

SERMON NOTES

By Pastor John Paul Miller

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians

Philippians 3:13-16 – “Running to Win the Prize”

In I Corinthians 9:24, Paul says, “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*”

There’s an interesting contrast between the Olympic Games, which Paul is using here as a metaphor, and the believer’s running the race of sanctification and the Christian life.

On the race on the tracks of the Olympics only one receives the prize.

As believers we all will receive the prize.

Paul used illustrations from the world to communicate truth about the Christian life:

1. **Military** – “*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*” (Ephesians 6:11)

2. **Farming** - “*...for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*” (Galatians 6:7-8)

3. **A building illustration, drawing from architecture** - “*...we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*” (1 Corinthians 5:1)

4. **A Body** – “*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

5. **Athletic Arena (Paul’s favorite)** – “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*” (1 Corinthians 9:24)

- the Christian life is pictured as a race
- all Christians are in the race
- all Christians can win the prize
- the prize is not salvation (we can’t earn it)

What is the prize? “*...the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*” (vs. 14)

God will make us like Jesus Christ!

But the sad truth is many Christians are not running well.

Galatians 5:7, *"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"*

"Philippians 3:13-16, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

What are the essentials we need to run well, finish the race, and win the prize?

I. An Honest Admission (vs. 13a)

Philippians 3:13a, *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended:..."*

Remember Paul had already admitted that he had not yet attained (vs. 12)

Philippians 3:12, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

1. He had not received everything
2. He had not become everything
3. He had not done everything

However here in verse thirteen, there is a new emphasis; he is contrasting himself with others.

Notice the pronouns: *'I'* and *'myself'* are emphatic. They stress that Paul had evaluated his own spiritual condition.

He had not accepted the opinions of others.

He did not compare himself to others.

It could be that Paul is contrasting himself with the false teachers of verse twelve, they were legalist, and so self-satisfied and complacent.

No matter how much we grow in knowledge and likeness to Jesus, there's always room for growth.

The Bible warns us not to have a false estimate of our spiritual condition.

Jesus said to the church in Sardis, *"...I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."* (Revelation 3:1)

This church had reputation without reality!

The church at Laodicea boasted that it was rich yet God said they were *"...wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:"* (Revelation 3:17)

When it comes to self-evaluation we can err in two directions:

1. We can make ourselves better than we are.
2. We make ourselves worse than we really are.

An honest admission of your spiritual progress is so important.

Illustration: Samson

Judges 16:20, *"And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. (Like I have before) And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him."*

II. A Holy Ambition (vs. 13b-14)

Philippians 3:14b-14, *"...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

Paul's honest admission did not lead to discouragement or defeat (as it often does with us) but rather to a new determination.

Paul's life had one grand goal: *"...this one thing I do..."* (vs. 13) or, one thing!

Notice our problem – As Christians, we don't narrow our focus down to one thing.

We get distracted by many things.

Matthew 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

Nehemiah 6:3, *"And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"*

Not Paul, his life was lived with unity of purpose and such definiteness of aim, that nothing could distract or divert him from it.

To be effective while running a race, you need to keep your eye on the goal.

What was Paul's goal?

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."
(vs. 14)

Remember, Paul was in prison

How do you reach the goal?

1. forgetting those things which are behind - the past (vs. 13)

What does it mean to forget the things which are behind?

It's not erasing from your memory from what has happened in the past.

It means we break the power of the past by living for the present and future.

- we don't let the past hold its power and influence over our lives.

We can't change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past, and the effect it has on us.

There were things in Paul's past that could have been weights to hold him back.

I Timothy 1:12-16, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

Note the two dangers:

1. letting the regrets, failures and hurts of the past slow you down.

- don't live shackled by the past
- see it from God's perspective

Illustration: Joseph and all that happened to him.

He refused to let the past hinder him from the future.

Genesis 50:20, "*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*"

2. letting past successes make you self-confident and complacent.

- you can't run looking back

2. reaching forth (vs. 13)

Someone has said, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." For the believer in Jesus, the best is yet to come.

We should be reaching forth – the verb 'reaching' denotes an athlete who runs with all his might, who strains his entire body to cross the finish line.

Are you?

What are *those things which are behind*?

Philippians 3:10, "*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*"

Philippians 3:14, "*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*"

There was so much more for Paul to do.

Illustration: David Livingstone, the great missionary, back in England, was once asked, "where are you ready to go now?" "I am ready to go anywhere provided it be forward."

3. I press toward the mark - (vs. 14)

To press describes a vigorous, concentrated pursuit.

You don't become a winning athlete by listening to lectures, or watching others compete.

Paul was a man with one purpose – to win the prize

Hebrews 12:1-2, *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

John Wesley was a man who ran well:

John Wesley traveled on horseback the equivalent of ten times around the world's equator. He preached as often as fifteen times a week for fifty years. He authored more publications than any writer in the English language until the contemporary science fiction writer Isaac Asimov. He read books while making his horseback journeys. When he was past eighty, he complained that he could not read and work more than fifteen hours a day.

There are two extremes to avoid:

1. I must do it all – the activist
2. God must do it all – the quietist

Remember Philippians 2:12-13?

Philippians 2:12-13, *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

Remember to keep your eyes on the prize.

Illustration – At the Greek games, the winner of a race was summoned from the stadium floor to the seat of the judge. A wreath of leaves was placed upon his head. At Athens, the winner was also given five hundred coins, free meals, and a front row seat at the theater. These prizes were temporary, but believers can obtain an eternal and incorruptible prize (1 Cor. 9:26)

It's the believers high or upward calling.

III. An Honor Achieved (vs. 15-16)

Philippians 3:15-16, *“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”*

“Let us therefore,...” – Paul is saying, in light of our honest admission, and holy ambition, we are to have two aims to achieve:

1. The same mind – “...*thus minded* ...” (vs. 15) – Like Paul (mature)

Perfect?

What about verse twelve?

Paul uses two different Greek words for the word *perfect*.

(vs. 12) absolute, complete perfection

(vs. 15) a relative perfection - maturity

2. The same walk – “...*walk by the same rule* ...” (vs. 16) – same conduct

Let us believe and live like Paul

Only let our conduct be consistent with the level we have attained.

Are you running well?

God has only one way of salvation

He also has only one way of sanctification

You are saved by faith in Christ alone.

You are sanctified by total submission to the Holy Spirit and obedience to the standard set forth in scripture.

Let us mind the same thing.

In a small church grave yard at the foot of a mountain in Switzerland, there was a head marker with the following caption: “he died climbing”

What a fitting caption for a believer!

The Christian life summarized is always forward and upward.

FLAME of GOD

By

Amy Wilson Carmichael

From prayer that asks that I may be
Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee,
From fearing when I should aspire,
From faltering when I should climb higher
From silken self, O Captain, free
Thy soldier who would follow Thee.

From subtle love of softening things,
From easy choices, weakenings,
(Not thus are spirits fortified,
Not this way went the Crucified)
From all that dims Thy Calvary
O Lamb of God, deliver me.

Give me the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that will burn like fire;
Let me not sink to be a clod;
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.

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