

Don't Stop Now

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. We're so glad that you've joined us together this morning, wherever you are, and we're going to be in the book of Philippians, chapter number three, and we're going to be looking primarily at the first few verses of chapter number three.

Most people read biographies to satisfy their curiosity about great people, often in hopes to discover the secret of what made them great.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe tells a story about when he was a student in grade school quite a few years ago, that in the assembly they were hearing from an aged doctor, and he said supposedly he was the physician to a United States president at one time, and he said they were all waiting to hear what he had promised as the secret to his long, healthy life.

And as he went through this explanation, he ended up with giving them this advice. The doctor told them, drink eight glasses of water a day. Kind of a big letdown, huh?

Well, in Philippians chapter number three, the apostle Paul is giving us his spiritual biography. He gives us his past in verses one through eleven, his present in verses twelve through verse sixteen, where we're going to be beginning this morning in verses twelve through the first part of verse number thirteen.

[1 : 42] And then in verses seventeen through twenty-one, the apostle Paul talks about his future. Now, we've already met Paul the accountant. He, in effect, in the first few verses was looking at his P&L; sheet, his profit and his loss.

In the loss column, he saw all the things that he had tried to do to gain favor with God at one point in his life. He had looked at his religion. He had looked at the rights that he had gone through as a Jew.

His pedigree, his pedigree, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. As far as zeal, he was persecuting Christians. So all of these things were what he considered to be in his loss column.

Everything that the Judaizers, the ones who had come into the church at Philippi and trying to convince the Philippian Christians that they had to be circumcised in order to be right with God, those were the things that they considered important and really necessary to be right with God. Those things Paul considered to be loss. But in the profit column, or the gain column, the apostle Paul said it was to know Jesus Christ and to know him personally.

[3 : 15] In this section, we're going to be seeing Paul the athlete, where he, with spiritual vigor, is pressing toward the finish line in the Christian race.

Then in the final section, we're going to see the apostle Paul the alien, having his citizenship in heaven and looking for the coming of Jesus Christ.

And in each of these experiences, Paul is exercising what we know as the spiritual mind. He's looking at things on earth from God's perspective, from God's point of view.

As a result, he is not upset by the things behind him. He's not upset by the things around him. And he's not upset about the things before him.

He's not allowing anything to rob him of his joy. In Paul's letters, as we go through the New Testament, we find the apostle Paul using quite a few illustrations to communicate the truth about the Christian life.

[4 : 27] And four of those are fairly prominent. The first is the military, where we're told to put on the whole armor of God.

Then architecture, where he says that we are the temple of God. Then agriculture, he says, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

And then this morning, we're looking at the athletics metaphor or the illustration of athletics. In this paragraph, it's Paul the athlete.

Now, Bible scholars are not sure necessarily what particular event Paul was referring to. It may have been the foot race, where all of the runners were running in each of their lanes. And they were striving to run the race well without getting out of their lane and being disqualified. They were concerned about finishing the race, obviously.

[5 : 27] But they all wanted to win the race. And that would have been the foot race. The other potential event Paul may have been referring to was the Greek chariot race.

Now, this was not necessarily the Greek chariots that we normally envision, like a little box that the charioteer would be in.

Most likely, the chariots that were ridden by the Olympians was merely a small platform with wheels on either side and maybe a small bar for them.

But they were primarily holding on to the reins and had to muscle their way to stay on that little platform to maintain their balance and to control the horses.

The verb in verse 13, reaching forth, literally means stretching as in a race. So it could have referred to maybe stretching out to be the first to cross the tape.

[6 : 35] Or it could have been that stretching out to hold on to the reins. Either way, these were runners, these were Olympians in a race that were striving to reach the goal, striving for the prize that would await them after they crossed the finish line.

What's important to note here in these verses as we are looking at verses 11, verses 12 and following is Paul is not giving us the instructions on how to be saved.

If he were, it would be a picture of salvation by works or self-effort. And this would contradict what he wrote in the first 11 verses, if you remember when we were there in Philippians chapter number 3.

In keeping with his race analogy, in order to compete in the Olympic Games, a person had to be a citizen.

You didn't compete in the Games in order to gain citizenship. You were in the Games merely because you were a citizen and you chose to compete.

[7 : 51] In Philippians chapter 3, in verse number 20, Paul reminds us that our citizenship, our conversation is in heaven. Because we're already children of God through faith in Christ.

And we have the responsibility of running the race, achieving the goals that God has set for us. And this is the graphic picture that we see in verses 12 and 13.

He says, work out, in the previous verses, he said, work out your own salvation. For it is God which worketh in you. So we trust Christ as our Savior.

We're placed in the race of this Christian life. And our goal is to finish the race, to run it well without being disqualified.

Each runner is on the track. Each runner has a special lane in which to run. And each has a goal to achieve. And if we reach the goal the way God has planned for us, then we receive a reward.

[8 : 59] If we fail, we lose the reward. But we don't lose our citizenship. As a matter of fact, I encourage you to read 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 11 through verse 15 for the same idea, only using architecture this time as the symbol.

And I know all of us want to be winning Christians. That's our goal. Hopefully your goal is not just simply not to miss heaven, but that your goal would be to run this Christian race, live this Christian life, so as to please our Heavenly Father, and to fulfill the purposes for which he has called us, which we've been saved.

So what are the essentials? We asked that question this morning. What are the essentials for winning the race and one day receiving the reward that's promised?

We're going to cover the first one of those essentials this morning. So let's read. As we begin this morning, as we read verse number 12 of Philippians chapter number 3, the Bible says, 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.

Verse number 13, brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. We're going to stop right there in the first part of verse number 13.

[10 : 43] He says, not as though I had already attained. This is the statement of a great Christian who never permitted himself to be satisfied with his spiritual attainments.

Obviously, Paul was satisfied with Jesus Christ. We see that in verse number 10, but he was not satisfied with his Christian life.

The first essential that we see in order to be a winning Christian is, and here it is, don't be satisfied with how far you've come.

Don't be satisfied with how far you've come. Now, I know the Apostle Paul has said in another place that he had learned to be content in whatever state that he was in, whether it would be in a difficult time or in a time of plenty.

Paul said, we need to be content. But that's not what Paul is talking about here. Really, what he is talking about is a sanctified dissatisfaction about where he is.

[11:57] He knows that he is not as mature as he needs to be. He knows that he has not reached the state of perfection yet. We cannot reach that perfect state here on planet Earth.

So he has a holy dissatisfaction about where he is. And so this is the first essential to progress in the Christian life. So let's look again at verses 12 and 13.

He says, That's an important part of that verse.

And he says, Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended or laid hold of that goal, laid hold of the prize that is awaiting for me one day.

He was not satisfied with where he was. Henry came out of the manager's office one day with a dismal look on his face.

[13:08] And it was a horrible look. And as a matter of fact, the secretary asked as he left the boss's office, she said, You didn't get fired, did you?

And Henry said, No, it wasn't that bad. But he sure did lay into me about my sales record. I can't figure it out. For the past month, I've been bringing in plenty of orders.

I thought he'd compliment me. But instead, he told me to get with it. Well, later that day, the secretary talked to her boss about Henry.

And the boss chuckled. He said, Henry is one of our best salesmen, and I'd hate to lose him. But he has a tendency to rest on his laurels and be satisfied with his performance.

He went on to say, If I don't get him mad at me once a month, he'd never produce. You know, many Christians are self-satisfied because they compare their running with that of other Christians.

[14:17] They compare their progress or their level of maturity with other Christians. And usually, it's those that are not making as much progress.

Had Paul compared himself with others, he might have been tempted to be proud of what he had accomplished and maybe let up a bit. You know, after all, there weren't too many believers around that could have experienced what Paul had.

So, Paul could have looked at others, rested on his laurels, and said, You know, I believe I've paid enough of a price for this. But Paul didn't compare himself with others.

What he did was, Paul compared himself with himself and with Jesus Christ. So, think about it. If you compare yourself only with yourself, knowing your potential, knowing what you could be doing but are not, and then ultimately comparing yourself with Jesus Christ.

If we do that, we know we're going to miss the mark. What Paul is saying here and what he is doing is, he uses that word perfect in verse number 12.

[15:34] Or, am already perfected. And in verse 15 as well. And I believe those two kind of explains his thinking.

He had not yet reached that state of perfection, verse number 12. But in verse number 15, he says that he is mature.

The same word, perfect. But what he's saying is, he's not yet achieved perfection. But he is perfect. He is mature. And one mark of maturity is the knowledge that we're not perfect. And I think that's one thing that we need to understand.

We know we're not perfect yet. But yet we are mature because we know we're not there yet. And we're still working on it. The mature Christian honestly evaluates himself and herself and strives to do better.

[16:37] Now, often in the Bible, we're warned against a false estimate of our spiritual condition. In the church, for the church at Sardis, they had a name that thou livest and are dead.

In Revelation chapter 3, verse 1. They had a high estimation of themselves, but it was a false estimation. They had a reputation without reality.

The church at Laodicea boasted that it was rich when in God's sight it was wretched, miserable, blind, poor, and naked in Revelation 3.17.

We contrast, in contrast to the Laodicean church, we have the church in Smyrna who thought they were poor when they were really rich in Revelation chapter 2, verse number 9. Then we look at the Old Testament character, Samson. He thought he still had his old power, but in reality, it had departed from him.

[17 : 46] So his estimation of himself was wrong. Now, self-evaluation can be a dangerous thing because we can err in two different directions.

One, we can make ourselves better. Paul had no illusion about himself.

He still had to keep pressing forward in order to lay hold of that which Christ laid hold of him. As we see in verse number 12, he says, It's not that I have already attained or am already perfected, but he says, I press on.

I'm not there yet. I haven't stopped now that I may lay hold of that. We talked about this earlier. Paul said his goal was to lay hold of that which Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus had also laid hold of me. Now, think about it. Not many of us have the same type of conversion experience Paul had. Paul was on the road to Damascus on the way to persecute Christians.

[19 : 09] And a blinding light shone. And Paul was literally knocked off his horse. He was blinded for a while. And God spoke to him.

That was an awesome conversion experience. So God literally laid hold of Paul for a purpose. And Paul was fulfilling that purpose in his life.

So what Paul says, I haven't gotten there yet. I haven't stopped. But my goal is to press on so that I might also, so that I might lay hold of that for which he laid hold of me.

A divine dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress. Bible tells us, As the heart panteth after the water broke, so my soul panteth after thee, O God.

My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. Psalm 42, verses 1 and 2. So, what does this mean?

[20 : 18] Well, first of all, the knowledge that we will never attain perfection in this life shouldn't stop us from moving in that direction.

Then, let's not be comfortable in our ignorance. Thinking we are mature. Thinking we're mature enough. But we're not there yet.

So the whole point of this is, Don't stop now. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, this morning we've, We come to you and we thank you that you are still working in us.

We thank you that you are in control. And that you have laid hold of us for a purpose. Help us to run the race well.

I pray that we may stay in our lane. And we may, every day, be pressing toward the prize, toward the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 21] Lord, please be with everyone. Protect each family. We pray that you would protect us as the body of Christ, the family of God.

And we look forward to all that you're going to accomplish in us and through us. And may you further your word through all means possible. We thank you for this.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless.