (3) on the thing for which Jesus saved him!

C. Paul wrote further,

“that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

- 1. A commentator said:

“...a powerful hand was laid on his shoulder, turning him right round in his tracks...Paul was conscripted into the service of Christ, but never was there a more willing conscript. The passion of his life from that hour on was to serve this new Master and fulfill the purpose for which he had conscripted him...” (F. F. Bruce).

- 2. We have been drafted into the Lord’s army.
 - a) Jesus has laid hold of us!
 - b) Let us be thrilled!

II. Philippians 3.13–14 – Forget the Past; Reach for the Future

13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things

which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phi 3.13–14).

A. It often comes down to one thing and

1. that is why Paul says, “but one thing I do.”
2. The rich young ruler lacked one thing.
3. Cornelius lacked one thing.
4. Martha lacked one thing.

B. Therefore, Paul was

“forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.”

1. Paul forgot the past.
2. The same scholar said:

“He speaks of himself as a runner with but one object in view: to finish the race and win the prize. A competitor in a race does not look over his or her shoulder to see how much ground has been covered already or how rivals are getting on: the runner keeps eyes fixed on the winning post. What is behind is that part of the race that has been completed so far, but it will not help a runner to outstrip the others for the first nine-tenths of the way only to falter and be overtaken in the last lap” (F. F. Bruce, emphasis his).

C. In this context, Paul spoke of forgetting his past that consisted of

1. his heritage and
2. his accomplishments,
 - a) which would include sins he committed (v. 6) and
 - b) the sins committed against him.

D. Be careful how you look to the past.

1. Jesus said,

32 “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17.32).

- a) Why or what is it about her that we are to remember?
 - b) She looked back.
2. In Luke 9, Jesus showed the danger of looking back.

62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luk. 9:62).

- a) Whether farmers still use this technique, I do not know, but
 - (1) to plow a straight line,
 - (2) they cannot look back the whole time.
 - (a) They fix their gaze on a distant object in front of them.
 - (b) Otherwise, always looking back they veer off to that side.
 - b) I tested this principle of plowing
 - (1) when the church parking lot at the Nile Street Church
 - (2) was covered deeply in snow.
 - (a) I looked behind me constantly, and sure enough
 - (b) my footprints went all over the place.
 - (3) Later when I walked to the mailbox,
 - (a) I did as Jesus teaches,
 - (b) and I made a straight line.
3. Forgetting the past, Paul reached for the future.
- a) We cannot change the past; but
 - b) we can change the future.
- E. Therefore, Paul pressed

“toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

1. Pressing forward like a runner leaning forward to win the race.
2. Doing so, propels the runner in that direction and gains him some space.
3. Paul focused on the prize from God.

“There is a prize to be awarded, and he aims to secure it; he looks forward to hearing the president of the games call him up to his chair to receive it. On a special occasion in Rome this call might come from the emperor himself; how proudly the successful athlete would obey the summons and step up to the imperial box to accept the award! For Paul, the president of the games was none other than his Lord...” (Bruce, emphasis his).

F. Concentration upon that goal is crucial.

1. Chrysostom (c. 347–407) said,

“He that runs looks not at the spectators, but at the prize. Whether [the spectators] be rich or poor, if one mock them, applaud them, insult them, throw stones at them—if one plunder their house, if they see children or wife or anything whatsoever—the runner is not turned aside, but is concerned only with his running and winning the prize. He that runneth stoppeth nowhere; since, if he be a little remiss, all is lost. He that runneth relaxeth in no respect before the end, but then, most of all, stretcheth over the course.”

2. Therefore, do not be distracted.

- a) Jesus, in the Gospel According to Luke,
- b) gives these two sayings about distractions.

41 And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10.41–42).

34 “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly” (Luke 21.34).

3. An article in U. S. News & World Reports:

“The kind of mental conditioning that makes athletes into superstars also helps ordinary folks become extraordinary” (Jay Tolson, “Into the Zone,” U. S. News & World Report, July 3, 2000, pp. 38–45).

a) [From the same issue]:

“When...the mind is completely focused, even unaware of what it’s doing, an individual can achieve the extraordinary.”

“When you’re in the zone, it’s so quiet, it’s so peaceful,” says Harriet Ross, a potter from Hartsdale, N.Y.

“They’ve shot thousands of foul shots, but the issue is not shooting the foul shot, the issue is screaming fans, no time on the clock, and your whole team is looking for you to perform. The issue is focus.”

b) There are many distractions, but the superstars block those things out.

“...you have some incredible athletes, physically blessed people, who are just not able to pull it off during a match, all because their mental strength lets them down, or they couldn’t focus, or they got distracted.”

G. Now, look at the prize, which is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

1. What does God want to give us?

2. Press on!

“The Christian must be like the sun; but he must not be like Hezekiah’s sun, which went backwards; nor like Joshua’s sun, which stood still; but he must be like David’s sun, which ‘rejoices as a giant to run his race’” (Acts and Facts, no. 181).

Exhortation:

I. What is in your future?

A. If you are in school,

1. what are you doing there?
2. What do you hope to achieve?

B. If you are working,

1. what are you doing there?
2. What do you hope to achieve?

C. If you are retired,

1. what are you doing?
2. What do you hope to achieve?

D. When you die,

1. what is going to happen then?
2. Is your life helping you to win the prize?

II. Forget the past; reach for the future