



Old Testament Reading – Isaiah 40:25-31

New Testament Reading – 2 Peter 3:14-18

**The Epistle of Joy**  
**“Pressing Toward the Goal”**  
**Philippians 3:12-21**

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In his letter to the Christians at Philippi, who were being hassled by the Judaizers, the Apostle Paul exhorted them to stop letting the joy robbers distract them from their pursuit of that prize of a high calling of God to a deeper, more intimate relationship with Him.

- **The prize was not their eternal salvation** – salvation is a gift of God’s amazing grace to those who will place their faith in the finished work of Christ alone.

- **The prize was not about their heavenly home** – the believer’s citizenship is already secured in heaven, and very soon, the Lord Jesus will call His followers to come home through the Rapture of the Church.
- **The prize they were to pursue was to measure up to the level of spiritual maturity that had been entrusted to them by their faith alone** – to be fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

For over 30-years, Paul thought he was right with God because of his Jewish heritage and his educational pedigree.

- However, after Jesus Christ personally confronted him on the Road to Damascus, Paul not only saw how those human accomplishments and human achievements could never make him acceptable unto God, but also how his pride in those things were actually preventing him from ever becoming right with God.
- Paul said, when he saw the actual value of knowing Christ, and that his eternal salvation was to be found in Christ alone, those things he once thought were of value to him were no match for the things he had received by God’s grace – the knowledge of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the power of Christ, the fellowship of Christ, and the glory of Christ.
- However, that did not mean that Paul had reached the point of spiritual perfection. As far as fleshing out that which God had entrusted to him, even Paul said he had a lot of growing up to do.
- Even though Paul knew when God called him to stand before Him, he would have the righteousness of Christ to cover him, he was still a sinner, and therefore, he was not perfect in any way.
- Therefore, he had to continue to pursue that goal; to press on toward that prize of the upward call of Jesus Christ, which was to be fully conformed to His image.

## **1. The Intrinsic Conviction to a Higher Calling – Vs. 12 – “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected.*”**

- The believer’s “**position**” in Christ is fixed by God’s grace alone, through our faith alone, and in Christ alone, and once that position is settled, it is settled forever.
- However, the believer’s “**condition**” in Christ does not always measure up to our “**position**” in Christ – we are certainly not what we should be, nor what we could be, if we were earnestly pursuing that high goal.
- Awareness of that difference is the work of the Holy Spirit convicting us to pursue a higher calling, and a deeper devotion to our Savior and Lord.
- The evidence of our eternal salvation is the progress of our spiritual transformation, and those who have no desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord are in a very dangerous condition, for the next event on God’s prophetic calendar is the rapture of the Church.

## **2. The Extrinsic Conviction of a Higher Calling – Vs. 12 “*I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*”**

- To win this race, the believer must give their maximum effort.
- **Hebrews 12:1-2** – “*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*”

- Paul defined that “higher calling” in Romans 8:29 – ***“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”***
- The goal of the Christian life is to conform our lives to the image of the One who saved us, and the true believer will never settle for a lesser goal.

### **3. The Extreme Concentration Required to Achieve a Higher Calling – Vs. 13 – *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do.”***

- Nowhere in this letter does the Apostle Paul exhort his readers to counterattack the Judaizers.
- However, Paul challenged them not to allow the attacks of the Judaizers to distract them from their primary goal, which was to perfect their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.
- In effect, Paul was saying that the only way we, as Christians, can defeat our distractors, who want to diminish or redefine our faith, is to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.
- Even Paul said he had not reached that level of spiritual maturity.
- But Paul said that even though he was under house arrest, the one thing he did – the priority of his life – was the pursuit of that goal.
- Such extreme concentration requires a positive and a negative.
  - **The negative** – ***“Forgetting what lies behind.”*** – Don’t look back at what did or did not happen, what should or should not have happened, or what could or might have been, if only!
  - **The positive** – ***“Reaching forward to those things which are ahead.”*** – The word picture here is of a runner, stretching every muscle to win the race.
- To achieve this high calling, Christians must establish this goal as their major priority.

### **4. The Spiritual Motivation Required to Achieve a Higher Calling – Vs. 14 – *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”***

- The Greek word “kata” means to bear down on! Paul said, regardless of what he was doing, or where he was doing it, his mind was on the goal of living up to that level of righteousness that had been given to him by his faith alone in Jesus Christ.
- And it was more than just a casual goal – it was like a weight lifter bearing down to get underneath the weight to lift it up.
- Paul said he pressed down; he continually pursued that goal of a higher calling. He lived each day in the light of the imminent Rapture of the Church – to be called out of his world and ushered into God’s presence.
- 2 Timothy 4:6-8 – ***“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”***

### **5. The Divine Resources Available to Achieve that Higher Calling – Vs. 15 – *“Therefore let***

***us, as many as are mature, (or perfect) have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.”***

- Paul’s instructions, and therefore, his timeless application is for all Christians to follow his example, even those who may be spiritually mature, but especially those who just think they are.
  - Verse 18-19 – ***“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.”***
  - Verse 20-21 – ***“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”***
- The goal of every believer is to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord to the point that they are ready to stand before the Lord and give account of their lives, when He calls them to “Come Forth!”