

Press On!

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[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and let's open them up to the book of Philippians this morning. Book of Philippians, once again, we're about halfway through chapter 3 this morning.

And so, if you would, take your Bibles, open them up to Philippians chapter 3, and we'll be in verse 12, all the way through chapter 4, verse 1. So when you found that in your Bibles, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word today.

Paul says, 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.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

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.

[1 : 41] 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.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. This is God's holy word.

Let's pray once more. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the promises contained here. We thank you for the warnings contained here. We pray now as we study this passage together, Lord, would you help our ears and our minds and our hearts to be attentive to what you would say to us this morning.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. We just sang one of my favorite Christmas hymns, Joy to the World, The Lord Has Come. Let earth receive her King.

Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing. This is my, again, annual petition. I do this every year. Annual petition to sing this hymn year round, not just at Christmas time, because in pinning those words, the author of Joy to the World wasn't thinking about the first coming of Christ.

[2 : 58] He was actually writing about the second coming of Christ. When the Lord, the King, would return and come home and reign as King over all the earth, and the earth would be filled with joy at the arrival of King Jesus.

I, once again, request that we sing Joy to the World year round. Whether or not you realize it, you and I, we live in an incredibly unique period of human history.

We live in between the two advents of Christ Jesus. Here at Christmas time, we celebrate the first coming of Christ, the first advent of Christ, and his coming as a baby, being born in a manger, but also his perfect life, and then his sacrificial death, and then his victorious resurrection, and then his ascension into heaven.

All of that is in the first coming of Christ. That's past. But we also, we look forward to the second coming of Christ. There is an advent yet to come, when we will sing with fullness of joy, joy to the world, the Lord has come.

And so my question for us this morning is, what is life meant to look like for Christians in between the two comings of Christ? What is life meant to look like for you and I in the in between?

[4 : 17] And the Apostle Paul, here in our passage this morning, he speaks to that question, and here's what he says. He says the faithful Christian life in the in between, it looks like working, and it

looks like waiting.

Faithfully, Christians in between the two comings of Christ are called to work hard, and to wait eagerly. Paul wants to make sure, especially after what he's just said in the first half of chapter three, that we understand that how you live in between the two comings of Christ, it truly, actually, really matters.

You may have noticed this, as I read this morning, our passage, that our passage this morning, it picks up in the middle of Paul's train of thought. He's continuing a line of reasoning for us, and so we really need to zoom out and understand the context here of what he's saying.

If you were here last week, then you heard Treg explain from verses two through 11, some of these incredible claims that Paul is making here in the first half of chapter three.

He has said some pretty shocking things to the Philippians, and these are things that if you're just hearing this for the first time, it may be easy to misunderstand.

[5 : 30] These are things that you don't want to just skip right by and not really grasp the meat of what Paul has given to us. Maybe you're here, and you wouldn't necessarily even call yourself a Christian, or maybe this is all kind of new information to you.

I want to encourage you this morning to pay close attention to what Paul is saying here in these verses, because if we misunderstand the gospel, then we can wind up in some pretty dangerous ditches here on either side of the road.

So let's recap what he said last week. Think about this with me. Paul said up in verse three, chapter three, verse three, he said, we put no confidence in the flesh, none, no confidence in the flesh.

You take all of your goodness, you take all of your obedience, you take all of your pride, and you toss it out the window. We put no confidence in the flesh. Not only this, he says to this Gentile church here in Philippi, he says, we are the circumcision, not those who are Jewish by birth only. We are the true heirs of the promises of God. We are the circumcision, not those who have kept the law of circumcision, and not those who insist that we keep the law of circumcision.

[6 : 45] We who know Christ Jesus by faith, we are the circumcision. In fact, he says that all of that, all of my confidence in the flesh, you remember, tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day, Hebrew of Hebrews, Pharisee, as to the law, blameless under the law, all of it, Paul says, all of those trophies on my shelf, he calls it rubbish, compared to knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

Here's the point. Paul says, the only thing that matters is knowing Christ Jesus by faith. The only thing that matters is knowing Christ Jesus by faith.

And this is good news for us, church, isn't it? Because what this means for us is that ultimately, it doesn't matter ultimately what family you were born into. It doesn't matter ultimately how sinful you've been up to this point, or even how obedient you've been up to this point.

It doesn't matter if you would consider yourself religious, or if you would classify yourself as rebellious. Rebellious, the only thing that matters is knowing the Lord Jesus Christ by faith.

Of course, this is at the very heart of the gospel. We need to understand this. By grace, you have been saved by faith, Paul says in Ephesians 2. And this is not your own doing.

[8 : 10] Read that again, and again, and again, and again, until we get it. That is not your own doing. It's not your own doing. It's a gift of God, not by work, so that no man may boast.

You all know how gifts work, right? If not, you got maybe 17 days to figure it out, okay? Gifts, you can't earn a gift. If you earn a gift, it's no longer a gift.

What is it? It's a payment. It's a wage for works done. Paul says salvation is given by God to sinners who are bankrupt and couldn't afford it if they tried.

It's given as a free gift of God's grace through the gift of faith in a Savior who has lived in your place, died in your place, risen in your place, so that by faith in Him, everything He's earned by right is now given to you by grace.

This is the gospel. So Paul says, I want you to understand that because there's two ditches here that we need to avoid. Two ditches.

[9 : 13] Ditch number one on one side of the road. Paul, if that's true, if you already have Jesus' perfection credited to your account, and Paul, if you already know the power of His resurrection, well, then you can just take it easy.

Relax. Coast your way to glory. You're already perfect in Christ. Paul, you said so, so relax. Why are you working so hard? That's ditch number one. Ditch number two on the other side of the road.

Paul, if we're done with the law, if we're done with this whole system of works and earning and doing, if we're covered by grace, we're people of grace, we're saved by grace, we live in God's grace, well, then we're free to just live however we want to live, right?

We can do whatever we want to do and live however we want to live. Paul wants to keep the Philippian church and us this morning, Siwe Bay, right in the middle of the road.

And so he says, again, faithful Christian life here in the in-between, it looks like working and it looks like waiting. Let's see it in our passage here. First, here in the in-between, we are to be working.

[10:34] Look there with me to verse 12 in our passage. Verse 12. Paul wants to make sure to avoid ditch number one and so he clarifies here in verse 12. He says, not that I have already obtained this or that I'm 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.

That doesn't sound like Paul is taking it easy, does it? Paul wants to make it abundantly clear, doesn't he, that grace doesn't produce lazy Christians.

And not if you understand it correctly. Paul says, yes, we are legally, objectively righteous in the sight of God. We are perfect in the sight of God.

We are justified, declared righteous in the sight of God by faith in Christ. Yes, we are spiritually speaking, we are raised up with Christ, raised to walk in newness of life and yet, are you perfect, Christian?

[11:58] Do you still struggle with sin, Christian? Be honest. Do you still wrestle with temptation, Christian? Do you still struggle with anger, Christian? Do you still struggle with the sins of the flesh?

Do you still struggle with weakness? I do. And Paul says, I do. And so he says, no, no, no, I don't coast my way to glory, I press on to make this perfection my own.

See, the Christian life is one of active pursuit of what is already yours in Christ. You hear that? And so we're called to put off the old man and to put on the new man, as we're told in Ephesians chapter 4.

And this is the tension between the already and the not yet, isn't it? In Christ, if you're in Christ, you are already a new creation.

The old is gone, behold, the new has come. And yet, not yet, we await the time when we will finally be a new creation. In Christ, if you know Christ Jesus by faith, you are already declared perfect in the sight of God.

[13:09] And yet, who here is perfect? And yet, we await a final perfection. If you are in Christ by faith, your salvation is secure, you are saved by the grace of God, and yet, not yet, we await a final, perfect, complete salvation at the day of Christ when He returns.

We're here in the already and the not yet in between the two comings of Christ. We look backwards to see what's already done and we look forwards to see not yet. And here in the in between, Paul says, I press on to make the not yet my own right now.

And he gives us two images here, two images here to drive that message home. The first is of a soldier in battle. A soldier in battle. Look to verse 12. The language here in verse 12 is military language.

He says, I press on to make it my own, verse 12. Another way to say that is I pursue it and I overtake it.

This is wartime language. And Paul understands that the view from the air, okay, the view from the air is that the city has been taken, the victory is secured, but he also knows that as a soldier on the ground, it's not time to put away his gun yet.

[14:30] There's still a battle to be fought. There's still dangers out there to be avoided. The soldier on the ground still has to fight even though the view from the air, the battle has been won. So in the same way, Paul can say in the same breath, he says, Christian, the fight's been won already and yet, not yet.

Go fight. Go press on. Go make it your own until he comes again. Image number two is of an athlete in competition. Look there to verse 13.

He says, 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.

This straining forward, pressing on toward a goal, pursuing a prize, that's athlete language, isn't it? Paul knows that the Christian life is a little bit like a race.

Now, I'm not a runner at all. You won't see me running laps anywhere, anytime soon, but I know this, I know you don't ease up after just a few laps of a race, do you? You don't slow down to look behind you.

[15:43] If you do, you're going to get overtaken. If you slow down and think about the last ten steps, that's not what a good runner does. The good runner doesn't think about the steps he's already taken. He thinks about the next step and the next step and the next step and ultimately he's thinking about the prize of completing the race and running that race as fast and as hard and as diligently as he possibly can.

Paul is giving us this image to say, I'm not resting in what I've already done. I press on toward the prize of the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul also knows he's smart like a good coach. He knows that the only way to really motivate Christians like you and me to get up and to work and to press on and to pursue in this way is not just to yell at them to do better.

He gives us both the prize to pursue and the power to pursue it. What's the prize? What's the prize? It's the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

How is that for a goal? New Year's is just around the corner. Some of y'all make some New Year's resolutions. It's a good time to make some goals to evaluate your life and to make a few goals that you might be ambitious towards over the new year.

[17:05] Let's add this one to the list. I want to hear God say to me, well done, good and faithful servant. I want to run the race that's set before me so that at the return of Christ I will hear the voice of the Lord say, this one is mine.

Come into the joy of your master. I want to press on towards glory. I want to press on towards perfection. I want to press on towards resurrection. I want to press on towards Christ.

I don't want to coast my way to glory. I want to make mine what Christ has already purchased for me. How's that for a goal? How will we do it? What's the power?

He says in verse 12. Look there again. I wonder if you caught this. Verse 12. He says, I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Do you hear that? The power for your pursuit of Christ lies entirely in the power of Christ's pursuit of you.

[18:13] This is the only power that we have to run the race that's set before us. You and I have zero power to pursue Christ apart from Christ's pursuit of us.

We got to get this order correct because we don't pursue Christ in order for Christ to make us his own. No, no, no. Paul says, we press on because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

We put on what belongs to us in Christ. We pursue Christ with our lives because Christ has already pursued us with his. And so, Christian, are you pursuing?

Are you pressing forward? Are you straining forward? Are you striving to know more and more and more of the Lord?

Not to earn his favor but because he has come and he has pursued you by the grace of God. The Christian life is to be characterized by working.

[19:14] Paul says in verse 15, let those of us who are mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Do you think this way? It's interesting how he says, let those of us who are mature think this way. Literally, you know what it says, literally, the word there for mature?

It's perfect. Let those of us who are perfect think this way. It's a wordplay. It's the same wording as in Matthew 5:48, where Jesus says, you therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.

Let those of us who are mature, perfect, think this way. So let me sum up point one like this. Paul says, if you are perfect, you will know that you're not perfect.

So because Christ has made you perfect, you press on until you are made perfect at the day of Christ. That's the Christian life here in the in-between. Not only this, second, second, here in the in-between the Christian life is one of waiting.

[20:27] One of waiting. You remember ditch number two, don't you? Ditch number two, I am righteous, objectively righteous, and so I can live however I want. I am covered by the grace of

God.

We are grace people. We live in grace, not by works, and so it doesn't really ultimately matter how I live, right? Paul? Paul says, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Here in the in-between, you are called to live a life of holy waiting.

Holy waiting. You are a servant waiting on your master to return. As you wait, you are, we've already seen this, you're called to work out your salvation with fear and trembling because it's God who works in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

We're to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. Again, not to earn his favor, but because he's come and purchased this for you in Christ. Look there with me starting in verse 17 because Paul contrasts two groups of people here in verses 17 through 21.

There's one group here that walk as enemies of the cross of Christ he says verse 18. And then there's those who walk according to the example of Paul and Timothy verse 17.

[21 : 46] You see the contrast there. He says, brothers join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example that you have in us. That's one way of walking here in the in between.

for many verse 18 of whom I've often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

That's another way of walking here in the in between. And he says, be like this group not like this group. You see the contrast. Be like those who are waiting for the return of Christ not like those who are rebelling.

Don't walk like them. Don't use grace as an excuse to walk in sin. Don't walk like them. Why? Well, look at how he describes this first group of people here.

And I want you to ask yourself as we walk through this, ask yourself, does any of this describe me? He says, they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

[22 : 50] This is the dividing line between all people. Which side of the cross of Christ are you on? Do you look at the cross of Christ where Jesus paid for the sins of his people?

Where Jesus bore the wrath of God against our sin? Where the perfect son of God was made sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God?

Do you look at the cross of Christ and say, yes, that's my only hope. That's my only hope for good standing and salvation and righteousness. That's my only hope to know God.

That's my only hope to be washed clean of my sin. Do you look at that and cling to the cross and say, that's life for me? Or do you look at the cross of Christ and say, it's not for me.

I could take it or leave it. It's nothing special to me. It's just some religious stuff. I've heard it before. I'm not impressed. You need to know that if that's how you feel, you are not neutral.

[23 : 58] Paul says, you are an enemy of the cross of Christ. And as an enemy of the cross of Christ, you are an enemy of the living God. Paul says, many are walking this way. And he says it with tears.

Don't walk this way. Don't walk this way. I'm begging you, if you are here as an enemy of the cross of Christ, do not leave here thinking that you are neutral and all is well.

Do not walk this way. He says this first group of people has their minds set on earthly things.

They're consumed with earthly things. And you and I know this as well as I do. It's far too easy as we wait on the return of Christ that we can't see, that we don't know when it's coming, it's mysterious, it's invisible to us, it's far too easy for us to be distracted by things that we can see, that we can taste, and that we can touch with our hands, that's visible and tangible here.

Waiting on his return, it means fixing your eyes there on him, not on things here on the earth. Set your mind on Christ, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[25 : 17] Take your eyes off of earthly things and fix your eyes on Christ. Don't consume yourself with stress and with worry about things that are just going to be burned up like chaff on the last day.

This is why Paul calls us in chapter 4 verse 8. Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Don't think so much about money. Don't think so much about sex. Don't think so much about pleasure. Don't think so much about entertainment.

Don't think so much about earthly things. Fix your mind on Christ. Not only this, Paul says also, that they glory in their shame.

The things that they ought to be ashamed of, they celebrate. How many beers can I drink? How many women can I sleep with? How much money can I hide from the tax man?

[26 : 29] what are you glorying in now that you will be ashamed of at the day of Christ? And he says here, their God is their belly.

Now he didn't have to do this right at the holiday season. I didn't plan this. But in God's providence, here we are, right? Here's the idea. They give their appetite whatever it wants.

They serve their appetite and feed it whatever it wants. That belly rules their life. They are slaves to their physical cravings. It makes it a God.

The end of all of this, Paul says again with tears, with tears, he says the end of all of this is destruction. Friend, I'll ask you again. Are you headed for destruction?

Don't leave this place headed for destruction. temptation. Here in between we live in a time of God's mercy and grace towards sinners.

[27 : 32] This invitation of the cross of Christ is for you. Praise God that you're here to hear it this morning. God says turn from your sin, repent and put your faith in Christ and you too will live.

Don't walk this way. Don't walk this way. Instead, Paul says, instead walk like this. Walk like those who are waiting.

for his return. Walk like those who know the king is coming soon. Walk like those who know that the Lord is coming and with him. He's wrath for his enemies and life for his people.

He says in verse 17, he says, walk like me. Now that's a bold thing to say. For somebody who just says, no, I'm not perfect. He's not saying I'm perfect, so imitate me completely.

He says, I am trying my darndest to follow Christ. I'm pursuing it with everything I have. Don't look at me as a savior, but look at me as an example. Walk like me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to our example.

[28 : 35] Look how I'm living. I believe in grace. Don't you think Paul knows a thing or two about grace? He says, I believe that I am totally justified. I believe that I have Christ's righteousness in full right now, that I am objectively perfect, and yet look at me.

I am straining forwards towards this perfection ahead of me. I am pressing on to know the Lord.

Look at me and imitate my example. Live waiting on the return of Christ.

This first group of people belongs to the world. They're headed for destruction, but he says, here's the contrast. You, Christian, look there to verse 20. Here's the contrast. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, 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.

Church, would you just do one thing for me this week? Would you memorize that verse? Would you commit this verse to memory? Would you meditate on it and think on it?

Because in this verse, Paul, he gives us a picture of what we are waiting for. He says, here in the in-between, we are waiting for home.

[30 : 03] However good your earthly home is on this side of eternity, listen, there is a much better, more permanent, more lasting, more glorious home ahead of you. However difficult your home life is, maybe your family is difficult, maybe there's tensions in the home, maybe you grew up in a broken home, put your faith and your hope in a coming, permanent home for all those who know the Lord.

Paul says your citizenship in Philippi, your citizenship in America, all of that is very, very temporary, it's fading away, it's momentary, you are citizens and saints of an eternal kingdom of glory to come. It's hard to imagine anything like this, isn't it? A home that's imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, Peter says.

A home that's free from the shackles of sin and death, but Paul says it's ahead of you and in order for you to receive it, guess what? You too must be made imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and you too must be freed from the shackles of sin and death.

And so Paul says ahead of you Christian, guess what? We're waiting for the transformation of our bodies. We're waiting for transformation. I heard a conversation, overheard a conversation the other day between two children, I won't tell you again which children they were, and one asked the other, if you could only have one thing for Christmas, for the rest of your life, what would it be?

[31 : 45] And the kid thought about it and then he said, I want to be able to drive, and then I want a cyber truck. He understood something very important that we need to understand, church, which is this, just a cyber truck, that's no good for a kid, is it?

He has to be made fit, has to be made capable of enjoying the gift. He has to be qualified and transformed in some way so that he can actually receive it and enjoy it and not just look at it. In the same way, Paul is telling us that eternity with God, this promise of a forever home free from sin, this promise of eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ, we can't enjoy it in this physical fleshly body that we have right now.

This body is prone to decay and corruption, it's weak, it's perishable, but good news, Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, he has been raised with an imperishable glorious body, and he says if you are united to me by faith, guess what?

You get one too. You will be transformed to be made like him. You will be made fit to enjoy eternity with him.

[33 : 08] Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, so also we will bear the image of the man of heaven. But friend, that's not even the best part. What are we waiting for? Ultimately, church, we are waiting for King Jesus.

We are waiting for Christ Jesus himself. Our citizenship, is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, more precious than a forever home, more valuable than an undying glorified body.

Christ himself is the greatest treasure of heaven. We are waiting for the return of Christ that we might see him and we might know him in full, that we might be with him forever.

That's what we're waiting for, and so here in between, that's what we are to pursue right now. Are you waiting for him?

Are you pressing on to know him, the power of his resurrection right now? Church, this Christmas season as we sing and as we think about the first coming of Christ, all the years of waiting and longing and anticipating this fulfillment of God's promises and the coming of Christ, please don't just leave it there.

[34 : 31] I want you to sing and to worship and to long for and to wait on the time when he will come again, when in fullness together we'll sing joy to the world, the Lord has come.

Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room in heaven and nature sing. O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

Come thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free. From our fears and sins, release us. Let us find our rest in thee.

Father, we praise you for what you've done in the first coming of Christ. We praise you for the cross of Christ. And we praise you for the certain return of Christ and for the kingdom to come, of which we are citizens and saints if we know him by faith right now.

And so we pray, Lord, for those of us that have been saved by grace through faith, would you lead us to press on, lead us to persevere, lead us to press on to make that perfection and righteousness ours that already belongs to us in Christ.

[35 : 54] And for those of us who are walking now as enemies of the cross of Christ, would you cause us this moment to repent and put our faith in a holy savior who loves us and loves sinners like us, came for sinners like us.

We love you, Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.