

Philippians 10-07-23a

This is Friday, the 23rd of July, 2010. We're in the book of Philippians. We resume our study tonight at chapter three, verse 17.

Although we'll be actually taking a quick look at a couple of things in verses 12 through 16. So I should probably say 12 through 16, but it'll all be visited, revisited, remunerated upon and so on. But we'll take a moment as we begin to address ourselves to God in his throne room.

It's an opportunity for us to approach with our hearts, having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water, which of course speaks of the acknowledgement of our sins, the cleansing grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ, so that there are no obstructions or impediments to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit to help us all understand the word of God better and to see its application in our circumstances. Shall we pray? Father, what a blessing it is for us to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word. We are so grateful for the ministry that we receive when we spend time with fellow believers.

The active work of your Holy Spirit in bringing great benefit to each of us through the presence and the encouragement and the truth spoken and the example set by believers in every different part of the body of Christ, fulfilling all different functions as you have assigned them. We thank you for the Lord Jesus himself and for his work on our behalf. The incredible, almost inexpressible gifts that we have been given in him and through him.

And we find the satisfaction and the stimulation of opportunities in this life and the expectation of great things in the next. And all of these things come to us through the Lord Jesus and through the revelation of him that we find in your word. We pray that you will bless us as we study this portion from the book of Philippians tonight.

May God, the Holy Spirit, minister it to each one of us in a way that is effective and that is meaningful and that will stick with us in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Let's take a look at the passage to refresh our minds on where we are.

The apostle Paul is writing, of course, to the church at Philippi. He established that church. He visited there along with Luke and met Lydia.

And we have that passage in Acts that talks about when he first came there and found people who were interested. And this is probably about a decade after that, by the best estimates I've been able to find this. He has evidently written many letters back and forth.

We don't have all of those preserved, but this is one. And he has also had converse with them through messengers, Epaphroditus and Timothy going back and forth. And as he finds himself now in what people would consider to be dire straits, he's in prison, he's on trial for his life.

These people who are his longtime friends and supporters are understandably concerned. He has assured them that he's in good spirits. He looks at it as a benefit either way.

And he uses this as an occasion to introduce a theme, which we have seen throughout the first two and a half chapters of this book. And that theme is the rejoicing and the celebration that comes from recognizing that whatever state we find ourselves in, whatever is happening by way of circumstances, it's not always an occasion for smiling and laughter, but it is always the opportunity to see God at work. And Paul would obviously rather be free.

He would like to be with these people in person. He is instead imprisoned. And yet he understands that God is at work and that this is the way God has chosen to accomplish his purpose.

And for that reason, and in that sense, it's all good. He reminds the Philippian believers of the example of the Lord Jesus, who did a similar thing. He endured the cross and underwent great humiliation set aside his eternal glory, his deity, and so on in the interest of others, namely us.

And this is the example. If you look at life from the divine viewpoint, if you look at life from the standpoint of the privilege and the opportunity of being a part of what God is doing, then it changes the perspective. And he encourages the Philippians and the part we want to review here is the first part of chapter two.

Look for the consolation in Christ, the encouragement in Christ. Look for the comfort of love. Look for fellowship in the spirit.

Look for affection and mercy and enter into those things wholeheartedly, being of one accord, having the same love, being of one mind. When we enter into these areas of fellowship, that's where like-mindedness is going to occur. When we have the same, when we understand what God's plan is, then there's going to be comfort of love.

There's going to be fellowship of the spirit. There's going to be affection and mercy. There's going to be encouragement in Christ.

And it isn't a matter of splitting doctrinal hairs. It isn't a matter of vibrating because somebody raised their hands in a worship service or the songs they play aren't exactly our favorites or whatever. What are we looking for? These things that are listed in chapter two.

Look at what the Lord Jesus did. He didn't get so put out when he came to earth that he couldn't talk to anybody. Well, the Pharisees are too self-righteous.

The tax collectors and sinners and harlots and so on are too sinful. All the rest of them are full of diseases. And there's nobody here I can talk with.

There's nobody here I can have any fellowship with. They're all messed up in one way or another.

Well, the Lord Jesus would have never been able to come to earth.

He relaxed. He ate with publicans and sinners. He talked with the Pharisees face-to-face.

He didn't vibrate. He didn't get self-righteous and so intolerant that no dialogue could be exchanged. We need to relax.

We need to look at the potential. We need to look at the consolation that is in Christ, the opportunity to share that with other people, believers and unbelievers. Comfort of love, the love of God, the love that believers have for one another, that great vertical and horizontal set of commands, the two great commands that sum up all the law and the prophets and the gospel itself.

The fellowship of the spirit, what a privilege it is to be associated with believers of like mind in whom the spirit of God is active. We get to both be a blessing and to receive blessing because of the presence of the spirit. And it's just a great thing.

We ought to be happy about that. We ought to be excited about it. We ought to get up in the morning and think, you know, there's believers here.

I am not Elijah by the brook Cherith. There are other believers. I've got at least one other person with whom I can have some kind of fellowship.

Even if you have to write an email or make a phone call, all of us, if you're listening to the sound of my voice, you know at least a few other believers or you wouldn't be listening to me because you wouldn't be here or you wouldn't be watching or listening or whatever. There are fellow believers. We cultivate that.

We cherish it. We exploit the grace of God that is manifest when the body of Christ is engaged in the one another level of obedience. Well, that was the heart of chapter two.

Paul gives some personal expression to that when he talks about Timothy, when he talks about Epaphroditus and mentions them as examples. And then we got into chapter three, where he says the rest of what I want to say to you is don't forget to celebrate. Don't forget to rejoice.

And this is not so much a matter of, okay, let me sing, don't worry, be happy, or let me sing the smiley song or something, but it is a matter of getting ourselves into the place where we are focusing on those things that are good and noble and virtue and praise of good report. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. It is a matter of choosing what to think about.

This is where psychology and counseling and human efforts are insufficient. If you just try to think about something else, it's almost impossible. But with the presence of the Holy Spirit, with the power of the word of God, we are enabled, you and I are enabled.

Perfect love casts out fear. A lot of people can't shake fear. They've got an inordinate fear, an unreasoning fear.

It's just an ever-present fear. And you can't shake it. You can't lose it.

You can't talk yourself out of it. You can't distract yourself from it. It's just there.

But the perfect love of God, the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit will displace fear. Nothing else has that power but God. The presence of God's word, the power of God's spirit can change our thinking and we can think on these things.

That's our task. Choose to think because God has given us the power. Nobody else.

Name your religion, pick your cult, pick your health program, your philosophy, your scientific, secular humanism, whatever it may be. Nobody has the power to actually shift human thinking in a meaningful and effective way except God. And each one of us has it.

Every single one of us has got thought-shifting power because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, because of the power of God's word. And it's a matter of choosing it and using it. So Paul emphasizes that.

And he says, don't let yourself get dragged into the distractions of this world. Fellow believers who've gone down a wrong path. He says, learn a lesson from the false circumcision, the false righteousness, the false holiness, the false spirituality that is represented by these people in chapter three, verse two.

He says, we are the genuine article. We are the righteous. We are the ones who are on the narrow road going through the straight gate if we worship God in the spirit.

That's where the power is. If we rejoice in Christ Jesus, if we celebrate Jesus Christ. If we put no trust in the flesh, and that's key.

If you haven't circled it already, circle the last part of verse three. No confidence in the flesh. He says, look, I've been there and done that.

I've got a lot of stuff I could point to. And a lot of us do. You can look back and say, I've had accomplishments in some area of life.

I've graduated from things. I've made it through things. I've finished.

I've got a certificate or I've got a, I completed a hard task. I built something. I made something.

I achieved a goal in some area. Most of us have things we can point to. And we say, I'm not just a total bum in the alley with a bottle of cheap liquor.

I've done something. I've made it this far somehow. And Paul says, look, you can't look at those things for your self-worth.

You can't look at your clothes. You can't look at your car. You can't look at the school you went to.

You can't look at the family you come from or the community you live in or the church you belong to or how well you have fixed up your appearance or how expensive your shoes were or how much you spent on your suit or your dress or your purse or what kind of tag you've got hanging off or how many tattoos you've got or how many piercings, I don't know, whatever it is, whatever people, listen, there are people who say, I am somebody because look at me. I've got a hat and boots. I'm in Texas and I've got a hat and boots to show I'm a Texan or I joined something.

I'm a member of some lodge or some organization or we always, it's a natural appeal to our flesh. Why do you think almost everybody is a member of something? Well, I'm a member of the Moose Lodge or I'm a member of the Elks or I'm a member of the VFW or I'm a member of the whatever, name your thing to be a member of. You know, in colleges, all these frats and sororities and whatnot.

Why do people do that? Well, there can be multiple reasons, but a lot of times I just want you to know that I'm spatial, S-P-A-T-I-A-L, I'm spatial. So here's the point. Paul says, look, don't be fooled.

There's only one place where you need to find your self-worth and it's better than anything else you can name. You are in Christ. Jesus Christ bought you.

You belong to him. You are named in the family of God. You have a heavenly citizenship.

What do you got down here that's better than that? So he says, look, I used to play that game. I was circumcised the eighth day, tribe of Benjamin, sat at the feet of Gamaliel. I was a big time Pharisee.

I had all kinds of credentials. And he said, I consider that to be scubala, which I saw a new translation of that this week. Unspeakable filth.

I think that's a real good, acceptable translation. I consider it unspeakable filth. It's about as good as it's gonna get in grabbing the force of that word.

But Paul says, look, these things that I thought were gain, I count them as loss. Because once I saw the Lord Jesus Christ, once I began to grasp who he is, it is so much more excellent, so much more powerful, so much more permanent, so much higher in quality that these things that I used to think were great. I was talking to somebody earlier this week.

And it reminds me of when you're a preschooler and you sit down and they've got those little

plastic toys. And if you get thrown in with a bunch of other preschoolers, there are X number of preschoolers and there's usually X minus one number of toys. You know, there's somebody's short a toy.

And well, this guy over here is playing with the toy that I wanted to play with. And I wanna go over and get that. And suddenly that toy is the most valuable possession on earth and there's screaming ensues and fits and all kinds of parents have to come in.

And there's just a huge, over this little thing, whatever it may be. It's a block or it's a tinker toy or it's, I don't know what they play with now. It's probably battery operated and glows in the dark, but some kind of a toy.

Well, as Paul says, when I grew up, I put away childish things. I haven't seen anything in a preschool area that I found particularly interesting in a long, long time. I can walk past racks and racks of toys.

I don't find them interesting at all. I don't covet them. I don't wanna try to take them away from some little kid.

I see playing with them. Why is that? Because I have found so many more valuable things. My capacity is much greater than that now.

I am not satisfied to sit on the floor and play with a piece of plastic cheese or what have you. Well, I remember one of those with a squeaker in it. May have been a dog toy, but I guess the folks gave it to me for whatever reason.

Took those things in the bathtub, bath water got in and then they get that sour smell. I remember it from my early childhood days. It was easily amused back then, but not now.

Doesn't amuse me at all. I have no interest in any little squeezable toys. Why is that? Hey, you laugh, but you think about the toys and the accoutrements that people get wrapped up in now, even bad habits.

You think about the appeal of addictive substances or alcohol or stimulation of various kinds and sorts and people say, oh, why can't I break this cycle? Why can't I get out of this addictive behavior? Why can't I get out of this habit of life where I constantly fall back in? Well, I can tell you one problem is your capacity is too small. If you're excited at the prospect of getting drunk, if you're excited at the prospect of getting high, if you're excited at the prospect of looking at pornography, if you're excited at the prospect of some other sort of addictive cyclical behavior, guess what? You're the kindergartner playing in the floor with the plastic cheese. It's pathetic.

If when you begin this, and I'm not idly talking here, this is what Paul is talking about in chapter three. He says, this stuff that I thought was great, being a Pharisee, strutting around, being admired, having the status and having the religious power and being well thought of, ooh, you're

a disciple of Gamaliel, that's an exclusive, that's really hard to get into. Your family in Tarsus and so on.

There are clues that tell us that Paul came from a wealthy family in Tarsus. He was a big noise in a little town and he came to Jerusalem and got into the exclusive circles of Pharisee-ism. He was elite.

He was on the fast track to superstardom in the religious realm in Jerusalem. And he said, you know what? That stuff is so meaningless to me now. It is unspeakable.

I treat it like what I would sweep up off the floor and throw out with the garbage after my pet has had an accident. It's just, it's unspeakable filth. How useless, how pointless, how meaningless that stuff is.

And he says, I count in verse eight of chapter three, all things lost in comparison to the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. Now, let me ask you, do you want a Tonka toy or do you want, name the car of your dreams or the truck of your dreams? Your 35, 45, \$55,000 car. Patti and I passed a Maserati coming up central the other day.

I think that I may have only ever seen a Maserati one other time in my life. Some guy, older gentleman, Patti said, ah, he's leasing. But, you know, whatever it may be, your Rolls-Royce Silver Phantom or your Mercedes, your Lexus, your DeLorean, whatever it is that's your dream car, your 77 Volkswagen bus, whatever it may be.

What do you want? Do you want a plastic toy car or do you want this real thing? If you now own a really nice car, do you say, well, yeah, but what I really want is to go sit in the floor and roll my little plastic car around on the carpet. I mean, it's absurd, right? Well, Paul says, look, this is the kind of comparison he's trying to make. I'm just couching it in more modern terms.

In the world of his day, these things were just the pinnacle. This would be, oh, you know, they'll let you into the elite clubs and the celebrities greet you by your first name and so on. That's who Paul was in that religious world.

He said, it's pointless, it's useless compared to the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have experienced the loss of all of these things. I've just thrown them out and I count them as unspeakable filth compared to, so that I can apprehend what is really valuable, gaining Christ and to be found in him. I don't want to be found at the feet of Gamaliel.

I don't want to be found in the Sanhedrin. I don't want to be found in the rich elite in Jerusalem. Where are all the elite, rich people and Sanhedrin members and rich and powerful religious types that were in Jerusalem in Jesus' day and in Paul's day? Where are they now? How much of all that stuff have they got? It has perished.

With one or two exceptions, we don't know any of their names. We don't know where they live. We can't see their houses.

We can't see their robes. We can't see their finery. Nobody's bowing and scraping.

All of their stuff has gone like a dandelion seeds in the wind. What has Paul got? Gaining Christ and being found in him and the tremendous biblical truths and the concepts and the realities of the plan of God that Paul apprehended and set down an inspired scripture that are eternal and unchanging. It's just no comparison.

Even my poor analogies are just insufficient to show the distance between the two. And Paul says, look, if you just think about it for a minute, what are you after? If we could ever get a grip on how great the Lord Jesus Christ really is and what the tremendous potential is that we have in this Christian life, things that we think are big stumbling blocks that are attractive, that are tempting, that are alluring and seducing in terms of, oh, but I wanna drink or I wanna shoot up or I wanna smoke it or I wanna roll it or I wanna engage in it or I want to go off and have this kind of stimulation, which just seems so pathetically small. They're ephemeral, they're temporary.

Most of the time they turn to ashes in our mouth. It's just so weak and anemic and pathetic and it goes down into that realm of unspeakable filth compared to the shining, glorious, amazing eternalities of God that have been given to us, handed to us through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's just no comparison.

And the only reason we choose the childish, foolish things of this world is that we have failed to grasp, we have failed to lay hold of these things of Christ. Laying hold of these things is what Paul is talking about now in this section of the chapter. If you lose everything else I've said up to this point, that comparison of the insignificances of this life compared to the significances of God and Christ and eternal things, that's what Paul is talking about in this whole section.

He says, I've offloaded those things. I have discarded those things. I've thrown them out with the rubbish so that I may gain Christ, verse eight, verse nine, and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own, my pathetic little crayon drawings from kindergarten, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

This is the difference between an original Rembrandt and a crayon rubbing that you did over a rock when you were in kindergarten. I just can't express the distance. Paul does it very elegantly here in Greek.

He says, you know, these meaningless things. I have set aside that I may have his righteousness by faith so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And we asked the question last time, what exactly is he talking about when he says that I may know the power of his resurrection? And ultimately in verse 11, he says that if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

And it's really very simple. I think I almost overthought it and overcomplicated it last time. But if you look at the flow of thought here, what's he talking about? To know the power of the resurrection and to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Look at the Lord Jesus Christ. In his incarnation, in his humanity, he's in one place at one time. He's healing one person at a time.

He's dealing with people in the flesh. He's getting tired. He is largely rebuffed and rejected by his own people.

When they knew him, they didn't glorify him. They weren't thankful. It became, you know, he came into his own and his own received him not by and large.

Look at Christ in his glorification, post-resurrection. He is in the eternal realms. He's seated at the right hand of his father.

He is preparing to return in glory and receive his bride and establish his kingdom and do all of the things that are right now only in heaven. You remember the example prayer, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It wasn't done on earth in the incarnation.

God's will wasn't done on earth in the sense of God's people responding and entering into the kingdom promises on earth when Jesus came the first time in his flesh. But with his death, with his conquering of death, with his satisfaction of the righteousness and justice of God, with redemption and reconciliation and propitiation accomplished through his death, in his resurrection, the sky isn't even the limit of what is going to take place. Post-resurrection, the Lord Jesus is exponentially more glorious and more effectively reigning and ruling and accomplishing the purposes of God.

He had to empty himself and take on the form of a servant to be in the flesh, released from the flesh, entered into his resurrection glory. His power and glory are unlimited, unfettered, undiminished. And Paul says, that's where I want to get to.

I want to get past the limitations of the flesh, past the righteousness that is of the flesh, past the glory that is in the flesh. I want to put off the flesh. I want to get into that eternal spiritual realm.

I want to know the power that is manifest in the resurrection. Any old Pharisee can run around doing a few righteous deeds. I want to get that righteousness that comes from God by faith, that comes from glory, partakes of glory, reflects glory, lasts for eternity, treasure in heaven, eternal inheritance, white stone, new name, rule and reign with Christ, walk with him in white, partake of the hidden manna.

That's the power of the resurrection. That's what Paul says he wants to attain to. If by any means I can break through the bubble.

You remember over and over again in Ecclesiastes, we saw Solomon bumping up against that glass ceiling. It's kind of like Paul says in Romans, who will deliver me from the body of this death? I'm just, I'm trapped. I'm under the sun.

My accomplishments are earthly. They're temporal. They're going to be handed over to somebody else.

Everything is just under the sun. It's chasing the wind. I can leave nothing permanent behind.

There's no monument. There's no permanence. Where is the eternal? Where can I get to that? And Paul says, we are free from the law of sin and death.

Christ has made us free. That's the power of the resurrection. Attaining to the resurrection is fully gripping just how great the potential is.

That's what you and I are supposed to do every day. Get out of the mundane. Get out of the earthly.

Any schlep-along unbeliever can check the stuff off of their task list. Well, got to go to work. Got to get X, Y, and Z done for the boss.

Got to make it through traffic without getting bent. Got to run some errands. Got to get the groceries.

Got to pay the bills. Got to keep the house up. Make sure the yard looks okay.

Got to do this. Got to do that. Anybody can do those things.

What is it you and I can do that unbelievers and faithless believers cannot do? Righteousness by faith. Enter into eternal things. Attain to the resurrection from the dead.

That's what Paul's talking about. Stop playing with toys in the kindergarten. Start living the life of the mature.

When I was a child, I thought as a child, and I spoke as a child. When I grew up, I put away childish things. When I became a man, I put away childish things.

That's our opportunity in Christ. So we pick up now in verse 12. Not that I have already attained or am already perfected.

Now there's a two-pronged argument here. A, Paul says, I put aside all the Pharisee-ism and all of the born on the tribe of Benjamin and circumcised on the eighth day. I set all that aside so that I may gain Christ.

I set it all aside. So the first assumption might be, oh, Paul, so you think you've arrived now. You

are totally saturated with righteousness by faith.

And he says, yeah, I'm telling you that I've set all these aside that I may gain Christ, but I'm not telling you that that's an episode. It's a process. It's a lifestyle.

It's not a, you know, the Damascus Road experience didn't finish putting aside the old life and gaining the new. It was the beginning of a lifelong process. And by the way, I think it's a process that will continue for us even in the kingdom ages.

God is infinite and we are not. So we can continue to learn. God is going to constantly be revealing himself to us.

Our eyes haven't seen, our ears haven't heard. It hasn't entered into our hearts the things that God has prepared for those who love him. And if you love God, it's not a matter of, well, when I get to eternity, my cup will just be full and running over and that'll be it.

No, bigger cup, more stuff to fill in. Bigger cup, more stuff to pour in. Bigger cup.

We are going to be treading on the upward way and gaining new heights every day in eternity, just like we do now. You cannot reach the infinite. And it's a great thing.

Look how much we have to look forward to. It's so much fun to learn things about God now. And with freedom from our limitations of our physical brain and our, you know, everything else, we'll just be able to really accelerate our involvement and participation and understanding, gaining Christ.

So Paul says, look, I haven't got it all. I'm not a complete encyclopedia of Christ and I am not perfected, but I press on that I may lay hold of, that I may apprehend. Apprehend is a really good translation for this word, that I may apprehend that for which I was apprehended.

And there's a play on words in Greek, just like there will be a play on words in English. We say that I may apprehend, meaning that I may understand that for which I was apprehended, which has a more physical connotation. You think of Paul on the Damascus road and Jesus pretty much slapping him down and blinding him and saying, look, get with the program here, buddy.

Tired of waiting for you to wake up and smell the coffee. And he says that I may apprehend that for which I was apprehended. And it provokes a smile when you read it in Greek and it ought to in English as well.

Because Paul is excited about this. He says, I don't think I've gotten there yet. And the joy of it and part of the great fun of it is that process.

If you could complete it, where would the enjoyment be? It's like a lot of other things. You think about something you really, really enjoy doing or that you really, really enjoy learning about. And

it's always great to get a little further.

If you play the piano and you master a difficult piece and you say, ah, boy, that's great. I'm gonna tackle another one. If you try to grow a plant and you never can get the thing to bloom year after year, then, well, this is supposed to bloom.

And I've changed the light. I gave it food and I repotted and I put in the plant stakes and I debugged it. And then one year it finally blooms.

You say, oh, that's great. Think I'll get a cutting. Try another one, get a different color.

We like to make progress and to keep advancing in things that we enjoy. And that's what Paul says. He says, look, it's not a matter of just crossing a line and wiping the sweat off your brow and saying, well, that was fun.

It's a continuing process and there's joy and celebration all along the way. One thing, forgetting those things which are behind, I press forward, I lean forward. And it's a very, this has been compared to the, have you seen that marble statue of the discus thrower? And it's one of these classical things they've kept from back in Roman days.

And the guy is leaning way forward. He's got the discus and he's in mid spin, I guess. But that's what this verb pictures.

Forgetting what is behind, I stretch forward as far as I can. This is like these people that lean forward just as they're getting to the tape, you know, to get just that extra microsecond of time. But he says, I stretch, I lean forward and to those things which are ahead.

And we tend to like this part about forgetting those things which are behind because we think, well, that's all my failures and my sins. I'm going to forget what's behind. I messed up really badly and I'm just going to forget about that.

But what are the things that are behind that Paul is talking about forgetting? What does he mention in the context? Not only do I consider them to be unspeakable filth, but forget about it. I'm forgetting being a Pharisee. I'm forgetting being an Israelite, tribe of Benjamin circumcised on the eighth day, Hebrew of the Hebrews, feet of Gamaliel, big time Pharisee, rich family.

I'm washing my hands of that whole thing. I'm forgetting all of that. Even my accomplishments, I'm forgetting that as well as sins and failures and the sins and failures of others.

What's behind is already written in the record. The time that is left to us, that's where the opportunity is. That's where the potential is.

Going back to my analogy, playing the piano, I learned a few little songs. One long pan, the famous Chinese detective, and it's just, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot in the left hand and just a few

little notes in the right hand. Well, when I was able to start learning some classical pieces and get a little further along, I don't want to sit and play one long piece.

I don't want to forget that song. I want to forget Henry's Henry and you know, in an English Rose Garden, some of these other little two bit songs. I just want to forget that.

I don't want to do that anymore. I want to move forward. I want to advance.

I want to lay hold of these greater things. So accomplishments as well as sins are forgotten. I'm not resting on my laurels.

I'm not looking back and saying, oh boy, you know, I won so many people to Christ or I was engaged in a great ministry or I had a great victory. I actually did something by faith. Forget about that.

Let the books take care of it. Maybe it'll come up at the judgment. I am leaning toward what's ahead, good or bad.

I got no rear view mirror, he says. I press toward the goal. What's interesting about this, this is the only use in the Bible, certainly in the New Testament, of the simple unadorned word skapos.

We've got episkapos, we've got all other kinds of combination words, but plain old skapos is only used here. And skapos is not goal. Skapos is goal marker.

When you're trying to cross the finish line, you know, what are you actually wanting to do? You want to finish the race. If you're trying to go across a boundary, you're trying to get from one state to another, you're looking for the line, you're looking for the marker, but your goal is not the marker. You're not going to stop right at the line.

I mean, how sad would that be? I'm running around and I fall right at the line and I don't get to where I'm trying to go. I don't get to that next state or that next destination. I just, skapos is goal marker.

He says, I press toward the goal marker of, and it says the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. But a good translation of this is, I press straight for the prize to which God calls me up. I press toward the prize.

I'm going to pass the marker and get the prize. I'm not just looking for that line and oh, I love this finish line. What a wonderful border this is.

Look at how straight it is now, how nicely they painted it. No, that's a helpful guide, but I'm pressing toward the prize. The prize is my goal.

I pass the goal marker and get to the prize. And the prize is that to which God calls me up. It's an upward call.

Lift your eyes up from the mundane, from the childish, from the tawdry, from the mundane, from the temporary, from the pathetically human. Look up. Dr. Griswold has a book.

Look up, brother. There's joy ahead. It's an upward call.

And I like this translation. I press straight for the prize to which God calls me up. The prize that is in Christ Jesus.

It's certainly wonderful to have a marker to let you know that you're getting closer. You can see it coming into view. You can mark your progress by looking at the goal marker, but you're not going to go run up and hug the marker.

You're not going to grab the ribbon and say, oh, wonderful ribbon. No, I just, I'm so happy. You want to get to and through and you want the cup.

You want the medal. You want the accolade. You want whatever that prize is.

The financial check that comes when you win, whatever it may be. You don't just go say, oh, ribbon, ribbon, ribbon. I've been looking for you.

I'm so happy. So the opportunity to lay hold of these things is uniquely ours. Therefore, verse 15, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.

You can't do this as a baby believer. You do not have the capacity. You do not have the frame of reference.

You just can't see it. You're the child and you've got to grow. And you got to say, you know, maybe I don't want these plastic toys now.

I'd really like something a little more substantial. I want Legos that I can build something more complicated out of. I want a bicycle where I can ride around.

I want a computer that I can do more sophisticated things on. I want to grow in capacity and grow in what I can appreciate until ultimately I can get up to this place of maturity. It is the mature who recognize the value of things that children just don't care about.

You know, kids think adults are boring. Adults think kid stuff is boring. Why is that? Difference in worldview, difference in capacity to understand what is really and truly great.

And Paul says, as many as are mature, have this mind. This is not stuff for your Galatian believers or your Corinthian believers. This is not stuff for your people in the first couple of chapters of Acts.

These Philippian believers have been learning and growing and listening to Paul teach and

Timothy teach and Epaphroditus teach for over a decade. And they're getting it. You all have been listening to the teaching of the word of God for a long, long time, all of you.

And guess what? This is something to which we can begin to aspire to, which we can comprehend and appreciate. Not possible as a neophyte, not possible even as an intermediate believer. Those who are mature can begin to get this.

And Paul says, this is where I am. And let me tell you, I'm an apostle. I've been doing this a long time.

I've talked to the Lord and everything else. And I haven't gotten there. And I'm just celebrating the race.

I am celebrating, moving toward that goal marker, pressing for the prize to which God is calling me upward, the prize that is in Christ Jesus. If any of you think otherwise, in other words, if you really don't have the maturity to get this, just keep with it. God will reveal it to you.

If this doesn't make sense, if this sounds like a lot of eyewash or like, what is he talking about? Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be open. If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. I promise you, if you move in this direction, it is going to start to take shape.

It is going to start to be a reality. And it's very exciting. And it just makes things in this life pale into insignificance.

Why would you want to mess around with some empty, hollow, stumbling block type of thing in this life when you've got something this profoundly great, almost within reach. The goal marker is drawing nearer. You can see the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's the prize, to be found in him. I'm not bringing him any kind of righteousness I tried to make. Here's my pathetic little piece of righteousness.

I've got righteousness that God has given me through faith. And the Lord Jesus is going to recognize it because it's the kind of righteousness he has and the kind of righteousness he died to give us. He's going to look at it and he's going to smile and he's going to be pleased.

God the Father is going to say, well done thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord. Nothing compares.

Nothing is even remotely comparable. And Paul says, that's what I'm, and all this other stuff, I just leave it behind. That's what I'm pushing toward.

Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule. To the extent that we do understand this and we do get it, then act like it. Live like it, walk like it, adjust

your habits to it.

Invest your time accordingly. Set your priorities accordingly. Adjust your goals accordingly.

Eliminate your besetting sins accordingly. To the extent that you have attained, to the extent that this is starting to be real, well, get with it. Don't just let it be pie in the sky, by and by.

Walk according to this rule. Let that be your standard. Walk according to this standard.

Does your life look like you understand this? Does your life look like you're moving in that direction? If not, what's the matter with you, is the idea. And let's all have that in mind. What a privilege to be part not only of this great plan of God, but to look to your right and look to your left and see fellow believers who understand the same thing.

What an encouragement. What a great thing to not be traveling a road solo, nobody understanding, nobody getting it, but to have fellowship, to have shared enthusiasm, to be able to celebrate as a group instead of just as a lone ranger. That's what Paul's talking about here.

Well, we'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll look at verse 17 and following that is titled in your New King James, Our Citizenship in Heaven.