

# Untitled (57)

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Preacher: Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So, unless you're living under a rock, you're probably thinking a bit about citizenship in this election season. Under our system of government, good citizenship means involvement.

We keep informed, we discuss, we debate, we vote. In 2020, we also argue on the internet. I take my citizenship seriously.

I love my country. Two generations of my family now have served in the military. I vote. I consider that my civic responsibility.

These, in my view, are all good things. I think that we should take our citizenship seriously. But I would add one simple caveat. If we take our earthly citizenship seriously, we should take our heavenly citizenship even more seriously.

[1:35] So, I was thinking about this. I was reminded of the epistle to Diognetus. Has anyone picked that up for a little light reading recently?

It's an apologetic work, meaning that it was written to defend the claims of Christianity. It was from the 2nd or the 3rd century it dates to, probably.

As we think on the calling that we have to press on as Christians and live as citizens of heaven in this world, I'd like for us to consider a small section of it.

I assure you, it's not going to be dry, dusty, long, or boring. All right. So, here's the section of the epistle to Diognetus that came to mind as I was preparing for this sermon.

We read there, And yet, Well,

[3:51] It's a great description of the life we're called to, isn't it? In our reading for this morning from Philippians chapter 3, Paul is charging the Philippian Christians to live as citizens of heaven as they pass their days upon earth.

Here in Syracuse, New York, in the year of our Lord 2020, that calling has not changed for us. The call to live as citizens of the call to live as citizens of heaven as we pass our days upon our days upon earth.

In this morning's reading from Philippians, we see a sharp difference between two ways to live. Walking with the Lord and walking with the Lord and walking according to the flesh, living as citizens of heaven.

Two basic ways to live, and I want us to think about that together this morning. Please look with me in Philippians chapter 3 as we do that.

Backing up a little bit from the opening of our text that we read, the Apostle Paul has just said that whatever it takes, he intends to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

[5:01] With that end goal in sight, he says, picking up in verse 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.

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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Quick point before we dive in. Paul is not saying here that he isn't sure that he is saved, to be clear. That would be a misreading of this text, I think. He is saying, as is the experience of every Christian in this life, that he is not yet completely without sin, and certainly not yet raised from the dead physically and bodily.

Do we have anyone here this morning who is completely without sin, or has been raised again from the dead? Yeah, me neither. So we're all in the same boat.

What do we see in Paul's example of how we should walk as Christians? First, we see in Paul's example that he forgets what lies behind, and he focuses forward to what lies ahead.

[6:26] He forgets what he has left behind, and he keeps his eyes on the prize. Keep in mind, Paul had left behind quite a lot. In his case, he left behind quite a lot.

Sacrificed quite a lot. He left behind, for example, being a respectable member of his religious community. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees, after all. He left behind the religious traditions that he had known, the traditions of his fathers for which he had been zealous.

Presumably, he left behind a number of relationships that had once been important to him. You can imagine a whole host of family members or friends who, after Paul starts following this Jesus fellow, don't feel the same about him anymore.

He left behind most earthly comfort. And he left behind, as he says earlier in the chapter, the self-satisfaction of looking to his own goodness for salvation.

But Paul gained Jesus, which is everything. And his testimony is that it was all worth it, because eternal life is found in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone.

[7:46] Following Jesus costs the apostle Paul something, and it always costs us something, doesn't it? Exactly what it costs, how the circumstances play out, will vary from person to person.

Some people lose a way of life that had once been dear to them. Some people lose past relationships. Some people lose patterns of sin that had once entertained them.

It can take all kinds of forms. But here's the common thread for all of us as Christians in walking with Jesus. We all lose our sense that we are the ones calling the shots.

We die to ourselves, and we follow Jesus as Lord of our lives. And that means leaving behind everything else that we're inclined to call our own.

We lose our life to find it. I'm reminded, though, of what C.S. Lewis wrote in a letter a few months before his death.

[8:53] Lewis said, There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind. Isn't that true in the Christian life? That's why we look forward instead of behind us as we walk with Christ.

The things that we leave behind. Ways of life that were self-centered. The shiny things that had our attention. Sins that once held us completely in their grip.

The momentary pleasure of living for earthly things. Our trust in our own righteousness instead of in Christ's righteousness. Whatever we left behind, we left it behind because it is nothing compared to what awaits us.

And what we see when we look ahead. Because we cannot begin to even imagine what God has prepared for those who love Him.

We should walk with an attitude of joy because what lies ahead, the thing that we are pressing towards, is so much better than anything we might leave behind.

[10:04] We are pressing forward to be with Jesus forever. We are pressing forward to be completely set free from sin and death. We are pressing forward to the resurrection from the dead.

We are pressing forward towards the greatest joy in the universe. We are pressing forward to things that the greatest pleasures of this earth cannot compare with.

So there's no reason to look back. Because there really are far, far better things ahead than any that we leave behind. There's a temptation for all of us.

When we look back on our lives to think about all that we have lost. Isn't that a fruitless endeavor when instead we could be thinking about what we have gained and what we will gain in Jesus Christ?

Because what we have gained and what we will gain in Jesus Christ will more than make up for what we have lost or left behind, no matter how much we have lost or left behind.

[11:16] So the kind of walk that Paul describes here involves forgetting what lies behind.

It also involves pressing forward. It involves not giving up. Now all of this talk about pressing forward sounds a bit too much like running for my comfort.

I know some of you might be scandalized, but running is something that I have never really enjoyed that much. There is a reason that God's word says that the wicked flee when no one pursues.

When I was in the army, I had to run. I was pretty fast then, but I'd inevitably run my two miles as fast as I possibly could to get it over with, and then I'd throw up at the end.

Every time. Thinking back on my history as someone who had to run, it was part of my job, but I never found that part all that enjoyable, helps me to put the challenges of the Christian life in

perspective.

[12 : 28] There were times when I was running, and I would just straight up want to stop. I found it miserable. It would have been easy to just give up. I disliked it enough that the thing that kept me going was a sense that quitting wasn't an option.

In the Christian life, too, we need to remember that quitting is not an option. When we signed up to be disciples of Jesus, we signed up for the whole race.

Don't get me wrong, there is plenty of joy in the Christian life, but there are plenty of challenges. Paul is talking about pressing forward in this morning's passage because he knows that there are times when Christians are tempted to not keep pressing forward.

As a pastor, sometimes I talk to people who used to profess faith in Christ and no longer do, and I often see common themes running through those stories.

One of the most common themes I'd summarize like this. It's as if someone says, I gave that a try and it didn't work. All of my problems didn't magically disappear.

[13 : 47] God didn't keep hard things from happening to me. I thought I was signing up for my life to be easier. I thought that was the deal. It doesn't go that way, does it?

We press on in the face of difficulty. We press on remembering that there is much that we left behind.

We press on even when times are difficult because the one who called us is faithful and he will carry us when it feels like we are too weak to continue. and we press on through difficulties of every kind because it's worth it.

We press on even though there might be another way. Seems like it might be more pleasant.

Paul continues. Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

[14 : 59] For many of whom I have 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 they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things.

There is another way to walk. A second way that we should talk about this morning. A way to walk with the mind set on earthly things instead of on Christ.

A way to walk in which our appetites and our desires become our gods instead of walking with Jesus as Lord of our lives. A way to walk where we cling to things of this world for our security and our meaning only to find that we always lose those things in the end.

It's possible to walk that way. Even can seem appealing at first. Seems easier. But the outcome is always the same.

Misery and destruction. But the Christian walks through this world as one who is passing through and as a citizen of heaven.

[16 : 28] And the outcome in that case is far different. Our passage concludes with this. 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.

brothers and sisters in Christ our end is not destruction because we have a Lord and Savior named Jesus one who died for the forgiveness of our sins one who rose again that we might never die and one who is coming back to raise our bodies from the grave.

And in the meantime by God's grace we keep pressing forward walking with Jesus Christ our Lord remembering that there are far better things ahead than any we leave behind and remembering that though we pass our days on earth however long those days will be our citizenship is in heaven.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen.