

Jesus: The One Thing

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[0 : 00] It is a great blessing to have such wonderful musicians in our midst to lead us in worship, isn't it? This morning I want to begin by asking you a question.

What is your one thing? What is the one thing that you are known for? What is the driving passion of your life?

What is the priority that pushes all others to a secondary status? What is it that you spend your discretionary time and money and attention on?

What is it that wakes you up in the morning thinking about it? What is it that helps you persevere through the difficulties and trials? What is your one thing that not only drives you but organizes your life?

The thing that you shape your life around? It might be lots of things for us. It might be something cultural like you're a Giants fan or you love the Marvel Universe or even J.A.R. Tolkien.

[1 : 11] That's almost worth it. Some things are global like you're determined to try to cure a disease or to bring clean water to needy communities.

Maybe they're more local like building your family or supporting a local cancer fundraiser. Some of them honestly are self-centered.

I want success in my career, early retirement, and a life of leisure. Some are altruistic. I want to spend my life teaching underprivileged kids or caring for the elderly.

Some of them may be overtly spiritual. I want to write a book that will help others start a new gospel ministry, plant a church. Maybe some of you think, I don't have a one thing.

Maybe your life is spent each day. What's the next thing before us? But either way, as we think about our one things, we may judge some of them as wasteful or selfish, frivolous or misguided.

[2 : 18] And some of them may be great goods. But I want to ask you this question. Do any of them bear the weight of being your one thing? What does God have to say about all of this?

What would the Bible point us to as we consider our one thing in our lives? And this brings us to our passage this morning. We're in the book of Philippians, page 922 in your Pew Bible, if you want to follow along.

And we're going to, we've been preaching through this book for a while, and we're going to continue to do so. We're looking at Philippians 3, starting in verse 12. And what we'll see as we start reading is, in verse 13, he says this, But one thing I do.

Let's read it together and consider all that God has to say to us today about our lives and about our one thing. So let's read Philippians chapter 3 together.

Starting in verse 12. Verse 13.

[3 : 50] Let all, 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 and sisters, join in imitating me. And keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example that 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 their glory, and they glory in their shame with their 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.

[4 : 53] Let's pray together.

Lord, I pray this morning that you would give me words. And that you would give all of us hearts to sit under your word this morning.

Lord, that you would encourage our hearts, sharpen our minds. Lord, and bring new life to our spirits that we might know and understand what you have called us to in Christ.

Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Our key verse this morning is in verse 13 and 14.

One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[6:19] God calls us to pursue being with Christ, our one thing. And this passage tells us three things about that pursuit. Tells us first about the foundation of that pursuit.

The second one is the nature of that pursuit. And the third is the reason for that pursuit. And we'll see that as we walk through it. So we're going to walk through this passage and just look at those three aspects of it.

The foundation of our pursuit, the foundation of our pressing on is in verse 12. Look with me again at it. It says this, Not that I've already obtained this or am perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Paul has just talked about in the verses before, and Pastor Nick preached on this last week, how he had counted all things as lost for the sake of knowing Christ and being found in him, so that he might receive a righteousness not of his own doing, not of his own building, so that he might have status with God by his own efforts, but receiving, being bestowed upon him by Christ through faith, a righteousness that allows him to be a child of the King and to be united with Christ.

And Paul has just talked about this, and he says, I want to know Christ. And the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, so that also I might attain to the resurrection of the dead.

[7:49] And so Paul has had this great aspirational thrust to what he's just said, but here he then qualifies this or couches that in something different, because here in verse 12, the emphasis is not on Paul's devotion, or his sacrifice, or his faith, or his passion, but it's in what Christ has done, that Christ has made me his own.

He has taken hold of him and not let him go. And just like we saw in chapter 2 in verses 12 and 13, we see this great combination where Paul willfully talks about all the human energy being spent, working out our salvation, because God has worked in us.

The foundation is that God has made this certain, and his pursuit is in light of that. It strikes me that this is kind of like what it's like to try out for the U.S. national soccer team.

Right? We often feel like, maybe you've never aspired to this, but if you're trying out for the U.S. national soccer team, do you know what's true? You are never in. You are kind of in as long as you keep going, as long as you're good enough this time, this season, if you're fit, if you're playing at a high level, then you'll be in.

But if you aren't, hey, you know what? There are other guys behind you. There is no certainty, and there's no security. And it's a terribly uncertain thing to do. If you stumble, you will fall, and you will always have to prove yourself over and over and over again.

[9:24] And I think we often think of God being like that. Only if we meet the standard. Only if we can keep up the race. Only if we don't stumble or fall.

But what Paul reminds us in this passage is that Christ Jesus has made us his own. He has chosen us. In Ephesians, before the foundation of the earth, he has set his love on us, and he has set his salvation purposes on us.

And therefore, for those who believe in Christ, the pursuit of him is not one of fearful of falling away, but one of confidence, knowing that Christ has already done this for us.

Unlike the Olympic soccer team. Our position is secure. Paul says, Christ Jesus has made me his own.

And this is the foundation on which this pursuit is built. But it presses on then. Paul moves on and he says, but I do something in light of what God has done.

[10:29] I press on towards this thing. And I want to begin by noting in verses 12 and 13, again, look at this. Paul's expression of humility as he does this.

And maybe you felt this. Maybe you felt this last week when Nick preached 7 through 11. Man, Paul was awesome. He counted everything as lost for Christ.

He's like this superstar Christian. I could never do that. I could never be that good. Paul says, no, friends. Brothers and sisters, I've not already attained it.

I'm not already there. I, with you, am on the journey towards something that God has begun in me. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus.

The same thing is true of me. We are on this journey to move forward. And friends, just as an aside, this is what theologians call progressive sanctification.

[11 : 30] We are brought by faith into a new relationship with Christ. And this whole life between now and eternity is going to be growing into that new life that Christ has given us.

And all of us, from the brand new believer who trusted Christ yesterday to the saint who's walked with Christ for 50 years, will continue to need to press on and continue to be called to this ongoing growth.

All of life will be growth but not attainment because what is to come will be ultimately God's work at the end. Paul then gets to his core verb.

What does he do? He presses on. This is a racing turn. I'm not a racer, so I'm actually a terrible runner. So I'm not, this is a borrowed analogy.

But, you know, I've watched runners and particularly the longer ones, right? They're coming down the back stretch. They're seeing that last turn. And as they come around that last turn, particularly when you see like the mile, they kick it into a whole other gear because they can see that finish line.

[12 : 41] And they're spending all of their energy and focus on just getting to that point. And Paul says, this is what we're doing. Forgetting what lies behind.

And that might be his self-righteous plans that he tried, that he used to do before he knew Christ that he talks about earlier in chapter three. It might just be, he's forgetting all the other things so that the one thing that he's focused on, he will press on towards.

It's the same, this word is also sometimes used as a hunting image, right? Pursuing one that is getting away. And I thought of like Aragorn and Gimli and Legolas running across the plains of Rohan, chasing after the orcs who had stolen Merry and Pippin.

And their tireless and focused effort, we will continue to pursue them until we gain them again.

This is the kind of dogged hunting and the single-mindedness to not rest until the quarry is captured. Friends, do you see how energetic Paul is?

[13 : 52] This isn't a hobby that you do when you're feeling like it. This isn't something that you would do just because, I don't know, I didn't have anything else to do today or something you would fit in the margins of everything else.

For Paul, this is an all-consuming passion and desire. A desire to pursue knowing Christ. There is a goal before him in verse 14.

I press on towards the goal, the finish line, for the prize that will come with the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is piling on these words and even theologians and Bible expositors don't always know what's the relationship between all these things, these adjectives that he's piling on.

But the thrust of it is very clear. At the end of the day, in Christ, God has called me up to be with him. And that is a treasure and a prize and a reward.

[14 : 55] Paul says, this is what I press on towards. This is the one thing that I do. Then in verses 15 through 17, as Paul has described it, he says, I wish you would imitate me in this.

This is what maturity in Christ looks like. Not thinking that we've already got it in a proud way, but pressing on towards it. And if you read verse 16 the way I did the first time I read it, preparing for the sermon, think Paul's kind of arrogant there.

He's like, hey, and if anyone thinks differently, eh, you guys are wrong. You'll see that I'm right. I think actually that's not the spirit that Paul says that. Verse 16, I think, is Paul's spirit saying, listen, the glory of Christ is so compelling and so great that if you will just consider with me what we're running after, we're all gonna see this is the right thing.

This is the thing worth doing at the end of the day. We're gonna see it together more and more as we pursue it. Friends, it's easy, I think, for our Christian lives to become distorted.

It's easy for us to think that what we're trying to do is not this single-minded pursuit of knowing Christ. So often, we can allow duty to be the thing that drives us.

[16 : 26] I don't wanna be seen as a failure. I don't wanna be seen as making a mistake or doing the wrong thing. Sometimes we pursue knowledge, not so that we might know Christ, but so that we might be proudly competent in the eyes of others so that they might think well of us.

Sometimes our obedience is a desire to not be punished. And you know, if that's what we think the Christian life is, if that's what pursuing Christ looks like, it's no wonder that we look elsewhere.

But for Paul, he is captivated by Christ. Christ whose life is worthy of imitating himself.

Remember what we saw in chapter two, verses six through 11. He who had equality with God did not count it something to be grasped, but humbled himself, made himself nothing, and died on a cross for us.

Paul was so captured by the person of Christ that he said, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. And when we're captured by this vision of who Christ is and what he has done for us, then all of the things that Paul has been exhorting us to throughout this book, that we would count others as more worthy, more important than ourselves, chapter two, verse four, that we would pursue obedience as we work out our salvation, in chapter two, verse 12, that we would count all things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ, chapter three, verse seven, that this is worth it because of Christ, because of who he is.

[18:24] And Paul goes on then to give us one more reason, one more way for us to understand why it is so worthy for us to make Christ the goal.

And this is the third thing that we want to look at, verses 18 through 20. The reason for our pressing on is that our destiny is glory with Christ.

Paul has just said, I hope you'll imitate us in this pursuit. I hope you'll imitate us in this pursuit of Christ. But recognize that there is another path that some have taken.

There is another path. And they're walking as enemies of the cross. Who are they? Lots of ink has been spilled over this. It seems like they're part of the member of faith.

Paul is weeping for them because they have lost their way. It doesn't seem like in the mix that they're probably the opponents that Paul refers to in chapter one, nor the Judaizers, the people who try to impose the Jewish law in chapter three.

[19:29] They might have been those things, but Paul seems to have a bigger picture. What does he say about them? Look with me in verses 18 and 19. He says this, their God is their belly.

These are people whose driving passion is their own satisfaction, their own pleasure. Controlled by their human appetites, it might be gluttony, it might be all the other things that drive us, sex and money and power and pleasure.

Not only is their God their belly, but they glory in their shame. We're reminded of what Paul says in Romans one about the nature of the human heart, how we exchange God, the creator of the world, for idols.

And how we worship the creation rather than the creator. And not only do we do these things and therefore in that, run after all sorts of things that God did not design for us to have and ways for us to live that God did not design us to live.

But not only do we do that, but then we encourage others to do the same. So Paul says that their God is their belly. They glory in their shame.

[20:47] The things they exalt and trumpet are shameful before God. And finally, their minds are set on earthly things. Their eyes are set on here and now. They're convinced that the final good of their lives is not in the future, but in the present.

And they're desperate to make this life their one thing. And Paul calls them enemies of the cross. That is a strong phrase.

Why does he say that? Again, because of who Christ is. Because when we set our minds here and want to be our own saviors, Christ set his mind on being obedient to the creator, Father.

When we believe that heaven can be made on earth, Christ left heaven to come to earth and walk in its brokenness and its fallenness and to take on our sin.

Not grasping, but giving himself up so that we might be saved from this world. When we would deny the need for suffering on the path to glory, Christ's life shows us that in fact it is a necessary plan.

[22:10] He embraced suffering for the greater good of our salvation. This is why when we set our minds on earthly things, when our God is our belly, and when we glory in things that are shameful, we are enemies of the cross because Christ is going this way and when we do these things, we are going that way.

And they are antithetical. Paul tells us that they're on a path of destruction because the end of Christ is salvation, so the end of the other way is not salvation, but death and destruction.

They find themselves outside of Christ and in opposition to him. But that is not the focus of Paul because Paul has used them simply as a foil.

There are some who do this, but not you. Don't do that. Because we are something different. We are citizens of heaven.

We belong to this country. We belong to this nation. And God has, in Christ, given us by faith a passport that says this is where your citizenship lies.

[23 : 26] You are connected to Christ. And what we are waiting for is the Savior to come. And there's this great imagery because remember in Philippi, the greatest glory in Philippi was to be a citizen of Rome.

And Paul says there's a greater glory than that. And the greatest leader of Rome, the emperor was often called the Savior, the Lord, the Soter. And so Paul intentionally says, we await as citizens of heaven, a greater Soter, a greater emperor, a greater Lord, a greater Savior, who is Jesus Christ. And to be connected with him means that all the suffering that you might endure now, it's worth it because he's going to raise you to new life.

And the brokenness of your body is going to be raised to a profound glory that you've never seen before as you are raised with him because he has the power, ultimately, to bring all things into subjection.

You don't have to make this life your one thing because when he comes, when he returns, when he establishes his kingdom, then we will see the fullness that we long for.

[24 : 44] Then we will see the richness that our hearts can taste and see but never attain to. Then we find, when Christ comes and establishes all of his kingdom, then we will see that knowing him is worth everything.

And making him our one thing is the only way that we would want to live. all the meaning, all the glory, all the comfort, all the hope that we long for.

Paul says in verse 21, it's in the Savior who's going to come and make it all happen one day. So press on. Press on, brothers and sisters.

Don't lose sight of this goal. See the treasure that Christ is and pursue him with all of your heart. And if you're here this morning and you're feeling the pull, you're feeling the pull to live a path of self, seeking everything in this life, not in the life to come, recognize Paul's warning and look to Christ.

If you are outside of Christ, what you have in this life is what you will have, but your end will be destruction. But if you have Christ and Christ invites you and he calls you, as he calls all of us to see who he is and to treasure him, that he is the one who is the path that leads to eternal life.

[26 : 32] He is the one who gives hope in the midst of suffering in this life. He is the prize that we gain by the call of God on our lives as we press on to know him.

Let's pray together. O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus, I would simply ask today that by your spirit you would open our eyes to see you so that we might know that you are worthy and so that we might take up this call, that we might run this race, so that we might fix our eyes on the right goal.

O God, have mercy on us for how often we are wandering and distracted, how often our thinking becomes foggy and we lose our way.

Lord, renew in us this morning the clarity of our call and to make you our one thing. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.