

The Rock: 06-01-2021

Philippians: The letter of joy

First reading:

Title: Press on

Scripture: Philippians 3: 12-21

Theme:

As Christians we should always keep our eye on the prize, looking heavenward for our Kings return, all the while working in this world on His behalf.

Introduction:

Well, as we come to the end of chapter three, the end of Paul's letter is approaching. We have all learned a great deal so far.

Paul has taught us the importance of being in community, that his prison time has been to his advantage as he has used his prison cell as a pulpit.

Witnessing to those who are guarding him, and doing so in such a way that even they realize Paul is locked up because his mouth could not be.

We learned that living is great, but that dying and being with Jesus is even

better. Weird, I know, because talking about death seems to be the topic we all try to avoid. Yet it happens to us all.

Then that beautiful poem he gives us in chapter two that paints such a clear picture of King Jesus and what he left in order that we have a way home to the Father.

We should never take for granted our salvation, but rather we ought to be dying to ourselves and working it out. Why? Because Jesus gave all for us, why would we give less.

Timothy and Epaphroditus, friends for the journey and their dedication to not only the Gospel, but to Paul himself.

The next gen pastor and the helper from Philippi. Two men who under Paulk's direction and mentorship grew in service and pastoral care understanding.

We left off a month ago with Paul reminding us that while heaven is good, it's not the end all prize. The prize is Jesus and the resurrection from the dead.

It isn't heaven and harps on clouds that he was running this race for. The hope, the blessed hope is the resurrection, the New heavens and New Earth, and again, the presence of our King: Jesus.

The Story:

He picks up there again as he brings himself back down to earth, and helps us to do the same. He reminds us not to think too much of ourselves.

Neither are we to think too little of ourselves. It's quite the balancing act, really. We have to find that balance as we journey through life working out our salvation.

Because even Paul, as he wrote understood that he wasn't there yet:

"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."

-Philippians 3:12-14 ESV

It's like trying to find that. Perfect Oreo-to-milk ratio. I mean, an over-simplification I suppose, but it works, at least for me.

How many cookies does one need so that when you have that last bit of milk, you

have one last cookie: Perfection! But that takes me a few tries, and a whole lot of cookies before I get there.

None of us have obtained perfection in our salvation, or rather our sanctification. But, we keep at it every day. One of the most important things to remember, is what to forget.

Too often, too many of us live our lives in the "what if" moments. Or the, "I've never gotten this right." "The last time was a complete disaster."

These things can freeze us in place, or we beat ourselves up until our self-esteem is non-existent. Having such a low view of ourselves, we can't ever seem to move forward.

Paul didn't suffer from that. Many do, I know. But Paul's problem wasn't low self-esteem. It was a proud, high-view and opinion of himself.

Remember, when we were here in this letter the last time, no one needed to tell Paul he was the best at pretty much everything he put his hand to.

He was wrestling with and learning that as good as he was it amounted to poo. Nothing but a pile of dung. Compared to Jesus, he had nothing to offer. But that didn't make him nothing.

False humility is nothing more than pride in disguise. If you are good at something, own it! Thank God for it, because He is the one who made you good at it.

Remember James tells us:

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

-James 1:17 ESV

To minimize god's gift in you, is to minimize God and His purpose and desire for your life. Be careful that you don't do that.

At the same time, remember what Paul said -I count it all rubbish in order to gain Jesus. Perspective and gratefulness will always keep us standing rightly.

You see, the goal is to be conformed to His likeness, as Paul reminds us in his letter to Rome:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

-Romans 8:28-29 ESV

Find the balance, stop comparing yourself to others. I said that a couple weeks ago. Listen, you will always find someone worse than you. It's a fact.

Don't ever avoid self-assessment and self-awareness because you can always find someone to point a finger at and say: "See, at least I'm not them."

No, because, if you are honest, there is also always someone who is better than you. IF you don't think so, ask your spouse. They'll help you with that.

That's why I like to say, Give the Pope a wife and in five minutes he'll realize he's not perfect.

Paul here in these verses is concerned with our perspective. How we see ourselves not in relation to others, but rather, in relation to Jesus.

Joy is found when we can be settled in our spirits before Him. Seeing who we are in relation to Him. The striving ceases when we understand that in Christ, we are all we need to be, and have all we need.

Press on Paul says:

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 3:14 ESV

Look to the prize. What is it right now? The upward call of God in Jesus. How we see ourselves in light of Jesus, and how we see others as we grow is essential.

Doing it right, we find personal maturity and cooperate unity when we all focus that way. It's no longer my agenda, my wants, my desires. It's making much of Jesus.

Healthy, mature Christians DO NOT play one off of another for gain, personal pleasure and selfish motives. Rather, as individuals within the body, we put others needs in the community before our own.

Why? The Love of God found in Jesus. The example Jesus left for us in chapter two. In that way of serving, we are actually served.

Now I know this is so much easier said than done. God has a sense of humor, just look around you. Look at me.

Personalities, back grounds, degrees of brokenness, different ways of doing

things, of handling pressure and on and on and on.

It's no wonder He told us to work it out! Not only to work it out, but to extend grace!! We are not all in the same place.

Our gifts are not the same. We do not have the same level of spiritual maturity, same reference points on our journey with Jesus. We are all dealing with different things, and it is those who are more mature in Christ who are to extend more grace.

Doing so first. A sure sign of Christian maturity is the ability to overlook an offence, to extend forgiveness and let go of things in a good, healthy, and proactive way.

Solomon, a pretty wise guy, in the good way said this:

"Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."

-Proverbs 19:11 ESV

How quickly do we go from zero to irate? How quick are we to forget? If we were to nail one thing down that me, you and the entire world struggles with is this.

Just look at the news feed. We are quick to anger, quick to insult and quick to

never forget an offence! All the things Solomon tells us we shouldn't do so we can experience glory, we seem to do.

Back to Paul, because verses 15-16 seem to level things out for us, and focus:

"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."

-Philippians 3:15-16 ESV

If you are mature, ok. Think and act this way. If you aren't quite there yet, that's ok. Keep at it! God will show you how to work these things out.

Just don't be something or someone you are not. Don't play the comparison game. Know yourself in relation to how far you have grown in Jesus.

Live up to that, because that is now your base line, your new starting point in maturity. You cannot be less than that anymore. Hold true to that, because if you do maturity will come within that and you begin to grow beyond where you are right now.

All of this is essential because Paul now takes a bit of a turn here in verse 17:

"Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

-Philippians 3:17 ESV

Listen, you are going to need all of this, so imitate me, he tells them. Keep your eyes on those who are farther along. Look for a mentor, remember discipleship.

The challenge to both is to understand that a healthy community both here in the church and then out into St. Albans and the wider community does these things.

The one-on-one mentoring, small groups for Bible study and wrestling through with the hard questions.

Getting together with your affinity group grows you and me in maturity. You have accountability people, at least I hope you do. Those who speak into your life in a way that is edifying and encouraging. Even if at times it is a hard word said in love.

If you don't have that, or don't give someone space to do that, regardless of age, you are missing out on a huge piece of community. One that is vital for personal growth and also church growth.

These things are important because they are the only way we will ever handle our actual enemies:

"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."

-Philippians 3:18-19 ESV

We don't fight with them, belittle them, ridicule or demean. No, the world does that. Paul here is so deeply affected and heart-broken that people actually live as he once did -an enemy of the cross of Christ.

So much so, that he is in tears because people hate Jesus. Are any of us that broken in heart and spirit for those outside of Christ?

I leave that question for us all to ponder as we hope, pray, and desire that revival come, but far too often we can't get ourselves to service on Sunday.

Paul is in tears here because he knows their eternal end, and it's not good. He finds no satisfaction in that knowledge, in fact like Jesus, he is broken for those who hate Christ and His cross.

Father: break our hearts for what breaks yours. May we see the lost, not as the enemy, but as the lost sheep, the prodigal children, just like we were before you found us.

Paul understands their end also is their choice, sad as it may seem. They are focused on earthly things, satisfying the earthly nature of humanity, to the point where they find great glory in the shameful things they do.

I leave that with you, as time is short again. We simply need to remember that were it not for Jesus calling us and softening our hearts toward Him, we too would be in that position.

But He sets us up and sends us out. Why? So they too may have the opportunity to hear about Jesus, even as they reject and rejoice in themselves.

We press on. Growing in maturity, becoming more like Jesus and shining as lights in dark places. Why? Because we know what waits for us.

"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."

-Philippians 3:20-21 ESV

Heaven, again is not the end game. Paul makes that very clear again. We are citizens of a kingdom, so politics do matter to us. Kingdom politics.

The Jesus way of justice and mercy and grace. The Bible talks about all of those things. If we avoid particular topics such as social justice for example because they have been somehow co-opted and given a "new" perspective and reason for being by the government gives us no right to ignore injustice in this world.

Rather, because we know who we serve and that He is coming back, as Paul says here, we ought to be the loudest voices, with broken hearts for the things that break God's heart.

The rejection of Jesus, the mistreatment of other human beings, the abuse of power by the petty little tyrants who think they are the end all be all, while people are starving and abused and manipulated for selfish gain.

We must be the voice for a balanced, Biblical justice in this world, and it starts with understanding who Jesus is and the fact that he is coming back.

We await the Return of the King from Heaven, our blessed hope as citizens of

that kingdom. When he returns, He will take these broken-down shells of our bodies and make them brand new.

Press on. Work it out. Grow together and reach out. Help the lost become found, and the found become whole.