

Welcome to 2009
 Philippians 3:12b-14 16
 Jan 4, 2009

This morning we are going to celebrate communion to begin 2009 as Crossroads Christian Community.

Philippians 3:4-14

We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him.

12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

SO far as our acceptance with God is concerned, a Christian is complete in Christ as soon as he believes. Those who have trusted themselves in the hands of the Lord Jesus are forgiven before God — and may enjoy holy confidence that “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”

Paul understood he had attained this salvation. But also understood that while the work of Christ for us is perfect, the work of the Holy Spirit *in* us is an ongoing process called sanctification—it is continually carried on from day to day—and will need to be continued throughout the whole of our lives. If salvation were God's only goal he would have taken us as soon as we first believed. It is God's intent and plan that we become “conformed to the image of Christ”. The condition in which a Believer should always be found is that of progress toward this goal. His motto must be, “Onward and upward!”

Nearly every figure by which Christians are described in the Bible implies this idea. We are plants of the Lord's field, we are sown that we may grow and bear fruit. We are born into the family of God, but there are babes, little children, young men, and the mature in

Christ Jesus. Yes, and there are none who are perfect or fully developed in Christ Jesus. It is always a growing process.

The follower of Jesus also described as a pilgrim. A pilgrim is not one who sits down as if rooted to the place. The believer is compared to a warrior, a wrestler, a competitor in the games—these figures are the very opposite of a condition in which nothing more is to be done. They imply energy, the gathering up of strength and the concentration of forces in order to move, contend, overcome adversaries - even ourselves.

The Christian is also likened to a runner in a race and that is the figure before us this morning. It is clear that a runner is not one who merely holds their ground, content with where they are—the runner is only a runner when they are steadily moving toward the goal of finishing the race. A true runner has nothing to do with a careless and mindless effort but runs dedicated to and focused on training and practicing to win the prize! Progress is the healthy condition of every Christian and the follower of Jesus. We will call progress in this race growing in an ever increasing knowledge of the Lord, being ever more conformed to the image of Christ - and so maturing in our faith, our faith showing in our living and our living becoming more and more like Jesus.

Now, to this progress the Apostle *allures* us. He stands among us. He does not lecture us from some far off perfection, like a learned master far above his disciples, but he puts himself on our level. And it is something to hear *this* from the very chief of the Apostles, he says to us, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended all this but I press myself toward this goal.” To be sure, Paul does not give us the details of his own imperfections and deficiencies, but in one word he confesses them all at once. And then he declares that he burns with eager desire for perfection, so the one passion of his soul is to press onward towards the great goal of his hope, the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus.

We cannot desire to have a better instructor than a man who sympathizes with us because he humbly considers himself to be of the same rank as ourselves. Teaching us to run, the Apostle, himself, runs. Wishing to fire our holy ambition, he bears testimony to that same ambition flaming within his own spirit. Yet, In this passage Paul is reminding us that we are only part-way through.

Paul’s statements call us to consider four great things in our lives as a follower of Jesus—

First, make an accurate assessment of our present condition...I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him...“I do not say I have already reached that perfection.”

Secondly, as placing his past in its proper place—“forgetting the things which are behind.”

Thirdly, as aspiring eagerly to a more glorious future—“**I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.**”

And fourthly, as making every effort to obtain this burning passion—“**I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**”

That is our course this morning. To engage in the race. To take up the holy call of running to win the prize of heaven...a turning forward to look at our call to live for Christ and **Longing to be conformed to the image of Christ...**with a burning passion...saying to ourselves, to each other, and to our Lord...yes, I desire that.

We're going to apply this passage to our lives today and for 2009. To do this we will physically move through three points.

- First, we are going to forget the past...lay aside what may hold us back from the future God has already set forward.
- Second, we will give thanks for God's faithfulness in Christ and allow his gift on the cross to bring our lives together as we share the Lord's Table.
- Finally, we will turn to look forward to 2009...having forgotten the past we will look forward to what lies ahead. We press set our course to take hold of that for which Jesus first took hold us.

First: Forgetting the past

We'll do that by writing down and literally leaving behind us – so I invite you to ask God what it is that lay in the past and is or has the potential to detain us from engaging in what God is doing and where God would take us, write it down and be ready to leave it in the past

What is it that we want to forget? There's not one who has not struggled with failures that crush our spirits, failures like a weight we must shed...lay aside resentments and anger to seek reconciliation, we'll hang up the disappointment of unmet expectations and plans, offload guilt and sin that so easily tangles, and leave our old natures where they should be. We also, like Paul, must recognize that we experience some extraordinary events and what by worldly standards would be considered a defining accomplishment, a great successes that has a sense of prominence... an accomplishment that when placed alongside of Jesus instantly fades to nothing and no longer defines us or our course. ...Today this most clearly means financial success, a prominent position gained through work, a social status and certain life style...for to long followers of Jesus have allowed the standards of the

world to define their course and their longings, standards and hopes that keep us them from engaging where God would have them, us, go.

We are being formed through a process not bound to our past but to God's future, and we are only part way through. If we can remember that moving through this process is God's plan for us we can be encouraged when we find that we still have a long way to go. Ours is a process which permits us to be honest about the present and which gives us the freedom to shed the past.

So today, we want to make an accurate assessment. We seek to answer the question...am I engaged in a life that is moving forward in Christ? Am I growing in my faith? Not one of us can say...I have reached perfection in Christ I need not move on. Every one of us in this process has a past that needs a good scraping...like the hull of a boat too long tied to the dock, too long at anchor. I invite you to go to the table in the back at any time and leaving the past behind you.

What is the Lord would have you forget so you can engage in the race...run for the prize...move forward.

Past failures that crush our spirits

Lay aside resentments and anger, and may involve a person in this room with whom you need to seek reconciliation,

Hang up the disappointment of unmet expectations and plans

Offload guilt and sin that so easily tangles, and leave our old natures where they should be.

It may be a standard of the world that has prominence over God in your living.

Lets leave that behind...this morning...

Our Second motion

We give thanks for God's everlasting faithfulness. It is God who has made it possible to leave the past for HIS fullness of life in this moment and the next. Give thanks that you can shed the past, including your sin and be made new to move forward. Give God thanks and praise for what he has done for you. Write it down and give it to the Lord

When you are ready come forward and place your thanks in the container and we will serve you the bread and cup. We ask that you take the bread and cup back to your seat, meditate and pray while we wait for every one to be ready, then we will bless and share all together

Finally, and I invite you to present your dedication when you are ready. Don't wait for me to stop. What is it you must take up to conform to the image of Christ.

The only hope for the runner was to forget all that was behind and occupy his entire thoughts with the piece of ground which lay in front! Never mind that you have run so

far—you must let the space which lies between you and the goal engross all your thoughts and command all your powers.

We press on to take hold of that for which Jesus first took hold us. This is not a future event. It is a disciplined, daily journey with our Lord in which we commit ourselves to God's desire for our lives.

- To deepen and strengthen our faith through fellowship, prayer and trusting God.
- To increase our knowledge of Jesus by studying God's word so that we might be more obedient to God.
- And our living glorify God more and more by being God's workmanship, created in Jesus to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10).

We will press onward toward the goal... To take up the holy call of running to win the prize of heaven...a turning forward to look at our call to live for Christ and **Longing to be conformed to the image of Christ...**with a burning passion...saying to ourselves, to each other, and to our Lord...yes, I desire that. Every day of 2009 is a step toward this goal...setting ourselves to press onward to reach the end of the race and receive the prize of heaven for which God, through Christ is calling us.

A great painter once had finished a picture and he said to his wife with tears in his eyes, "It is all over with me. I shall never paint again, I am a ruined man." She enquired, "Why?" "Because," he said, "that painting contents and satisfies me. It realizes my idea of what painting ought to be and therefore I am sure my power is gone, for that power lies in having ideals which I cannot reach, something yet beyond me which I am striving after." When a man once realizes his own ideal, it is all over with him. May none of us ever say, "I have reached my ideal, now I am what I ought to be, there is nothing beyond me."

The aim of the Christian is to be *perfect*—if he seeks to be anything less than perfect, he aims at an object lower than that which God has placed before him. Would you God's standard to be lower? If the highest degree of holiness were denied to any one of us, it would be a heavy calamity. Is it not the joy of a Christian to attain to be perfect, like his Lord? Who would wish to stop short of it? To be obligated to live under the power of even the least sin forever would be a horrible thing! No, we never can be content short of perfection! We will reach forward towards that which is before. "It is a wonderfully high standard," If we do not reach it, it is that which we must press for!

I invite every soul that has been saved by the precious blood of Christ to gather up all its strength for this one thing—to cultivate a passion for God's presence and an intense longing after holiness and godliness. That was Paul's high calling and it is ours