

The High Calling of God

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Date: 10 September 2023

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[0 : 00] All right. I strongly recommend you open your Bibles to chapter 3 of Philippians. We're going to start in verse 12. I don't know how well my voice will hold up, but we'll see.

I about choked to death there a minute ago. You want water now? No, it won't help. Stuff goes the wrong way. Once it does that...

I can't wait. Lord, come quickly. I'm ready. All right. So we're going to get Philippians chapter 3, verse 12 through 21, which is the last part of that chapter.

Last week, Glenn talked about the first part, and we're going to finish that up. It's really tied together. It's sort of an artificial divide. So Paul's been moving through his discussion on his pursuit of Christ.

You know, that's what we're supposed to be doing, pursuing Christ. Now, pursuing Christ doesn't mean sitting in a pew waiting for him to come back. It means to actively go after him.

[1 : 04] If I pursue a deer in the woods, you don't hunt like that here. You know that, right? You hunt wrong. But you have to because you kill somebody and there are too many people around. But when I grew up in Montana, you hunted.

You went up in the mountains. You started walking. I can't remember when my dad was tromping through the snow. I was light enough that I could walk on the snow crust and he wouldn't. And we'd hunt and hunt and hunt and look for signs of deer.

And when we found them, then we started looking for the deer themselves. You actually went after them. And when you found one, killed it, you had to drag it back. Instead of sitting, you all sit in a deer stand.

May I ask you what's wrong with the church in the south? It's used to sitting in deer stands waiting for the target to come by as opposed to going and finding it. I don't know. But anyway, Paul says he's pursuing Christ.

And he lays out several things that are pertinent to us in that. He personally and deeply desires to be with Christ. Remember he said that? I think we heard it. It's better for me to be with Christ, but to stay here is gain for you.

[2 : 12] I would much prefer to be with Him, but I think He's going to make me stay here and be with you for a while longer. I think that's what he's telling me. Janet told me that after I had my surgery.

She says, God's not done with you yet. You're still going to stick around a while. I go, shucks. Paul wants to be with Christ, but he also wants to experience the resurrection.

To know Christ as He, Paul, is known by Christ. He also wants to remain obedient to Christ as His servant. That Christ would be glorified in His walk and His life, in His work and His relationships.

And that brings us to our section, which is 12, the first part of it is 12 through 16. So bring up that slide. 12 through 16. There you go. Now I didn't put the whole thing up there because I wanted you to be able to read what I did put up there.

So what I want you to do is when we read this, to follow through the rest of it, even though it's not on the slide. And he says this, Not that I have already attained this, that is, I have not already been perfected, but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me.

[3 : 26] Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to attain this. Instead, I am single-minded for getting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead with this goal in mind.

I strive toward the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, let those of us who are perfect embrace this point of view. If you think otherwise, God will reveal it to you, the error of your ways.

Nevertheless, let us live up to the standard that we have already attained. Now, I think we first need to understand what he means by not that I have already attained this. It goes back to what Glenn talked about last week.

So, the next slide, please. Where Paul wrote in verses 3, or 10 and 11 of chapter 3, my aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share his sufferings, to be like him in his death, and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead.

See, his aim, his intention is to be like Christ in everything. And he says, I haven't got there yet. I'm not there yet. I'm still a work in progress.

[4 : 38] And that's true of all of us. We're works in progress. You know, we saw a video, I think Mark showed it to us, about the man that God's working on, sculpting.

Some of us are just blocks of stone that have barely been touched, unfortunately. And some of us are more mature. Now, we heard this morning that white hair is a sign of maturity.

So, out of all of us in here, we've got one mature man. I'm still a work in progress. You know, it's still not quite gray.

Not white. He said back in 12, chapter 2, verse 12, next slide. There we go.

He says, So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but even in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with awe and reverence.

[5 : 40] And the part I want you to look at, continue to work out your salvation in awe and reverence. Paul's telling us that he too is working out his salvation.

Now, what he means here is not getting saved. That's not what he's saying. I'm not working out getting saved. That's already happened. That's happened to most of us in here.

We've already come into a relationship with Christ, but we have to work out what that means. What does that salvation look like day to day for the years or the days or the hours or whatever God gives us?

He strives to lay hold of it, to grasp it, the fullness, the purpose of God in Christ for him. Why did God bring him into relationship with him?

That's the question. Why did God bring you into relationship with him? What was his purpose for you to know him and to be found in Christ? You know, a lot of times we think, well, it was to save me, to give me eternal life.

[6 : 46] He loves me. He does those things. But he had a purpose. Why you? Why not someone? Why did you respond and not somebody else?

See, it encompasses all of our being. He wants to bring us into the fullness of Christ. That is, that we should become what Christ is. Not that we become gods. We'll never do that.

but that we might become more of what we are now, what we were supposed to be. We would be perfected. That is, we will become mature. And we use that, the other word for mature is ripe.

You know, but what he really means by that word is complete, whole, fully human the way God intended us to be.

You know, we're just a shadow of what Adam was before he fell. And we have had the effects of all those years of sin in our lives, in the world and around us, molding us into something less than what we're supposed to be.

[7 : 53] God wants to restore us to the fullness of what he intended for us. He wants us to be able to comprehend what that fullness of life in Christ is and to see him face to face.

Remember, Moses asked to see God face to face and what did God say? Not going to happen, Moses. No man can live and see me. But the day's coming that we're going to stand in God's presence face to face with him and live.

And not only live for a little while or a moment but for eternity. Paul wants to deepen his level of understanding and he's reaching out for a closer relationship and a closer understanding of Christ.

And the words he used is really an athletic term to strive for, to grasp hold of, to pursue. And I was thinking of a wrestling match but maybe a better one is a race.

When the race, when the runners get on the starting line, what do they do? They get ready, right? And when the signal goes, they run. Well, how far do they run?

[9 : 07] Around the first corner? It's cross country. Let's go to that. Do they just run down the road a little ways and go, well, that's far enough and quit? No, they keep going. Well, do they run halfway and say, all right, I'll just double my time and that'll work?

No. George is going, yep, that'll work. Why not? No, they run and they run and they run and they run. Now, I've been a cross country runner, not a very good one, when I was a lieutenant. And I can remember the guy, the major that was running us wouldn't tell us how far we were going to run that day and there were days and I'm going, if we run one more step, I'm not going to make it. And suddenly, we'd be at the end. And what you do is, when you run that long distance, what do you look at? Fish. Fish? Fish. Oh, the finish.

Thank you. I thought you said the fish. I'm going, I don't know about that. Yeah, the finish line. You don't look at your feet because if you look at your feet, what are you going to do?

[10:13] You're going to slow down and you're going to feel tired. You're going, I can't put one more foot in front. You look at the finish line and you keep running. You keep moving. It hurts, but you keep moving.

And that's what Paul's picture is. We're pursuing Christ. We're supposed to keep on going. It's not always easy. He's been, you think about Paul's life, what has he been through?

Well, he's been hell on earth, literally, you know? Beaten, shipwrecked, accused, run out of town, imprisoned, some bad, the only thing that hasn't happened to him yet is he hasn't been killed and that's going to happen to him.

What does he say? I count it all joy. Forgetting what's behind me, all that stuff that happened to me, I don't even think about it anymore. I consider everything that's happened and everything I've had as what?

Rubbish. Rubbish. That's a nice way of saying it. We can't use that word in church these days.

Dung. Huh? King James Dung. Dung. That's even a nice, all getting closer.

[11:27] We have to grapple with our opponent, whatever that is that keeps us from pursuing Christ and gaining him.

This is where the wrestling match comes in. You know, when a wrestler wrestles, what does he do? Does he just sort of, well, I got him sort of controlled. I just, no, you're a wrestler.

What'd you do? You went for blood, right? Let's get him on the ground and pin him and look him in the eye and say, ha, ha, ha, ha, I got you. That's the kind of striving that we need to be doing.

We're looking to gain the prize. We're in pursuit of a prize. We have to struggle in life and overcome. We've got to be single-minded.

I can guarantee you that if you're wrestling and you start thinking of that sweet thing that's waiting on the sideline for you, you're going to lose. Both of them, by the way. We have to stay focused on the one thing that we're doing and be aware of our enemies, the Satan, and all the stuff that he's trying to do to distract us and we are to strive after and lay hold of Christ.

[12:44] You see, Paul says, I want to grab a hold of him like he's a grab hold of me. How do I know that Jesus has grabbed hold of me? He said, no one can snatch those that belong to me out of my hand.

No one, nothing, can take us away from him. Now we, on the other hand, tend to be wanderers. We look around and we go, oh, I'm in a hand. I wonder what's out there. And we hang off the edge instead of holding on for dear life.

We've been claimed by Christ as His own. We are His brothers and sisters in the faith. Do you know that? He's the firstborn of many. And Paul wants to take hold of Christ and hold on to Him, serve Him, know Him, proclaim Him until He's taken up or He's made new with the resurrection when Christ comes back.

To attain, to pursue this goal, this aim, Paul says, He has set His mind on what's ahead. He's, all things, He's experienced everything that He could claim as His own, all the honor and the wealth and the ideas of the world, all the possessions He might have had, He's let go.

[14:16] Why? So He can run unencumbered toward Christ. Run the race. Yeah, I remember way back when I had Mike Polito here one time and I had a backpack on him that was full of bricks and the bricks were labeled with things, you know.

And I said, you need, you know, you're going to run. And he goes, I can't run with this on my back. Why? Well, it weighs about 50 pounds. Well, you can run. Well, not very far. Well, let's see what we got in there. And we started taking out all the things that these bricks represented.

Think about that. What in your life is an obstacle toward you pursuing Christ wholeheartedly, single-mindedly, focused on Him? What is it?

We have those things in our lives. We have those things that detract us, pull us away. Probably worse than that, that satisfy us.

Or at least think we're satisfied with. And we don't run. See, Paul calls his prize, the prize that we are supposed to be pursuing, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[15:32] It's not some brass trophy that we can put on a shelf. It's not some ribbon with a medal that we can hang around our neck. It's not even some wreath of laurel like they used to use in the ancient days that they could wear as a crown.

But it's new life fully realized in Christ given to us in the resurrection. We have a taste of that now. Haven't you had that moment when you knew you were new in Christ?

You saw, maybe you saw you were outside in our backyard. I love to sit on our deck because I can see the trees and the birds and all that stuff. What does it remind me? I'm going, this is good.

This is very good. Like Peter says, it's very good for us to be here. Well, this is very good. I enjoy this. But this is just a glimpse. This is just a glimpse of what's going to be ours to enjoy.

A foretaste, a promise of the fullness to come with the resurrection. When we will be made whole and complete. New creatures in Christ. Fully human.

[16:38] Free from the weaknesses of this world. Free from the sorrow and the pain and the sin. And that's what Paul tells us to strive for. He tells the Philippians, He hasn't got there yet. He hasn't made it.

He's not perfect. He hasn't been made new completely. Now, it appears in the text that some thought they had. He says, those of you who think you're perfect, God will show the error of your way.

You know? He said, I'm not there. Surely you're not there either. When is that going to occur? It's going to occur at the resurrection. It's going to be made new creatures in Christ.

So Paul says, keep on going. Don't sit on your laurels. I had an epiphany when I wrote that. I'm going, oh, laurel wreath, laurels. You win, you sit on them. You go, oh, I sit down.

I've won. I don't have to do anymore. No, don't do that. What happens to a laurel wreath, by the way? It rots. It dries up, falls apart, and you end up with a stick. Won't do any good.

[17:43] Let's not slip into complacency, but live daily up to the level of maturity that we've attained in Christ. In this life, in this present body, we'll never get into the fullness.

We'll never know the fullness. We'll never be perfect. We'll always need to seek and to understand and to pursue. And our understanding, to pursue an understanding and a relationship with Christ. It's a race that ends on the deathbed or in the clouds of Christ. Alright, next slide. Paul goes on, verses 17 through 21.

And I warn you, I took the middle out this time. Be imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have an example, us for an example.

For many live, about whom I have often told you, and now with tears tell you, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction.

[18:48] Their God is the belly. They exalt in their shame and think about earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and we also await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of His glorious body by means of that power by which He was able to subject all things to Himself.

So Paul is telling the Philippians, and he is telling us that we should follow His example. And by that, he doesn't mean that I'm perfect, and so you've got to do what I do and be just like me.

He's saying, set your hearts and eyes on the goal, and those goals are not of this world, but goals that will bring life. Fix your eyes on Jesus, on the heavenly calling.

Run with endurance the race set before you. We need to run like we are in a long distance race. Pacing ourselves. Sometimes we have to run a little faster.

Sometimes we have to slow down. You know how bicycle races are done? They have teams, right? How do they know the teams, you know, they work together.

[20:04] They know in advance who they want to win. Did you know that? They figure out who the winning rider in their team is going to be. What do the other bicycles do?

Support. They block. They fix. They draft. Did you know that you get behind somebody that's a group riding bicycles, the guy behind actually has it easier?

He's drafting behind them. Sometimes we have to do that. Who's the leader of our pack? Jesus Christ. We need to keep pace with Him.

When He speeds up, we speed up. When He slows down, we slow down. Why? Because He's our leader. Where's He leading us?

To the new Jerusalem. To new life. The other picture is He's standing on the finish line.

[21 : 01] He runs ahead. He's faster than us. He gets there and He says, Come on! Come on! Come on! Come on! Come on! Don't slow down! Now's the time! We're close to the end. Dash!

Most of us get close to the line where you go. Sit down. Sit down. You know? I'm ready to sit down. I'm 75 years old almost. He says, No!

Don't laugh. Run faster. Run harder. Run with more endurance. Why? Because the end is near. There's work to be done. Things have to be accomplished.

So Paul says, Look around. Follow the examples of those that are more mature in their walk in Christ. Learn. Let them guide you in the walk.

Ask them questions. By the way, we were talking at Sunday school. It's a give and take. Just because you have more experience in living in Christ doesn't mean you have all the answers. Some young buck can walk up to you and ask you a question and teach you a lot about Christ and His love for us and His call on us.

[22 : 06] So it's a give and take. But follow those that have had that steadfastness in their life following Christ. And then Paul warns us.

He says, There are those who may claim Christ. For sure, there are those who deny Him. Whose life, in both cases, are consumed by the things of this world. And he says, They are enemies of Christ.

Christ. Because they bow down to the God of this world. They worship worldly things. They pursue possessions and titles and honors and recognition in this life.

They revile the sinful, shameful things that they have that happen around them and that they're involved in. They seek for themselves a good life.

What they think is a good life. And we should stand in contrast to them. Why? Well, they've made their home in this world.

[23 : 07] And Jesus says, as that happens, your reward has already been given to you. But our reward is in the next world. In the next life. We're only sojourners here.

We're on a journey. There's a song. It's a long and winding road. A difficult and winding road. You know that song? Talking about our life. But we're here for only a short time.

Ecclesiastes says what? The life of a man is like a what? A vapor. Gone. Like the grass in the field. And the sun comes and it wilts.

It's gone. Or in my case, anything I grow in my yard is here today or not tomorrow. The road is marked with struggles and difficulties.

And our rest comes, though, at the end of our journey. We seek a Savior, our Lord, who's coming back for His own. And He will bring judgment and justice.

[24 : 14] He will transform us from lowly, weak, dying bodies to what we have right now. And I tell you what, the older you get, the more you know it, into the likeness of His glorious body.

And He'll take us to our new home where we'll live with Him forever. Learning of Him and enjoying Him for eternity. When we live with this mindset, and that's what we need to get, is this mindset, this purpose, we will find the joy that Glenn spoke of last week.

We will not be brought low by the passing frailties of this life. We will find God's peace and experience His grace fully.

The degree of our commitment, though, often reveals the depth of our love for Him. Which portrays our understanding of the truths found in Christ.

So I invite you, let's stop striving, seeking, and serving, but run together toward our home, encouraging and supporting one another on the way.

[25 : 24] Let's pray.