

A LETTER FROM PRISON



THE PARADOX OF JOY IN SUFFERING
paul's letter to the philippian church

Week 6: "STILL RUNNING THE RACE"

INTRODUCTION

A mid-point review of the theme being developed in the letter.

"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..."

It's amazing what God can do in and through a group of people who are partnering together, humbly serving others, united around mission.

LOOK TO THE BOOK – Hot Pursuit!

Philippians 3:12-16

- Paul quickly points out that he has not yet achieved his goal. Even after all these years, still in process, with no claim of having arrived.
- Authentic spiritual growth (holiness) requires humility and honesty!
- To underscore his point, he switches metaphors from book-keeping to sports, introducing the image of a race.
- He has not yet obtained his goal of v. 10; He has not yet "been made perfect" (*teteleiomai*)
- Authentic maturity = understanding we have not yet arrived, always room for growth (vs. false maturity that equates maturity with completion or perfection.)
- He presses on – dioko = deliberate pursuit as in a hunt or race -- chase and capture or pursue and overtake.
- When we connect vss. 10,12,14 - Paul wants to fully take hold of Jesus. Relationship vs. religion.
- The increasing experience of Jesus and resurrection life now. Living in the reality and living out the reality of the kingdom...living in the present in light of the future.
- Philippians could understand...not actually living in Rome, but living as if they were...as colony, as citizens of Rome. Not waiting to get to Rome to realise their status as Romans, but living out that reality in the now!
- V. 13. But one thing I do, FORGETTING what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. But one thing – very clearly emphasizing this fact, it's crucial to the race.
- Forgetting - the opposite of Biblical use of word "remembering" – carries the important dynamic meaning of a recalling from the past into the present something which lies buried in history, in such a way that the result of the past action is made powerfully present.
- Paul strains (active, determined) forward into relationship, not backward on achievements.
- V. 15 those of us who are mature or perfect (teleio) = honest/authentic understanding that we are in process of maturing, growing, becoming.

SO WHAT?

TAKE OUT #1: Unity is strengthened and furthered when we focus on Jesus. Relationship and partnership is deepened when we are looking at Jesus rather than elsewhere (ourselves or others). When we take our focus off of Jesus we quickly start to become critical and disunity and division sets in.

TAKE OUT #2: Spiritual growth requires honesty, authenticity and humility. We do not need to pretend we have arrived or are perfect regardless of who we are or how long we have been a Christ-follower. Encourage rather than criticize.

TAKE OUT #3: Spiritual development does not happen by accident. We need to be intentional and determined in pursuing our goal of becoming like Jesus in all aspects of our lives. We invest our energy and our time.

TAKE OUT #4: Christ-followers are not to be simply "waiting for heaven", but actively living and serving in a way that manifests the Kingdom of God now. This impacts our values, our ethics, our activities, and our perspectives.

TAKE OUT #5: We need to practice active forgetting to develop in our relationship with Jesus and becoming increasingly like him. We tend to either idolize (achievements) our past or let it paralyze (failures) us. Jesus brings freedom and grace to look ahead.

TAKE OUT #6: Christ-followers should primarily have a forward perspective that allows us to embrace growth and change rather than get stuck in the past, either personally or as a community. This cultivates growth and also reduces chances for division and legalism.

CONCLUSION – What are you looking at?

Isaiah 43:18-19; 42:3

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. Take time to review this week's message. What things in the message most challenged, puzzled, or encouraged you?

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

2. Read our key passage (**Philippians 3:12-16**), in various translations if possible. a) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? b) Paul describes Christ as taking hold of him. Look up Acts 9:1-16; 26:15-18; Col. 1:24-29 to understand his sense of purpose. Discuss main points of why Christ took hold of Paul. c) Share among yourselves your own sense of what God desires to do in and through you. d) In verse 14 Paul puts his past in perspective. What are ways you have found to put your past (positive and negative) in perspective? e) Paul uses athletic imagery to encourage spiritual growth. See 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-11, as well. What are principles indicated in these passages and images that encourage growth?

SO WHAT?...

3. How can we encourage one another in this race we are all engaged in? How can we foster openness so we can support and pray for one another?
4. What needs to be actively forgotten in your life? Pray for God's grace to resist bringing this into the present so that it no longer shapes your present or future. Pray for each other.

Darrell Winger @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, July 29 /Aug 5, 2007