

Rejoice! The Gospel is Unstoppable (Even in Eternity)

Philippians 3:12-4:1

Introduction

What is it that you look forward to at the end of a long hard day of work?

What is it that motivates you to get there?

Paul urges the Philippian Christians in our text here today, to fix their eyes on a greater source of satisfaction that is coming not just at the end of a long hard day of work... but at the end of a long, hard life of a Christian who runs the race with endurance...

But what is it that keeps you and I pressing on in the Christian life? What should be our motivation for enduring in a broken and sinful world?

The prize for the Christian Paul says, is obtaining an eternity with Jesus Christ!

Main Point: *Keeping your eyes on Christ is the only way to overcome your sin and enter into eternal rest with God*

Outline:

Straining to obtain the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:12-16

Those who do not strain to obtain the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:17-19

The benefits we obtain because we strain toward the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:20-4:1

Straining to obtain the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:12-16

Verse 12

Now verse 12 starts as it were sort mid-way through a thought process that Paul has already begun in the previous section we saw last week.

Last week we saw that Paul has just finished laying down a long list of impressive accomplishments as it were; in verses 5 & 6 of chapter 3, he says: I was "...Circumcised on the eighth day of the tribe of Benjamin, I was a Hebrew of Hebrews (I took my Hebrew heritage seriously!); as to the law, (I was a Pharisee) as to zeal: a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, (blameless!!!), but then Paul says, that in light of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, all these things, these accomplishments are! But! Rubbish!!!

And then we saw in verse 11 last week Paul says that he wants to know the power of His resurrection and that "...by any means possible he may attain the resurrection from the dead..."

And so here at the start of our time in verse 12 Paul says "*Not that I have already obtained **this** or am already perfect, but I press on to make **it** my own...*"

And so Paul is simply saying that he wants to obtain the resurrection from the dead but that he hasn't yet!

See I imagine that people must have been sitting in the pews that week, listening to Paul's long list of accolades and accomplishments and thought to themselves "Geez, Paul's pretty perfect..." Paul is complete, he's blameless, he's reached Christian maturity, he's reached Christian perfection...

And so to stop this mode of thinking Paul says no no no no..., *I'm not there yet!*" *I have not obtained the resurrection from the dead, I'm not there yet...* I want to be! but I'm not!

But notice, although Paul is not there yet; he **is not** static in his Christian walk...the Christian walk is not "once you trust Jesus, the rest is done!"

Rather

“Once you trust Jesus, it has only just begun...”

He says.... I press on...!!!

So I want to draw your attention now to the reason why Paul decides to press on in his Christian walk...

Paul’s “why” for pressing on and enduring in the Christian life is found in the second half of verse 12.

Paul says, I press on

“...**Because** Christ Jesus has made me His own...”

Paul knows that the only reason he presses on for Jesus Christ is found in the fact that God first loved him!

1 John 4:10: *“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*

We love...(WHY?) Because he first loved us.”

John 15:16: Jesus talking to His disciples said, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...”*

Paul’s knows the depravity of the human heart, that unless God first raises our spiritually dead bodies we cannot love Him!

It must be said that salvation from first to last is a divine act of the sovereign will of God! That’s why we say that we are saved by Grace! And that we press on in the Christian life because of God’s continual drawing us to Himself!

I press on says Paul, because and only because Christ Jesus has made me His own...

Our security for our salvation, and also our security for knowing that we will endure and press on until the end is found in the finished work of Christ, **not** our ability to love him!

So this striving described here is not a striving after salvation...(that's clear given that Paul says, "Christ has already made me His own...) I'm not working toward salvation."

Rather it is a striving after what he already knows is His in Christ... Paul says I have been apprehended by Christ to one day be resurrected from the dead! And so I press on to make this reality my own!

Paul's logic, is that Christ has already taken hold of him, so Paul is striving to more and more take hold of Christ...

And so in verses 13 & 14 Paul shows us the method of how it is that we strive to obtain the prize.

He shows us the Christian's highest calling and method for overcoming sin and temptation and obtaining the prize of the upward call!

Brothers! (13-14)

Paul says:

*"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

Now the first thing to Notice is that Paul uses the noun "*brothers!*"

Paul is a brother amongst brethren!

It's quite easy sitting in the pews each week listening to guys like Dave, Craig, Kyosti, these leaders who are so in tune with the Christian faith... who are so in love

with Jesus. It's easy elevate them above the rest of us as though they are somewhat more holy, more Christ-like because they preach God's word faithfully and thus are somewhat higher than us... it's natural for us to want to do that...

And no doubt that is what the Christian's in Philippi would have been thinking and doing when they read the letters from Paul... he speaks the very words of God as a writer of Scripture.... He gives the long list of accolades earlier on in the chapter...

And so to stop this type of thinking Paul identifies himself with the rest of the church...

He identifies himself here not as an Apostle, not as an author of Scripture, not as an Elder of the Church, but as brother of you and I...

I love that Paul does this! Right, think of your most valued Christian hero of the faith that you love... for some its John Piper, for others it's John MacArthur

Rhoison Loves Chandler!

But even our most beloved heroes of the faith are in need of grace, they are still broken, they are still fallen, they are still sinful human beings who need the gospel!

Just like Paul needs the gospel of God! Paul identifies himself as a brother amongst his brethren... he says brothers, I do not consider that I have obtain the resurrection from the dead, I'm not there yet... just like you, I need grace, I need Christ, I need the gospel!

But!

Here is what I do.... Here's the one thing that you need to do Grace Bible Church!

"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead"

I!

Press!

On!

Strain forward! (13-14)

This word translated as “straining forward” here describes stretching a muscle to its extremity. Straining every muscle and every nerve possible to obtain Christ!

It’s one of the reasons I love the bible! Because it rightly describes the world in which I live!

The bible doesn't try to hide the fact that life is difficult, it says to strain!

It's not rainbows and sunshine right! Like the world in which I live is grimy...its dirty... it's hard... and the bible's not like "hey, let's all just sit around, let's sing a song, let's have fun, life is better with Jesus, hey guys would you just give Jesus a try.... NO!!! It’s not like that!

That's **not** the world in which I live...

The world in which I live is “Hey I don't want to get out of bed today... I don't feel like God's presence shines upon me today... I don't want to read my bible... I don't want to do devotions... I don't want to lead my family... I don't want to do this God! I don't feel as though I trust you with my circumstances right now.... if I'm honest, I have to ask God what are you doing???...”

And brother Paul, he knows this, he says, hey, I’m fallen, I’m sinful, I’m not there yet...I struggle, I strain!!!

And here's what you do... Keep pressing in to Christ, keep your eyes fixed on the cross... forget what lies behind, and you strain forward!!!

Right! It's not prance your way toward Jesus... it's not prance your way forward, it's not "hey" skip your way toward eternity... no no no it's strain! With every effort! By the grace of God... STRAIN FOWARD!!!

That's is key to finishing the race faithfully, that's the key to succeeding in the Christian life, that's the key to overcoming your sin.... **I press on!!!**

I keep battling away my sin! I keep running forward toward Christ... I don't look back!

I trip over my sin but I get back up! I keep running forward, I don't give up... because the end is coming... the end, the prize is coming!

The whole point of the gospel is to look to Christ and not to yourself...

Hebrews 12:2 *"Looking unto Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..."*

And in verse 1 of Hebrews 12, the author uses this analogy of an athlete running a race...

He says, *"let us also (that also being the people of faith in chapter 11 of Hebrews; just like them) let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us **run** with endurance the race that is set before us..."*

How do we run with endurance the race that is set before us? Verse 2; by keeping our eyes fixed upon Jesus; fixed upon the cross; fixed upon the gospel!

The phrase that is translated to *"press on,"* the Greek word is used of hunters who are in active pursuit of their prey!

Now brothers and sisters, you and I both know that if the hunter does not get the prey, what happens? HE DIES!!!! The hunter is dead! And **if we are not** actively pursuing Christ in our daily walk, Paul says, "brothers and sisters...WE ARE DEAD! And we will not press on!

The prize of the upward call

But... if we do pursue Christ, if we are active in our daily walk with God, what will be the result when we die?

Verse 14:

“The goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Now Paul doesn't explicitly say what the prize will be... he simply describes it as *“...The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...”* Some think that it is a physical crown that will be given as a trophy to those who overcome... some think that given the context of the resurrection that it's a resurrected body and some think, (and this is a good way to think about it) that Christ Jesus Himself will be the reward described here!

And so I don't think it's wrong to say that any one of these things will be the reward because they are all rewards and benefits of the gospel...

If I had to choose which one Paul had in mind here (this is Rhoi's conjecture) I would say that it's Christ... Christ is our prize... and I think that's clear from verses 7 & 8 of this chapter, Paul says:

*“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. **8** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, **in order that I may gain Christ...**”*

[John piper asks this question: *“If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?”*]

Verses 15-16

And so in Verse 15 Paul; says:

“Let those of us who are mature think this way...”

What way?

Everything just described from verses 12 to here... not that I am already perfect, I press on, I seek Jesus, I am not there yet!

A “mature Christian” is one who acknowledges their own immaturity in the things of God... and desperately needs the gospel...

Let those of us who are mature know that we are not fully mature; Whether you’ve been a Christian for one year, or one hundred years you will not be perfect until you enter eternity!

And secondly a mature Christian is also one who trusts that God is sovereign enough to reveal these truths to those in the church who would disagree with us...

Look at verse 15b with me...

“...And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you...”

Paul shows us that the church is full of people who **are not** interested in pursuing Christ. Who **are not** interested in growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ... they are professing Christians; always wooed but never won!

Rather they are interested in looking at the past, they are content with where they are spiritually, they think that they don’t need to pursue holiness...

And sometimes the only thing you can say to God, is, "Lord, I've poured out my heart to this person, I've said all I can say, Lord, You're going to have to do the rest..." Show them that they need Christ. Show them that they need to pursue you! Show them that it is a daily taking up of the cross... change their mind by your Spirit Lord!"

The mark of a mature Christian is one who trusts in God to reveal such things to others. It's not essential (says Paul) to win arguments, winning an argument is not as important as praying for them says Paul.

Paul says to win **the person...not** the argument!

So let me ask you this, are you a mature Christian or an immature Christian? Are you satisfied with your degree of Christ's likeness or are you not? Are you constantly giving up in warring against your sin or are you battling on?

Verse 16

For the mature Christian in here tonight, Paul says this:

“Only, let us hold true to those things that we have already obtained...”

The verb to “walk” (or to hold true) to that which is already obtained has the idea of soldiers marching together as one unit... So Paul says, to the mature Christians in the church, keep marching forward, strain together toward obtaining Christ, march on in unity...

Because

A mature Christian thinks this way...

Those who do not strain to obtain the prize of the unstoppable gospel- Verses 3:17-19

Now at the start of section 2 here, Paul again uses the word “brothers,” which indicates that he is writing to believers at the start of this section. But he does this because he wants to give them a standard by which they can observe, so that he can contrast those who follow his example and those who do not, it is a contrast between the true Christian and the professing Christian... he says in verse 17:

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”

Why?

Verse 18...

***For** (or “because”) many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.”*

Now are these the people Paul speaks about in verse 15 (those who think otherwise?) Perhaps they are...

There is no way to know exactly who these enemies that Paul is describing are...

What we do know however, is **why** it is, that Paul call attention to these people...

Verse 18b; because they are walking contradictions of the unstoppable gospel; Paul says that they are enemies of the cross of Christ...

Paul calls the Philippians to imitate him because if they **do not imitate godly leaders in the church**, in contrast they will walk as these enemies of the cross...

Because they will live a life contrary to, and in opposition of the unstoppable gospel...

Verse 19 Paul says:

“Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

3 examples that Paul gives us here to show why they are enemies of the cross of Christ:

1. **Their god is their belly:** in other words they recognize no authority, no need, no concern for anything outside of their own personal satisfaction; their appetites for sin dictate their way of life.

All things sinful are their god, their appetite for sinful things are their guiding passions!

2. **They glory in their shame:** Whereas Christians are convicted by their sin... the enemies of the cross are not! For Christians the Spirit of God convicts them when they do something shameful, whereas these enemies of the cross of Christ, glory in their ungodly passions. It's not that they simply approve of sinful things and do them, but much than that; they celebrate sin!!! They celebrate in their sinful/wicked acts! To glory in shameful sin (Paul says) is to be an enemy of the cross of Jesus Christ...

Why?

Because Christ died so that we may sin NO MORE!!! If Christ died for sin on the cross, these enemies celebrate the very thing that God abhors! The very thing that killed the Saviour of the world is the very thing these enemies of the cross celebrate!

They glory in their shame...

3. **Their minds are set on earthly things:** Whereas Paul commands Christians to fix their eyes on the heavenly prize of knowing Christ Jesus in verse 14, these enemies of the cross fix their eyes on earthly things...their whole attention, their focused horizons, their entire lives are fixated on the fading things of this world, their eyes are fixed on the opposite of heavenly realities!

And so Paul describes these enemies of the gospel, and he tells us what their final destination outside of Christ will be; the final destination of any human being outside of the saving work of Jesus will be utter destruction in hell forever...

Are you outside of the saving work of Christ?

And so I have to ask you this because I love you, and I love God:

Are you outside of the saving work of Christ here today? Do you really trust Jesus here today? Do you trust that He is enough to save you from all of your sin? Is Christ the most precious object in your life, so much so that you consider everything else in comparison to Him as rubbish!

It's a hard question, but it needs to be asked... and I don't want to ask this question in some sort of generic tone, like are you trusting in Jesus... which can so often be done by so many of us here...

But I desperately want to be genuine when I ask...

Because I want you to notice how genuine Paul is when he describes these enemies...

Notice now, Paul... who is often seen as hard-faced, predestine-ary, Romans 9, Calvinistic, Church discipline-ary, calloused, rough, beat my breast Paul, anathematize these Jewish heretics Paul, he describes these enemies of the cross with eyes full of tears...

When was the last time you or I wept over other peoples' sin!?!? When was the last time we wept like Jeremiah, like Nehemiah, or like Christ Himself saying "Oh Jerusalem Jerusalem!!!"

When was the last time we cried out to God in tears because of those whom we know, love, and cherish walk as enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ?!?!?

For Paul, he described these enemies with eyes full of tears as he understood that their only end, their final place will be in hell forever!

The benefits we obtain because we strain toward the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:20-4:1

And so just as Paul finishes describing those who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ... he once again looks heavenward to the prize for his only hope and comfort...

Once again he uses the preposition “but” to change the tone of his focus and to point the Philippians’ hope heavenward!

Verses 20-21:

“But our citizenship is in heaven...”

Paul is reminding these Philippian Christians that although they are surrounded by strangers in a foreign land, though they are legally citizens of a Roman colony, their real citizenship is not of this world!

Their citizenship is heavenward!

In contrast to these enemies of the cross of Christ; their minds are set on earthly things, but our minds are set on heavenly things... Their end is destruction; but our end is heaven; their eyes are fixed on their own appetites, but ours are fixed on Christ...

Brothers and sisters we have a citizenship now in heaven...

“...and from it (that is from heaven) we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

If you are a believer in Christ, if you are a true Christian, if your gaze is fixed upon Jesus then you do not have to wait for the second coming of Christ to know where your home is.

If you have truly trusted in this unstoppable gospel, then there are 4 benefits you have now at this present moment, in which you can eagerly be awaiting. 4 things that this unstoppable gospel promises:

1. A citizenship in heaven
2. A hope for your Saviors' return
3. A future transformation
4. A power working in you that is greater than any power ever to be known

Citizenship: Firstly, we have a citizenship in heaven, because The King is there! The Savior, the Messiah, the promised Lamb of God, He is presently seated there on His throne! And so our citizenship resides with Christ the King!

A Hope for your Saviour's return: Secondly, we have a real hope for our Saviour's return! And when He comes, your citizenship comes with Him. Where He is, there you have the privilege and the right to be! As a citizen of a heavenly kingdom, we await the return of the Sovereign Lord who claims every square inch of planet earth, as Abraham Kuyper famously said, "*...There is not one square inch on planet earth over which the risen Christ does not say MINE!*"

He owns it now as we speak, but one day He will physically come back to claim what is rightfully already His.

A future transformation: Thirdly, we have a hope for a future transformation, for a body that will be like Christ's. A body that will not sin, a body that will not fade, a body that will not perish, a body that never be corrupt...

A power working in you: Lastly, Brothers and sisters, we have a power working in us that is the same power that holds the universe together. The same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead! That same power that will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body!

This is the result of having a citizenship that is found in the kingdom of God! This is what the unstoppable gospel promises...

4:1 (Therefore)

So in light of these wonderful truths Paul ends this section of his letter with a command...

“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”

A third time Paul uses the word brothers to remind the believers at Philippi that the command he gives to stand firm thus in the Lord is one in which every Christian, who profess the name of Christ must follow.

Paul says to stand firm! In light of everything just discussed in this section, in light of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus stand firm! In light of running the race set before us, stand firm! In light of the enemies of the unstoppable gospel, stand firm! Stand firm like soldiers on the frontline of battle...

God promises us that the kingdom of God rooted in the unstoppable gospel will grow like a mustard seed, like branches on a tree, it will spread! No man can thwart it, no power can stop it, no religious ideology can overcome it, no extremist, no terrorist, nothing can stop the spread of the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel!

Rejoice, Philippians, rejoice Grace bible Church, rejoice and stand firm in this unstoppable gospel! Until the Saviour returns and sin is done away with so that we can rest in this unstoppable gospel, that doesn't just stop here on earth, but continues to work in us even in eternity!

Let us glory in this unstoppable gospel and let us glory in Christ the King who's gospel it is.... Let us glory in Christ the Redeemer!

Rejoice! The Gospel is Unstoppable (Even in Eternity)

Philippians 3:12-4:1 – Discussion Questions

- What do you look forward to most when you finish your daily work?
- What is the most difficult struggle that you have as a Christian?
- Are these struggles similar or different to those in your church community?
- What so far has been the biggest encouragement through this Philippians series?
- What has been the most challenging aspect through this Philippian series?

Straining to obtain the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:12-16

- How does it impact you that Paul had to strain in his Christian walk?
- Would you identify yourself as a “mature believer” according to how Paul determines what a mature believer is in verses 12-15?
- What do you think the prize is in verse 14?

Those who do not strain to obtain the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:17-19

- Is there a specific example that Paul is urging the Philippians to follow in verse 17?
- How genuine are you when you tell people about Jesus?
- Do you weep over unbelievers and their sin? Do you think one should weep over such things?
- What are the earthly things Paul may be referring to in verse 19?

The benefits we obtain because we strain toward the prize of the unstoppable gospel - 3:20-4:1

- Is there anything that stirs you to rejoice in verses 20-21?
- What is the significance of having a resurrected body like Christ's?
- Can you think of any other blessings we obtain as believers that you are looking forward to, and that Paul does not mention?
- In light of Sunday's sermon, how have you been challenged throughout this week to live in light of eternity?