Philippians 3:12-21 (New Year's Eve)

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[0:00] Around the world and over the course of history, nations and cultures have recognized the passing of the year at different times. Even today, China and Korea celebrate Lunar New Year, usually in February.

In northeast India, they celebrate the New Year in April. The Jewish and Ethiopian calendars place the New Year in the fall, usually September. But nearly every culture at some time or another, in some way or another, marks the passing of a year.
And this shouldn't be a surprise. In Genesis, the account of creation, it says, God appointed the lights in the sky to be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years.
And so, I think it's appropriate, it's even part of God's design for us as God's creatures to recognize the end of a year, to reflect upon the past, to look ahead into the future, to acknowledge God who is sovereign over the times and seasons and to rest in His unchanging character.
So, as we prepare to enter into a new year, I want to look at Philippians 3, verses 12 to 21. As we read Paul's words to the church in Philippi and the Holy Spirit's words to God's people through the ages, I want us to consider how God is preparing us here in this church for the year to come.
[1:16] So, let's read together Philippians 3, beginning at verse 12. Paul says this, It's 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.
Let those of us who are mature think this way. And if 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. 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.
[3:02] So this summer, my seven-year-old son Nathan and I hiked to the top of Mount Mananok. We did so along with a married couple and their two children who were five and three.

So we were a motley crew. Mount Mananok, if you've ever hiked it, it's one of the more accessible mountains in New Haven. It's just about three hours from here, less than two hours from Boston. And so many people make the trek. It's actually the third most climbed mountain in the world. 125,000 people per year make it to the top. And the top is completely bare.
It's just above the tree line. So on a clear day, you can see into all six New England states. It's the only place where you can do that. You can even see the skyline of Boston, which is about 60 miles away.
So it's a neat climb. But the thing about Mananok is despite its popularity and its apparent accessibility, there is no easy trail to the top.
[4:02] Any trail that you take includes at least a couple of sections that are quite steep where you're scrambling up the side of rocks that are slippery when wet. And the weather is not predictable either.

We hiked in the middle of July, and it was cloudy and foggy and 50 degrees. Now, when you're hiking up a mountain with a group of other people, there are at least three dangers that can hinder

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your progress.
First off, you can get distracted. You can waste energy on all kinds of irrelevant things, like answering text messages that periodically come through on your phone from the intermittent cell reception.
Or you can take a detour. Ah, this trail's too busy. Let's make our own path through the wilderness. Ah, this trail keeps on winding back and forth. Let's just do a straight shot.
But sometimes a detour leads to a dead end. Or third, you can get discouraged and despair. At least three times on our summer hike, someone or other in our group said, this hike is way too long. [5:08] We should just turn around and go down. Now, what we see in Paul's letters to the Philippians is that the Christian life is a lot like climbing a mountain with a group of friends.

Paul compares the Christian life to an upward call into a difficult journey that leads to a prize of all surpassing value at the end. Verse 12 to 14, Paul reminds us of the goal.
We've been called to pursue the mountain we're seeking to climb together. And then in the rest of the passage, he warns us against distractions. Verse 15 to 17, against detours. Verse 18 and 19, and against discouragement.
Verses 20 to 21. So, that's what we're going to look at this morning. The Apostle Paul is like our team captain. He's leading the way, setting the pace, and keeping us focused. So, first look with me at verse 12 to 14, where Paul lays out the mountain that we're seeking to climb.
And Paul begins verse 12 and verse 13. They're sort of parallel verses that basically repeat themselves. But he begins both verses by saying, I'm not there yet. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect.
[6:19] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But then Paul continues saying, I press on. That's actually the main verb in both sentences.

Verse 12 and verse 13 and 14, that's what he says. It's the same verb. I press on. And you might say, well, okay, what exactly haven't you reached yet, but you're pressing on to?
What is this and it that you keep saying? And Paul, if you look back in verses 8 to 11, Paul really brings that out a little bit.
And Paul says his great desire, the end of verse 8 is that he might, or the beginning of verse 8, he says, the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. The end of verse 8, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.
Verse 10, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection. And may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death. So, in summary, what's the mountain that Paul is climbing?
[7:18] It's knowing and belonging to Jesus and therefore becoming like Him as a result. That's what he's pressing on towards, is Christ-likeness as a result of being in Christ.

Now, to some of us, the way Paul begins these verses might surprise us by saying, I'm not there yet, because think about all that Paul has already achieved at this point in his life.
Paul, you know, by the time Paul wrote the book of Philippians, he was an apostle who had traveled the world, preaching the gospel, and planting new churches. He was a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus. He had been persecuted, and he was persevering. He was already a prominent intellectual in the ancient world, right? Several of his writings would become part of the New Testament, which is the all-time bestseller. And he had already had powerful spiritual experiences. He had prophesied, he had performed miracles, he had spoken in tongues, he'd even had a vision of the third heaven, and all by the power of the Spirit. And you might look at Paul and say, wow, if I had experienced or achieved all those things, I would feel like I'm there. I mean, what more can you do? How much further can you get? But Paul says, no, even though I've done all these things, I haven't yet reached my goal. I'm still pressing on. And I can press on with confidence, he says, not because of all these things I've already achieved or experienced. Really, he would say, those are God's gifts of grace to me. But he says, I press on by and in Christ Jesus. Verse 12 and verse 14 end in the same way. They end with the word Christ Jesus. So, the ESV translates verse 12, because Christ Jesus had made me His own. You could also translate it, because I have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. That's literally the order of the words, by Christ Jesus. And then verse 14 ends in Christ Jesus. So, it's by Christ Jesus and in Christ Jesus that he's pressing on toward this goal. He's saying, Jesus has called me. He's called me upward. He's raised me from death to life, so I'm going to press on and onward and upward toward that great goal that He has for me of knowing and belonging to Him and therefore becoming like Him. And of course, this is not just Paul's great ambition. It's God's great purpose for every believer in Jesus Christ. This is not just his

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own journey. It is our journey. It is the pilgrim pathway that every true Christian is on. This is the mountain that God has appointed for us to climb together as a family of believers in Jesus Christ. So, having set that out, in the rest of the passage, Paul warns us against distractions, detours, and discouragement. So, let's look at these sections one by one. Number one, verse 15 to 17, Paul says, don't be distracted. Rather, stay focused. Now, in these verses, Paul speaks as a friend, as a fellow traveler. He's not just a coach looking on from the sidelines. He's not just giving advice from far away through a walkie-talkie system. He's like a team captain. He's walking with us. He's on the same journey with us, and he's setting the pace for us. So, verse 15 and 16, he says, 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.

Now, this is an interesting way that Paul speaks here because there are other places in his letters, and even in verse 18 and 19, which we'll get to in a minute, but there are other places in Paul's letters where Paul strongly rebukes people who think and act differently. That is, in ways that are not in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, Galatians 5, he says, for freedom Christ has set us free.

[11:27] Don't submit again. Don't let yourself be bound by a yoke of slavery, right? Don't go back to your old ways of works righteousness and cling to the law. 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says, flee from sexual immorality.

1 Corinthians 10, he says, flee from idolatry. Run away from these things. Don't compromise with them. But here, he speaks differently. He says, if in some way you think differently than I do, God will make it clear. Just keep the main thing the main thing. Let's live up to what we've already attained. People debate what might have been the issue Paul was addressing. Perhaps there were some people in the church in Philippi who maybe there was a difference in what degree of sanctification was possible to achieve, and Paul's sort of saying, let's not get hung up on how we define that. Let's just focus on growing in Christlikeness. But whatever the issue might be, Paul's approach here is, don't be distracted. Stay focused on the main thing. Keep the main thing the main thing. The rest of the puzzle pieces will fall into place. Paul addresses an issue in a similar way in chapter 4, verses 2 and 3, if you turn over the page. He addresses two women in the church who had had some kind of public disagreement, it seems. And he writes this. He says, I entreat you, Odia, and I entreat Syntici to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together, whose names are in the book of life. Now, Paul's addressing an issue where two sisters in Christ don't agree, and they're part of the church, but he doesn't even say what they don't agree about. He just says, I urge you to agree in the Lord and help these women out. They're both co-laborers in Christ. Both of their names are in the book of life. They're very clearly on the same team.

They just need a little help to come to terms with one another and act like teammates and not competitors to recognize that what they share in common is far more important than whatever they disagree about. And this is a relevant word of encouragement to us as a church. We might summarize it as, some things are worth fighting over and some things aren't. Right? Think of it practically. How many marital conflicts start with minor disagreements or external stressors that somehow turn into massive fights? Right? My wife and I would freely admit perhaps half of our quarrels fall in this category. Things that if we thought about them with a clear head the next day, it wasn't worth arguing over. Right? And sometimes that can happen in the church, right? How many fractured Christian relationships have occurred because people have quarreled over minor differences? Secondary doctrines or strategic emphasis that don't undermine the gospel of Christ. And over time we've failed to do what

Scripture clearly tells us to do. Things like be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to get angry. Paul's saying, brothers and sisters, our goal is to know and become like Christ. And where the Bible's clear, we want to be clear because the Bible, the entire Bible, is God's Word to us and for us. But if we don't see eye to eye about everything, or if we seek to apply the same biblical principles in slightly different ways, God will sort that out over time. Let's just fix our eyes on Him. So what are some potential distractions on our horizon as a church in 2018? Let me name a few. Number one, the parking lot that most of us use on Sundays will soon become a construction site. [15:18] Now that may be annoying and disruptive. But in the end, we'll have a new neighborhood of people in our backyard. This could be a gospel opportunity. Second, as a church, we're considering a potential building project to knock down that garage and build something there, some

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more classroom space and multi-purpose space. Now the building committee is diligently working with local architects to develop a design proposal, and then we're going to consider that. And we haven't made any decisions yet, but the elders and the congregation are going to consider that in this new year. If we move forward, that will require time, energy, flexibility, and money. Now yes, a building is a potential distraction, but in the long run we believe it could facilitate even greater gospel ministry opportunities.

Third, even more, we're considering moving to two morning services. Not right away, okay, but perhaps sometime in this year because our sanctuary is regularly full on Sunday mornings, unlike today, right? Holidays are holidays, right? We're glad that you're here.
So that would be a shift for us, right? We wouldn't all be in the same place at the same time every week. We'd need many more ushers and greeters and many more children's ministry volunteers. We might be asking some of you. We've already asked some of you to join those rotations so that they can have plenty of backups. But we're considering that switch even though it brings along its share of potential distractions and sort of practical issues, but we're considering that to make space for more people to come to know Christ and belong to Christ and become like Christ. And so whatever we do in all of these areas, whether they all happen or they all get postponed or something else comes our way that we can't foresee at all right now, let's not be distracted. Let's keep…let's deal with the minor issues, deal with the little logistical details and the issues where we might not always see eye to eye on which is the right strategic call to make, but let's stay focused on our gospel mission.
J.C. Ryle put it this way. He said, let Christ and His person be the son of our system. Let the main desire of our souls be to live the life of faith in Him and daily know Him better. And in all the things we do, let's make that our great ambition and goal. So that's the first point. Let's not be distracted. Let's rather stay focused. But then in verse 18 and 19, Paul gives a more pointed warning.
Verses 15 to 17 are a friendly encouragement. Verses 17 to 19 are more of a sober warning. It says, brothers and sisters, join in imitating me and keep your eyes, again, keep focused on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I've 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 their mindset on earthly things. You see, knowing Christ means not just enjoying the power of His resurrection, but also sharing in His sufferings. [18:45] As verse 10 said, and Jesus Himself said, if anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. In other words, becoming like Christ means dying to our selfish impulses, to our ungodly habits, to our self-centered ways of thinking. Look up at verses 5 and 6 in this chapter. Paul lists not just his past sins, but he lists some of his inherited privileges.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. He comes from this sort of privileged pedigree. And then he lists some of his earned qualifications as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. And then in Paul says, verse 7, Paul says, but whatever gain I had, all my inherited privileges, all my earned qualifications, I count it loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.
What's Paul saying here? Paul's saying, I'm willing to let everything else go for Jesus' sake. Not just the bad things, the obvious sins, but even my inherited privileges, even my earned qualifications, I'm holding on to them loosely, and I'm willing to surrender them for the sake of Christ. And I value them far less than I value Christ. And even comparing them to Christ, he says they're rubbish and garbage. Now, what's the problem with the people in verses 18 and 19? The problem with the people Paul refers to here is that they're not willing to walk in that way of the cross. They're not willing to deny themselves in order to follow Christ.
They weren't necessarily persecuting Christians. Some of these might have even have claimed to be Christians, but they were not willing to take up their cross and follow Christ. Paul says their God is their belly. In other words, they ordered their life around their bodily appetites, whether it's for food or sex or comfort. They glory in their shame. They not only persist in attitudes and actions, they dishonor God. They glory in these very things. And Paul says their minds are set on earthly things.
They've taken a detour off the difficult path of the cross toward a seemingly easier way, but that detour, Paul says, will only lead to a dead end. Because these people are unwilling to die to

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themselves and to their sin, they will never truly live. They will never experience the resurrecting and transforming power of Christ. They will never enter into God's new world. Paul says their end is destruction. And Paul weeps as he gives this warning. Paul doesn't speak with gleeful pride, but with tears about the coming judgment of God and the eternal destruction of those who have forsaken the path of Christ. Paul warns against this. Paul warns against this because it's very real, but he warns against it with tears. And he says to the Philippians, and God says to us, beware of being drawn into these self-centered, earthly-minded patterns. Don't follow people like these. Don't turn aside to a detour that seems easier but is clearly off the path of the cross of Christ.
Now, what might we as a church need to heed from Paul's warning in these verses? Number one, two things. Number one, we need to be a church that consistently walks in the way of the cross and calls one another into it, into the way of the cross. Somewhere in the history of American Christianity, we have got the idea that we can pursue Christ wholeheartedly, and it shouldn't really cost us anything in this life. Or that living in America should make it easy for us to be a follower of Christ. That Christians should have the best of both worlds.
[23:24] Jesus never said that. If you read the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ calls all of His disciples into a difficult and countercultural way of life.

Extending forgiveness instead of holding on to bitterness toward those who have hurt us. Telling the truth even when it hurts rather than being evasive and slippery.
Sexual purity in body and mind. Faithful, self-sacrificial love in marriage and God-centered celibacy and singleness. Detachment from worldly possessions and generosity with them.
Brothers and sisters, we need to remind each other that the Christian way is hard and countercultural in all of these ways and more. G.K. Chesterton said, the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.
Paul says, beware of the allure of the seemingly easier path that leads only to spiritual destruction in the end. So second, so first, we need to walk in the way of the cross consistently in all of the ways that Jesus calls us to. But second, positively, consider what Paul says in verse 17. He says, brothers and sisters, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. You see, the way we learn to walk in the way of the cross is by following others who are cutting that same path. The only reason that we made it to the top of Mount Mananok is because thousands of people had gone before us and cut that path and made the trail signs and kept the trail signs and kept the way clear. If no one had made a path, we wouldn't have got anywhere. And as Christians, the way we learn to walk in the way of the cross is by following others who have gone along that same path, following our King. You see, the Christian way of life is not just taught in principle. It's also caught by example. What does that look like? Well, you learn what it means to forgive when you see someone else who has been wronged pursue reconciliation with truth and humility and sincerity. You learn how to show hospitality when someone else opens their home to you in a gracious and unpretentious way. You learn how to pray in part by praying with others, by hearing others pray, and by voicing your prayers with another Christian who can say amen and who can join with you in that prayer. You grow into a more godly husband, wife, or parent when you see up close other husbands who love their wives, other wives who respect their husbands, other parents who build intentionally into their children. We don't learn these things just alone.
[26:43] We need to be in each other's lives. And this is important in our increasingly fragmented world. You know, more and more adults, especially men, I would say, have no real friends who can speak into their lives. Now, women are more likely to have friends, but do your friends actually challenge you or do they only affirm and sympathize with you? And then some of us spend so much time on social media that we effectively distance ourselves from flesh and blood people who really know us and can speak into our lives in those deeper ways that we desperately need and sometimes don't want.

But we desperately need that. Let me challenge you as you head into this new year. Find two or three other Christians whose examples you're actively seeking to learn from in some way or other. Find two or three other Christians that you can model yourself after in some respect. It doesn't mean you need to mimic them in every respect. It doesn't mean that you'll find one mentor who can speak comprehensively into every single area of your life. Only Jesus really fits that bill.
Sometimes we have such exalted ideas of the friend or mentor that we long for, and nobody ever lives up to them because really we're looking for Jesus. And in that way, we need to lean on Him,

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but we need to lean on brothers and sisters in Christ whose examples we can respect as godly and emulate and model ourselves after in some way. Just like you follow somebody else on a treacherous path through the wilderness that you haven't journeyed before. And that's why God gives us each other and calls us to meet together every week and calls us to be part of each other's lives.
Maybe that's through a small group. Maybe that's through some other way. But to be part of each other's lives, praying with one another, being in each other's homes, spending time with each other, talking about what we're learning and issues and questions and prayer requests and all kinds of things.
[29:02] So find some Christians whose examples you can seek to follow and then make it your aim to set an example for others. To be able to say with Paul, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.

Paul said that. Can you say that? Paul didn't just say that because he was an apostle. The reality is somebody's probably looking to your example that you don't even realize.
You're setting an example one way or the other already. So Paul says, is that an example for Christ? Christ. So we've seen Paul's encouragement not to be distracted.
We've seen his warning not to take a detour, but rather stay on the path of the cross. And finally, Paul concludes with a word of hope. Verse 20 and 21, don't despair, rather persevere.
Our citizenship is in heaven, Paul says, 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.
[30:08] Now, Paul uses the language of citizenship. And for the people in Philippi, that would have struck a deep chord. Because if you were a citizen in Philippi, you had special privileges.

You had all the privileges that Roman citizens had, citizens of the capital city of Rome. So you could, that means you had tax privileges, you were exempt from certain taxes, you had property privilege, you had special rights, you had legal privileges, you could appeal directly to Caesar for legal or military aid.
So if a band of marauders attacked Philippi, they could send word to the emperor and he would send his troops and protect them. So as citizens of Rome and Philippi, they had many privileges and they had the responsibility of extending Roman rule and Roman language, Roman culture, and Roman ideals to their region.
Now what Paul says to the Christians in Philippi, he says, you may have a great responsibility and privilege in your earthly citizenship, but far more important and far more enduring is your heavenly citizenship.
You are citizens of the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ who reigns as Savior and Lord and whose kingdom will never end. While we still live on earth, we have a responsibility to extend the joy and peace and beauty of heaven into this dark and chaotic and confused world.
[31:38] But as citizens of heaven, we also have a great privilege that we can call upon our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will send help to us. He hears us, that we can call upon him confidently as citizens in his kingdom, that we belong to him, that he's placed a stamp of approval on us in Christ by simply trusting in Christ.

We can appeal to him for help at any time in prayer. And one day in the future, King Jesus will come and he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.
He will rescue us from all our enemies, and we will see him face to face and reign with him on the earth. Brothers and sisters, this is a wonderful truth that we can hold onto in uncertain times.
You know, 2017 has been a tumultuous year on the national and international scene. Many things seem uncertain, troubled, troubling, easily shaken.
But Paul's saying, Christians have a rock-solid hope that is not subject to the shifting winds of politics and economics and all the other things that happen in this world.
[32:54] And we can speak this hope to one another. Children, no matter how young you are, if you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, you can know that he is with you every moment of the day.

You can know his love and his presence and that he will never leave you. From the youngest age until you, to the oldest, senior citizens, and everyone in between.

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If you're starting to think about that you may not have that much longer on this earth, this hope remains.
You can stake your claim on it. At whatever age and stage you are, whether you're in the, excuse me, whether you're in the prime of your life or whether you're beset by illness and difficulty, this hope is what you can plant your flag in.
That you are citizens of heaven. You belong to your Savior and that he hears your cries. And this is our hope.
[34:06] This is the hope that will stand the test of time. If you're discouraged, if you're despairing, if you're ready to just give up and turn around and go back, remember that the best is always yet to come.

Following Jesus is hard. There's no smooth and easy trail up to heaven. There are always plenty of distractions along the way that can suck away our time and energy and focus.
And we can get turned around. There are detours that seem easier, that seem more alluring, but in the end only lead to dead ends. The only way onward and upward is to take up our cross.
Sometimes it feels like clambering up slippery rock or wading through a muddy swamp. Maybe you want to give up, but Paul says you're citizens of heaven and one day Jesus will come.
And you have a promise from your faithful Savior that he will take your aching and weary and weak and sinful body and make it glorious and strong and solid and everlasting.
[35:13] And that promise won't change no matter how bad you feel, no matter how bleak the trail seems, no matter how alone you feel. He will come and rescue you. And you will one day reach the summit where you will see him face to face.

The one who has blazed the trail in the first place through his own death and resurrection, that he made a trail where there was no trail and that he sent his Holy Spirit to accompany you and strengthen you and equip you every step of the way.
He has taken hold of you so that you might take hold of him and know and enjoy him and become like him forever. That's the Christian hope.
If you're not a Christian, that's the hope that's on offer to you through Jesus Christ who died for your sins and rose again from the dead. If you put your trust and faith in him, you can know this hope too and you can begin that journey of walking with him and becoming like him by his grace.
Martin Luther put it this way. He said, this life, this life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth and righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise.
[36:37] We are not yet what we shall be, but we are going toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.

Brothers and sisters, may we as a church shine brightly with this glorious and undiluted hope. Let me conclude with the words of Augustine from his book, The City of God, talking about the hope of eternity that we have.
He wrote, how great shall be that happiness which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good, which shall afford leisure for the praises of God who shall be all in all.
True honor shall be there in the everlasting city of God, for none but the worthy shall be there. True peace shall be there where no one shall suffer opposition either from himself or any other.
God himself, who is the author of virtue, shall there be its reward, satisfaction, life and health and nourishment and plenty and glory and honor and peace and all good things.
[37:54] He shall be the end of our desires, who shall be seen without end, loved without satiation, praised without weariness. There shall be accomplished the words of the psalm, be still and know that I am God.

For there shall be the great Sabbath, the great day of rest which has no end. For we shall ourselves be the seventh day when we shall be filled and replenished with God's blessing and sanctification.
There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end.
That is the Christian hope that overcomes discouragement and despair. And it's the strongest reason of all why we can press on in this new year toward knowing Christ more deeply and becoming like him more completely.
Let's pray. Our God and Father, we thank you for this upward call that we have in Jesus Christ, that you have called us into this journey together.

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[39:10] With you, our Savior, with one another as brothers and sisters, we pray that we would press on toward the goal of knowing Christ, of becoming like Christ.

We pray that you would strengthen us to resist distractions, but keep our focus on you to resist detours that only lead to dead ends.
Lord, give us strength to walk in the way of the cross and defend us from discouragement and despair. Lord, give us this everlasting hope, this secure hope that is from you.
We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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