

Straining toward the Goal

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Date: 29 December 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, I thank you that we're able to come into a building and to worship you, that we're able to pray to you, we're able to study your word, we're able to have fellowship and meet with each other.

I just thank you for that, Lord. There might be some of us here who have had a hard year, and there might be also people here who have had a good year. But I ask all those distractions would just fall away, and we would just be focused on what you want to say to us and on your glory and on nothing else.

In Jesus' name, amen. So we're in that time of year now where Christmas has happened. We've done all the spending.

We've done all the family stuff. And we're kind of in that limbo right now between Christmas Day and New Year's where we don't know when the stores are open or what to do. And if you're anything like me, during this time over the past couple of years, I've tried to use this time to reflect on the past year or things from my past.

I haven't been able to do that this year because my brother-in-law is getting married tomorrow, so it's been very chaotic. But normally I would be reflecting about certain things that I've set, like goals I've set over the past couple of years.

[1 : 2 7] And the funny thing is, our culture loves to set goals. You see it all in books everywhere, all in bookstores. You see it in magazines. You see it online in podcasts.

All over the place. And if you're anything like me, I personally set goals for a lot of things, for my fitness, for my spending habits, even for my marriage, my friendships, and for travel plans, for my dreams that I have to travel.

And maybe you're also like me, and maybe you failed at some of these goals. Or maybe you also succeeded in some of these goals. And it's interesting because Paul, in this text that we're about to look at, talks about a goal.

He talks about straining towards a goal. He talks about this ultimate goal. This goal that is so great that he gave his life for this goal. So if you could turn with me to Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 to 21, I would like to take a closer look at this.

So again, it's Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 to 21. And if you don't have a Bible, there's some up here. Feel free to come up and grab one wherever you want. If you don't have one, you can take it, bring it home, it's yours.

[2 : 4 1] Or you can just read from the screen up there. So as you're turning there, I will talk a bit about the context. So this is a letter to a church in Philippi by the Apostle Paul.

Paul was writing this letter from a jail in Rome. So this is one of his famous jail epistles. And Philippi, this city, was a city refounded by the Roman emperor Augustus.

And because of that, it had special status. It had status because it was the Augustian colony, which let it be exempted from certain taxes. This town was found in eastern Macedonia.

It was found along an important Roman commercial road called the Ignatian Way. This church would have been mainly Gentiles. And these people in this church were friends of Paul.

You can see that in his writings when he writes this letter to the Philippian church that he has this kind of friendly tone to them. And he says he's visited them a couple times.

[3 : 48] So he knows these people. So let's take a look at this. So at the beginning in verse 12. Not that I've already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

So in the previous verses, you have to remember when you read the Bible, you have to always take everything in the context of the book that's written. You can't just pick verses out. So in the previous verses of chapter 3, Paul has been talking about, he talked about his past.

He talked about how he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a Pharisee. He used to persecute the church. And so he would have had this status where he would have been considered very high, almost above other people.

And then he threw it all away. Why did he throw it all away? But he says that he threw it all away because everything is rubbish compared to knowing Christ, compared to knowing Jesus Christ.

Another way to describe his level of how high he would have been in his society was I'm currently reading Harry Potter. And in it, there's two different types of wizards.

[5 : 11] There's pureblood wizards, and then there's halfblood wizards. And the way you're a pureblood wizard is if both your parents were wizards, one's a wizard, one's a witch. And if you're a halfblood, one is only magical, one is not.

So Paul would have been a pureblood. He would have almost like a higher status. People would have come to him for advice and all that. And then he threw it all away. He says it. He got rid of it because he considered it rubbish.

Now what does he mean by obtained when he says, not that I've already attained this or am already perfect? Well, if you look at verse 11, he says, that by any means possible, I may obtain the resurrection from the dead.

Now some of you here might be like, oh, time out. Matt, you just said resurrection. Don't you know we live in the 21st century? These things don't exist.

It's been proven by science. Well, I believe this because there's hundreds of eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. They're written down. It's the same way in the history books that are in our schools or in libraries.

[6 : 23] The way they make, they write these history books is from eyewitness accounts of ancient, like if there's something about the ancient wars, it's all written from eyewitness accounts.

And it's interesting because there's more, there's more written accounts on, for the resurrection than there is for a lot of the, a lot of the great ancient wars that they're talked about in schools.

And it's interesting also that people are so quick to, to throw away that the resurrection could actually happen, that this miracle could happen.

But then they're so quick to hold to the theory of evolution, which is also a miracle event. The evolution theory is how, is how it's claimed that how the world came to be from a big bang.

But that takes also a faith to believe in. That also takes a faith in a miracle event that happened. But there's no eyewitness accounts of that. So when Paul talks about a resurrection, we could actually believe this because there's, there's written accounts of eyewitnesses.

[7 : 32] So continuing in verses 13, brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I've made it my own. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. So Paul, he says he left behind, in the previous verses, he left behind the status he had.

He left behind, he left behind all these like sins he committed, everything. He's, he's tried to forget about them to look forward. Many of us have past hurts.

Many of us have these things that we've committed that we think are so bad that like no one could possibly love us. Many of us have past accomplishments that we put our pride in, that we hold to.

How many of us can't seem to forget about our past? Now I'm not saying, and Paul isn't saying that we shouldn't just block out our past, that we shouldn't just, like we shouldn't suppress it.

[8 : 41] We should remember our past. But when our past controls us, that is when we, that is when it's wrong. And that's what Paul does. He wants to forget about the past so we can strain forward, so he can put all his hope in Jesus, in Jesus Christ.

You could be here, and you don't know God. And you don't, maybe you don't want to know God. But you're tormented. You could be tormented by these pains, these hurts, or you could put all your pride in these accomplishments that you have.

The world tells you to never forget your past, or to never forget where you came from. But it offers you no way to deal with the pain of your past.

It says that it has certain things that could help you, but in the end, it'll always fail. And here Paul is saying there's something. There's a hope.

There's something found in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. He strains forward, and that is what he's telling the church in Philippi, the Philippians, and that's what also we could take from it.

[9 : 51] And notice how he says strain in verse 13, and press on towards the goal in verse 14. Now, I'm really into climbing.

I've been climbing for about 10 years, or I guess a little bit more than 10 years now. And when you get to a certain point in rock climbing, where once you've done all the easy stuff, you have to start selecting routes that you want to spend more time in.

A route is when you start from the bottom and you get to the top of the cliff. There's certain lines in the rock features that you climb, weaknesses in the rock. And when you pick these harder routes, you have to actually train for them.

You have to train your fingers, your tendons have to be strengthened, you have to have a general fitness. And when you pick these routes and you put all that time in, the goal of climbing is to start from the bottom and get to the top without falling.

But when it comes to climbing, when you get up to the hard parts, this thing's called the crux, the crux of the route. If you hesitate, you'll fall.

[10 : 57] If you look back, you'll fall. And it's the same thing with Olympic athletes. These people spend their entire lives for the one moment, the one opportunity they have, to try to get the gold medal.

And if an Olympic runner was running the race and it was really close, if he looks back, that would actually bring him back in the race because it would reduce his speed. So when they're running, they're straining towards the goal, the prize, which to them is the gold medal.

But isn't Paul already a Christian? Why must he strain? Well, any goal you set and become slack in, you won't achieve it.

And when Paul says, the goal or prize, what is he talking about? He is talking about Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate prize. Jesus is the ultimate goal.

The finished work of the cross, that is the goal, that is the prize. You see, when you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, you are instantly justified. It's like, there's this thing that's like, the already happened.

[12 : 05] Because of what Jesus did on the cross, and when you put your faith and trust in it, you're instantly justified. You are right before God. But then there's also a process after, and that process is called sanctification.

So what that means is, when you put your faith and trust in Jesus, you're justified. But that doesn't mean you continue on just doing the same thing you're doing.

You have to actually do a 180 and go the opposite way. Before I became a Christian, I was involved in many, like, I was doing drugs, I was a heavy drinker.

I come from a pretty rough past. And when I became a Christian, when I had that moment, if I continued in what I was doing, I wouldn't have been, I wouldn't have been the right way.

You have to, when you become a Christian, you have to go the other way. It's a higher calling. And continuing in verse 15, Paul says, let those of us who are mature think this way.

[13 : 10] And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have obtained.

Now when Paul says mature, he's not talking about, he's like, it's not talking about older people. When he says mature, the word in the Greek could also mean perfect.

But that kind of sounds a bit, it sounds a bit like Paul's full of himself. But that's not what he's saying. What Paul is saying is those who are, who are mature slash perfect are the ones who realize they are not mature slash perfect.

They're the ones who realize that they can do nothing to obtain the prize. They can do nothing to obtain the goal. They have to put all their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. They have to let him win the race for them.

But some of you might be saying, but surely I've been a good person and that's enough to get me right with God. Other people could be saying, but I've served at the church for many years. Isn't that enough?

[14 : 18] Other people could say, but I tithe and I follow everything that the Bible says. Isn't that enough? It's only when you realize that the finished work of the cross and your faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved.

And when you realize that, that is when you start the race. That is when you get up and you start going towards the goal. But it's so easy to get pulled off to the side. So that's why Paul says we must strain, we must press on towards the goal.

Now as you read Philippians, there's clearly, there's a clear distinction between two themes. One is this theme of joy.

Paul says joy constantly through this. The other theme is a theme of unity. And it's interesting when you look closely at it, the only way you could get this joy that Paul talks about is in the unity.

unity. And we see that in verses 15 and 16. Paul talks about being unified. He talks about that we need to, you guys need to come together and be unified.

[15 : 24] So in climbing, when you've done all your training, when you've done, when you've picked your route and when you're trying to climb it, you can't just go up and climb it on your own. You need a partner. You need a belayer.

And this belayer is the person who feeds your rope out. He's the one who gives you all, gives you the slack, who keeps the rope tight in certain spots that may be a bit more dangerous.

He's the one who catches you if you fall. And the rope, the rope that's between the two of you holds you together to the cliff. It is what keeps you to the cliff. And most people who climb without a rope or without a partner, unfortunately, eventually fall and they die because they have nothing to catch them.

And it's the same with the church except the gospel of Christ is the rope. That is what keeps you together. And you have the belayer. You may think you don't need fellowship or you can't relate to the people at the church or you've heard it all before or the sermons might be too long or the service might be too long or it doesn't fit with the way you feel church service should be.

Well, I encourage you to reflect and look around. Are you alone? Do you have unbearable stress and no one to share the burden with besides it could be yourself or your spouse?

[16 : 43] We need each other. It's all through the New Testament. It's all through Philipians. We need unity. We need to be together. And I know church isn't perfect. A lot of churches have a lot of bad things in it but we're human.

We're not perfect people. And in verse 17 Paul says Brothers and sisters join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the examples to the example you have in us.

When Paul says this he's talking to them because there's many false teachers around in the area who are trying to infiltrate the church to make them go in opposite direction. And you could and the way you could tell a false teacher is someone who's contrary to the Bible.

He's contrary to what they're talking. So Paul even though he is human was confident in the way he walked. So he told them to imitate him. It's the same way many people I myself will read like a biography or watch things on YouTube about interesting people and we try to copy them.

We try to live out the way they live. And it's kind of the same way that's what Paul's saying here. He says I follow the Bible.

[18 : 03] I follow scriptures. So follow what I'm doing. And in verse 18 Paul says for many of whom I've often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly and the glory and their shame with minds set on earthly things. Now what is the enemy of the cross when he says that?

An enemy of the cross is someone who's contrary to the gospel. Who lives contrary to the gospel. But you've got to look at this because it says to the cross of Christ.

It doesn't say to you. It's the cross of Christ. Christ. So when there's people who live contrary to what the Bible says we're not to make them our enemies. We're to show them Jesus.

We're to love on people. That is the calling of a Christian is to love on people. Not to make people our enemies. Not to segregate people. But to love on people. And that is what Paul's telling them.

[19 : 10] And you see that he cries for them. And why does he cry for them? Because when you look at this Paul knows these people that have fallen away.

He would have talked to them. He's talking about Christians who have fallen away. My wife Amy is a huge fan of Christmas movies.

So I've been watching Christmas movies since like beginning of November. And one of the Christmas movies we watched this year that I've never seen this version is The Christmas Carol.

And there's the Jim Carrey version. So The Christmas Carol if you don't know what it is it's a book by Charles Dickens from the 19th century. And there's a moment in this in the movie where Scrooge Scrooge is a man who's very stingy with his money.

He didn't like anyone. He kept to himself. The only thing he wanted to do was make more money and more money. And he didn't want to share any of it. And there's a moment on Christmas Eve in The Christmas Carol that he's visited by his deceased co-worker the person he made his business with.

[20 : 24] And his name's Marley. And Marley warns Scrooge that if he doesn't change his ways he's going to end up the same way as him. And Marley when he comes into the scene he's held by chains to a box of money.

And he can't grab the box of money but he always tries to get it. But he can't because he's a ghost. He can't grab it. He's tormented. And there's a moment when Scrooge is pulled to the window as Marley is leaving after he warns him that he'd be visited by three ghosts.

And he looks out. Scrooge looks out into the city and he sees an entire city of ghosts who are controlled by what they've idolized through their lives. And some are controlled by money.

Some are controlled by food. Some are controlled by their lust. Some are controlled by their debts. Some are controlled by just trying to obtain power. And you see them going through all the city trying to obtain this but they can't get it.

These are the people that it's showing that their end is destruction because they weren't following they didn't follow the goal. And they've tried to they've tried to when they're all this they're trying to they have no hope.

[21 : 35] But as Christians there is a hope and that hope is in Christ. And that is the only thing that will break you free from your desires. And when Paul talks about these people at their end is their destruction their God is their belly and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things you have to look at when he says mindset when he says mindset he's talking about people who are who are gone the other way who are who does not who aren't living the Christian life anymore they're going somewhere else their minds are completely set on another direction.

It's not he's not talking about people who struggle with sins he's talking about people who who are actively who are glorifying in the way they live that are contrary to the Bible. And Paul says something very interesting in verse 20 when he says but our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a savior the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Now there's two citizenships that Paul is talking about there's the worldly citizenship and to them to the Philippian church in Philippi their citizenship would have been a higher value in the Roman colonies because they were exempted from taxes they lived in a prospering city so to live there to have that citizenship was of great value to have a Roman citizenship you have to pay a high price unless you're born into it and then he talks about heaven citizenship heavenly citizenship this citizenship is a free citizenship that's offered to everyone getting a citizenship in the world is extremely hard people come overseas and they have to go through all this paperwork and spend many months trying to get a citizenship they have to pay a high fee for it but this citizenship is freely given when you put your faith and trust in Jesus all things that pull you down won't have their hold on you when you strain for the prize of seeing Jesus face to face when you run with fellow believers for the goal for the goal you're freely given your citizenship will be in heaven and Christ attained that on the cross there's nothing you can do to attain it you'll experience joy of knowing that you have a father in heaven and as we approach this new year why not set the goal of straining towards the prize of the gospel of Christ straining towards the ultimate the ultimate prize which is being which is seeing Christ face to face and if you don't know God now is the time to call out to him now is to start the race now is the time to put all the distractions of the world and to turn your eyes to Jesus now is the time to know him please stand heavenly father

I thank you thank you for your word I thank you for Jesus and what he did on the cross I thank you for the finished work of Christ I'm sure there's people here I myself who struggle with constantly looking towards this goal and straining towards it I ask Lord that you would minister to us you would work in our lives you would show us that nothing else nothing else matters except except for you and for and your glory and I ask that you would you would just minister to us Lord in Jesus name Amen