



A Life Long Pursuit

Series: Philipians – To Live Is Christ

Philippians 3:12-16

September 6, 2015

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1 – Intro---Let's remember what we saw from Paul last week. Paul described for us his former self and his accomplishments before he was saved. He described for us what he was trusting in and how he had thought those things to be a reason to be confident. Think about his resume---circumcised, of the people of Israel, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, Pharisee, zealous, blameless. In Paul's eyes he was the man. But then something happened. Paul had an encounter with the risen Christ and was changed. He was totally transformed. He was a new creation---a new man. You don't have a true saving encounter with Christ and not be changed. Paul's desires changed and his confidence changed. He no longer was trusting in what he had done but now he is trusting in what Christ has done in his place. His desire now, because the love of Christ controlled him, was to know Christ more fully. He counted all the other stuff that might be considered gain to be rubbish for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ more.

He wanted to know Him and the power of His resurrection. He wanted to know the power that was now in Him through knowing Christ because that power is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. And it is the same power that would enable him to live righteously. It is the same power that would give him the desire to know Christ more and it is the same power that would give him the power to live a life that is pleasing to God and honor Him in all things. It is the same power that would give Paul the heart to proclaim, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul wanted to grow in his knowledge of Christ and that was his primary desire and goal in life. What Paul wanted was not power so that he would be thought powerful but power so that he would be conformed to the will of God, which is why he was saved by Christ.

Well, we will easily affirm that desire. If we truly know Christ then we will have the desire to know Him more. Just like Nick's shark illustration last week, we will want to know more, the one who saves our life. If we know Christ then there will be no self-satisfaction in us, and if so, we will desire to put that to death in us. If we love Christ then we will want to know Him more. But how do we know Him more. What does the life that is pursuing Christ like that look like? Thank the Lord that Paul gives us insight to that this week.

2 – A Desire to pursue Christ (12)

-“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.” (Philippians 3:12, ESV)

A – A good self-assessment (12a)---The first thing we notice from Paul is a good self-assessment. Paul says that he has not already obtained or taken possession of this and that he is not perfect, which means to be completely successful in reaching your goal. What Paul is saying here is that he has not arrived yet in his maturity and knowledge of Christ. He is saying, I don't know him fully yet. He is saying that I need to grow more in Christ and be made more holy.

-Illustration of thinking you have arrived---Senior year in baseball pitching

-Now think about this. Estimations of when this was written and the ministry that was behind Paul would put Paul's walking with Christ at about 30 years. And Paul was trained by Christ himself and had been rescued by Christ in many trials and Paul had suffered for Christ and been comforted by Him. Paul had been used as an instrument to found churches and take the gospel of Christ to the world and he was controlled by the love of Christ. In our minds, if anyone could claim to have arrived at a full understanding of who Christ was and who knew Him fully it would be Paul. But Paul says no, I'm not there yet. I don't know Him fully but I want to. Paul is saying that his

desire is that he would know Christ more no matter how long he has walked with Him and no matter how long he has been a Christian. How about us? Do we want to know Christ more or do we think that our time with Christ or our spiritual accomplishments is the same thing as true spiritual growth in knowing Christ?

-Paul's desire was to know Christ even more and that desire worked itself out in an actual pursuit to do so.

B – A pressing on (12 middle)---Paul says that, “I press on to make it my own.” That word for press on means to run quickly with energy toward an objective. It means that Paul is actively and earnestly running after Christ. Paul is telling us that he is earnestly pursuing a fuller knowledge of Christ by the power of God that is in him. For Paul there is no room for complacency. For Paul there is no room for a sinful contentment of his current spiritual condition.

-This should be the same for us beloved. There should be no room in our pursuit of Christ for complacency or satisfaction with our progress so far. But we struggle with that sometimes. We think that we know enough for now so we are going to take a break---I need just a little break from following and pursuing Him because it's hard. Or I know enough to allow myself to put my sanctification process on hold for a while and just cruise and take a break. Do you hear the foolishness of these kind of thoughts. We should because if we are doing these things then we are not cruising forward we are actually regressing and backing up. We must, beloved, as the children of God strive forward in our knowledge of Christ. If Christ truly is life, and He is, then why in the world would we want to take a break from that life? Let's not take a spiritual break beloved. Let's encourage one another in this pressing on and let's help one another fight the tendency for cruise control. Let's help each other so we don't realize one day that we are in a spiritual place that we don't like and we don't even know how we got there. If we truly belong to Christ then we will want to commune with Him in the life that He is.

-That's what Paul tells us next.

C – A motivation for doing so (12b)---“I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Think about this. Paul’s belonging to Christ drives his pursuit of Christ. There is no thought of, “ok now that I am saved and belong to Christ the work is done---I’ve punched my ticket and the transaction is taken care of so I can just live how I want to.” No, for Paul, belonging to Christ and being saved by Christ and being reconciled to God and being in God’s family and being a co-heir of Christ and knowing Christ is actually the driving force to know Him more. His assurance of belonging to Christ is actually a stimulant and not a deterrent of pursuing Christ. It’s a fact of Scripture that the more we hunger for Christ the more we will be satisfied in Him. And that satisfaction in Christ will not produce complacency but will actually increase our hunger for Him which will drive us to know Him more and thus lead to even more satisfaction in Him. And all this because Christ Jesus had made us His own.

-We all treasure our salvation. I remember my conversion like it was yesterday even though it was January 21, 1997. I remember reaching my hand out in faith and crying out for Christ to save me and He did. But behind my action was the plan of God to choose me and the work of Christ to accomplish my salvation and the Holy Spirit to regenerate my heart to give me even the capacity to cry out and the faith to believe. Christ made me His own and He saved me to know Him deeply and intimately and personally and not to be content with a surface knowledge of Him and His love for me. And this humbles us before His grace and also gives us security and confidence and desire to know Him more because it was His loving will that it should be so. We have been saved and predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ and this is a lifelong pursuit.

3 – The pursuit is a lifelong pursuit (13-14)

“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 3:13–14, ESV)

A – Realize it's not yours yet (13a)---Paul reemphasizes that he has not arrived. He has not come far enough in his knowledge of Christ. And that knowledge about himself molds and shapes his pursuit of Christ, which Paul understands will last his lifetime.

-Paul realizes that there are no short-cuts to spiritual maturity in knowing Christ. We like short-cuts don't we. We are determined to take short cuts and most of the time they end up costing us more time than if we had not been determined to take it. Illustration---guys you know what I mean. We can take this road and it has to come out close to so and so which is where we would end up if we went the long way. So we do it and get lost as can be but we refuse to admit we are lost because we still have gas in the tank.

-There are no short cuts to knowing Christ and Paul is single-minded in his pursuit to know Christ more fully. We know that because he says, "one thing I do." Paul's primary desire in life is to know Christ more because he knows that everything in life flows out of that. And Paul tells us what he's doing.

B – Forget what lies behind (13b)---Paul knows that he can't look back and keep his eyes on Christ at the same time. So what is Paul forgetting here? Well, Paul is not forgetting God's past mercies to him. We are never to forget the past mercies of God and His faithfulness. That why Paul wrote Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1, ESV)

-And Paul would not be forgetting the important lessons that he has learned in the past. These lessons would be part of how God had shaped him into the image of Christ. Think about it, in Paul's description of his former self we see that Paul has learned the valuable lesson that it is not about his accomplishments and what he has done but it is about his knowledge of Christ and what Christ has done in his place. That's a lesson we all need to know and never forget. So what is Paul forgetting?

-He is forgetting anything in the past that will hinder his present effort in knowing Christ and his future spiritual growth. Well, what are some of those things? We need to gently remind ourselves that a bereavement can keep us in the past. After my dad passed away there was a time that I was stuck in that and didn't want to move forward and I know that my mom experienced that in much more depth than I did and for a longer period of time. We can easily harbor a grudge or bitterness toward a past wrong whether it's real or perceived that can hinder our spiritual growth in the knowledge of Christ. There can be despair over past sins that can even make us doubt if we ever were forgiven to begin with and that will hinder our pursuit of Christ. We can live in the past clinging to and thinking about and reliving past accomplishments whether secular or spiritual. Who doesn't want to live on the mountain top and that can obscure our way in the valley. We can live in past trials and tribulations and stay so defeated in those that it hinders our present and future growth and knowledge of Christ.

-Paul says that we are to forget those things. If not, the church can be full of spiritual cripples that are paralyzed by the past or trying to relive the past in the present. Don't look back because looking back requires us to take our eyes off of Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Jesus said,

-“Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62, ESV)

-We are to forget what lies behind and not live in the past. But Paul does not stop there. He also says that we are to...

C – Strain forward to what lies ahead (13b)---This word for straining forward is a running word that means that every muscle is stretched and straining or reaching toward the finish line. Imagine a runner with every muscle engaged, drawing on every energy reserve and in the final all-out sprint to the finish line---that's the picture here. Paul liked to use running a race in his teaching. How many of you like to run?

-Tell **illustration of track meet and shorts at FMC.**

-But as much as I don't like to run that is the effort that Paul is exerting in his pursuit to know Christ. A runner who looks back, which would take away from his straining forward, takes the risk of being passed because he loses focus---he takes his eyes off of the finish line. In the same way, we must not look back but we must strain forward never losing focus on the goal. That's why Paul says...

D – Press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ (14)

-“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14, ESV)

-the finish line is coming into view here. Paul once again emphasizes the need to press on and he is straining toward the goal. He sees that finish line and just as a runner, his adrenaline is flowing, his arms are pumping faster, his legs are pushing hard off of his toes and as we would say in SC, he's gettin' it!

-Well, what is at the finish line that he's running so hard after? Well, it's the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. God had effectually called Paul to a saving intimate knowledge of Christ and Paul had not realized that fully yet but he wants too. He sees Christ and the full knowledge of Him when He will see Him and be like Him and Paul is sprinting toward that prize because that's the goal of his life. He wants to gain Christ in fullness because that is of surpassing worth to Paul and that is what makes everything else rubbish to him. For Paul, knowing Christ fully and to experience perfect fellowship with Him was the greatest reward that could be had so he's is running toward that with everything he's got. He will leave no energy on the table but use it all to know Christ like this.

-What about us beloved---are we running to know Christ like this? Is Christ the prize for which we are running? He must be our prize church! Dennis Johnson says this and I can do no better:

-“The prize for which we run is so much more than merely escaping this world’s miseries. It is bigger and better than never going to bed hungry again or having shelter from the rain and cold or being free from the pain of cancer or arthritis or having a reunion with loved ones. The best thing about the prize that awaits us at the finish line is not the taste of the food at the Lamb’s wedding supper, as delightful as that will be. It is not having tears of sorrow wiped from our eyes never to return. It is not the streets of gold or mansions over the hilltop that never need repairs or alarm systems to discourage thieves. The most intense pleasure of heaven is found in John’s vision of the coming New Jerusalem, in which God’s servants will worship HIM. They will see HIS face and see Him as HE is. This is the prize that Paul sees as he stretches his stride toward the goal; that he, his Philippian friends, and all others who trust in Jesus will know Christ as they have been known by Christ and therefore will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

-Does this goal of beholding Christ’s face and knowing Him fully and being in perfect fellowship with Him captivate us beloved? If we belong to Christ it should. We should have the same mindset as Paul as it concerns knowing Christ.

-That’s what Paul tells us next...

4 – All Christians should think this way (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.” (Philippians 3:15, ESV)

-Now we look at this and we look at Paul and it is easy to think that this is just the life and pursuit of an apostle or a super Christian. We look at this and say this is Paul and we expect that from him. What we learn from this passage this morning is that Paul expects that from all Christians. Yes, Paul had a single-minded goal of pursuing and knowing Christ and he expects us to have the same. We are all called to a single-minded, determined pursuit of Christ. The gospel allows no room for a bland, relaxed knowledge of Christ that is satisfied with luke-warmness or coldness. If we have been gripped by the grace of God in Christ we must press on to a deeper knowledge of Him. This is the way all Christians should think.

– The mature and the immature---This word for mature means perfection or to be initiated into. Commentators are divided as to which meaning Paul intends. Since Paul says no one can attain perfection in this life then some say he must mean those who have been truly initiated into the faith by believing in Christ and thus they would be positionally perfect as they are progressively growing to be more holy or perfect. Some say no, that Paul is speaking of those that have grown spiritually and have attained a level of maturity in Christ but still need to keep growing which is why Paul would continue and say what he says in the last part of this verse about thinking differently about pursuing Christ than he has presented.

-And honestly, I didn't spend a lot of time trying to decide which group had the best argument because honestly, both are true and applicable. We all, as Christians, should think the same way as Paul does about knowing Christ fully and put forth the same effort. IF we have matured and grown spiritually in Christ to some level of maturity in Him then we definitely should think this way about knowing Christ. And if not, then Paul says that if you think differently about the importance of knowing Christ, then he trusts that God will reveal this importance to you and you will do something about it.

-So which part of this verse describes you? Do you think the same as Paul as it concerns the worth of knowing Christ? Can you proclaim with Paul that to live is Christ and to die is gain? Can you say the same as Paul that knowing Christ is of surpassing worth and so much so that you would gladly give up what was considered gain and consider it rubbish? Can you say with Paul that you have not arrived yet and that you are forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what lies ahead and that the goal of your life lived right here and now is for the prize of knowing Christ?

-Of course we would all say and affirm that we think the same as Paul right? But the real answer to this question for us is not determined by our words but by our lives. And this is where it gets raw and real for us. Does my life reveal a pressing and straining pursuit of Christ to know Him more fully and personally? Could someone look at my life and see a single-minded goal of knowing Christ fully and see that all other areas of my life flow out of that? Does my life reveal a knowledge of Christ that is real and saving in nature? It should be loved, it should. If our desire is to know Christ in a real way our life will reveal that and that is what Paul closes this passage with.

5 – All Christians should act this way (16)

-"Only let us hold true to what we have attained." (Philippians 3:16, ESV)

-It is mandated that we grow in Christ. What Paul is telling us here is that even though we have not arrived yet, that is no excuse for not living according to the wonderful knowledge of Christ that we do have while we seek to know Him more. And as new truths and applications of old truths open themselves up to us, they should shape our knowledge and our living so powerfully that others will take notice and see our growth. Our sins will become less and less excusable to us and holiness will become more and more attractive to us. The glories of our eternity with Christ will make all the perceived glories of this world fade into dullness by comparison.

-Beloved we must be faithful to what we know of Christ and we are to maintain a disciplined lifestyle that is based on displaying the truth of Christ that we know according to the Word of God and not our opinion.

-And one more layer to this. Each biblical truth must be held in the context of all biblical truth. This call to us as individuals to pursue Christ is also done in the context of the fellowship of this church. Our individual spiritual growth affects this body as a

whole and God uses the fellowship of this church to help each and every one of us grow in Christ. This is encouraging news. We don't have to run this race alone nor are we called to. Going back to my track meet illustration, I was racing with team mates. I never could have finished that race alone---I couldn't run that far in a sprint without passing out not to mention I had lost a lot of skin, blood and I had the fear of my mama lurking in my head because I had a hole in my new shorts. Being a Christian is not a lone ranger sport. We need each other. We need to encourage one another and spur one another on to good works. We need to hold each other accountable to the truths that we know while encouraging one another at the same time. And I am so glad that God has made our lives cross paths so that we can do this together. I value that and I hope you do too.

6 – Application

1 – Make sure you know Christ and not just know about him---there are some of you here today that may not know Christ in a real saving way and you know it. You don't even try to put on the show that you know him. You are not trying to fool others or yourself but you know that you don't know Christ and you realize that. But one thing that you may not realize is that you desperately need to know Him because He is your only hope of being saved from the wrath of God that your sins deserve. Share the gospel.

-But there may be another group here today too. They are described in this passage.

-“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'” (Matthew 7:21–23, ESV)

-There may be some here that think they know Christ because of what they have done or are doing but their knowledge is not personal and intimate. Elaborate. Make sure you know Christ and are trusting in what HE has done and not what you have done or are doing or what someone else in your family is doing.

2 – The more we know Christ the more we will sense our need to grow. Do you feel the need to grow in Christ and do you have the desire to act on it?

-What do we do?

-We seek to know Christ by communing with Him and meet with Him in the pages of His word

-We seek to know Christ by communing with Him in prayer in dependence upon Him

-We seek to know Christ by communing with other people that have the same goal as us which is to know Him

-We seek to love and care and encourage one another as we run this race together.

-Individually and together, we do not look back but forget what lies behind and we strain to what lies ahead and we press on for the goal to obtain the prize of the upward call of God in Christ to know Him more and let our knowledge of Him mold and shape our lives individually and together as a church.

-We have as our goal to know Christ fully and to make Him known.

3 – And know beloved, always know, that we can't nor do we have to try and do this in our own strength. It is by the resurrection power that is in us that we have the power to pursue and live this life.

-“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6, ESV)

-“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12–13, ESV)

-God is faithful to His word and to His people. He is complete in His sovereignty, He is infinite in His wisdom, and He is perfect in His love for His children. And His love for us means that He will be faithful to conform us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. May we be faithful to strive to know Him more!

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