

Committed to Finishing Well

Philippians 3: 13-14

Most will agree that living the Christian life can be difficult, especially in today's environment and rapidly changing culture. While believers once enjoyed a majority, we now find ourselves in an increasing minority. We are continually challenged to compromise our faith for the sake of cooperation. Across the board, numbers are in decline, baptisms are down, and many have no desire for the church. It is easy to become discouraged while dealing with these circumstances.

Our text today was written by the great apostle Paul while he was bound captive in Rome. He had been accused of his own countrymen regarding the preaching of the Gospel. He had been faithful to the Lord, continuing to preach, even at the risk of his own safety, and this was his reward. He had been relegated to a life of confinement and isolation. It would have been easy to become discouraged and abandon the faith. Paul could have easily assumed his life's work was over, but yet he remained committed and resilient. He refused to allow difficult circumstances dictate his life and ministry. Paul knew there was work yet to be done for the Lord.

While these are familiar verses, they are needful and relevant for our day. I want to discuss the [challenges](#) Paul reveals as we consider the thought: [Committed to Finishing Well](#). We are first challenged to:

I. Realize the Truth (13a) – [Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended](#). As we consider this profound statement, we must also consider the context in which it was spoken. Churches had been planted, and were thriving. Countless souls had been won to Christ, and disciplined in the faith. Young men had answered the call to ministry, being mentored by Paul. Now he is bound in prison, unable to interact with them. Many would have considered Paul's ministry a huge success. Others would have questioned its validity since he is no longer free to minister. Either way, it would have been easy for Paul to have backed away from ministry, assuming he had accomplished all the Lord had for him. However, Paul declared he had not yet arrived. He was still in the race; he had not yet obtained the prize. There was work yet to be done and he was committed to continuing that work.

- As we look back over the past, God has done some marvelous things in our lives. I know in my heart He is guiding His church. But, now is a time for caution. We must realize the truth; **we have not arrived!** God isn't through with us or His church. There is an abundance of work yet to be done. May we never be satisfied with things as they are; we can always improve! It is dangerous to grow complacent and see no need for improvement. [Gal.6:3 – For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.](#) 1 Cor.10:12 – [Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.](#) We must realize the truth! Also we must:

II. Release the Past (13b) – Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind*. Paul had seen great triumph, as well as, many defeats. His life was far from simple and easy. He always faced opposition while preaching the Gospel. It would've been easy to have become satisfied with the victories, counted the losses, and simply quit! Paul refused to focus on the past. The word **forgetting** has the idea of “*ceasing to be affected by.*” Paul refused to let his future goals be dictated by past circumstances!

- It is important to learn from the past, but we cannot live in the past. We too must learn to release the past; let it go! You will never achieve what the Lord desires by living in the past. We must overcome the desire to:
 - **Rest in Past Accomplishments** – Surely Paul had witnessed great triumph in the past, but he knew those were not sufficient for the current day. We too have experienced great blessing and victories in the past. (Revival at Bethel – 1950's; Pastor McDaniel, Pastor White, and Pastor Honeycutt's ministries. These are all great. I rejoice in them, and I continue to enjoy fruit from their labor, but those accomplishments are not sufficient for today. There is a work for us to continue!)
 - **Dwell on Past Hurts** – It would be easy for Paul to have become bitter and angry over previous encounters. He had been threatened, abused, stoned, imprisoned, and falsely accused for his faith. He refused to allow past hurt to dictate his life. We have all been hurt at some point along the way. While I don't enjoy those encounters or condone such activity, I know we cannot allow past hurt and disappointment to sideline us today. If we allow past hurts to hinder us, the enemy has won. We must be willing to let go of the pain of the past and continue for the Lord.
 - **Focus on Past Failures** – Paul had seen great triumph, but he had also experienced failure as well. He could have given up because his efforts hadn't worked out as he had planned. **He refused to allow past failures prevent him from future endeavors.** No doubt we all have tried and been knocked down before. It is easy to allow those times to dominate our minds. We feel inadequate and wonder if we will ever be able to accomplish anything of lasting value. You can be certain you will never obtain victory if you allow past failures to dictate future endeavors. When you are knocked down, get back up, learn from your struggle, and press on for the Lord.
- Don't let past defeat cause you to fear the future. *Phil.4:8 – Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* **Failure is sure for those who are constantly looking at where they've been instead of where they're headed.** Let go of the past and look to the future. Once we've released the past, then we need to:

III. Regain the Zeal (13b) – 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.* Paul had overcome the past. He was focused on even greater things ahead. He had determined to reach forth unto those things which are before. This has the idea of reaching out or stretching toward something with all one possesses. Picture a runner in a race. Maybe it's hot; the race has been long, but up ahead lies the finish line. This renews the runner's desire as he reaches out with all he has.

- Life may be hard, we may get tired and weary, wanting to quit. Let me encourage you to look toward the finish. Our troubles can't last forever; there is a brighter day! *1 Cor.9:24 – Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. Heb.12:1-2 – Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,* ^[2] *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

- I am praying for a great move of God in our day. I pray we, as God's people, will regain the zeal we once had. Do you remember the joy you had when you were first saved? Life was good; there was an excitement about serving the Lord. You looked for opportunities to tell others, attending church was a priority, and you only wanted a closer walk with Jesus. Sadly, trials have come and we've lost our enthusiasm. Church we need that zeal for the Lord renewed in our lives! Serving the Lord is a privilege that brings joy. Do you want to regain your zeal? When we regain our zeal, we should then:

IV. Resume the Race (14) – *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Paul was determined to continue the race. He was determined to finish well, refusing to focus on his surroundings. His focus was on the prize and hitting the mark, finishing where God intended.

- May I remind you, there is a prize to obtain? I fear our churches are filled with those who have taken their eyes off the prize. They likely started well, running strong, but circumstances have caused them to lose focus and drop out of the race. God didn't call us to watch from the sideline; we are to run the race! He isn't looking for spectators; He is interested in participators.

- There are some of you here today who need to resume the race. You know where you dropped out and life hasn't been the same since. The joy of serving the Lord isn't there as it once was. You see others running, but can't seem to find the energy or enthusiasm to continue yourself. The prize often isn't won by the swift, but by the steady. You don't have to make great strides every day, just get in there and be steadfast. Don't you want to finish well? You'll never

finish if you're not in the race. Paul finished well. [2 Tim.4:6-7 – For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.](#) ^[7] I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith.

Conclusion: Have you realized the truth that you haven't arrived? Are you willing to release the past? Do you want to regain the zeal of serving God? Are you ready to resume the race? That's what Jesus desires of us.

Maybe you've never begun this race for the Lord. He wants you to run as well. All you need to do is come to Him and start running.