



Sermon Text: Philippians 3:12-21

Sermon Date: April 23, 2017

Previously we saw that Paul had sacrificed all he had in pursuit of Christ, and yet he was profoundly satisfied (3:1-11). Paul's deep satisfaction in Christ produced a desperate striving to know him more. His contentment in Christ kept him from being content with knowing only a little of Christ.

The main thrust of our text is: **The Christian life is defined by striving.** In verses 12-21, we examined five qualities of gospel-shaped striving.

FOCUSED STRIVING (12-14)

Paul was focused on the goal—obtaining the resurrection from the dead (11). That is, enjoying the culmination of Christ's victory on our behalf. He was focused on the finish line of Heaven. He refused to stand on past triumphs or dwell on yesterday's failures. His vision was always forward, fixated on the goal of the Christian life. Without focus all of our striving will eventually falter.

INTENSE STRIVING (12-14)

Focus produces intensity. Paul uses the image of an Olympic athlete. Paul presses on. He strains forward. Gordon Fee explains, Paul pictures "himself as a runner whose every muscle and nerve is singularly focused on the goal, in hopes of winning the prize." We too should strive hard in our Christian lives, straining forward to know Christ with greater insight and love. D.A. Carson says, "Christians should never be satisfied with yesterday's grace."

HUMBLE STRIVING (15-16)

Yet, while we are to follow Paul's example with focused, intense striving after Christ, we must do so with humility. Paul is adamant that he has not arrived, and we must fully grasp that none of us have either. We must guard against the temptation toward arrogantly looking down upon others, sinfully criticizing the pace of their pursuit of Christ. We must never think that it is our job to take God's place in other people's sanctification. The mature should think like Paul, and where they don't, God "will reveal that also to you."

CAREFUL STRIVING (17-19)

Paul calls the church to strive carefully, with discernment. There are many people out there whose life and teaching are not marked by the Cross. We cannot follow their example. They are enemies of the cross because their teaching is indulgent and idolatrous because their minds are set only on earthly things. Like Paul, we must denounce them, not with callous spite, but with tears.

HOPE-FILLED STRIVING (20-21)

Lastly, we must strive with our eyes fixed on the hope of Heaven, longing for Christ's return. Our citizenship is heaven and we desperately await our Savior. Striving will cease in the life of the person who loses sight of heaven. The cross-centered life must also be a heaven-centered life if it hopes to remain a cross-centered life. Carson says, "Genuine spirituality cannot live long without an attitude that is homesick for heaven."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Do you feel your Christian walk is defined by striving hard after Christ? If not, what are some reasons you are not?
3. Saturating your heart in heaven is the only way to sustain a lifestyle of Cross-bearing. How can you grow more homesick for heaven?