



Philippians 3:12-21 Forget About It

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
www.calvarydcmetro.org

Have you ever had a friend ask you for advice, or have you ever seen that they needed some advice whether they asked for it or not, and offered it up? You see the right thing for them to do and you're really, REALLY encouraging them to do it. If you could jump in and drive their life for them, this is the choice you would make.

That's what Paul has been doing here throughout Chapters Two and Three – he's encouraging the Christians in Philippi to "let [their] conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27) and to manifest that by living in peaceful unity with one another, submitting to God, like Jesus did, for the sake of others because "it is God who works in [them] both to will and to do according to His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

And, as we saw last week, he is encouraging them to do all of this while rejoicing in Jesus – and then to let God shape their lives as a worshipful act of sacrifice.

Paul continues his plea this morning as we finish Chapter Three and we're going to see him wrap up his argument for *why* they, and we, should do all of this by pointing out the differences in what people live for and how that either holds them back or pushes them forward in their relationship with God.

He's just been telling them about how he considers nothing in his life to be more important than knowing Jesus, and now:

[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.

Alright, so first things first – here's what we have to understand – it all starts with God. Paul says, "Christ Jesus has laid hold of me." Yes, *I* press on, but its only because I see and I have become convinced of the value of, "that for which *Christ Jesus has laid hold of me.*"

Every one of you in here this morning has been or is being touched by God. You can submit to it or you can resist it, but He IS touching you. And not just brushing up against you, *laying hold of you!* And if you sit here and say, "No, He's not" then there are only two options that I'm aware of: either He is teaching you to trust Him even when He doesn't seem as close as He has in the past, or you've resisted Him so long He's relaxed His grip.

Paul says flatly "Christ Jesus has laid hold of me." I love the violence of the wording here.

KJV – I have been "apprehended"
NIV – Jesus Christ "took hold of me"

ESV – “Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

Now put that idea of Jesus taking hold of you with His hand together with what Jesus said in John 10 where He identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” (vss 27-30).

This past Thursday Mady was at work, so after school I picked up Ben and took all three kids down to the stream near our house for a walk. It didn’t take long for the boys to wander into the water and start splashing around a bit. They’re boys and they love to explore, especially to explore limits and danger so they want to wade out into the water and walk along. Now that’s fine because the water in most of the places we were is only up to their knees or their waists if they hit a deep spot.

But they’ve also got a sister, and she’s younger and smaller, and she probably has less fear than both of her brothers put together – so she naturally assumes anything they can do, she can do too. And several times she tried to tromp off after them and I had to reach out and grab her by the back of her dress and pull her back on to the shore before she slipped and fell into something that would have been too deep for her.

I’ve pulled that maneuver on everyone of my kids at one point or another, and I have to tell you, honestly, it just feels pretty cool to be able to reach out and grab them and lift them out of danger or trouble and place them where you would rather have them. And that’s kind of how I envision this – that Jesus Christ has laid hold of me. And because I know myself and my tendency to wander off and get in trouble – it’s what I really want from Him too.

I want to know that God has violently, forcefully, grabbed me. And much like I did with Karisa – I only grabbed her to put her back on the shore safely, after that I either held her hand lovingly or let her walk along freely under my supervision. *That’s what I want to know God is doing in my life!* I WANT a Good Shepherd. I need a Good Shepherd. And I need to submit to my Shepherd and not resist His grip on my life.

Because, did you notice, Paul says Jesus grabs hold of us *for a reason*.

Paul says he presses on in his walk with God because he wants to lay hold of “that *for which* Christ Jesus laid hold of him.”

Paul understands that he has been saved for a reason. He has been saved for a relationship and a purpose.

I didn’t just walk along the stream on Thursday and pull some random kid out. I would have if it looked like there was an emergency, but I pulled MY kid out. So I didn’t just pull her to safety, set her on the sand and then keep on my merry way, I stayed with her because she is mine.

You and God are like that. Too many people walk around with this notion of Jesus the lifeguard – there to come to your rescue when life really hurts, but the rest of the time He’s sitting up there quietly keeping an eye on things from His chair. He doesn’t really care what you do with the rest of your life; He’s just there to get you out of a jam – a sort of spiritual 911 you can dial.

That’s not it at all – and Paul wants the Philippians, and us, to understand that – God saves us, but He saves us for a reason – salvation is only the first step in a very long journey. And the best way to categorize that journey is as a long string of submissions - a life of repeating the words, “Yes, Lord.” That’s the key to understanding and taking hold of “that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of you.”

Now, as we move along, Paul is going to show us two things that keep us from saying those words.

[13](#) 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, [14](#) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The first thing Paul mentions is forgetting the past and focusing on the future.

That’s important for two reasons. The past can hold us back because of how bad we think it was, or how good we think it was.

I run into people all the time that tell me they used to go to Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, some of them even back when it was in the tent – that was 1972-73. God was doing a pretty radical work back then, during the Jesus People movement when all the hippies were getting saved. Most historians and sociologists have agreed: it was a revival, on par with the greatest revivals of history.

But the thing that always strikes me is the difference between what I imagine must have been going on back then, and what the person standing in front of me’s life is like now. I think to myself “how could you have been a part of that, a year or two before I was even born, and not be a rock star in your walk right now? Shouldn’t that have set you on a trajectory of amazing growth over these past years?

But then I realize what is going on, because the same thing happens in my own life. It’s easy to be a part of something amazing or to have a very spiritually moving experience, and for that light which once seemed so powerful and blinding to diminish with time. Many of us have had “Hallelujah Hilltop” experiences – moments it seemed like God really did grab ahold of us, moments when His presence seemed so real.

But what do we do when the miraculous fades back into the mundane? When the curtains that were parted for a moment, to give us a glimpse of the glory of God, softly fall shut again? Do we continue on, obedient to what was so powerfully impressed on us in that

moment, or do we let it fade and get distracted by other things, by the “reality” of day-to-day life?

For most of us, it’s the latter. We long for, and rightly so, those powerful God encounters – but if we don’t get them, it’s easy for us to drift. We lack the commitment of Paul, the desire to lay hold like we’ve been laid hold of.

Yet Jesus has said, “**Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:9-10; Matt 7:7-11)

God always initiates His relationship with people, but we are called to respond to that initiation and sometimes that means passionately pursuing. We can’t just sit back and reminisce about the good old days, about what God did that one time, and let that be enough. We have to keep seeking Him for today.

When the Israelites were wandering through the desert for forty years between their exodus from Egypt and their arrival in the Promised Land, God provided them with food every day – manna, but He only gave them enough for that day. If they tried to save today’s manna for tomorrow, it would rot. You and I need fresh manna for today. We can’t live off of yesterday’s relationship with God.

But here’s the cool flip side of that – some people need to forget the past because they think it was good enough, others need to forget the past even though it was full of darkness, shame, and sin.

Remember, that is what Paul is talking about here in his own example. He’s just recounted his own resume in verses four through seven, including those spots where he was actually persecuting Christians – remember, standing by while his friends chucked rocks at Christians until they died, and Paul was like, “that’s cool.” At this point in his life, *he’s got a lot in his past that he could be ashamed of!* But he knows that’s no longer the man he is now; after Jesus took a hold of him, everything changed.

He hasn’t *forgotten* who or what he was, *but he’s not dominated by it anymore.* He doesn’t look at it as an excuse for why he can’t or shouldn’t be used mightily by God right now.

Look, we all have a past. Some of us might have more colorful pasts – so some us have the basic Crayola eight pack of colors past, and some of have the big box of 64 colors, with the built in sharpener, though nowadays they actually have a 98 box! – but, we all have a past. And none of us can say we were worse than Paul.

So, if he’s not held back by his past, don’t be held back by yours either. EVERYTHING fits under the blood of Jesus. You need to give it up to Him and press on. TODAY. Don’t let anything in your past, whether an accomplishment or a failure, keep you from serving Him, actively, passionately, aggressively today.

[15](#) Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

If you keep an open ear God will keep you on course. I need to reach over and snatch up Karisa because she's young and doesn't obey well yet. But Ben I can direct with my voice most of the time. "Son, walk to the left of that log." "Son, you need to cross the stream over there, not here." And as long as he listens to me, things will go well. But he has to hear and choose to respond.

[16](#) Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

[17](#) Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

In my Bible, above the word, Brethren, I have written "Mady, Benjamin, Christopher, Karisa." My wife, my children, "join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern."

I want to challenge you all, but especially you men, to do the same. Think about what your doing, don't just do it because I said so, but think about writing the names of your wife, and your children, above the word Brethren.

We need examples of Godly living in our lives, and we need to be an example to others. Don't fall for this pseudo-piety that says, "oh I'm just a man, I wouldn't want people to look at me, they should look to Jesus." True, but they should see Jesus reflected in you because the alternative, as we're about to see, is ugly.

[18](#) For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: [19](#) whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is* their belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

These people "were digging their graves with their own teeth"¹

The question is: is Paul talking about people who were Christians and now aren't? Have they lost their salvation? No one is sure what actually happened, we don't have all the details, but we can clearly see what it looked like from the outside: there were people who at one time looked like Christians, and they did some Christian things – probably came to church with their friends or family for a while, but they never really gave up on doing whatever they wanted to do. Religion was a nice, or at least a tolerable addition to their lives, but it always remained on the sidelines and never took center stage.

Instead, what they were really driven by was their own appetites – for pleasure, for power, for position, for material possessions, "earthly things." Things that don't last. Things that

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, 157.

aren't bad in and of themselves, but things which should be accessories in our lives, not the focus of our lives.

Paul's whole argument is this – how can you be living life for yourself and your own goals and agendas while claiming to follow a God who sent His own Son to die for others? It's incongruous, it doesn't make sense. You either live for God and glorify Christ or you live for yourself and are an enemy of the cross and it's all determined by what you set your mind on.

And for the Christian, that should be Christ and eternity with Him – we should be constantly asking, how can I serve God here and now, in this job, in this relationship, in this city – how can I bring everything that I say and do under His authority, knowing that all of this is really just preparation for what is to come:

[20](#) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21](#) who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Two things that keep us from saying “Yes, Lord”: a focus on the past as if it was enough – either good enough or bad enough, and a focus on the present as if this is all there is.

As Christians we need to remember that there is more to come – we join Paul in “eagerly waiting for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” He is to be the focus of our lives. Not what we have done in the past or what we have the opportunity to do today, but what He wants from us for all of eternity.

It's my prayer that we would all be snatched up by Jesus today – taken hold of – and that we would submit to His will. And that once He has placed us where He wants us to be, our eyes would be fixed on Him, our ears would be tuned to Him, and He would be the One directing our lives - helping us to resist the temptations that come along so frequently and attempt to get us off track.

We're going to celebrate communion this morning and it's a great time to say “thank you for taking hold of my life” – a great time to remember what He has saved you from and what He has saved you for – a great time to ask, “Lord, is my mind set on earthly things right now, or is my mind set on You?” and then to respond appropriately to the conviction or comfort of the Holy Spirit.