

[calling up the reserves]

:: philippians 3.12-14 ::

Couple of verses this morning. Paul talking us through the Christian life and the fullness of God which is available to us day by day, says in verse 12 of chapter 3:

Philippians 3.12-14 - Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The Christian life is all about 2 things: The *reality* of what God has done for us and our *reaction* to that knowledge. Spiritual motivation isn't about greed or selfish ambition or resentment or guilt or anything like that. A spiritually motivated man is the man who understands what Christ has done for him. It is a personal love and expectation that causes a person to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. And once a person is on the road of discipleship, they are headed toward spiritual fruit, Kingdom usefulness and eternal reward. It's on the disciple road that we become representatives of Jesus Christ and are endowed with His power to shake the world. And as we follow after God, counting all other worldly things as loss, we get closer and closer to Him and we are conformed more into the image of Jesus.

Now, Paul takes a moment to address some doctrinal issues here. Because, some might come along and take a look at these texts and come to the conclusion then that a *real* Christian is sinless. And a *real* Christian commands the resurrection power at his discretion. A *real* Christian does all this and more. And, sadly, that is a doctrinal position that some groups within Christianity hold and teach.

Here's what Paul says:

Philippians 3.12 - Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

The apostle says, "I'm not perfected. You're not perfected. None of us can be perfected on this side of eternity." Now, if the Apostle Paul can evaluate his life and, at this point, say that he has not attained that which he's pressing on toward, then of course we understand that no Christian could ever attain perfect glorification or sinlessness on this side of heaven. To say otherwise is simply unbiblical.

At first that might disappoint us a little bit. The understanding that in this temporal life we'll always have to struggle with temptation and sin, we'll always have to walk by faith, trusting that the Lord is doing what He says He's doing, always be in that state of imperfection, being molded and tried by the Lord.

But, if we adjust our thinking, we will find ourselves not being disappointed with the imperfection of this life, but rather being invigorated by the completion God is bringing about within us.

Paul's mind was set on how **close** he was, not how **far** he was. Does that make sense? To Paul, the pursuit of Godliness was always just out in front of him. He had the finish line in sight and understood that the Lord was ushering him along and strengthening him to get there. Because Jesus Christ had laid hold of him for that very reason: To turn Paul into the man we see in the text of Scripture. To take a lost sinner, a persecutor of the Church, and transform him into someone who was in tune with God and full of the Holy Spirit, able to testify of the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

What we see is that Paul understood that Jesus had laid hold of him personally, and had set this life before him with a work to do and a race to run. Paul didn't spend all his time being disappointed that he wasn't perfect yet. He didn't spend his time being disheartened. Instead, he spent his time reaching out toward God and straining to take hold of all that God had for him.

We sometimes get bogged down in the imperfection and can get discouraged about how *far* we think we are from the excellence of heaven. But we must never lose heart. Because we *are* on our way as Christians. We're being transformed and conformed. Jesus Christ has laid hold of us and now we are new creations. Ironside has a good analogy. He thinks of the apple on the tree. From the death of a seed to the blossom of the bud to the development of the fruit, there is this wonderful progression. We look at an apple hanging on a branch in May and we think, "This apple isn't finished yet." It may not be finished, but it's still an apple. It's just not done. It hasn't been made complete on the branch. Now, walk by that same apple in August, and will have matured and ripened. It will be exactly what it's meant to be, and it's made that way by staying connected to the tree and growing on the branch.

We are in the hands of Christ. He's laid hold of us and He's made us into a new creation. And now He's set us on a path that leads to fruitful completion. Along the way we develop and we grow. He works out the imperfections continually until we finally ushered into eternity and made into glorified citizens of heaven.

But then, one might think, a Christian doesn't really have to do anything in order to fulfill his purpose. He just sits and the growth happens. Of course we've seen how that isn't true from our earlier studies, we see it all over the New Testament, and Paul reiterates it again in these verses. If we want to receive the fullness of God, the fullness of His presence and His guidance, the fullness of His grace and His reward, then we must stretch out and push toward Him day by day. That's the choice to make. The same choice Jesus gave everyone who came and wanted to be a disciple. The Rich Young Ruler, the man who wanted to bury his father, the others as well, where it was put before them whether they would pursue God or whether they would let Him pass them by.

Paul said, "Look, Jesus Christ has laid hold of me to make me a new creation, but He's also taken hold of me for a specific purpose." And, indeed, we've seen that every Christian is grasped by God for some specific purpose. Some specific assignment and calling. And so, before each one of us there is a calling to **serve** the Lord and a calling to become **like** the Lord.

Onward and upward. Not letting God pass us by. Not letting Godly opportunities pass us by. Not becoming rigid in the hands of the potter, but moving forward, toward Christ in heaven.

The way Paul describes this pursuit is with race language. A runner, running flat out for the finish line. Pushing through fatigue and difficulty with the finish and the prize in mind.

He goes on to describe this frame of mind in verse 13:

Philippians 3.13-14 - Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Interesting here, Paul fully expected that there was more for him to receive from the Lord, more for him to do in the Lord. He had ambition to move forward in his faith because he knew that the abundant life Jesus offers doesn't end at salvation. One Bible commentator draws the analogy of marriage. Getting saved is like your wedding day. It's wonderful. It's life changing. But that's not the end. In fact, the wedding day is just the beginning. The depth of relationship is found *after* that. And so Paul expected each day to be an opportunity for him to gain ground in his pursuit of God.

To that end, he forgot the things which were behind. We should forget them as well. Be they past sins which the Devil tries to use to discourage or trip us, or past victories, which can sometimes cause us to slow our pace. Paul was all about moving forward vigorously.

Again, thinking of the runner analogy. If you're competing to win a marathon, you don't have time to think about how great you did back at mile 4. "Man, I just *CRUSHED* it during mile four. I ran so fast. I passed so many people." Great. But mile 4 is gone. All that's left is what's in front. Because if you're running to win, there has to be singular focus and strenuous effort to get there. And so, one of the keys to living a Spirit-filled life is to not let your past control your present or your future. If there's sin, repent and be set free by the forgiveness of God. If there's great victory in your past, praise the Lord. Give God the glory. Don't consider yourself finished because you ran a great mile 10 years ago. There are more depths to God's grace and providence in your life. Keep running to win.

I think sometimes we think more militarily than we do athletically. Because when I think about military strategy I start thinking about the lines of defense and the groups of engagement. I think about the reserves that are held back for defense and contingency planning.

But Paul's asking us to think athletically. He's asking us to think of life as if we are a marathoner who's competing to win. Of course, in this marathon, there are lions that are seeking to devour you and enemies trying to trip you and obstacles to overcome. But it's a race. And in this race we can't be holding ourselves back. We can't store reserves of our life that we bank on in case this sanctification stuff doesn't work out. There has to be a flat out pursuit of God. And we need to push ourselves to grasp the fullness that God has set before us.

And so the question is: **Are we straining?** Are we pressing? Are we running the race to win the race, at a flat out exertion? Have we called up the reserves, or are we holding back the

surrender of our lives because of some fear or some entanglement with the world or some distraction?

Jesus came to give us abundant life. And in that abundance there is always more that we can receive, more than we can become, more than we can do with our Savior, not out of obligation, but out of devotion for the One who stopped you on your Damascus road and saved you from your sin and put a new path before you that brought you from darkness to light and is carrying you to heaven.

So, today, I encourage all of us to call up our reserves. Hold nothing back in your pursuit of God. Focus on the calling you've received and remember that God's desire is to fill you and mature you, to bring you from glory to glory as you keep pace with Him and press into His marvelous plan for your life.