

Pressing Forward

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Date: 23 February 2003

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to open your Bibles to Paul's letter to the Philippians. We're looking at chapter 3 from verses 12 to chapter 4, verse 1.

If you are looking at your pure Bibles, it's page 186 in the New Testament section of your pure Bibles. When I was growing up in my home in Nigeria, there were nine of us, nine kids.

We are still nine. And one of the things that kept coming up in my home was the theme of contentment.

I remember my mother always saying to us, you have to be content with what you have. And you have to continue to be content with what you've got.

And this became especially important the nights before my sister and I traveled back to boarding school. Usually the night before I travel back to school, our boxes would be open.

[1 : 23] And our parents would be putting things in those two boxes. And you guess where my eyes would be? In my sister's box. You know, what is going in there that's not going in on my own?

And you don't want to hear the nasty stories of things that I wanted, that I should not have. And usually my mother would give me a lecture on the virtue of contentment.

Contentment. My sister was a little bit more righteous than I was. Contentment is very important.

The Bible commands us to be content with what we have. In fact, the Bible will regard contentment as a virtue, especially with regard to material things for us.

But there is an area of the Christian life in which contentment is not a virtue. In fact, it could be considered a vice.

[2 : 26] It is in the area of our spiritual growth, our spiritual maturity, and in our pursuit of the fullness that we should have in the person of Jesus Christ.

Within the Christian life, there should be no place for contentment with regard to the degree of spiritual attainment. There is no single person that has reached the point in their Christian life where they should be content with what they have with regard to spiritual growth and maturity.

And we see this clearly in the life of Paul the Apostle. Here was a man who had lost everything for the sake of Christ.

He had lost his privileges. He had lost his prestige. He counted everything as loss in order for him to gain Jesus Christ.

And after he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul surrendered everything in order to fulfill the ministry of the gospel.

[3 : 42] If you want to talk about dedication and devotion to Christ, Paul the Apostle was dedicated to him and devoted to him and committed himself to the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

Earlier in the book of Philippians, Paul says, for me to live is Christ. In other words, if you want to talk about life and the meaning of life, if you want to talk about the purpose of life, Jesus Christ is the meaning, is the purpose of my life.

My only ambition in life is to live for Christ, to die for Christ, to proclaim him every moment of my life, to sleep and to rise from sleep for Christ.

Jesus was the center of Paul's life. And yet, as Paul examined his life, he was painfully aware of the fact that he was incomplete.

Verse 12, Not that I have already obtained or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[5 : 00] Jesus Christ has laid hold of me for a purpose. And that purpose is conformity to the person, to the life, to the suffering, to the redemption and to the resurrection that you find in Jesus Christ.

Christ laid hold of me for that purpose or for the purpose of being complete in Christ and not complete in myself. And as I look at myself, though I have received forgiveness of sin, I have the assurance and the certainty of eternal life.

I have the assurance of resurrection, the rest and incompleteness in my conformity to the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

I am not perfect. I have not arrived. It's basically what Paul is saying. He was under no illusion whatsoever that faithful Paul had come to the place of total conformity to Jesus Christ.

And so in his heart, he longed for it. In his heart, he longed to be like Christ. In his heart, he longed to finish this race and receive the prize of the high calling.

[6 : 26] But he was not there yet. I think one of the constant temptations that face you and I as Christians in the 21st century is a temptation to rest on our laurels.

What is the temptation to settle for the least in the Christian life? What is the most common denominator?

What is the most minimal that I can get in my commitment to Christ? That remains a constant temptation for you and I.

And of course, that was a problem with the Pharisees. They wanted to cut corners in their lives. And that continues to be a problem.

You see, what Paul is saying here is that there is still room for progress in the Christian life. God's sanctifying grace is still at work and can be at work in your life and in my life.

[7 : 37] And as long as we are pilgrims, journey into heaven, there is still room and there will be room for greater, further conformity and sanctification in the life of Christ.

And until we get to heaven, we are not there. And we must continue to go and grow with him. And so in the life of Paul, there was no room for complacency.

There was no room for self-sufficiency in the Christian life. And there was no room for standing still. Paul was on the move toward Jesus Christ.

And I really find it amazing that Paul is not doing what you and I would normally do sometimes.

We look at ourselves, we see our spiritual incompleteness. And we sort of acknowledge that I am not perfect.

[8 : 46] You hear that all the time. After all, I'm not perfect. Nobody is perfect. That's a kind of wishy-washy humility, if you let me say that.

Because if it stops at acknowledging that I am not spiritual enough, I am not perfect, it can become a camouflage for complacency.

And that's not what Paul is doing here. Paul is not doing the spiritual thing, saying, I am not perfect. And neither is Paul placing before us noble aspirations about spiritual life.

This is Paul's life. This is his life. This is important for him. And he does something about it. I am incomplete. I am not perfect.

I have not reached the place of total conformity to Christ. I have not yet received the transformation of my body. I have not yet received the resurrection in Jesus Christ.

[9 : 48] And I'm going to do something about it. And there are two things that he does here. The first thing that he does is that he makes a decision to forget the past.

Verse 13. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do. But one thing I do. But one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind.

And straining forward. Paul says, in order for me to arrive at the place for which Jesus has laid hold of me, I need to forget the past.

Forgetting the things that lie behind. When I was in school, in the days when I used to breathe a lot better, when I was young, I'm getting old, I used to be a hundred meter sprinter.

And I remember in those days when it's time to go, you looked toward the finish line. You were not looking sideways. You were not looking backwards.

[10 : 57] You kept your eyes on the prize, the finish line. That's what Paul is talking about here.

That if you and I are going to run the race, the Christian race that is set before us, we need to forget what is behind us.

For Paul the Apostle, he needed to forget his past sins. He started out in a very bad way.

Persecuting Christ. Killing the people of God.

But he felt guilty about it. After he came to know Christ. Paul had to forget his natural privileges and religious attainments.

And he probably needed to let go of his achievements in ministry. And in the Christian life. There was no place for sinful contentment with the present in Paul's life.

He renounced all self-confidence. I want to say to all of us this morning.

[12:04] That in each and every one of us in our lives, looking at the past. There are those things that keep dogging your steps.

There are those things that keep hindering you in your Christian life. Every time you stand before God to pray. Every time you take a step forward. Something begins to pull you back.

You remember your past. Maybe it's your past sins. Your past failures. Because the evil things that you have done. You keep your eyes looking back.

Maybe it's your successes in the Christian life. Maybe it's your privileges that are standing in your way. Paul says if you're going to move forward.

If you're going to reach your goal. You have to forget those things that stand in the way. As obstacles. And hindrances. And I want you to examine your life this morning.

[13:05] What is it that is hindering you? What is the problem? What is it about your present life? That is stopping you from accepting the fullness of the redemption.

The fullness of the forgiveness. The fullness of the power. The fullness of the hope that God has set before you. What is it? And I think some of us here would think about our sins.

And mistakes that you've made. And I think we need to acknowledge. That those are really, really bad. But we are looking at our sins in the light of the cross.

Of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ in his love. Went to the cross. And paid the penalty for our sin. And therefore.

Your sin. Your past sin. And your present sin. Which I repented of. Should not in any way. Stand in the way. Of your relationship with Jesus Christ.

[14:05] I want to speak to you as a pastor. When I go to the hospital. To visit parishioners who are dying. I fully understand.

The fear. None of us have been there before. I have not been there. I still have some fears about death. But what I do not understand. Is the sense of trepidation.

The sense of fear. The sense of dread. In the lives of people that I know are believers. As they begin to look toward. The end of their life. And my point this morning.

Is that there is absolutely no reason. To have that sense of fear. Because Jesus Christ. Has died on the cross. For you and for me. And he has risen from the dead.

We have to forget. Those things. We even have to forget. The things our neighbors. And our spouses tell us. About how wicked we've been. Because your spouse.

[15:07] Did not die on the cross for you. And probably won't. So why bother? We need to look at Jesus.

And be nice to our spouses. And so that's what Paul. Is saying to us here. I also want to speak to us. As a congregation.

If you and I. Are going to reach the goal. To the conformity of Christ. And to the resurrection. The prize of heaven. The crown of eternal life.

If we are going to reach that together. As a congregation. We need to forget. The past. We need to forget. The hurts.

And the injuries. And the evil. That we have done to one another. We need to forgive. One another. And perhaps. There are people sitting in the pews.

[16:06] With you. This Sunday. Or behind you. Or in front of you. Who have hurt you. In different ways. I want to appeal.

To you. This morning. That in order for us. To walk together. As a congregation. To the place. And to do the ministry. For which Christ. Has led hold of us.

As a congregation. We need to forgive. And forget. The past. And move forward. We need to forget. Our successes. In this congregation.

We need to forget. Our reputation. We need. To strengthen. Forward. In order to reach. The place. That Christ. Has called us.

Secondly. Paul says. We need to press on. Verse 12. But I press on. To make it my own. Because Christ.

[17:02] Has made me. His own. Verse 13. Straining forward. To what lies ahead. Verse 14. I press on. Toward the goal.

For the price. Of the upward call. Of God. In Christ. Jesus. Now that we have forgotten. The past. And let God. Deal with the past. Through the cross.

Paul says. We do not need to stand still. We need to press. Forward. And the word. That is used here. Is a word for hunting. It's a word for racing.

It's a word. That talks about. Active. Earnest. Endeavor. In reaching forward. Toward the goal. And what is our goal?

Our goal is to know Christ. It is to serve Christ. It is to proclaim him. It is to participate. In his suffering. And if it's possible. To die for him.

[18 : 01] And it is to receive the prize. Of the resurrection. From the dead. And the crown. Of life everlasting. That is where we are heading. We are heading.

For heaven. In this life. And in the life to come. We are heading. For Jesus Christ. And so what Paul is using here. Is the language of determination. The language of discipline.

I am determined. As I am devoted to Christ. To follow him. And I am going to discipline myself. And be diligent about it. I am not going to let things slide. And the reason is clear.

There will be discouragements. There will be distractions. There will be obstacles. Today and tomorrow. And those things will be coming from Satan. There will be coming from the world.

There will be coming from your flesh. There will be coming from the flesh. Of those around you. These things will try to stop you. From moving forward. There will be storms in your life.

[19 : 03] There will be crisis situations in your life. That may want to stop you from moving forward. But Paul says. We have to press on. It is a commitment.

To Jesus Christ. To press on in Jesus. We have to do that as individuals. We have to do that as a congregation.

We have reached a point. In our life as a congregation. Where if we do not desire to press on. It is going to be a problem.

We have to press on. No matter what happens. To us. As God's people. It is very normal. It is very normal. To suffer for Christ.

That actually is the norm. And if it comes for us all. To suffer for the sake of the gospel. We have to plunge in together. As a congregation. And press forward.

[20 : 03] To the prize of the high calling. Your calling. And my calling. Our calling. Is to know Christ. It is to serve him. It is to proclaim him. Suffer with him.

Participate in his resurrection. And reach heaven. And nothing else. And this is what Paul calls us to imitate. Him. To follow him.

That is the way of maturity. Now is Paul saying. You know. Just tighten up your belt. And struggle on.

In the Christian life. That is partly true. But that is not all that he is saying. I want you to look at verse 12. It says. Not that I have already obtained this.

Or I am already perfect. But I press on. To make it my own. Why? Because Christ. Because Christ. Has made me his own. See.

[20 : 59] We are able to forget. And to press on. Not because we are strong in ourselves. It is because Christ. Has made us his own. Christ has laid hands on you.

He has laid his hands on you. Christ is holding you. And as you forget. And as you press on. His hands. Are holding you strong. And when Jesus is holding you.

Nobody can take you out of his hands. Nobody. Nothing. Has the power. To take you out of his hands. So you are being held.

By him. And not only are you being held. By him. Look at verse 14. I press on toward the goal. For the price of the upward call of God. In Christ Jesus.

Jesus. We are being held by him. And we are being called. By him. Upward. Not sideways. And the call of God.

[21 : 54] Is a powerful call. It is a strong call. There is an upward call. It's not just talking about. Invitation to the gospel. It's talking about. God's powerful call.

Pulling you to himself. And so as you forget. And as you press on. Jesus is holding you. In his hands. And he is pulling you upward. Calling you. Drawing you to himself.

And there is nothing. That can take us away. From that. And so as you press on. As you forget. The things of our past. You are not doing it alone.

Jesus is holding you. He is constantly calling you. By his spirit. That's why he wakes you up at night. And reminds you of things. To draw near to him. Makes you uncomfortable. That's part of his call.

And let us respond to him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 52] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. James.