

Pressing on Towards the Goal

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the assistant pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you.
- A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us today. We're glad you're here. And we're glad you're here not because we are trying to fill as many seats as possible, but we're glad you're here because we're following after Jesus together as one community.
- And we're convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace. And no one's so bad that they can't have it. And so we're glad for everyone to be here because we believe that everyone needs to hear what God has to say to us in his word.
- If you've been with us, you know that we're going through the book of Philippians, and you know that Philippians is a letter. It's a letter that's written by a man named Paul, and he's writing it to a church that's in Philippi.
- It's a church much like our church. And you know that this church is in a city much like our city. And you know that this is a book about partnership in the gospel, that we are together.
- [1 : 0 3] We have a partnership. We're heading towards the same treasure together, and that that treasure is the gospel. It's the news about Jesus and his death and his life and his resurrection. And that we can't take those two and separate them apart.
- And we've been focusing heavily on the partnership in chapters 1 and 2. And now that we're in chapter 3, we talked about last week, we're focusing more on the gospel. Now these things are always related. They're always together.
- So we're not going to separate them. But there's going to be an emphasis more sometimes on one than the other. And if you remember from last week, as we focused on the gospel, we saw that there are only two ways to live.
- Paul tells this church in Philippi that they can either live in the flesh or they can live in the spirit. Living by the flesh is what we've talked about saying, be good like I'm good.
- What I do and what I can do in and of myself is enough. I can be good enough. I can do enough. Living by the spirit is saying, no one is good. Only Jesus is good.
- [2 : 0 0] I can't do enough. And I need Jesus to help me. To help me become more and more like him. And so while our culture says there's three ways to live. There's good people that are models that are exceptionally good.
- Bad people and then just normal average people. The Bible tells us there are only two kinds of people. People who are looking to Jesus knowing that they need him and people who are not. And so as we continue talking about the gospel here in chapter 3.
- As we've looked at the difference between living in the spirit and living in the flesh. As we end chapter 3 we're going to ask this question. What does it look like to live in the spirit? If we've made that choice that we are not going to rely on ourselves.
- Remember people who lived by the flesh were people who reduced what needed to be done into this life. Into a very manageable set of rules. If we've said no to that and we've said yes to Jesus in his way.

What is it that we do? What do our lives look like? And that's what Paul is going to talk about at the end of this chapter. We are going to be starting at verse 12.

[3 : 05] And we're in chapter 3 of Philippians. You can turn there in your Bible. It's also printed in your worship guide near the very end. The entire passage. And as we come to it remember that this is God's word.

And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold. Even the finest gold. And that it is sweeter than honey. Even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so read with me now starting at verse 12. Verse 15.

Verse 17.

Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. Verse 17.

[4 : 46] body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that again and again you come to us, you communicate to us, that you're with us, that you want us to know what you love and you want us to love it as well, that you don't just leave us to figure out things by ourselves, but you walk with us. We ask that you would do that again this morning, that you would send your Holy Spirit to help us, that we would be able to hear clearly everything that you have to say about yourself and your word. We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen. So it's the first Sunday in November, which means we're quickly getting into Christmas season, and families in America all often fall into two different categories when it comes to Christmas, either fake tree people or real tree people. And growing up, my family is very strongly in the real tree camp. However, there were a few years when I was very young that we would have these very short trees, like two or three feet tall.

And so for the first time when I was probably about two years old, we finally got a real size tree. This tree was six feet tall. And of course, I was not six feet tall at the time, being two.

But one of the things we had to figure out every year was how are we going to get the star on the top of the tree? And it's very exciting because only one person is going to be able to put the star on the top of the tree. And I had two brothers, and so obviously not every one of us were going to get to do it every year. But for whatever reason, when I was two years old, it was my year. And so, of course, how am I going to get this star to the top of the tree when I'm two years old and it's a six foot tall tree? Well, I've told you about my uncle before who works for the State Department. He's partially involved in the fake rain jackets I told you about. But he used to not be abroad. He used to live close to us, and we loved this uncle. We loved Uncle Rich. And he would come over to our house, and he'd play with us, and we just thought it was the best thing that had ever happened to us. And so one time when he came over, Uncle Rich was the one who helped me get to the top of the tree. So we have this picture in the Capone Family Christmas book, and my Uncle Rich is holding me up like this. So he's got one hand below my chest, and then the other hand pulling out my onesie to keep me in place. And he's about six feet tall. So he lifts me up all the way to the top of the tree. And you can see me like looking down, and my eyes are just focused on the top, and I have this star in my hand. There's only one thing in my mind, which is that I'm going to get to be able to put that star on the very top of the tree.

As Paul is talking to the Philippians, that is what he is saying about his relationship with God. That is what it looks like for him to live by the Spirit. And you see in verse 12, not that I have already obtained this, or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. In other words, my eyes are on everything that I just told you about. Everything in verses 8 through 11. Knowing Christ, gaining Christ, being found in him, being able to stand at the resurrection. But the only way I'm able to focus on that is because God is already holding me. He's already holding me up. He's already sustaining me.

And so I'm reaching out with my little hand, not in my own strength. I'm not doing this. I'm not earning something. I'm not earning salvation. I'm not earning anything from God, but I'm doing what he has made me able to do. He's holding on to me. And so I'm going towards everything that I want that's ahead of me. This is what he's talking about in verse 13. I do not consider that I've made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 01] In other words, I want everything that I know is waiting for me in the future now. I want everything that God is doing to restore the world. I want as much of the future as I can get.

And so it's avoiding two mistakes on the one hand. One would be living by the flesh and saying, I'm going to do it in and of myself. That would be like two-year-old Matthew deciding he's going to get to the top of the six-foot tree with the star, which would just end in tragedy for me. Remember last week we talked about living by the flesh is not just a mistake. It actually ends in destruction. You can imagine me trying to climb up this six-foot tree and pulling it down on myself. And so one mistake is believing we can reach the top by ourselves. And the other mistake is believing that nothing that we do matters. That if God has saved us, that we don't have to worry about anything else. We don't have to think about anything else or do anything else. But if God has saved us, then the reality that's true of Paul should be true of us as well. If we've admitted that the world is not as it should be and we are not as it should be, then it's our longing and our hope that everything would be made right. Everything would be set back to the way that it's supposed to be.

And so that is what Paul is pressing on towards. He's pressing on towards something that he knows that he cannot have by himself. And so living by the Spirit means, first of all, that Paul is looking for this thing. He's looking for the future. He's looking for all the things that God is going to restore, and he's longing for it. Being a Christian is being like someone who's having our taste buds slowly changed over time. You know, as children grow older, their taste buds change, and they begin to appreciate flavors and experiences they would not have appreciated at a younger age.

And that's the kind of growth that Paul is looking for here. He wants to love more and more the things that God loves and hate more and more the things that God hates. And he wants to see God's kingdom more and more on this earth. I'm going to jump ahead just a little bit. So his goal is what he's already talked about in verses 8 through 11, this knowing Christ being found in him, experiencing the resurrection from the dead, seeing things that are dead brought to life.

But it's also seeing this citizenship that he talks about in verse 20. He's longing for that, but it's not just that he knows God, but he sees what happens in the world when God is in control.

[11 : 41] And so he's pressing on. He's moving forward. And this race image he's using is not saying that he's trying to win and others will lose. He's simply saying, like a runner, I want to be completely focused on what's in front of me. I want my longing and my desire and my hope more and more to be for this upward call of God in Christ Jesus. I want everything to be made right. I want it for myself and I want it for this world. I want this citizenship that's in heaven. And I know that I don't have it now. I haven't obtained it. I'm not already perfect. By the way, in verse 12, this already perfect in the original language is actually a passive verb. I have not yet been made perfect. He's not saying that he is striving to do for himself, but he knows that God is doing for him. God is the one who's taken hold of him. And so he longs to see that become true more and more. And so he's pressing on. He knows that he hasn't made it yet, but he's pressing on. And so what does it look like to live in the spirit and not the flesh? Living in the spirit and not the flesh means that we want what we know is in the future.

When Jesus comes again and makes everything right, we want the future to be present. We want as much of the future as we can have right now. Everyone agrees. Not everyone agrees with Christianity, with the claims of Jesus, but everyone agrees that there's something wrong with the world. And everyone has their own sort of solution for what would make things right. And so living by the spirit is not just acknowledging that something's wrong with the world, which is something that everyone acknowledges, right? If we've lived long enough.

But it's acknowledging that we are part of the problem. And we are not the ones ultimately who are going to make it right. But our only hope is that Jesus is going to come back and make all things right.

And so the person who lives in the spirit, by the way, that's what's going on in verse 20, that this citizenship is going to happen, that Jesus is going to come back and make everything right in his kingdom. And so the person who lives in the spirit wants that reality more and more. They want more and more of the future and the present. But they also recognize that they cannot have the future and the present unless God does it. And so everyone in this world, in some way, is looking for some kind of future in their minds to become present. But living by the spirit means we know that only God can bring it about. It's only Jesus who, by his death and his resurrection, is able to make all things right.

And so this is part of the problem of living in the flesh is that we reduce the problems in our world to something that we are able to make right. We're actually not honest about how broken the world is. But living in the spirit allows us to be honest about how broken the world is because we know how powerful the solution is.

[14 : 58] And so we can press on because we know that God is holding on to us. And so Paul is pushing forward every inch of his body, wanting to see this more and more be true.

And he talks in verse 15 about those who are mature think this way. And then things get a little confusing in verse 15 and 16.

Let those of us who are mature think this way. And if anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Wait, what? First, we have to understand what Paul is saying by mature.

What he's saying is this. The mature Christian is someone who is living in this way. It's someone who more and more wants the future to be present.

And someone who more and more realizes they can't do it on their own. And so as we've talked about before, knowledge is necessary but not sufficient. The mature Christian is not necessarily the person who has the most knowledge about the Bible.

[16 : 13] It's not necessarily the person who understands the most theologically. But in Paul's mind here, Christian maturity is recognizing that you have not arrived.

Remember in verse 12, I have not obtained this or am already perfect. Verse 13, I do not consider that I have made it my own. In other words, Paul knows that he does not know enough of God yet.

And Paul knows that he has not arrived. And if Paul has not arrived, then I think we can confidently say none of us have arrived either. Paul who actually saw Jesus, Jesus who blinded him and then restored him.

Paul who wrote these books that have been inspired by the Holy Spirit admits that he has not arrived. And that that is the model for Christian maturity. Christian maturity is recognizing that we have not arrived on the one hand.

And continuing to long and work for everything that God has for us. wanting more and more to love the things that God loves. And hate the things that he hates.

[17 : 23] And so what Paul is saying in this confusing verse is, when he says, if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. He's saying, if you think Christian maturity is something different than this, as you grow, you'll finally begin to understand that I'm actually telling you the truth.

Don't worry if you disagree with me, God will reveal it to you eventually. It's probably one of the more blunt lines that Paul has here in Philippians.

And then he has some advice. If you don't agree with me, if you don't think that this is Christian maturity, first of all, God's going to reveal that to you eventually. If you grow as a Christian, you'll begin to understand that you haven't arrived. Number one.

And number two, while you're waiting, trying to figure that out, I have some advice for you. See in verse 17, brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

I told you this was going to be a focus on the gospel in chapter three, but we're not going to lose the partnership. And so on the one hand, walking in the spirit means wanting what is in the future to become more and more true now and knowing that only God can do that.

[18 : 39] But it also means walking with people who walk by the spirit. And if this sounds familiar at all, from chapter two, remember we talked about Timothy and Epaphroditus, if this sounds like the same thing, yes.

Paul is repeating himself here in verse 17. Join in imitating me and making it more explicit. Look, if you are trying to figure out how to walk by the spirit, find someone else close to you who knows these things, who understands them and walk close to them.

We talked before about question people and answer people, especially in chapter two. And in chapter two, the emphasis was heavy on the partnership. And so, the emphasis on question and answer people was heavy on people who understood the partnership.

Remember, question people were people who were asking about the needs of others around them. They were focused on what other people needed. Answer people were people they thought that they had arrived. And here we have a slightly different kind of answer and question person.

So, we have answer people would be people here in this situation who are smug. They think they know everything. They've been there. They've done that in the Christian life.

[19 : 50] They don't think they have anything new to learn. They don't see places where God could be at work in their life. They're not growing into what Paul becomes near the end of his life where he describes himself as the chief of sinners.

But question people here are people who know what Paul says in verses 12 and 13. They know that they have not already obtained everything that God has for them. They're not already perfect. They know that they haven't made it their own.

But they're pressing on. They're continuing. They're trying to grow. And so, we live in the Spirit first when we want God's future now as much as possible.

And we know that we can't do it by ourselves. But we also live by the Spirit when we find people who have learned to live by the Spirit. When we find people like Paul who are able to say, I have not arrived.

But I'm following after Jesus. I'm looking to Him. I'm seeking to grow. I want to know more and more. You may or may not know there was some pretty big news in the Colorado Springs hiking world recently.

[21 : 01] This is probably once in a quarter decade news. Which is that I meant 25 years. Quarter century. Once in probably 25 years news.

Maybe once in 15. But there's a new trail that opened up that goes all the way up to the top of Cheyenne Mountain. And this has been a place that's been relatively hard to reach in the past.

This trail has been anticipated for a long time. They started working on it about probably about 15 years ago. And there's a lot of legal issues they had to get through. And so it finally opened last month. Now this trail and of course when I found out about it I thought I have to hike this.

I have to get to the top of Cheyenne Mountain. We look at it every day from our church. But this trail probably starts I mean the elevation of where it starts is higher than the highest mountain on the east coast.

And if you know me you know that I'm an east coast boy through and through. So this whole Colorado thing has been new. And the point is this I have no idea what I'm doing. And I know you're looking forward to some great story right about how I did something stupid.

[22 : 08] The reality is I was smart enough to know what I didn't know in this situation. Now that hasn't always happened but in this situation I've been in Colorado long enough to think I probably really want to do this and I shouldn't do it by myself.

So I teamed up with two people who were born in Colorado. I thought that was a smart decision. And people who had been experienced hikers here in the region for a while. So we went out last weekend and there were a lot of times where we got to places where it wasn't clear which way the trail was going.

And so I just hung back and I would let these two experienced hikers kind of crawl around and look and look for different trail markers here and there.

They would look for small piles of rocks that people had put up to show us the way. And because of that I made it back down safely. Now I was pretty sore.

I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to walk at all the next day which happened to be last Sunday. Thankfully I was. But I was able to stick with those who are mature.

[23 : 11] And so I wasn't sure what to do or how to proceed next. I just let them go ahead and figure out the way. And so Paul here again is telling us what we have already talked about and what he has told us before which is that when we are trying to live the Christian life if we're not sure what to do he's given us people around us who do.

Who know the way. Who have walked it before. Who know what they don't know. Right? Part of what made these other hikers so skilled is that they've been in this situation before.

They had never been on this trail before so they were aware of their ignorance but they also knew the signs to look for. Paul is telling us in verse 17 keep your eyes on people who know the signs.

Join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. So how do we walk by the spirit? How do we stay true to the gospel? Well big surprise again we stick with the partnership and so we walk by the spirit when we want to see God's reign and his rule become more and more in our lives and we know that we can't bring that to bear and we walk by the spirit and we walk with people who have walked with the spirit for a long time.

And then Paul begins to tell us what this future looks like. What it is that we're headed towards together. We can join in imitating those who know the way verse 17 or verse 18 there are those who don't know the way.

[24 : 49] They walk as enemies of the cross of Christ their end is destruction their God is their belly and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. Now Paul is not saying there's a temptation when we talk about the phrase the flesh or earthly things there's a temptation for some Christians to think this world doesn't matter or earthly existence doesn't matter or if I have a job and it has nothing to do immediately with the church then it must not be very important.

Paul is not saying that. When Paul says earthly things we have to take his definition. Okay so his definition of earthly things comes from Colossians.

When he talks about earthly things he means people who are not interested in Jesus' rule and his reign. So Colossians 3 has a long list of earthly things. This by the way is another letter that Paul wrote to the people in Colossi.

It includes things like sexual immorality covetousness anger wrath malice slander obscene talk. And so Paul's not saying physical things are bad or the earthly reality is bad what he's saying is there are people who want the future and they want to bring it into the present.

But then there are people as one person puts it who want things that are present to become eternal. They're obsessed not with things becoming right in this world but things being comfortable and good for them.

[26 : 21] They're interested in pleasure rather than joy. And so again there are only two ways to live. There's walking towards Jesus and the cross or walking away from him. And as we saw last week we see here in verse 19 this doesn't just end in a mistake it ends in destruction.

Verse 19 their end is destruction. But there's something more glorious for the Christian. Because it says in verse 20 our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I'm going to pause here for a second. When we think citizenship we might think a variety of things. But we have to remember that Philippi was a city that was proud of its citizenship. It was a Roman colony in a land that was not Roman.

They were in Macedonia not Italy. And not every city had Roman citizenship and not every city was a colony but they were. And so unlike the cities around them Latin was their official language.

The whole city was actually constructed to look like a miniature Rome. So as you were traveling in this non-Roman area you could come to Philippi and feel like you know I'm not in Italy but I feel like I'm at home.

[27 : 36] People had reduced taxes there and so there was incredible pride in being a citizen of Philippi. And they would often refer to the ruler of the Roman Empire as a savior.

because he was the one who protected them and cared for them. And so Paul is saying this city is thrilled with its Roman citizenship but your hope is in the future in your heavenly citizenship.

And you think lower taxes is good? Let me tell you about something different. So the earthly savior Caesar can give you lower taxes guess what the heavenly savior can do?

Verse 21 lower taxes lower taxes is not a great deal compared with a different savior.

A savior who's going to give you a whole new body. Who's going to restore the world to what it was originally meant to be. And so it's not that you put your eyes on things that are too much.

[28 : 59] It's that you want too little. Reminds me of a quote from C.S. Lewis from his book The Weight of Glory. He says this, It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. And so what Paul is saying is don't be too easily pleased with the things that those around you are pleased with.

But look to this great future because we know what Jesus did in his first coming and in his second coming. He is going to return and what has been true of him will become true of you as well.

Just as Jesus has a resurrection body so you will be given a new body as well. Just as Jesus is going to come and bring justice on the earth so you too will experience that ultimate justice.

[30 : 23] Just as you struggle with sin and sickness and death Jesus is going to come and make an end of all of that forever. forever. And so look to that because it's a greater and more powerful future than anything that the Roman Empire can offer you.

And so when we live by the spirit living by the spirit means we're looking to our heavenly citizenship. Doesn't mean that we despise this world that God created.

He gave it to us. He gave it to us perfect. But we know that he's going to come and make everything right that is wrong. And so we look forward to that as our future as we live in the present.

Like Romans and Philippi who wanted to make their city look as much like Rome as possible. Even down to the layout of its streets. Paul is telling us that people who live by the spirit want what is true of us now to look as much like God's kingdom as possible.

He wants our churches and our families and our communities to be places of his goodness and his justice and his mercy. And we look to that now even when the powers and the authorities around us are not interested in that.

[31 : 50] If you drive enough around Colorado Springs or really any major city in the U.S. you'll see all kinds of grocery stores that are ethnic grocery stores whether it's an Asian market or an Italian grocery store.

And there's lots of people who aren't from those countries that go there. They're interested in what's to be sold. But the people who are really interested there are people for whom that's their home country.

That's the place they came from. Because if you're in a new land you know one of the things that's hardest is not having the food that you're used to. Not cooking the meals of your culture and the place that you came from.

That's one of the first things you might experience is culture shock in a new place. And so it's important when there's enough people of a community to make sure there's a place where they can find the things of their home country.

So they can cook the meals that they're familiar with the things that they're accustomed to. And what Paul is telling us is this. When we live by the spirit, we want more and more to make the dishes and the food of the place that we belong to.

[33 : 04] Because we're longing and looking for Jesus when he comes back again. And we know we can't get there by ourselves. So we look to Jesus to do it.

Please pray with me. dear father in heaven, we thank you that you have adopted us and made us your children for those of us who follow after you.

That we are a part of your kingdom. Even as we struggle with life in this world, we struggle still with the presence of sin. We know that the future that you've given to us. So we ask that you'd encourage us with it.

Father, for those of us who have doubts and questions and objections to Christianity, we ask that you would continue to show the glory and the beauty of the kingdom that you're bringing. We ask all these things in the name of your son.

Amen.