



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

A NEW DAY • PHILIPPIANS 3:1-21 • 1/1/2023

MAIN POINT

No matter what difficulties or victories our past year holds, God is calling us to fix our eyes on Him and press on to pursue His transformative work in and through us.

INTRODUCTION

What is your typical attitude when approaching a new year (i.e. apathy, anticipation, trepidation, joy, etc.)?

What about this year? Describe your view of the past year and your expectation of the coming year.

What advice would you give to someone who just recently turned to Christ in faith and asks, “As a Christ follower, what should my approach to the new year be?”

The new year marks a turning point on our calendars, but whether or not it marks a turning point in our hearts is not so simple a matter. In Philippians 3, we find that Paul wanted the Philippian believers to put the past behind them and live confidently in the victory Christ has achieved through His death and resurrection. Paul's words are also meant for us. Today's study will help us see that no matter what difficulties or victories our past year holds, God is calling us to fix our eyes on Him and press on to pursue His transformative work in and through us.

UNDERSTANDING

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6.

Read Philippians 1:13. Where was Paul when he wrote this letter? How would Paul's own personal circumstance speak to the Philippians about having joy in the Lord? How does it speak to you?

From verses 2-5, what are some things Paul was concerned might steal the Philippians' joy in the Lord?

Aside from working to earn God's favor (as Paul described here), what are some other ways we put "confidence in the flesh" (exs: the current political climate, the economy, our own personal comfort, etc.)? Why does putting our "confidence in the flesh" always end up letting us down?

From Paul's words here, what are some steps we can take to avoid putting our confidence in the flesh this coming year?

Paul did not consider his circumstances as the greatest reality of his life; rather, he considered Christ Jesus the greatest reality in his life. That's why he could rejoice while sitting in a prison cell! We, too, can rejoice in the Lord in every type of circumstance. Rejoicing in the Lord helps us avoid putting our confidence in the flesh. It is difficult to give undue attention to our circumstances when our focus is on Jesus and what He has done in us. Further, we must make ourselves aware of worldly people and our own tendency to form our identities around human achievement.

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:7-16.

Based on these verses, how do you think Paul would answer the question, "As a Christ follower, what should my approach to the new year be?"

In your own words, why is knowing Christ of surpassing value over anything else?

When thinking about the coming year, what phrase or sentence stands out to you the most in these verses? Why?

What would it look like this year for you to live out verse 14? What would need to change in your life for that to happen?

"Forget" in the Bible doesn't mean to no longer remember, it means "to no longer be influenced, affected, or controlled by." For example, in Isaiah 43:25, God promises that He will "remember your sins no more." This does not mean that God can no longer recall our sins, it means that God made a choice to no longer hold our sins against us. We will never forget our pasts in the sense of not being able to remember them. What we can do is live confidently for God, knowing that our sins are forgiven, which qualifies us to serve Him and help build His kingdom.

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21.

In these verses, Paul again referenced worldly people who do not know or follow Christ (look back at verse 2). Why do you think Paul felt it necessary to give these repeated warnings?

From verse 17, what type of people should we look to for wisdom in living this year? What does it mean, practically, to “pay careful attention” to those who live as Christ’s faithful disciples?

Here we see the importance of having other Christians help us in our walk with Christ. It is good for us to look to those who are pressing on and follow in their footsteps. Sadly, there are many people who do not continue in the faith but instead live as enemies of the cross and reveal that they were never truly converted. True followers of Jesus zealously move forward because of their love of Jesus. Paul’s zeal was clear, and we, by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, have the same zeal.

In addition to giving attention to the examples of godly believers, what else did Paul indicate we should give our attention to in verses 20-21? How might eagerly waiting for our glorification, either at Jesus’ return or at the end of our natural earthly lives, impact the way you think and act this year?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In what sense do you need this new year to not only be a turning point on your calendar but also in your heart?

How can this group encourage you in that?

How should that impact the way you interact with those outside the church?

PRAYER

Thank God for seasons that act as markers of new beginnings. Thank Him for the past year, including the good and the bad you experienced in it. Ask Him to help you turn your heart and mind toward Him for today and the days ahead in this new year, putting the past behind and pressing on to His heavenly call.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-21

3:1. Paul marked a transition point in his letter with a term that can mean “finally” but often indicates something like “well, then, or furthermore” (v. 1). He is only halfway through his letter at this point. In spite of Paul’s difficult circumstances, his relationship with Christ provided him with joy. He encourages us to “rejoice in the Lord.” This spirit or attitude of joy permeates this entire letter. Joy comes, however, only as one lives in the Lord. He is joy’s only source.

3:2-3. As a father protects his children, Paul wanted to keep his spiritual children from harm (v. 2). He warned them in strong language of opponents who would tempt them to false doctrine. These men were unclean “dogs,” not qualified to enter into

spiritual worship. A group of Jews in Paul's day attempted to distort the gospel by adding the requirement of circumcision plus faith in Christ as necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). Their false way of salvation was evil, as it could cause great confusion to the true message of Christ. They misunderstood the teachings of the Old Testament on circumcision and the Christian gospel of salvation by grace through faith. They wanted to preserve the Jewish heritage at any cost.

In disagreement with the teachings of his opponents, Paul took over their claims as belonging to the church and not to the Jews (v. 3). The opponents claimed to be the true Israel, circumcised in the flesh, being the truly spiritual ones, and glorying in their worship and goodness as measured by obedience to the law. Paul turned the tables. Believers in Christ are the true circumcision (Rom. 9:24-26; Gal. 6:16), having their hearts circumcised. Christians put no confidence in the flesh, neither in the ritual of circumcision, nor in the practice of obeying a law. This stands radically opposed to the false teachers who said Gentiles had to be circumcised to be acceptable to God. The Philippians and modern readers must make the choice—glory in Christ or in human religious achievement. Genuine believers have their complete hope or confidence in Christ's finished work on our behalf on the cross rather than anything done by them for God or in God's name. Trusting in anyone or anything besides the true Messiah is foolishness.

3:4-6. If anyone had bragging rights about their status and achievement, Paul did (vv. 4-6), but Jesus showed him that just being Jewish did not make him righteous before God.

3:7-8. While these credentials and accomplishments are impressive, Paul placed no "stock" or confidence in them (vv. 7-8). His relationship with Christ was far superior to his Jewish background. The things of the world—all human accomplishments—are viewed as rubbish or garbage in comparison to gaining Christ. Paul's focus changed completely. No longer did personal religious ritual and obedient religious acts occupy center stage. All eyes were on Christ and on him alone.

3:9-12. Paul's description of his desires pointed forward to a goal (v. 12). Not yet mature, he was still very much in the race of the Christian life. The perfection he would have at the future resurrection was not yet attained. He still had to deal with what in Romans 7 he calls "the flesh," an innate pull to sin. He had to deal with his sinful body and was only too aware of the need for further spiritual growth. He purposes to press on as he had not attained the intense personal knowledge of Christ

that he desired and had not become all that Christ wanted him to be. Paul always held God up as the source of every part of the salvation experience.

3:13. Paul, in verse 13, underlines his denial of personal power or attainment and his single-minded focus. To describe that focus, he employs the image of a runner in a race who hopes to win the prize. He cannot look back. He cannot cloud his mind with past memories. He strains every muscle in his body to achieve forward motion, keeping his eyes on the finish line. Paul forgets the guilt of persecuting the church. He forgets the pain of prison and physical punishment. He forgets the frustration of disobedient church members and false teachers. He looks ahead to see the resurrection, where he will meet Jesus face to face.

3:14. With this focus he pursues his goal intently (v. 14). His goal is to win the prize for which God had called him in Christ Jesus. He wants to hear God call his name and summon him to the victory stand, where he will meet Jesus face to face and know Him in perfect intimacy. Earthly prizes do not last. Eternal prizes do. The goal can never be realized on earth. It is a goal that pulls us heavenward. Note 1 Corinthians 9:25: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." While Paul was not spiritually where he thought he would ultimately be, he intended not to be distracted by anything as he pursued his goal (Heb. 12:1-2). Both discipline and determination are required to accomplish this objective.

3:15-16. Paul believed that all spiritually mature Christians would agree with or would share his philosophy toward life (v. 15). "Mature" translates the same Greek term as did "perfect" in verse 12. Paul pointed to a difference of opinion as to the meaning of perfection. His opponents thought they had obeyed the law and achieved perfection in this life. Paul knew he would never obtain perfection. The only persons who could claim to be part of the "perfect ones" were those who knew that running the race and seeking the goal was the only mark of perfection possible on earth. If they thought differently, Paul was confident God could cause them to change their minds, since Paul's human arguments could not. Paul was content to shed some light on the subject.

3:17. Paul urged his brothers in Christ to join in imitating him. He was not bragging or holding himself up as the perfect model; yet he was the best example of Christ's follower they had. He urged the Philippian believers to fix their attention on believers who were following his example. The Philippian Christians were to pattern their

lifestyles after Paul and other believers who imitated him—all of whom were following Christ's model.

3:18-19. With deep emotion, Paul warned his friends against enemies of the cross of Christ. Paul described these enemies as unbelievers and wept because of their tragic condition and their negative effect on others in the church. They were enemies of the cross because their lifestyles contradicted their professed commitment to Christ. Paul declared that these pseudo-Christians were headed for destruction—that is, ruin in the sense of eternal separation from God. Though they professed to worship God, they had made an idol of their stomach, a term for the wide range of their sensual (bodily) appetites. Their self-indulgence contrasted sharply to Christ's sacrificial self-giving. Rather than center their lives on heavenly or spiritual values, truths, and goals, the professing Christians were focused on earthly (material) things. The Greek term rendered are focused on means "to set the mind on," "to be intent on," and conveys continuous action. They consistently pursued material things as their priority.

3:20. In contrast, genuine believers' citizenship is in heaven. Paul maintained that Christians were (and are) members of two realms. They were citizens of the Roman Empire and should be exemplary citizens. More important, they were citizens of God's kingdom and owed their primary loyalty to God. Their heavenly citizenship governed their earthly lives. Paul emphasized the creative tension in which believers lived: they eagerly awaited the return of Christ their Savior. Paul's emphasis may have been on the fulfillment or culmination of Christians' salvation at that time or their being delivered from persecution.

3:21. Christ has supernatural power to subject everything to Himself. He is sovereign. With such unlimited effective energy, Christ will transform believers' bodies when He returns. The Greek word translated transform has the idea of changing something so it conforms to something else. The body of our humble condition is the physical body. The phrase His glorious body refers to the Lord's spiritual or resurrection body appropriate for eternity. Christ will change believers' bodies to be like His, not merely in external appearance but also in essential nature. Believers will reach full maturity.