

Philippians 3:7-16

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[0:00] If you have your Bibles, I would ask that you turn to Philippians chapter 3. We're going! to talk about Paul and his words in Philippians. So if you're able and willing, please stand! with me as we turn to chapter 3 verses reading chapter 3, 7 through 16. Stand with me, please.

Listen carefully to the words of Paul in his heart. But whatever things were gained to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being conformed to his death, in order that I may attain the resurrection from the dead, not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ

Jesus. 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude, and if anything, you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you. However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we give you honor and praise and glory that we are able to gather together as a body of Christ to be in your presence. Our prayer this morning, Father, is that you were honored by our worship, that you sensed our hearts' admiration and love and praise for you. We pray, Father, that you were honored and pleased by our offering as we return to you some of what you have given to us and blessed us with. And now, Father, we thank you for the word of

God that has been read. We ask now that the Holy Spirit would work in each one of our hearts so that, again, Jesus Christ would be honored by our lives. All these things we ask in the Lord Jesus Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. Book of Philippians was written by Paul. Originally, it was while he was in prison. It was written in the years 60 to 62. We're not quite sure. But Paul had actually founded the church at Philippi in around 49-51. Again, they're not completely sure of the date. So it was written 10 years later after Paul had left. I find Philippians to be the most encouraging in all the writings of Paul and what he has to say to us. Because this major theme of this epistle is pursuing to be Christ-like and having within our character Christ-likeness. It's interesting. Paul, in this book, seems to be placing himself on the same level with the people that he is writing to. Consider Paul. He had a superhuman career of writing, powerful words of instruction, to so many new believers, many weak and frail.

But Philippians 4-11 says very well about Paul, not that I speak from need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. Which is quite a statement. That's not particularly true, I think, of many of us, to be content. But even though he was content about material things, you will note in this scripture that we've read that he was not content with his growth spiritually. And typically, we think of Paul being super spiritual. He is expressing being far from where he wanted to be spiritually. And I love Paul's honesty here. Verses 7-11 talks about his heart. Whatever he had gained, he counted his loss. Whatever he lost, he considered and concerned it as rubbish. And yet, all the time, he wanted to be found in him, to know him, and the power of his resurrection. For a moment, consider

[5:12] Paul and his existence. Paul lived essentially in exile. I mean, he left his home country, Israel, and traveled far, far places in his missionary trips. He had no domestic life. He didn't seem to have a home. He lived among strangers. He attached himself to the churches that he ministered to.

Got to know the congregation.

He disciplined them. He disciplined them. Taught them. Prayed for them. Loved them. And then left them. Amazing. And yet, he never expresses any depression or discouragement about his ministry. He is always only concerned about the flock that he ministered to. Quite an apostle. But I also would have you note Paul and his superiority to what I would call the typical temptations that you and I face in our daily life. He didn't seem to have any interest in money or the love of money. He didn't seem to have too much discomfort, even though his surroundings, being in prison, tended to be a little uncomfortable.

He didn't seem to have any personal indulgences that many of us have. He didn't seem to have any personal ambition or pride or jealousy other than to honor Christ. In 1 Corinthians, he talks a little bit about the quarrel that among the Christians who were saying, well, I'm of Paul. Others were saying, I'm of Apollos. Others saying that I am of Cephas. Paul's only concern was that Jesus Christ was preached and he was rejoicing in that despite not being the one who is honored the most.

So, as we read the scripture, I find some interesting things to note about Paul. First of all, I would have us note the apostle's object or aim in his life. Perfection. Did you read it in verse 12 and 13? Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect. That word perfect is really kind of strange, isn't it? I mean, it makes me feel uncomfortable. Yet, we really do desire perfection, do we not?

[7:39] Think about it. Think about it. We want a perfect life. We want a perfect wife, a perfect marriage, a perfect job, a perfect house, a perfect career.

We even sometimes want a perfect church. And when I wanted to find a perfect church, I found that when I joined it, it was no longer perfect.

We come with our baggage sometimes, do we not? But Paul's concern was that he become Christ-like. That was his great pursuit. That was his great aim.

Now, the word perfect, again, simply means complete or mature or having moral integrity. It doesn't mean that we're completely flawless, but it says that we are becoming spiritually mature and in alignment with God's character. That word perfect appears in the Bible 91 times. So apparently, it is very important to God that we work toward perfection.

I looked up the word in the secular dictionary. It was interesting. It said, completely free from false or defect, but then it added, or as close to such a condition as possible.

[9:00] I like that one, because I think that's what we strive to do, come as close as we can. But here, Paul kind of speaks and hints that he's a little bit concerned that he may have missed being perfect, that he may come short at it, which he was.

That was his unreach mark in his life. Now, we have to be honest. We look at the life of Paul and what he did and what he accomplished and what he went through. If Paul's not attained it yet, where are you and I at in our walk to be Christ-like?

The closest we can come is an approximation to attaining that truth.

But Christ has to be our mark. Christ has to be who our standard is in our behavior and our lifestyle. So the question becomes, what does it look like to be perfect?

What does it look like to be Christ-like? It means that we have the characteristics of Jesus Christ, his character being part of our life. Think about those attributes.

[10:17] Love, mercy, grace, compassion, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, forgiveness, righteousness, long-suffering, patience, just, truthful.

Those are those characteristics that Paul was striving for that also is our target and our mark as well. Now, we fail, we know it, but we must not give up.

We must press on, as he will say, despite our failures. What's interesting about Paul, though, is he never, ever gloried in any of his achievements or any of his successes.

His only concern was to be more and more like Jesus Christ. That's true of us. We have no place in our lives to ever glory about our achievements or our successes. We need, again, to press more and more to be Christ-like.

So, even though Paul was not perfect, I want you to note, looking at the one thing he does, verse 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.

[11:37] Even though he had failed to reach that great spiritual maturity, Paul was pressing on forward. Paul is saying is, he's not a complete Christian yet, but he's going to press on.

It reminds him, he probably knew very well David's psalm in 27, 4 through 6. David wrote, One thing have I desired of the Lord that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Paul had reduced the process of sanctification to one simple and clear goal, to be Christ-like.

That should be our goal as well. Ephesians 5, 1 that Paul wrote said very clearly, Therefore, be imitators of God as his beloved children.

We will either be masters of ourselves, or we will be swept away and controlled by the mercy of accidents, circumstances, situations, and outward influences.

[12 : 49] I love the prayer that I found, and I try to repeat it often. Father, make my heart a temple in which you live. Grant that every impure thought, every earthly desire, might be like the idol of Dagon, each morning lie broken at the foot at the Ark of the Covenant.

Father, teach us to master flesh and blood, and let this mastery of ourselves be our bloody sacrifice, so that I may say like the apostle, I die every day.

We decide each day that we will be the master of ourselves. Then secondly, I would like, or next I would have you note, the means for the attainment of divine and perfect character.

See that word in verse 13? The one thing I do? Forgetting. Because we all have baggage. We all know our failures.

We all know the things that we have not done well. What's interesting here is Paul says, and he informs us, forget the past, and yet throughout much of Philippians, he is talking about his past.

[14 : 11] So the reality is you really never forget completely. It always is in your mind. But that should be our target, that even though we know our errors, we don't dwell on them.

We know it's under the blood of Jesus Christ. Romans 8, 1 says, therefore there is no condemnation, because Christ has treated our sin and covered us with his righteousness.

But it's one of Satan's greatest weapons. He works very hard on us to make us feel bad and guilty, because he reminds us so many times of our failure.

But to make progress in the Christian life, folks, we have to forget the past. Whatever hurts and disappointments, troubles that we've had, we even have to forget all of our successes.

They're in the past. What we need to do is continue to press forward and have greater successes.

And Paul had a lot to forget. Think of Paul, who persecuted the Christians early, as Saul, who witnessed Stephen's death.

[15 : 17] But he also, Paul was giving up all of his successes, all the things he had accomplished so far, and wanted to press on in that goal.

I, again, think in terms of being told, forgetting, because I remember David wrote in Psalms 51 a great prayer, my sin is ever before me.

It's always there, and it's hard for us to completely forget. But what we have to remember is that you and I, because we know Christ, have an inheritance that's incorruptible, cannot be defiled, and will never fade away.

So what do we have to do with the past? We have so much to look forward to. So remember what you still have to do to, again, each day, try to be Christ-like.

And finally, next slide, I would have you note the reaching, the reaching forward to what lies ahead.

Paul was still reaching because he wanted to be more and more like Christ and do more and more for Christ.

[16 : 25] And that is, again, continue to worship, continue to teach, continue to disciple, continue to serve, and continue to develop that Christ-likeness in his life.

That should be what we are reaching forward to on a day-to-day basis as well. Why? Well, note the prize in verse 14. I press onward toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Thank you, Christy, for picking out the song this morning, What a Day That Shall Be. Did you hear the chorus? I came in. Can you imagine? That is our goal, to be in heaven with Jesus Christ, to be clothed with his cloth of righteousness, robe of righteousness, to be truly at that moment Christ-like and to be perfected.

That is the prize that we are after, and that was the prize in which Paul was after as well, and that was his desire.

And it's our responsibility. It is something that I think that we need to do often. No matter what we're facing on day-to-day, we have the promise of heaven.

[17 : 39] It should be our habit to think in terms of heaven and what that will be like and be reminded. And then finally, or next, I'm sorry, I don't know why I've got finally on my mind.

I guess I want to finish as fast as you want me to finish anyway. Next, I would have you note the call. Do not forget the call of God. You realize you've been called and chosen by God?

What a great privilege and what a great thing for God to call us. First, he calls us to salvation. Then he calls us to conform to the likeness of Christ.

Then he's called us to be heirs of God. We have a great inheritance in him. He's called us, and will call us to a home in heaven. And we have so many other numerous spiritual blessings that he has called us to.

We can attempt great things for him, but we must always do so for the glory of God. And finally, there it is. I said it, and it's true.

[18 : 41] I would hope you to note the challenge in the last verse of 16. However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

What that means is we keep living the path that we're on being a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ, continuing to walk that line of spiritual development and progressing in our sanctification.

And that's my challenge for all of us this morning. Our goal each day to be Christ-like. In every Christian life, in your and my Christian life, every moment and every act that we do, we have the opportunity for doing one thing, being Christ-like.

I just returned last week from London. My son and I were there, and we enjoyed riding the subway. It's an amazing system.

But I noticed every time we got on the train and we approached the next station, there was this automated voice that said, mind the gap. And then when you actually got there, the doors opened, that voice would say it again, mind the gap.

[19 : 56] Which meant, of course, when you stepped off the subway station, you always had a little bit of a drop to the platform. Some were small, some were rather large. I like that.

I think we need that as believers also, this constant reminder, mind the mark. Mind the mark of your life to be Christ-like.

Maybe we could sell T-shirts. I don't know. I have a little bit of a warning, though. If we're going to develop Christ-likeness, it will also be a part of suffering.

That suffering may be the loss of a loved one. It might be the loss of a divorce. It might be the loss of a job. It might be the loss of peace of mind, whatever the case may be.

But F.W. Robertson said this really well. In the law of humanity, as in Christ, that we must be perfected through suffering.

[21 : 07] And that will come. But because our desire is to be Christ-like, because Christ suffered, we will go through that as well. But we are not to give up.

Being Christ-like, the only way that we grow and progress to be Christ-like is through him. By reading his word, praying, being together as a body of Christ.

Let me finish with Hebrews 12.1. We know it well as the faith chapter, but listen to the words. Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Are you running? Are you in the race? And that goal, that line to show us the end of the race is to become more and more like Jesus Christ.

One of our favorite Christian artists is Lornell Harris. He had a great song that we listen to often, Jan and I. It goes, Forever running, but losing the race, were it not for grace.

[22 : 20] Thank God that you and I are covered by the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen? Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we thank you again for the work that you're doing in our lives.

We thank you, Father, that you set a standard before us, one that we will not reach until we actually come into your presence and be with you. But we pray, Father, through the Holy Spirit and the gift of your love and grace that we would strive each day to take upon the character and the characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ.

not for our benefit, Father, but that others might see a difference in us and the world, that we might again bring glory and honor and praise to the name of God through our life.

We ask your blessing upon each person. I thank you for the work you're doing in their lives and ask God that you continue to direct and guide us in all that we say and do. In Christ Jesus' name, Amen.

If you'll stand with me and we have the hymn of invitation, as Christi...