

## *What Really Matters (2)*

### **Introduction (Text: Philippians 3:12-14)**

- A. **What really matters, says Paul, is the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** The price of a vital faith is a continuous struggle.
- B. **We were created by God to grow; we were recreated by Christ to grow. Not only to grow, but to become our whole selves—the new creation we are in Christ Jesus.** So Paul sets it out in this word about pressing toward the goal for the prize to which God has called me. The pattern is clear.

### **#1: Recognize Who and Where You Are (3:12)**

- A. **Verse 12 is one of those hinge verses in Paul's thought to which we need to return and ponder often. It comes in the text with striking abruptness.** The apostle has passionately set before us what really matters, the guiding purpose of his life and that of all Christians. The commanding motive of *knowing Christ* and all that means has led to his scathing renunciation of everything less worthy. His word now is an explosive disclaimer: **“Not that I have already attained all this, or have already arrived at my goal,...”**
- **It is obvious that Paul does not want his readers to misunderstand what he has just said, for of all people, Paul was aware of how far below the possible glory God had in store for all Christians he was.** There was perhaps another equally important reason for this disclaimer. There were among his readers those who maintained that they themselves had arrived at perfection.
  - Some scholars contend that in this verse, and in **4:12**, Paul used technical terms drawn from the vocabulary of the Greek mystery cults. **He makes this disclaimer because a group in the church regarded their baptism as initiation into a state of perfection to which nothing needed to be added.**
- B. Whatever the situation, whether Paul was being careful to state his own case, or was addressing a specific problem in Philippi, the message for us is clear. The Christian life is a journey, a process of growth in which we seek to **“take hold”** of the fullness of that which has been given us, **“of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”** **We are Christians; we must now become what we are. We have been saved; now we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling.**
- We are caught in tension. The demand is that we live in the now with those who have **“died with Christ”** to sin, yet are still sinners. **We have been reckoned by God as righteous and He has accepted us by our faith in Christ. Yet we are in fact unrighteous and any claim we make to righteousness is “as filthy rags.”**

- That is the tension. But it is creative tension. We are not caught in impersonal forces to which we are victims. **We are drawn by the powerful impulsion of a personal relationship with Christ.** He has already made us His own. The impulsion of this love makes it necessary for us to be—and to become—what we are: **new persons in Christ.**

C. **Every day, then, we begin where we are—claiming boldly and confidently that Christ has made us new creatures, but confessing humbly that we have not become in fullness what Christ wants us to be.**

- There are two frames of reference out of which we tend to operate, either of which is debilitating to our Christian growth and service. **One is a false humility that refuses to name and claim our gifts.**
- **The second is confidence that claims too much for ourselves and is not dependent enough on the power of Christ.** In verse 12 Paul calls for a balance between these two. We make no claim to perfection, but we have an unshakable confidence that Christ Jesus has made us His own.

D. **We walk the tightrope of naming and claiming our gifts and struggling against the deep hold pride has on our hearts, and the tendency to fall into self-justification.**

### **#2: *Leave the Past Behind (3:13)***

- A. Acknowledging who and where we are is necessary at every step along the way to the prize for which God has called us. **Likewise, every day we must leave the past behind.**
- B. **The Christian, drawn by the powerful impulsion of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is uniquely equipped to leave the past behind.** Yet, how many of us do not. The dimension of our past that continues to drag us back, weigh us down, and make our movement unstable at best, is our sense of failure, our guilt over past sin, our pain from past hurts.
- C. **Does not this inability to leave the past behind contradict everything we confess about the healing, forgiving, redeeming power of God?**
- D. **If God is not remote, and if He does not deny us the forgiveness we desperately need, why do we refuse it?** “Refuse it” may be too harsh, but we certainly do not appropriate it. **Thus the past is always with us, robbing us of freedom, making us heavy-hearted, preventing us from being able to use all our spiritual energy and gifts for coping with the new and moving with joy into the future.**

### **#3: *Have a Goal (3:14)***

- A. To take no thought of tomorrow does not mean that we have no aims in life, no goals toward which we are moving. **It means that the focus of life is in the**

**here and now, and our energy is expended in living to the fullest the life Christ gives us today.** A part of that energy for present investment comes from the divine purpose of our life. So Paul says **“I press on toward the goal...”**

- B. **Consider an incident from the illustrious life of Winston Churchill which underscores the need for a goal.** It was in the critical days of World War II, and England faced the need for increased coal production.
- The Prime Minister called a meeting of labor leaders to give them the facts and enlist their support in his inimitable way of using imagination and power oratory. He closed his presentation by picturing in their minds a parade which would surely be held in Picadilly Circus after the war was over.
  - **There would come the men of the *Royal Navy* whom everyone would know had kept the vital sea lanes open. There would pass the *Army* who had come home from Dunkirk and then gone on to defeat Rommel in Africa and fight under Montgomery in Berlin. There would come the *Air Force* who had driven the Luftwaffe out of the sky and beat it at its own game.**
  - **Then, he said, last of all, there would come a *great host of sweat-stained, soot-streaked miners*. Someone would cry out from the crowd, “Where were you?” And from ten thousand throats would come the answer: *We were deep in the earth with our faces against the coal.*” Winston Churchill sat down to a widely cheering throng, many with tears running down their cheeks.**
  - **The man at the top had shown the power of purpose, the need for a goal, how everyone working together would mean victory.**

#### **#4: Concentrate on the Path**

- A. **There is no question about the power of an ideal, the energy that is produced by a driving passion, and the likelihood of our achieving what we set our hearts on. How important it is that we choose our goals wisely.** That suggests another piece in the pattern of what really matters as we seek the prize for which God has called us: ***concentrate on the path***, run the race with your eyes on the course and your attention to your present steps.
- B. Earlier we discussed forgetting the past. Another facet to that theme deserves noting here. There is debate about whether Paul is talking about his pre-Christian days, or specifically about his life since the Damascus Road, or his whole life. It is clear, since his metaphor is that of a foot race that he is not talking about his pre-Christian life. Nor is he referring alone to past failures. **In this entire passage one thing he is combating is self-satisfaction.**

**Therefore included in what must be left behind are our achievements as well as our failures.**

- C. In the race of life we concentrate on the path and we forget as we run. We may store our achievements in our memory, but we do not allow them to slow us in our present running. We may take them from our memory storehouses on occasion, but we do so not to rest on our laurels, but to be energized for the race ahead. (Ex: Michael Phelps)
- D. **And don't forget the goal of the Christian's race: "the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."** This does not mean the *calls* that come to us along the way, the summons to duty here, and unselfish service there. It is the ultimate bliss to which God summons us. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to it as a "**heavenly**" call (**Hebrews 3:1**), and Paul writes to the Thessalonians of "**the God who called you to His own realm and glory.**" **It was the call that came to Paul on the Damascus Road and that call never ceased to summon him onward.**