

Philippians 3:12-21

Introduction

“There lurks in the modern Christian the thought that to desire our own good is a bad thing, and we are taught to try to stifle our desires. But if we consider the staggering promises of reward mentioned in the Bible, 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 being offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he can't imagine what it might mean to take a vacation by the beach. We are far too easily pleased.” – C.S. Lewis

The Passage

I. What is Paul's goal?

A. v. 8-11 = the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus

-v. 9 be found in Christ (righteousness)

-v. 10 experience him fully in his life (power and fellowship)

-v. 11 resurrection of dead to be in his presence

B. v. 14: Prize = everlasting enjoyment of fellowship of Christ

C. v. 20-21: the ultimate goal: Christ's return

Eternal life involves two fundamental promises

1. We will be with him

See Philippians 3:20, 1 Thess: 4:16-17, Revelation 21:3

Be with him in order to know him fully (See John 17:3)

a. If you don't know Jesus, if you have not been grabbed by him, the idea of being with him is not that attractive

b. If you do know him, if you've tasted his life, then the idea of being with him is wonderful

c. What will we be doing with him?

--Celebrating (enjoying a feast, a wedding reception)

--Reigning (given responsibility over the new creation)

2. We will be like him

See 1 John 3:2

a. Like him physically (Philippians 3:21)

Christ has the ultimate power in universe (to subject all things to himself). He will use that power to:

“Transform our lowly bodies” (subject to decay, sickness, etc)

“To be like his glorious body” (the body he received at his resurrection)

1 Corinthians 15: 42-49

No longer a “natural body” like Adam’s

It’s a “spiritual body” like the last Adam’s--Christ

b. Like him morally

We will perfectly love one another, perfectly trust God,
never be full of rage or fear, totally honest, etc

II. How does Paul go about obtaining this goal?

A. He recognizes that he isn’t there yet

v. 12: Not that I have already attained this or have been perfected

v. 13: Brothers, I do not consider that I have taken hold of it

“I don’t know Christ as much as I’d like, I haven’t been made totally like him”

B. He develops a “holy dissatisfaction” (John Piper’s phrase)

1. Illustration: The great athletes (Tiger, etc) have this “holy dissatisfaction”
They’ve tasted winning and they want more

2. Paul: v. 12: “Christ has taken hold of me”

Paul has tasted Christ, and he wants more

3 Us today

Have we grown stagnant, complacent, satisfied with too little

Or do we have a “holy dissatisfaction” urging us on to want more of Christ

C. He goes after this goal with everything he’s got

1. Strong, almost violent language

“press on” = intense pursuit

“make it my own” = seize, take hold of, possess

“One thing I do” (not 10 things): v. 14: “I press on”

2. Like a runner in a race (v. 13-14)

a. Drawing on imagery of the Roman Olympic games of the time

The victor received an upward call to the emperor’s box to receive
the prize (a wreath)

In a race you don’t look back

Loss of rhythm or focus

b. Forgetting what lies behind

NOT: forget the past completely

BUT: forget anything that distracts him from pursuing Christ

--all those gains he counts as rubbish

--past sins

--the good Christian service he’s done that might distract

- c. Straining ahead
single-minded purpose, discipline, intentionality, focus

III. What is the opposite of Paul's approach?

v. 18

People whose behavior demonstrates they are enemies of the cross

v. 19: four descriptions

1. Their end is destruction
Instead of being with Christ and being like Christ
2. Their God is their belly
they worship their own appetites, cravings (food, sex, power, etc)
3. They glory in their shame
They're proud of things that are shameful
4. Their minds are set on earthly things
Don't see beyond stuff of this life to a calling to something more

That's a pretty good description of many people in our culture

They started this race towards Christ, and over time they got distracted by other prizes along the way (tempting in Orange County where there are a lot of other nice prizes available)

Conclusion

A. As you look at your life, do you see this intentional and focused pursuit of Christ (like v. 13-14), or do you see this meandering journey of wanting other prizes (like v. 18-19)

C.S. Lewis: "we are far too easily pleased (with lesser prizes)"

B. We are passionate people. Let's bring the same passion we bring to other things (our work, our hobbies, etc) to our relationship with Christ

C. Action steps

1. If you don't have a desire for Christ, ask God to give it to you.
2. Take one concrete action step towards pursuing Christ this week (a regular time of reading the Bible, a regular prayer time, etc)
3. Get together with someone who is passionate about Christ (v. 17)
Watch them, spend time with them, ask them, imitate them

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. How did the view of eternal life described on Sunday change or stimulate your thinking about life after death?
3. Discuss/debate the validity of the following statement: “The Biblical story does not end with us finally ‘going up there’ to heaven to be with God, it ends with heaven and God finally ‘coming down here’ to be with us.”
4. At this point in your life, where are you on the “holy dissatisfaction” scale? Are you fairly content with your spiritual life right now, or are you in a stage a dissatisfaction and yearning for much more?
5. Who is someone you know who seems to approach their relationship with Christ like an athlete pursuing a prize with intentionality, focus, and passion? What behaviors do you observe in that person’s life?
6. Given that we are constantly surrounded by “earthly things” and must operate within earthly things (our jobs, our bodies, our families, our friendships, etc), what does it actually look like to pursue a heavenly prize within the context of those earthly things? Can you give some concrete examples?