

Philippians: The Pursuit of Joy

Press On! * Philippians 3:12-16

Introduction

Good morning church! Well, I don't know about you, but right here in this room last Sunday I heard possibly one of the best messages I've ever heard, whether it was at this church, or any other church. We heard and studied the doctrine of justification, and there were a lot of "Amen's!" "Hallelujah's," and I even heard a few "Preach it brother's!"

One of the greatest truths to hear over and over again is that when we place our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, in that moment, all because of His grace, we are suddenly and permanently in a right relationship with God. Listen; in the eyes of God, we could not be more acceptable. He no longer sees my sin...he only sees the righteousness of Christ. It's a stirring truth isn't it? All around where I was sitting last week I was hearing, "Mmm-hmmmm!" "That's right!" Even my son Cooper looked down the aisle at me last week and gave me the 10 year old "thumbs up" and a grin.

We love justification, because the greatest thing EVER is to be saved! I don't know if this week's message will receive the same rousing response, because the instant that justification happens, sanctification begins, and when preachers start talking about sanctification, most generally people don't jump up and down and start hollering' "That's right brother, preach it! Tell me more about this daily process that will take my entire life. Mmm-hmmmm, talk to me about killing sin. " No – when you preach on sanctification– you don't get hearty "Amen's!", you get this (*crickets chirping*). And if you don't get that, you get people very upset saying, "Dude – don't give me that legalistic stuff! I'm free brother – Pastor Chris Carr said so just 2 weeks ago!"

Friends, this is very much just a continuation of the two previous messages, and even if your Bible this morning has a paragraph separation between the text last week and the text this week, the original letter did not have that, and it is a non-stop continual flow of thought from Paul. He does not say "Oh – and let's talk about something else here" No sir – Paul knows that the powerful truths of justification start a process that is just as glorious, just as amazing, just as important, just not as instantaneous. And I hope that by the end of our time this morning you will be as fired up about His finished work for you in justification as you are about his finishing work in you for our sanctification. I pray that we will be as excited to say "I HAVE that" faith that saves as we will proclaim, "I want more and more" of that faith that changes me, yes Lord!

Let's Pray. Lord Jesus, your Word is truth, and that's what we need. Without your truth, we will surely just make it up as we go, and we will nearly always make it up so that it agrees with whatever our flesh desires. I would ask that you clear away the noise in our heads, and the whisperings of the evil one – that tell us only what we want to hear and help us understand and desire the truth that we need to hear. The power is in your Word, may we hear it, receive it, and let it have the run of our lives. It's only possible with your Holy Spirit, amen.

Let's take a running start at our text this morning. We'll back up to Philippians chapter 3 verse 10 – and read all the way through verse 16.

¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 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. ¹³ *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,* ¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* 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.* ¹⁶ *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.* (Philippians 3:10-16 ESV)

Now, what Paul is referring to when he says, "I haven't obtained this," or that he's not "already perfect," He's referring to what we call "Sanctification". It's kind of a \$5 word, but we proved last week that we're big people and can handle it. And although he doesn't use the word here in our text this morning, we do get the word directly from the Bible and it is used many times by the Apostle Paul. The word in English comes from the Latin word *Sanctus*, which means set apart, holy. The Greek means the same thing, to be sanctified is to be "made holy" – to be morally pure. It means, "real change." It will be worth our time to get a working definition of sanctification, let's take a minute and flip over to Romans chapter 6 – a few chapters to your left. Pick it up in verse 20. Remember this is Paul writing.

²⁰ *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* (Before becoming a Christian, we only did what pleased us, and what pleased us was sin, we did nothing with the intention of (or the ability to) please God) ²¹ *But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?* (What did that get us?) *For the end of those things is death.* ²² *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, (our lives with this new spirit) the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.* There's not only a new master of our lives, there is new fruit that our lives are producing... so that what we feel, what we think, and what we do – changes. Not all at once, but it stops being selfish, stops being worldly, stops being God-dishonoring and starts being loving, and gracious, and kind. The fruit of the Spirit would be a great example of what "sanctification" looks like because this is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, so we will see more and more of those fruit – or those products of the Spirit - as this process continues. We'll be more loving, more joyful, more patient and more kind. We don't upon our conversion become instantaneously holy or completely sanctified. Paul over at the end of 1st Thessalonians – He's praying that God will sanctify us: our minds, our spirit, and our body. And then he says that, "God is faithful, He will surely do it," which means it's not done yet - it's a process.

So, in a nutshell, sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit, engaging our will (so we are very much involved here) moves us toward holiness through obedience, or conformity to Jesus Christ, toward sinlessness. It begins at regeneration, and it is completed upon either our death, or Jesus' return. Total sanctification is not possible in this life – (Grudem Systematic Theology graph.)

Now, Chris mentioned last week that by the time the Apostle Paul wrote this letter, he's been a Christian for about 30 years. And when it comes to Christians, if there were tall buildings back in those days, Paul would be at the top of one of those buildings with his cape flapping in the wind. He's just had this incredible life of service and obedience to the Lord. In the verses prior to our text this morning you'll recall Paul has been saying, "The only thing that matters is knowing Christ, being like Christ, I want more and more and more of Christ. Everything else is dung – it's poo." That's his attitude, and yet after 30 years - Paul has a very honest assessment of himself in this text, "I'm not there yet!" So his words right off the bat should be a little bit comforting to us, "*Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own.*"

Even Paul hasn't "made it." And remember, he's just in a different class than you and me. The guy gets beaten and thrown in jail, and he converts the jailer and everyone gets saved. People who are sick touch Paul's hanky and they get well. (If you touch my hanky, you're going to get the crud.) And do you hear him? He wants more! He's going to press on! He's not satisfied, and this is the guy who said, "I have learned to be content in all things." If I'm wealthy, praise God. If I'm poor, praise His name. If they whip me, praise Him that

I'm worthy of a beating for His name. But there is no contentedness in Paul when it comes to knowing Christ. He's saying, "There's more, always more!" In this thing, he is not content!

Look – we live in a time where in some Christian circles – in some churches – there is a culture that wants people to be contented. Be comfortable. They'll park your car, have great kids programs, great seats, a band, lights, you name it. And look – you affirm the pastor and tell him how gifted he is at preaching, and he makes you feel good about yourself each Sunday, and you do a few good things... and they'll just keep up this little game and call it church. I can tell you that is not this church. The Elders of this church, the Staff of this church, I would say including, but I really mean – especially - its lead pastor are serious about the pursuit of holiness in their lives and in our lives. We want the people who call Harmony Bible Church their home to have a healthy discontentedness. We should be uncomfortable with sin in our lives and we should all be serious about this because the Bible is serious about this. The apostle Paul is serious about this. Look – we're all for great kids programs, and great music and worship, and there might be a time when I even park your car for you, but God tells us in 1 Peter – to "*Be Holy as I am Holy.*" And that's a command to "be sanctified" – and He tells us in Hebrews to "*Strive for Peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*" – We need to press on!

Paul gives us an honest assessment of how satisfied he is – in his pursuit of becoming more like Jesus. – and he is not content. "I'm going to press on!" and I think it would be wise for us this morning to take that assessment ourselves. Where are you? Way down deep, where it's just your naked consciousness and God, do you really want more and more of Him? Do we *really* long for more of Him in our everyday lives? If we were to graph out our lives, looking back over the course of time – does it resemble the graph that Mr. Grudem gave us, or does it resemble this one?

I think there are 2 places that most of us find ourselves in. 1. Not Perfect, but totally satisfied... "I got enough Jesus thank you" and 2. – Not Perfect – and so defeated because of failure... we're paralyzed. I think Paul clearly speaks to each one in this text. There is actually a third place some people land, but it's a very small camp, so let's talk about it first: those who have achieved perfection. And we won't spend much time here. Notice Paul says "Not that I've obtained this – or am already perfect." Super Christian, healing people, suffering in prison for Jesus - Paul says that he's not perfect. Just going to take a wild guess and say I don't think anyone in here would claim to be perfect, to be free from sin. If perhaps you are on the edge of your seat this morning ready to raise your hand, I would just please ask you to check with your wife and kids before you make any kind of big announcement. OK? But there *were* people in that day who claimed to be free from sin and that they had reached a state of perfection. And there are those in this day who will stare right into the TV camera and preach a message that says we can claim Jesus as Lord and not suffer any effects from sin, that we can "*stay healthy and enjoy material prosperity and wholly overcome sin*" I have no idea how they can square that with this text where the most spectacular Christian who has ever lived – confessed that he had "Not arrived, or become perfect."

Before we leave the subject of perfection and get on to where most of us land. I do want to be clear that "Perfection" is the goal that we are to press on toward...and that is because Jesus is the goal we pursue. If we seek to be anything less than perfect, we are aiming at an object lower than God's plan and purpose – which is that we will be "conformed to the image of Christ," and that is perfection.

I think if we were honest, many of us would find ourselves in camp #1 this morning and verse 12 is for us. We've attained all we care for, we're good, we're satisfied. The sin, it doesn't really bother me all that much. And the reason I think we're satisfied is because we have not fully grasped who we are if we are in Christ. I'll say that again, we get satisfied because we've not fully come to grips with who we really are! Now, maybe you expected that we'd spend the rest of the time this morning hammering on "What you do," a long list of

things that you're falling short on, followed up by me standing up here saying "C'mon man! You're a complete slacker. Get with the program already! Guilt, guilt, guilt. Let's go! Get er' done!" But guilt is a terrible motivator, and if our motivation comes from a sense of begrudging guilt that we are complete slackers, then we'll just end up in Camp #2 where we're frozen because of failure. There's a saying in sanctification that we are "trying to catch up, with who God has made us already." And if we are ever going to make progress toward that goal, we have to "get" the who we are – not the "what we do" – because the "who we are" leads to the "What we do."

Paul in our text this morning knew "who" he was, that's why he pressed on to make it his own. Why do you press on Paul? Because Jesus had made me His own.... That is who he is. I don't think we get who we are, but I want to take you to a place in Scripture where God tells us who we are. Please turn with me in your Bible to 1 Peter chapter 2, I'm going to go ahead and put that on the screen, but I really want you to hold it in your hand, and underline it, and come back to it over and over. 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 1 - 9: We're going to just walk through it phrase by phrase.

" But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,"

If you are a Christian this morning, I hope you underline this, because this is your identity, and so far this has said nothing of what you do and talked only about who you are. Lets walk thru them. Believers in Jesus, are a chosen race, so yes, you are an individual, but you are a part of race that God has built, and it's across cultures, and across ethnic lines, and across people groups.... you are a part of the chosen race of God. It has nothing to do with your whiteness, your blackness. It has nothing to do with whether you're Asian, or Caucasian, and it has everything to do with you being chosen, that is your identity. From every tongue and tribe, who you are, is chosen! The people who are belonging to Christ who attend the 1st Baptist church in Danville, or the 4 Square Gospel Church in Burlington, or the (*whisper*) secret underground church in East Asia. Regardless of what they look like, they are brothers and sisters to you and I, and by the almost unbelievable Grace of God, we are a chosen race. But that's not all of who you are.

Peter goes on. You are a royal priesthood, so not only are we a chosen race - but we have been adopted as sons and daughters of the King, which makes us royalty. And He say's that you and I are priests, a royal priesthood, which means that every one of us has clear and constant access to God – so that everything in our lives (everything: work, rest, play) everything is done as worship to God as priests. So not only are we a chosen race, we are a royal priesthood, which means that we constantly live our lives in the presence of God, and you and I loose sight of this. We could look at Romans 12 – we could look at a lot of places – but the Bible teaches us that we who are believers live our lives in the presence (in front of) a Holy God and that all of life is Worship (on the ball field or at the workplace.) And if we live lives that don't reflect that, then we are out of character with who we are.

Imagine if you got in your car and you were headed on 34 East and you went up and over the Mississippi River bridge and made it just a mile or so into Illinois. And all of a sudden – bam – you have a blow out. It's the middle of the night – like 12:30 a.m. – and there are no cars going by and you have no cell phone with you. At this point you realize that you really have no choice but to wander over into Gulfport, IL. Now you know what Gulfport is famous for right? Give me the Harmony nod if you know what I'm talking about. It's nothing but seedy little "joints" (strip clubs.) You don't want to go there, but you have no choice. So you kind of shade your eye's and keep your head down as you wander into this smoky room and you come up to the first guy you see at the bar, and you tap him on the shoulder and you're like, "Hey buddy, can we step outside here and use your cell phone a minute, I got a flat." And the guy turns around, and it's LEONARD SCHANTZ! Your like, WHAAAA? This doesn't make any sense. This is totally out of character with who Leonard is... (This story was completely made up – just for the record.) I talked to Leonard last night on the

phone and he is in El Paso, Texas and has been nowhere near Gulfport I promise you. The point is, when we're OK with our sin, and we're satisfied with our holiness, we're completely out of character with who we are because you are royal priesthood!

And then He tells us that we are a holy nation. Notice that all of these are bigger than just you or just me. Yes, we are a part of this, but who you are is a part of something much bigger than ourselves (Chosen race, royal priesthood.) We don't live this life in a vacuum! Notice he didn't say you are a royal priest, but we are a royal priesthood, we are to do this together! We should encourage each other with even the tiniest of victories. "Gosh Ron, you are so *patient* with people. I wish I were more like that, will you pray for me?" You and I are part of something he's doing all over the world. We are part of a Nation and He has declared that Nation to be holy. Look, that is who you are. I pray you will believe it. I hope you are finding it increasingly difficult to be satisfied with sin in your life as we grasp just who we are.

Last one; we are a people for his own possession. I think our lives would change so much if we just got this way down deep, that we are His own possession. If you would just believe this, your not just a banker, or a nurse, or a teacher, or a business owner, you are his possession and he is watching over you. *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also give us all things?* He's constantly protecting his possession in ways that we will never know until we get to heaven. He is jealous for you; he isn't going to let this thing or that thing own you, because you are His. We are a people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his very own possession, and He will never let you go. There is a banner that is flying over our lives and it is a banner that God himself has made, and His banner say's "They're mine." I could stand up here all day long and holler 100 different ways how to "press on" and strain forward – but at some point – like the Apostle Paul, we have to believe that He has actually, no kidding made you his own, because who you are leads to what you do. You may be thinking that sounded very theoretical, but if we actually believed who God has declared us to be, I think we'll be astonished how our lives will reflect who we are.

Let's get back to our text in Philippians, because some of us are in the Camp #2... and because you've tried and failed, you've just figured you'll never make any progress in holiness or in sanctification and your frozen. Verse 13 *"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...[14] – I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Over and over Paul is telling us to press on, press on, don't quit and here he says, I haven't made it yet either. I fail at times, but let me tell you one thing I do "Forgetting what lies behind" – I strain forward. Now let's chat about that part of the verse a minute ok? Because I think this verse gets overused or at least misused sometimes: "Oh well, forget the past!" "Bible says just forget!" There are too many places in scripture that tell us to remember; even later this morning we will share in communion together where clearly Jesus Christ say's to "Do this in remembrance of me." Psalm 77 reads: *I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.* When Paul say's "Forget what lies behind" that doesn't mean that we just erase the memory and live in some fairy tail world where we act like it never happened. One way we know this is because about 8 verses earlier, Paul spells out exactly who he was when he gave us his pre-Christ resume. He hasn't erased his memory. Circumcised on the 8th day, the tribe of Benjamin, A Pharisee...and a persecutor of the church. The lesson is not "Never look back." The Lesson is: Look back only for the sake of pressing forward. Paul could have very easily said "I'm disqualified" He's shown me grace – but because of my past I'm of no use to Him! – I'm gonna just sit right here and hope he takes me soon! And some of you feel disqualified. And you'll say, Jeremy, you have no idea what I've done; you have no idea the wreckage that is in my past. And maybe you don't realize it, but what you are doing when you declare yourself disqualified, is you are actually trying to play God. You have unilaterally decided that whatever sin is in your past – it is too big for God to forgive...and you are wrong. I don't think that anyone in here can say that

their primary JOB in life was to persecute the church and kill Christians, and yet while Paul was in the thick of that, God decided to redeem him and turn everything around for His Glory. Listen, I can go here very easily.

I have one picture on my desk at work, just one. It's a little old Polaroid picture (some of you older folks will have to explain the whole Polaroid concept later) and I'll show it to you. That's me and my mama. Now some of you are laughing a little bit, because you thought that I have been bald since birth, and your surprised to see me with hair. But I can tell you that many times, I'll look at that picture, and instead of laughing, I cry. I look at that picture, and I think, I have wasted so much time. I've wasted so much. When that picture was taken, I had so much life ahead of me and I gave so much of it to the wrong thing. And very easily I can stay right there, in that spot – where I'm defeated, regretful and instead of straining forward to what lies ahead, I just think, "what an idiot I've been – and I can't get any of it back." And that's when I need to hear Jesus speaking to me through this scripture. Forget that. Don't let it paralyze you! He has redeemed that. Forget that past because God is going to use it for His Glory, and suddenly, almost as a gift, I recall that when that picture was taken, I was dead in my sins. That's a picture of a little boy who was in the darkness and so was his mama and that past and that person doesn't exist anymore and since that time I've been transferred into the kingdom of light, and so has my mom, and so have you. And we will spend the next 50 billion years together, worshipping the Savior who saved us, Jesus Christ, and I can hear Him, "Press On!" "Look back only for the sake of pressing forward! If you are going to look back Jeremy...look back and remember my grace!"

Sometimes we can look back at the accomplishments in our lives and we can get smug and proud, forgetting what is behind – straining forward to lies ahead means that with a completely thankful heart He should get the praise for every accomplishment. Some of us need to forget the good ol' days, back when you were really in the service of the Lord, because Paul reminds us that the Good ol' days are always ahead of us, "Thank you Lord, use me again.... I want to be used again!"

I read great commentaries this week about the imagery that is in the words that Paul used in this text. And if you've ever heard this passage preached before you know that it's a picture of these Olympic athletes that are on our TV's right now. It is about straining forward like a runner crossing the line, pressing on as hard as we can to the finish line, but I believe it's not so much about a physical battle, the real battle is within, in here, and this is where I want to bring faith in the gospel, and free grace right back into this. Because yes we are to press on, yes we are to strain forward...yes, yes, yes... but, this pressing on is not just faith in the Gospel and what God has done for us in the past through Jesus, it's faith that God will do what He say's He'll do in us in the future. The New Testament does not, and this text in Philippians does not, leave us in a place that say's – "Hey if you believe long enough and hard enough that you are a forgiven and justified person, you'll just become good." And then we just sit and wait for God to zap us and make us holy.

This faith that you have been given in the Gospel is faith that really trusts both in past grace and the promise of future grace. Our faith should be future oriented. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for (Hebrews Chapter 1) - what could we ask more clearly than that? If you were to ask me how does faith in the Gospel change your every day life? When we are given faith to believe the Gospel – and embrace it, faith that say's, I'm banking everything – all my hope is in this thing – that Jesus is the Messiah and what He did for me on the cross in the past makes him totally able to deliver on His future promises that He can actually bring me through. So faith in the Gospel doesn't only look backwards it looks forward, it clings and presses on to the future. I'm trusting in His promises and scripture tells us that all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus! Yes, He promises to be with me, in an hour and a half from now (that's the future.) He promises to deliver me (that's the future.) Yes, He promises to be totally for me, He is never against me. He promises to give me His Holy Spirit so that I will have the strength to be obedient to Him. Yes, all of God's promises find their Yes in Jesus Christ. Faith is faith in the future of what the blood of Christ has bought for us.

Press on, strain forward to what lies ahead in the full confidence that He is the Messiah and is able, and that you really are who you are: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. He has made you His own.

(Closing Prayer)

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