

MESSAGE TITLE: Are We There Yet?

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:12-16

KEY TRUTH

With all that Paul had accomplished in his Christian life, he is clear that he had not “arrived” yet. Our text reminds us that spiritually mature people do not live in their past; they press on to what God has provided for their future.

GETTING STARTED

Some believers in the church at Philippi could have seen Paul as a spiritual giant who had already ‘arrived’ in the eyes of God and man; someone who had his life perfectly together. Paul reminded his readers that he had not cornered the market on perfection, and had no illusion of achieving perfection this side of heaven. He wanted the Philippian believers to know that he had not yet fully realized the godly lifestyle he described earlier in verses 10 and 11. But, by God’s grace, Paul pressed on toward the goal of knowing Jesus better and experiencing more fully His resurrection life by faith. And he encouraged his readers to do the same – to press into God, driven by the realization that God had made them his own in Christ. This pressing into God required that believers let go of their past to strive to follow Christ in the here and now.

OBSERVATION

What according to verse 12 had Paul not yet attained? Read verses 7-11 for a fuller understanding of what Paul meant when he expressed a desire to ‘have made it my own’.

What one thing did Paul do to press on to maturity in his life? What did Paul mean when he said he forgets what lies behind him and strains forward to what lies ahead of him?

What goal did Paul say he strived to reach in verse 14?

What did Paul mean when he challenged believers in verse 16 to hold true to what they had attained?

APPLICATION

If we are not careful, we can become fixated on past successes and failures to the detriment of experiencing the joys of pursuing Christ now. How can we as believers forget what lies behind us and strain forward to what lies ahead? What makes it so hard to let go of the past?

Believers who remain paralyzed by their past mistakes often experience an avalanche of guilt and shame. How would this kind of emotional paralysis keep someone from pressing on to maturity in Christ? How might you use the truths of the Gospel to encourage someone like this to look to Jesus?

In verse 12, Paul boldly proclaims that ‘Christ Jesus has made me his own’. Do you personally believe that Jesus has made you His own? What does this mean to You, that Jesus has seized you as His own prized possession? When fully realized, how would this truth lead to freedom from fear and guilt?

Ask God today to stir up in you a desire for Him. He alone can give you a holy craving to live up to what we as believers have already attained, namely a right standing with God based on the blood of Christ.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for making me your own by adopting me in your family of faith! I realize that You made me your own not based on my own merit but because of your rich grace and mercy. Help me now cast aside my past successes and failures to strive forward to what you have in store for me in the future. Help me run with endurance that race that you’ve set before me.

SHARE POINT

Read and review the application questions. Share with someone in your life how God’s Word is changing you into a growing disciple. Encourage that person to do the same. That person could be a family member, a friend, a co-worker or a neighbor.

COMMENTARY NOTES

3:12 Paul stresses that he is not already perfect, he is still involved in the struggles of life in a fallen world and hence he still sins; the full glory of the resurrection means in the future that he presses on in the sure hope that he will one day be conformed to image of God in Christ.

3:14 The word ‘goal’ could also refer to the finish line in a race or an archery target. Paul’s life is purposeful, for he constantly aims toward a heavenly goal. The prize is the fullness of blessings and rewards in the age to come, most especially being in perfect fellowship with Christ forever.

3:15-16 Paul exhorts mature believers in Christ not to think too highly of themselves by assuming they have arrived at perfection by their own self-effort, as the false teachers who claimed perfection in the flesh. He encouraged them instead to live up to the calling of Jesus to follow Him, much like a soldier marches in rank behind his commanding officer.

SOURCES CONSULTED

ESV Study Bible

Serendipity Group Bible for Leaders

The Bible Knowledge Commentary (NT)

Holman Christian Standard Study Bible

