

IN PURSUIT OF GLORY

Philippians 3:1-16

— **Intro:** When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippi, he was a prisoner in Rome. He was no stranger to persecution, but he always found that his troubles were profitable to himself spiritually. There are times in all of our lives when we stand in special need of what trials can do for us.

His epistle to the Philippians has been called *his spiritual autobiography*, and I think it would be difficult to find a better title. And that is especially true of chapter 3. There we see the things which he said were most important to him before he was saved. And then he told how his life took an entirely different direction after he was saved. But he called his life *a pursuit*. I want to show you why I say that.

In this one chapter the Apostle Paul used a particular word, a verb, three times. It is clearest in the KJV in verse 14 where we read, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.’

— That verb “press” is the translation of the Greek verb, διώκω. It speaks of that which is a person’s primary goal in life, more important than anything else.

I check the lexicon in my computer to find out if he used that word anyplace else in this chapter, and I discovered that Paul used it two other times. I found that he used in verse 12 where it is translated, “I follow after.” And then I learned that he had used it as far back as verse 6. There the same verb is translated, “persecuting.” In all three of these verses we could translated this Greek word with the English word, *pursue*. And so we have it in verses 6, 12, and 14 here in Philippians 3. The last two uses, in verses 12 and 13 go together, but what Paul said in verse 6 was a pursuit he had before the Lord stopped him and changed his life on the road to Damascus.

— Before I discuss that, let me explain a little more about the idea in this verb. It is a strong verb. It means *to go after something like it was going to get away from you*. It indicates in these passages what at different times in Paul’s life was the most important objective to him.

We can see from verse 6 that this idea of pursuing can be used in a bad, and even “a hostile manner” (Thayer, p. 153). That had been Paul’s main

purpose in life before he was saved. He was hot in pursuit of any and everyone who was a part of the church of Jesus Christ. And it was his object in life to kill the church, to do away with it completely. Whatever he could do along that line not only brought great satisfaction to him, but it brought all kinds of honors to him from his fellow-Jews who had the same goal in life. However, you will find by reading Paul's epistles carefully that this was one thing that grieved him more than anything else after he became a child of God. What he had been proud of before, he afterwards *deplored*.

Writing to the Galatian churches, and using this same word for persecution, the Apostle Paul had this to say:

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it (Gal. 1:13).

Paul did not just persecute Christians when he accidentally came upon them; no, *he went after them*. And it was his purpose to get them to renounce Christ, or he would do all in his power to see that they were destroyed. And he did all of this thinking that he was serving God! *This was the one consuming passion of his life. This is what he lived for!*

But when the Lord Jesus saved him, and changed him, old things passed away, and all things became new! From that point on he loved the people whom before he had tried to destroy, but what was even more important than that was that he loved their Savior. And if anything, with an even greater zeal his life purpose became what he said in verses 12, 13, and 14, not just to follow Christ (although he did that), but, as he said, to "follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." And then he said this:

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14).

Here in verses 12, 13, and 14 Paul was describing his salvation. Let us notice what he had to say.

I. PAUL'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS SALVATION.

A. He had been *called*.

Before that day on the road to Damascus I am certain that Paul didn't even know that there was such a thing. Paul was like you and I were; he would never have sought the Lord Jesus, but the Lord Jesus sought him. He hated the Lord Jesus, but the Lord Jesus loved him. He would never have chosen Christ, but Christ chose him. And the Apostle Paul called this calling a "high calling," *an upward call, a call to higher things than the Apostle Paul even knew existed.* And it was an effective call, because when the Lord called, the battle between Saul and the Lord was over, with the Lord Jesus the victor.

He was called from his sin, and called to salvation. He was called to forgiveness. He became a child of God. Life could never be the same again for Saul of Tarsus after the Lord called him on the road to Damascus. And we are not talking about his call to be an apostle; that was something else. This was a call to salvation.

But Paul used another expression that we need to notice, and to understand..

B. He had been "apprehended by Christ Jesus."

What does this mean? It means that the Lord Jesus had seized Saul of Tarsus, had taken possession of him. And the word "apprehended" carries with it the idea of taking possession of Saul *eagerly*. It means that the Lord was delighted to take Saul for himself.

Now I would say that the Lord exercised that same eagerness when you were saved, and when I was saved. This word "apprehended" carries with it the idea that the Lord laid hold of us because He loved us.

This expression means that the Lord had a purpose in saving the Saul of Tarsus which went beyond the forgiveness of his sins and his becoming a part of the family of God..

In the first verse of this epistle the Apostle Paul said something about the Philippian believers that applied equally to himself. He spoke of God beginning a good work in them, a work which was certain to be completed at the day of Jesus Christ – which was the day when the Lord would return. *What was that work? What was the reason Paul prayed so fervently and constantly for all believers? What is the ultimate goal of their salvation?* The Philippians knew what it was, and so the Apostle Paul did not have to explain it to them. But he did explain it to the believers at

Rome, and you will find his explanation in Rom. 8:28-30:

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

The Apostle John stated it this way:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

Saul of Tarsus was apprehended by Christ because Christ intended to make Saul of Tarsus like He is, like the Lord is! That is amazing truth, isn't it? I hope that it never becomes commonplace to us, because the same is true of each one of us. *And there wasn't a day after Saul of Tarsus was saved that the Lord was not working in Saul's life to accomplish that purpose.* That is the "good" of Rom. 8:28.

But there is another side to this whole work that the Apostle Paul was discussing. In Phil. 1:6 Paul was talking about what God was doing, but here in Phil. 3:14 he tells us that there was something that he was doing. Let me call it:

II. THE WORK OF PAUL IN SALVATION.

Now before you call me a heretic let me read to you from verse 7 down through verse 16.

And now go back to verse 14. Paul was pursuing the purpose for which the Lord had saved him. This was the main objective of his life. This is what he lived for. All of his energies were devoted to this one purpose. It was not that Paul was saving himself, nor even that he was responsible for his own sanctification. But he definitely had a responsibility toward his own conformity to Christ. He was pursuing the goal of his salvation just like a runner would train and then run in a race to be awarded the victor's crown – or whatever the prize might be. The prize for us is that we will be made like the Lord Jesus.

I would assume that Paul's time in prison had brought all of this into focus for the Apostle Paul in a new way. I don't know, but perhaps Paul had been so busy ministering to others, and seeking to bring others to Christ, that he was neglecting his own soul. Maybe I am wrong in this, but I know that there have been times in my life when I have had that problem, and I have read enough biographies of Christian leaders to know that this is a common problem among the most godly people. And, as a pastor, this has been one of my main concerns for the people to whom I minister.

What did Paul mean when he said that "I press toward the mark ..."? What do you think he was doing?

A. He was spending time reading and meditating on the Word of God.

Of all of the things that you and I need to do, nothing is more important than this. And it would seem that it should be expected that the longer we know the Lord, the more time we should be giving to the Word of God.

I read just this past week about some kind of a check which was made on Christians several generations ago, and it was learned that Christians in that generation averaged no more than five minutes a day in the Word of God? What do you suppose the average is today among professing Christians? What is your average? I know we all have other responsibilities, but first things need to come first. How often during the day do we get back to the Word when time permits, or how often do we review in our minds passages of Scripture which we have committed to memory? Or are you memorizing the Word?

A second thing that Paul undoubtedly was referring to was that

B. He was spending as much time as possible each day in prayer.

When you read Paul's letters you can't help but see that he prayed much day after day. He drank in the Word, and then he had the habit of praying about everything. No matter was too small for Paul to leave out of his prayers. And it was not all bringing requests to the Lord. Paul spent much time in worshipping the Lord, and much time in praising the Lord for the many blessings that Paul experienced every day. From the very beginning of his life as a Christian, prayer held a major place in his life every day.

How important is prayer in our lives? Andrew Murray worked among pastors in South Africa years ago, and in a questionnaire that he circulated among those pastors, asking them to respond without giving him their names, he learned that the average pastor spent less than ten minutes a day in prayer. These were evangelical men, men who loved the Lord, and who taught His Word, but prayer was a neglected part of their lives. I doubt if we have the right to say that we are pursuing the goal if we are not praying, and spending much of our time in prayer.

A third thing that was very important to the Apostle Paul:

C. His fellowship with the people of God.

You can see how he loved the Lord's people by what he said in his letters. And if he wrote Hebrews, he told the Hebrew Christians of his day that they were not to forsaking the assembling of themselves together. Cf. Heb. 10:25. And he indicated in that verse that the closer we get to the coming of the Lord, the more we should seek to be with the people of God every time they get together as a church. The closer we get to the Lord, the greater will be the ungodliness in the world, and the more we will need to support and encourage one another in our relationship with the Lord.

Let me mention one other thing:

D. If we are pressing on, we are going to be witnessing to people who do not know the Savior.

I have been reading about revivals this past week, and those who have been in true revivals, or who have studied the great movements of God in the past – something which we have not seen in our generation – say that in times of revival when God is working in the hearts of His people, there is great compassion shown toward the unsaved by all Christians. Boldness in witnessing is evident everywhere.

We are closer to the coming of the Lord than any generation of the Lord's people ever has been. Shouldn't we, if we are pressing on toward the goal, be speaking to others about Christ and their need of Him?

Concl: I could go on and on speaking of what it means to press on toward the mark, but each one of us needs to examine our own hearts to see just how much we can say that we are pressing on, pursuing the glory that will be our when our Lord comes. And yet remember: There is going

to be a difference among believers in that day. We are all going to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, but there will be some way that our zeal for the Lord and His will will be evident when the Lord returns. So let us make it a point to understand what Paul was saying in this important passage, and then devote ourselves more right away to doing what Paul meant when he said, “I press toward the mark ... “ These are evil days in which we live, and they are also busy days, very busy for all of us. But we can’t allow them to be so busy that they keep us from that which the Lord has given us to pursue the glory which will be ours when we some day see Him face to face, the One we love, and the One we desire to be like here and now.