

JOY IN PRESSING ON

Philippians 3:12-4:1

Good Morning! It's great to be back with you today. If you're not already there, open your bible up to Philippians 3. Last week we looked at vs. 1-11 and today we're going to finish the chapter through 4:1. The book of Phil. was a letter written to the church in Philippi by the Apostle Paul from his prison cell. Which makes it surprising that the overtone and theme of his letter is joy.

What we saw last week (throughout the letter) is that the joy that Pauls calling us into, the joy that he's experiencing, is unmoved by circumstances. That even when difficulty, suffering, even when the unexpected happens, his joy is unshaken.

Theres probably things in your life right now that are stealing your joy, or threatening to steal your joy? Maybe you haven't been incarcerated for preaching the gospel, but there's probably something. And if not right now, chances are there will be soon. Small or big, unexpected, when you don't get what you want, often are legitimate bad things that happen to us-financial, health, family issues, relational...

And our tendency is to focus on those things and how big, discouraging, disappointing, harmful they are, and lose sight of God in our trouble. We spend 1/2 our energy lamenting and complaining about our situation, and the other half trying to get out of it.

But Pauls saying that the issue isn't avoiding those things happening to us, they're going to happen. He wants us to know how to hold on to our joy even in the midst of the storm, difficulty. That's what we're going to look at this morning, Joy in Pressing On. How do we persevere in Christ and have joy in the midst of this broken world. So let's start by reading our passage, Phil. 3:12-4:1 (slide 3-7).

Stand firm in the Lord. What does it mean for us to stand firm in the Lord? Paul starts out saying, "Not that I have already attained this." What is this? "This" is referring to what Pauls been talking about so far in this letter, it's a pursuit, something he's giving His whole life to go after. It's what we talked about last week. He says, I haven't yet fully obtained it, but I'm going after this. And "This" is Knowing Jesus.

You can give your life to so many different things, but for Paul, and should be for us, the most important thing is to give your life to Knowing Christ, shedding everything else as worthless compared to knowing Him. This is what he says in Phil. 3:10-11 (slide 8), "10 **that I may know him** [what it's all about, drives/motivates Paul] **and the power of his resurrection**, [and we all say-yes and amen, right!] **and may share his sufferings**, [We don't like this. This is when the crowds would walk away from Jesus].

[Paul understood these sufferings were profound in the believers life. That following Jesus meant we would suffer like Him, but that its not purposeless, but God at work in us, leading to the very thing he wants most, Knowing Him and being like Him], *becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

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Paul knows where the story heading. He knows all this is leading to something glorious. This is what motivates him to press on. What about us? Do we know what this is for, where it's leading? Is this what motivates us to press on? That's what Paul's taking about in vs. 12. "I'm not there yet, but I'm giving it all I've got, I'm shedding everything that holds me back, gloves off, leaving it all on the field."

[See, I think we need new theology, a new understanding of suffering. I think there's probably 2 main philosophies of suffering out there among Christians. 1-Sufferings bad, avoid it at all costs. 2-We're going to suffer, we don't really know why (I deserve it, I'm a victim) or like it because it's not what we want and interrupts our plans, but endure it till you die and it'll be worth it, just trust me.

But in both of these scenarios, the motivation to endure is weak at best, let alone the motivation to press on in joy. But if we what Paul's saying, it'll help us, not only understand, but have the same motivation as Paul. See, if you think about it, most of the things you want or need in life require some level of sacrifice, and therefore some type of suffering.

Especially if it's worth something. If you want a good career, you don't just walk down to the bank and tell them you're ready to be CEO. Or join the NFL draft. You have to prepare. You go to school, you study your brains out, for years, work lower positions. You practice, train, and you give up certain things so you can go after the ultimate thing, and you know the sacrifice is going to pay off.

If you're barely scraping by, in debt, struggling financially and you decide, I need to fix this. You don't just call your CC and tell them to stop sending bills. No, you need a plan. And a part of the plan is going to be, paying off the debt you owe, while you continuing to pay for your living expenses.

Which means you're going to be making some hard decisions that mostly mean "no" for you for a while, Paring down your expenses, nothing extra, because everything extra goes to debt. If you see the freedom that awaits you on the other side, you will suffer through doing without for however long it takes.

If you want to run a marathon but you're over weight and out of shape, you don't just just register and show up. You'll quit the 1st mile, or die somewhere along the way. No, you train, prepare, submit to the regiment. But you won't do it if you don't really want to run a marathon. Because it's gonna be grueling, you're gonna say no to a lot of things you've grown to love, like junk food, sleep, laying around, binging Netflix, doing what you feel like in the moment.

And you're going to say yes to a lot of things you don't enjoy right now, like a strict schedule, kale/bland protein, lots of exercise, daily sore muscles, pain, waking up early, being exhausted at night, and running (is there any greater suffering). But you know what happens over time? As you endure with your eyes on the prize, the things you once hated, you begin to love,

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because you start to experience the good effect in your life. And the things that we loved that were harming us begin to lose their appeal.

I think that's a lot closer to the way Paul sees suffering and hardship. Is it pleasurable in the moment? No. But is the question even reasonable? Is removing a splinter pleasurable? Why should we expect the absence of difficulty, or that growth, fruit, profit should be ours without sacrifice, resistance, hardship, or pain at some point?

See the reason for the pain and hardship isn't because God requires it. It's because of our condition at the beginning of the process. We're broken, ignorant, proud, out of shape, poor because we've loved things that keep us from God and are destroying us. In the goodness of God, He saved us through Christ, and is transforming us, Titus says, "He's training us, to be like Him.

Which is the process of going from the couch to the track, from debt to freedom. There's pain in the process, and many spend their days resisting God because of the difficulty, and ignoring the goal, and never get to the point where you see the good effect, the joy, on the other side. And we forget who God is, what He's done for us and who we are in Christ.

Dane Ortlund in his book A New Inner Relish (slides 9-14), quoting Jonathan Edwards, "The new nature that is in the saints is of God. And is a divine nature. And therefore must be an enemy to every degree of that which is against God. This new nature is from God and is something of God and therefore it tends to God again, and is contented with nothing short of God, and a perfect conformity to Him.

As long as there is any separation or alienation remaining, it will not be easy [as long as there's any distance between who God is and who we are, it's not going to be easy for us] because as long as it is thus, the soul is kept off [at a distance] in some measure from God, whence it's new nature is.

So we have the nature/Spirit of God drawing, leading us to God. But we still have the flesh that gets in the way, seeks to pull and wrestle us away from Him. Here's what Dane Ortlund says about Edwards statement, "As a result of the believers union with Christ, God has replaced the old with the new. He has exchanged the heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The Law has been etched indelibly on our hearts. God's Spirit energizes us.

Do we still struggle? Of course. But these struggles themselves are evidence that God has savingly revolutionized us. Regeneration is not the elimination, but the inauguration, of true moral struggle. And the hope for victory in these wrestlings lies in this: God has resurrected us." That's the hope, that's the power and motivation, that's the glory.

It's important that we never separate the commands of God from the love, mercy and work of God. Scripture never separates the two, on the contrary, it always provides the power the motivation to obey alongside the command.

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Paul does it here in vs. 12, "I'm not there yet, but I'm pressing on to know Him, to have Him. Why? "Because He has made me His own." See who started this? That motivates Paul, not to work to have Christ, but to press on and into Christ, to be transformed like Him, forged into a vessel that can fully know His Lord, and rest and rejoice in Him. He's not perfect, but He knows what Jesus did for Him and what he's doing in Him now, and what's coming, So he's pressing on.

And he calls the church to press on with Him in vs. 17 (slide 15). Imitate me, keep your eyes on those who follow this example (Paul, Epaph, Timothy, Jesus). This is in contrast to the mutilators of the flesh he calls out in vs. 2. Imitate those who example the gospel, Christ. In 1 Cor. 11 Pauls says, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." Paul's not saying he's perfect, he wants us to pursue Christ with Him. And we see one of the ways he does that in vs. 13-14 (slide 16).

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward. Now, we have to understand this in context. This does not mean, "forget who you used to be, how you used to sin, and expect those you sinned against to do the same." Hang with me. Remember what Paul's talking about here, "Rejoice in Jesus. Don't put any confidence in your flesh (rules, outward), what we all used to do. I had more reason, better resume than everyone, to be confident but it wasn't enough, all my good was rubbish compared to Christ and having Him. So I gave it up, counted it loss, took on the mind of Christ, suffered the loss of it all that I would have Christ...Forgetting what was behind, straining toward Christ."

So this doesn't mean, when your spouse brings up that time(s) you sinned against them in hurtful ways, that you can use this verse to shut them down. What you need to do is listen, with humility, understanding sin results in pain. It's hard, uncomfortable, irritating, and you just want them to drop it. And that's exactly why you shouldn't, cause their need to talk about it, and your inability to talk about it are evidence that it's still unresolved, you haven't rightly repented or allowed your spouse to heal.

Pauls not saying ignore unresolved sin, especially our sin toward others. The assumption is that we've humbled ourselves before God in repentance of our sin, trusted His forgiving, saving grace, and are burdened by it no more. Not paralyzed by condemnation. Not continuing to look back to life before Christ, or to the world with envious curiosity. But that we'd be all in, like a runner, not distracted by our failures or comparing ourselves to any others, but dead set focused on giving our all for the goal, Christ.

Paul says, "I forget what's behind, remember I'm a new creation and strain forward, pressing on toward the goal. And I want you to follow me, casting off everything not of God." But what he lays out in these vs. are contrasting choices, a fork in the road. And many take the other route. Look at 18-19 (slide 17).

Some choose not to give themselves to pursue Christ and instead commit themselves to their own pleasure, comfort, and in their pride—either assume on Jesus or reject Him (enemies). Their end is destruction. Pauls heart is broken. But they've decided to be their own authority, to

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make the world their home and give themselves to a life that opposes God. The warning is this: Beware of any pleasure that impedes the passionate, self-denying, suffer-willing pursuit of Christ.

And then Paul reminds us who we are in Christ in vs. 20-21 (slide 18). If you're a Christian, this isn't your home, you don't belong to this world. You belong to His kingdom. Your citizenship, your people, team, loyalty, culture, is Heaven. It's God's. This isn't your home, you're an exile, alien, just passing through. So don't give allegiance to it, don't attach your affections to it, don't be influenced and deceived by it. Stand firm in His truth, press on toward Christ, who is our hope.

Dane Ortlund finishes his thought with this question (slide 19-20). *“Do you trust Christ? Do you desire holiness above all else? Take heart. Grace comes to you both as forgiveness for past sins and fuel for future battles. If you long to know and love God, be not discouraged by your moral failures. He knows all about it. A day is coming soon when sin will become a forgotten nightmare, a fleeting memory never to be dealt with again. Press on, God will see you through.”*

See Paul knew this. He knew the resurrection of Christ was His. And so He's encouraged, motivated, confident in Christ. That's what enables him/us, to press on. It's so important that we never lose sight of that. Because without the resurrection and power of Christ in us, we're hopeless and unable to know God, we're blind to Him even though He stands right in front of us.

So as we close, I want to ask the question: Do you long to be healed, to be made whole, to be transformed and rid of sin? Do you get discouraged? Do you long to worship God and love others purely, unhindered by your sin, struggles, insecurities and pride, wayward un-sanctified desires?

To you Paul says in 4:1 (slide 21), “Stand firm in the Lord.” We have no other hope than Jesus. Stand firm in Him. Take heart. Rejoice! Jesus is coming, and He will do it. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. The same power that enabled Jesus to subject all things to be submitted to Himself is at work in you and will one day transform your lowly self to be like Him! For His praise and honor, which will be all of your Joy! So press on in Christ, because Christ has made us His own. Amen!

Let's pray.