



# RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

## THE WEEKLY BRICK

January 31, 2010.

*As you come to him, the living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:4-5*

Sermon Series: “Walking By Faith With Godly Goals”

Sermon: “The Priority of ‘Pressing On’”

Philippians 3:7-14

### Context:

Today, we continue our sermon series on “Setting Godly Goals.” Last week, we heard that in setting goals and priorities, God and God’s ways must be primary. If there is one common experience when it comes to setting God honoring, God centered goals and priorities in our lives it is this: we will face circumstances that will challenge, interrupt, derail, and flat-out threaten, our goals and priorities, tempting us to turn away from God’s plan and purposes for us. Today, in this text from Philippians, we are encouraged us to “press on” toward “the goal.” What is this “goal?” It is a life that is surrendered to God so that God might transform, heal, and/or re-direct it. This process of divine work in our lives is called, “Sanctification.” God will/is sanctifying your life. The core theme in today’s text is encouragement. Paul wants to encourage the Philippian church to continue to let God work in and through them, despite the hardships of this world, despite of the spiritual exhaustion that often plagues us.

### Relevant Scriptures and Ideas:

Goals and the Christian life: Setting goals is good; fulfilling them takes: \_\_\_\_\_ !

*Philippians 3:12-14 ... but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...<sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

### \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus’ goodness yesterday.

*Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

*2 Timothy 2:13 If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*

### \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus’ presence today.

*Philippians 3:13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...*

*Matthew 11:28-29 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

### \_\_\_\_\_ on Jesus’ promises for tomorrow.

*Philippians 3:14 ...I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

*Psalms 145:13 The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.*

*Philippians 1:6 ...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

**Question/Think About:** This week, take time to pray for the Holy Spirit to give you strength to “press on” in the places where you are spiritually fatigued. Stand firm. The Lord is at your side!

*(Answers: Pressing On. Recall, Recognize, Rely).*

# WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

## Monday, February 1<sup>st</sup> Read: Philippians 3:7-14.

The sermon text yesterday, Philippians 3:7-14, is a passage within the phenomenal book of Philippians. Saint Paul, writing from prison, encourages this beloved church from a far, urging the people to find their identities in Jesus and in him alone! According to some commentators, the church in Philippi was being influenced by some missionaries whom Paul referred to as “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “enemies of the cross of Christ.” (Philippians 3.2, 18) Why these invectives from Paul? Because this faction was espousing a righteousness based on law and culture, especially on the rite of circumcision, which was in direct conflict with Paul’s view of righteousness based on Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection (See 1.11; 2.6-11; 3.3, 9-11). Paul’s continuing admonition to the church is to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, to imitate him rather than the false teachers, and to stand firm in the Lord. This week, we explore this text and how it calls us to stand firm in the truth of Jesus’ love, grace, and presence in our lives.

A little more background about this text: In Philippians 3, Paul is giving us his spiritual biography, his past (Philippians 3:1–11), his present (Philippians 3:12–16), and his future (Philippians 3:17–21). There was Paul “the accountant” who discovered new values when he met Jesus Christ. In this section we meet Paul “the athlete” with his spiritual vigor, pressing toward the finish line in the Christian race. In the final section of Philippians, we meet Paul “the alien,” who recognizes his true citizenship in heaven and is looking for the coming of Jesus Christ. In all of his letters, Paul uses many illustrations from the world to communicate truth about the Christian life. Four are prominent: the military (“Put on the whole armor of God”), architecture (“You are the temple of God”), agriculture (“Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap”), and athletics (“finish the race”). In our text, it is Paul the athlete. Scholars do not necessarily agree as to the exact sport Paul is describing, whether the footrace or the chariot race. Either one will do, however, I personally believe it is the footrace. In all of these Pauline images, Paul is exercising his “spiritual vision;” he is looking at things on earth from God’s point of view. As a result, he is not upset by circumstances behind him, around him, or before him—*circumstances* do not rob him of his joy! Everything Paul has, or will have, is from Jesus and is found only in Jesus!

**Question/Pray:** As you read through this passage in its entirety, think about your life right now. What do you consider important, valuable, central, and essential? How do those values relate to your relationship with Jesus? What is the connection between your relationship with Jesus and the priorities in your life?

## Tuesday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> Read: Philippians 3:7-8.

Verse 7 refers back to the previous verses where Paul outlines all of his “accomplishments” when it came to religious practices, specifically Pharisaical Jewish practices. The “evil workers” that Paul criticized, would have loved to have been able to claim the credentials that Paul had. Paul had all the reason to be self-confident when it came to his religious credentials. Certainly, Paul had a great reputation as a religious leader (See Acts 26:24). He was proud of his Jewish heritage and his Roman citizenship. He likely had many friends who admired his zeal. All of his religious practices and his identity as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (v. 5) were valuable to him; he could profit from them, both personally and perhaps, financially. However, in terms of these “credentials,” Paul says “I consider loss for the sake of Christ.” (v.7). The Greek word translated, “consider,” means to “think through or reflect on.” In Greek, this word is in the perfect tense, which indicates a decision made in the past, which is still in effect in the present. Likely, Paul “thought through or reflected on” his life-transforming conversion on the Damascus Road. This divine encounter marked the beginning of Paul’s complete change of focus and trajectory. Paul now measured his past achievements against what Jesus Christ had to offer, realizing that all he had believed essential was really nothing but “refuse” (which can mean food scraps or even dung!). It would be hard to find a more forceful refutation of human effort to please God than what Paul presented here (v. 8). Four Greek particles (*alla menoun ge kai*) are translated as, “More than that,” and introduce the strong statements of verse 8. Paul considered as loss not only the things already listed (vs. 5-6), but everything else (v. 8)! In exchange for his confidence in his achievements, Paul was given a relationship with the living Christ. Jesus was now his “Lord.” Compared to his relationship with Jesus, all his religious strivings no longer mattered.

**Question/Pray:** How does the vision of your “ideal life” relate to your relationship with Jesus? Is there anything in your past that is holding you back in your relationship with Jesus? Pray about this today.

### **Wednesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> Read: Philippians 3:8-9**

Those who “gain Christ” (v. 8) are those who are “found in Jesus.” (v. 9). The Pauline “being found in Christ,” is reflective of baptismal imagery. When we are baptized, we are “dipped,” “immersed” (the definition of Baptism) into the life of Jesus, joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus now lives in and through the Christian and the Christian lives in and through Jesus. Since we are “in Christ,” we cannot cling to any righteousness of our own; no work, no achievement, no status, not even by observing the law. It is all Jesus’ work and achievement for us! The righteousness which saves and in which Paul trusted is received (read: not achieved) through faith in Jesus. This righteousness is from God and God alone. God’s righteousness is God’s gift, offered on the simple condition of believing (See Romans 3:21–4:25; Galatians 2:15–3:29; and Ephesians 2:4–9).

One important theological point needs to be made. For Paul, this cataclysmic event of being found in Jesus, receiving His forgiveness, and being made righteous, was founded upon Paul’s absolute belief that he himself had seen the promised messiah. The One whom Israel longed for and expected soon had come, was crucified, and rose again. The future “Day of the Lord,” the day when God will judge the earth through the messiah, has arrived in the person and ministry of Jesus! Theologically and experientially, everything Paul had been taught about God and the messiah has been established, yet in a way that Paul never expected (a crucified messiah)! I suggest that for Paul, becoming a Christian did not make him *less* a Jew. In fact, it made him a *completed* Jew, a true child of Abraham both spiritually and physically (See Galatians 3:6–9). Nor did he lower his standards of morality because he saw the shallowness of pharisaical religion. In fact, he accepted the *higher* standard of living—conformity to Jesus Christ (See Romans 12:1–2). This belief, among other reasons, fueled Paul’s anger toward the false teachers who urged Christians to return to the OLD WAYS of living. The “invasion” of Messiah Jesus has inaugurated a new day and a new way.

**Question/Pray:** How has Jesus changed your way of thinking? Relating to others? Your attitudes toward the world?

### **Thursday, February 4<sup>th</sup> Read: Philippians 3:10-11; Galatians 2:20.**

The words “becoming like Him” at the end of v.10, translates the Greek word, *symmorphizomenos*, which means “being conformed inwardly in one’s experience to something” (See Philippians 3:21), and in this case, to Christ’s death. As Jesus died *for* sin, so a believer can die *to* sin (Romans 6:2, 6-7; Colossians 3:3). The process of becoming like Jesus is the heart of Christian discipleship. As we grow in Christ, we increasingly leave our old ways of our sinful life, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, live a new life by means of Christ’s resurrection power (See Romans 6:4). Paul’s relationship with Jesus was also a *painful* experience. Described by Paul as “the sharing of his sufferings...” Paul knew (as did all the martyrs of the ancient church) that it was a privilege to suffer for Christ (See Philippians 1:29–30). In fact, suffering had been a part of his experience from the very beginning (See Acts 9:16). As we grow in our knowledge of Jesus and in our experiences of His power, we will come under the attack of others and the enemy (Satan). Paul had been a persecutor at one time, now he was learning what it means to be persecuted. Paul lived for Jesus because he died to himself (“being made conformable unto His death”). (Romans 6 explains this truth more fully). Paul did take up his cross and follow Jesus. We are to take up our cross and follow Jesus. The result of this spiritual death was for Paul, and is for us, a spiritual resurrection (Philippians 3:11). Dying to self caused Paul to walk “in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). We too can live new lives. When God puts to death something in our lives, God will birth something new as we wait on God and God’s transforming power.

**Question/Prayer:** What do you need to “die” to in your life right now? What part of following Jesus is painful for you? Pray specifically about these now.

### **Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup> Read: Philippians 3:12-13a**

“Not as though I had already attained this or have already reached the goal...” This is the statement of a Christian who realizes that life on this earth is never finished. Clearly, Paul was satisfied with Jesus Christ (v.10), but he was not satisfied with his Christian life. A “sanctified dissatisfaction” typically drives us to make changes, grow, learn, and seek new opportunities in our lives so that we might become more obedient and faithful to God. Paul wanted to take hold of, to gain, the great purpose for which Jesus had taken hold of him when Paul was confronted on the Damascus road years before. The Prophets in the Old Testament, and Jesus in the New Testament, warns against a false estimate of our spiritual condition. In Revelation 3:1, the church at Sardis had such a false estimate: “you have a name of being alive, but you are dead.” They had reputation without reality. In contrast, the believers at Smyrna thought they were spiritually poor when they were really spiritually rich (See Revelation 2:9). Self-evaluation can be a dangerous thing; we can err in two direc-

tions: (1) making ourselves *better* than we are, or (2) making ourselves *worse* than we really are. Paul had no illusions about himself; he still had to keep “pressing forward” in order to “lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold” of him. Again, often God will work in us a spiritual dissatisfaction so that we can experience spiritual progress. The Psalmist articulates this inner longing: “*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God*” (Ps. 42:1–2 KJV).

**Question/Prayer:** How does Paul’s admission in verse 12 encourage or discourage you? Are you experiencing a spiritual dissatisfaction? Does God seem to be “birthing” something new in your life?

**Saturday, February 6<sup>th</sup> Read: Philippians 3:13b-14**

As we looked at on Monday, Paul used various metaphors to describe the Christian life. In these powerful verses, Paul uses the metaphor of a race. The Greek verb “straining forward” in v.13 literally means “stretching as in a race.” In v.14, “I press!” is the same Greek verb translated as, “I follow after,” in Philippians 3:12, and carries the idea of intense endeavor. The Greeks used it to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey. An athlete does not become so by listening to lectures, watching movies, reading books, or cheering at the games. An athlete becomes an athlete by getting into the game and determining to win! The same zeal that Paul employed when he persecuted the church (See Philippians 3:6), he displayed in serving Christ. Actually, wouldn’t it be wonderful if Christians put as much determination into their spiritual life as they do their golfing, fishing, or any other favorite sport? Toward what goal is Paul “the runner” reaching toward with such spiritual determination? “The prize of the high [upward] calling of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 14). Again, Paul is not suggesting that we attain heaven by our own efforts. He is simply saying that just as the athlete is rewarded for his perseverance and training, so the faithful believer will be crowned when Jesus Christ returns. (See 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 for a parallel, and note that while only *one* athlete may receive a prize, *all* Christians receive the final reward; stranding with Jesus in His kingdom!).

**Prayer/Question:** What would it mean for you to “forget what lies behind?” If you had to compare your life right now to a track race, where would you be: sitting on the sidelines? Warming up? At the starting blocks? Giving it your all?

