

# Looking Forward

INTRO: Take your Bibles and turn to Philippians 3:12-14. I'll keep talking to give you time to get there. These are some very famous verses in scripture that are often pulled out at New Year's or some other occasion when we not only take stock of where we have been, but we take a look forward to where we would like to go. That is what I want to talk about is where I would like to see us as a church focus and the direction I would like us to head in for this coming year.

READ: Philippians 3:12-14

- I. The first thing to note about what Paul says is an admission that he has not obtained all of this
  - A. The "this" that Paul is referring to is found in verse 10
    1. I want to know Christ
    2. I want to know the power of his resurrection
    3. I want to know the fellowship that comes from suffering for Christ
    4. I want to know what it is like to become like Him in His death
  - B. Ladies and gentlemen, I am not going to lie, that is a tall order.
    1. And no doubt that is why Paul said he has not reached that goal yet
  - C. It does seem odd that Paul would say that he wants to know Christ
    1. This is Paul - one that spend three years with Christ, suffered for Christ, and has such a deep relationship with Christ
    2. I think that shows us a couple of things
      - a) First, this desire to know is a lot like a loving marriage
        - (1) In a loving marriage there is a deep desire to know your spouse
        - (2) And in a loving marriage, over the many years, you continue to learn more and more
          - (a) Watch this video
          - (b) VIDEO: Home Improvement
          - (c) Did you hear what Earnest Borgnine said: Don't try to figure her out - that is a mystery that will last your lifetime, and it should
      - b) It is like marriage in a second way too
        - (1) Paul's desire for sharing in Christ's suffering can be equated to a loving marriage as well
        - (2) No one desires to suffer in some sort of masochist manner
        - (3) However, because of the love that is present, we are willing to suffer for the other person come what may
        - (4) So Paul is saying I love Christ so much I will suffer on His account - no matter what that suffering may take
          - (a) Would you go to prison for your spouse?

# Looking Forward

- (b) Would you take a beating for your spouse?
- 3. This is the kind of love for Christ that Paul desires
- D. And this is what He tells us that he has not attained yet
  - 1. What this screams is a holy discontent
  - 2. A drive and a desire to know Christ so deeply and intimately that even with all that Paul has accomplished in knowing Christ, he is not content - he wants more
- E. And the first thing that we should apply to ourselves
  - 1. Developing a holy discontent to know more of Christ
  - 2. To pray for a love that runs so deeply that some of Christ is never enough
  - 3. That the end of church or Bible study is like the end of a great date - we can't wait to find the next time we get to be together with Christ
- II. The second thing I notice in these verses, which goes hand in hand with the last part, is that Paul uses this drive and desire to set a focus and direction for the future
  - A. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."
  - B. Paul basically refuses to rest on his laurels
    - 1. He has had all kinds of successes in ministry
    - 2. People have come to Christ in droves
    - 3. Christ has healed people through Paul
    - 4. Through Paul, demons have been cast out
    - 5. He has many things to his credit - of course they all came because of Christ
  - C. Paul wants to press on toward the goal
  - D. For us the same would be true that we should never rest on yesterday's grace
    - 1. We should never be satisfied with how we grew last year
      - a) It should motivate us to grow more this year
    - 2. We should not refer back to one special event and how God used that in our lives only
      - a) Is it wrong to talk of how God used a special event in your life for growth - of course not
      - b) But if that is the only event you have - if you have no other ways in which you see where God has helped you to grow, that is a problem
        - (1) It can be that it is difficult to see when you are growing while you are in the midst of the growth

# Looking Forward

- (2) Just like your child does not realize how fast they are growing until they have already outgrown their clothes
- (3) We do a lot of growing, but often do not see it, because it is not dramatic growth
  - (a) If you tell me that you realize you are growing in Christ because you tripped over the dog - great! Because last year you would have been frustrated and sworn your head off, this year you were just frustrated - that's growth
3. Look, I don't care if your growth is dramatic or gradual, but all of us should be able to see how our lives are conforming more and more to the image of God
  - a) Which means it is always good to reflect on how we have grown
    - (1) Even ask those that know you best how they see you have grown
    - (2) Your spouse, your Life Group
  - b) It is also a wonderful practice to set some goals for yourself
    - (1) Think through your life and areas that may need growth
    - (2) Use that in how you pray, in ways that you direct yourself to grow, in the kinds of things you study or read
      - (a) And let me encourage you again, even if you are not a reader, if you read two pages a day, in a year you will cover an average of 3-8 books (depending on the exact size of the books)
      - (b) Maybe that can even be a personal commitment for this coming year to read some good Christian books on topics that interest you
        - i) Max Lucado is an excellent read on Christian living topics
        - ii) Francis Chan, David Platt, Ken Gire - all great, easy reading authors
        - iii) For some heavier hitters, Norman Geisler, J. I. Packer, D. A. Carson,
        - iv) Or how about this, get some biographies of famous Christians - we just went through several authors of the hymns: Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and others
    - (c) But personally, challenge yourself to set some goals for yourself

III. This brings up what direction and goals we set for our church for the coming year

  - A. The adage is true: He who fails to plan, plans to fail
    1. That is something I do not want our church to be guilty of is failing to plan

# Looking Forward

2. While we have made great strides forward in how ministries are run, in consolidating our form of government, in areas of our philosophy of ministry, I think setting some goals as a church for all of us to rally behind will help us in the ultimate goal of pursuing Christ
  3. So allow me to throw out a few goals that we will be aiming for in 2014 as a church
    - a) To do so I will start with the more general and move to the more specific
- B. Goal #1: To increase our obedience to God's Word
1. I left this as a large, broad goal because we certainly could put many specific things in under this umbrella
  2. Now please hear me on this because I don't think that we have a group in here that are borderline psycho killer types
    - a) I don't think that we have a bunch of drug dealers in here
    - b) I don't think we have people cheating on their spouses in here
    - c) I don't think we have people that have what might best be termed as obvious sin in their lives
  3. What I do think...scratch that...what I know is that we do have sinners in here
    - a) And all sin is is saying "No" to God
    - b) Most of us don't say "no" to God in most areas of our lives, but we may, or do say "no" to God in those areas that touch us most closely to the core of who we are
    - c) Let me give you some examples:
      - (1) For some of the single folk in the room, the area of romance is so important to you that instead of trusting God with how He directs you, you disobey God by striking out on your own - usually leading you to a person that does not love God
        - (a) You follow God in all other areas of life, but that one hits too close to home
      - (2) For some of you it may be that you don't want to follow God in the marriage you are in
        - (a) Some of you do not have your marriage relationship surrendered to God and so it results in negative behavior in your home
        - (b) You want to control that area of life rather than turning it over to Christ
        - (c) You want your way in your home, even to the point of making it sound like your way is God's way

# Looking Forward

- (d) And in every other area of life you are well submitted to God, but not your marriage
- (3) For some of you it is the area of finances
  - (a) In all other areas you are letting God do His transforming work
  - (b) But when it comes to money, you won't be generous
    - i) You won't give up your creature comforts to invest in the mission of God
    - ii) You won't tithe because money is the area at the core of who you are that you will not turn over to God
- (4) Some of you will not release your kids to God or to do God's work
  - (a) My dad struggled with that a bit, but my mom, while she was concerned trusted God with my future
- (5) Or how about the area of work
  - (a) You will not turn it off
  - (b) Your family is suffering, you are wearing yourself out, your kids are being raised without their parent, yet you will not allow God access to that area of who you are
- (6) Or schedule
  - (a) I harp on schedule and harp on schedule
  - (b) Maybe that is because I see people wearing themselves thin to participate in everything, and missing out on digging into the mission of God
- 4. Look, we all know, or should know that the Lordship of Christ is total and complete
  - a) You cannot tell God that He is welcome to this area of life, but hands off that
  - b) God wants it all, and He deserves it all
  - c) Remember that passage that we make so innocuous, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." - Luke 9:23
    - (1) The cross is no object of sentimentality
    - (2) The cross is not just bearing the burden that comes when people think you are weird for following Christ
    - (3) The cross was an instrument of torture and death
      - (a) The original hears of that phrase KNEW what Christ was saying!
      - (b) They knew that it meant their very lives
    - (4) The cross means sacrificing ourselves at the core of who we are for the mission of God
- 5. So however that translates for you

# Looking Forward

- a) Whether I mentioned your area of obedience or not
  - b) I think the first goal that we set, and perhaps a perpetual goal is increased obedience to God's Word
- C. Goal #2: Seek with all of our hearts to be about the mission of God
1. That means:
    - a) As individuals we each have our heart full and burning with passion to be apart of the mission of God
    - b) That means that we as a church body - the **WHOLE CHURCH BODY** - have our hearts full and burning with passion to be apart of the mission of God
  2. That also means seeking where we may be of service to God
  3. Looking out for those opportunities that God places in our path daily, as well as areas he may call us to along the way
    - a) Were you aware that you can go on family mission trips
    - b) Or perhaps your Life group would like to arrange something like that
    - c) Those are the out of the ordinary opportunities that God might call you to, if we are listening
  4. It also means being about the mission of God with our finances as a church and individually
    - a) I mentioned finances earlier, and I want to make something clear, we are **NOT** a church that is all about money
    - b) I am **NOT** a pastor that is all about money
    - c) In fact, my desire for our church is simple: that we have enough money to meet our budget
      - (1) Anything above our budget I want to see going to kingdom projects
      - (2) So for example, I would love to be able to stand up here, with budget covered and tell you that we have a great opportunity to share in the kingdom work of some missionaries that will go into this country and dig a well for clean, safe water, and teach the natives how to farm the land so they can provide for themselves - all while they share the gospel with the natives
      - (3) That is the kind of thing I would love to see us having a heart for and setting ourselves up to accomplish
      - (4) Then watch families do what they have to do to give
        - (a) Maybe you have a family night coming up and instead of going out to eat and a movie, dad, you talk with the family and explain why this is so important and give an alternative that we can get an order of chicken from Vinckiers (no, I am not a

# Looking Forward

- spokesman), and rent a movie, and use the leftover money for the project
- (b) That's awesome, because you have not lost sight of your family, or your wife (unless you choose this only because she was going to drag you to a chick flick and you think you can butch up the movie choice now), and you are seeking the mission of God
5. However this translates, in whatever area of life, I want to see us as a church and as individuals push ourselves to be about the mission of God
- D. Goal #3: That we would learn to speak to our friends and family about Christ (evangelism)
- 1. This is
    - a) The most specific goal
    - b) And the one that scares me the most
      - (1) You may find that odd - a Pastor that is scared to talk to others about Jesus
      - (2) Not at all - Tell me to talk about Jesus and look out, we could be there all day
      - (3) I'm scared because I'm more the introvert - I don't like talking to strangers
  - 2. Here is what I am becoming convinced of
    - a) For the kingdom of God to grow, and for God's church to grow, we need to be obedient to God and share Christ
    - b) Now, God will build His kingdom
      - (1) With or without us
      - (2) But it is far better with us when we are obedient, and we get to be involved in His blessings
    - c) The other thing is we keep hearing the same word: obedient
      - (1) You may have heard it said that it is called the Great Commission not the Great Suggestion
      - (2) This is an area that we need to soak in prayer, and allow our hearts to conform and beat with the heart of God for the lost in our community
  - 3. To achieve this goal, we are going to start talking about how to talk with your friends about Christ
    - a) Many, even most of us know the gospel
      - (1) Christ died in our place to take the punishment we deserved so that we could have a restored relationship with God
      - (2) That, in some ways is the easy part
    - b) The hard part nowadays is how to get to be able to share Christ

# Looking Forward

- (1) People have their defenses up
- (2) We have to learn how to take those defenses down, and do so in a way that people feel inclined to ask more questions
4. One of the things we will do is begin a sermon series next week designed to help us start to learn how to do these things
  - a) It really can be considered a form of “pre-evangelism”
  - b) Pre-evangelism being what we say to our friends and family to help minimize defensiveness, and create an openness so that we can get to the gospel
    - (1) None of this happens all at one time
    - (2) I have a cartoon:
      - (a) First of all this pretty well displays my attitude about Christian Fiction books - I know I will get tarred and feathered for that, but its okay
      - (b) But I think sometimes we think evangelism is supposed to be just that easy - we say our speech, and someone drops to their knees begging for how they can be saved
    - (3) It is a process, and can even be a lifelong process - but one well worth engaging in
5. As of the writing of this sermon, I have not determined how long the series will last
  - a) In part because I need to teach you a process of knowing how to ask questions to help the person you are speaking with arrive at the idea you want them to, but do that on their own
  - b) In part, I may need to go into greater detail about common ideas that are out there, and how we as Christians should respond
6. The other part to this will be that this is not just going to be an emphasis for the sermon series
  - a) This is going to be an emphasis for the whole year
  - b) Reaching out to those around us with the good news of Jesus Christ
  - c) Being obedient to Christ’s command to share the good news