

Retrospect And Prospect.

Text: Philippians 3:13–14

1) Retrospect

Suggested Hymns:

2) Prospect

23 pt 2, 556, 352, 559, 554

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Philippians 3:13–14, ¹³ *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,* ¹⁴ *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The natural thing to do at the close of an old year and at the beginning of a new year is to look back on the past twelve months and to wonder about the next twelve. We need to consider the changes that have occurred in one's life, and wonder what new changes will take place in the twelve months immediately ahead.

At this turning of the year let us consider *Retrospect and Prospect* - looking back and looking ahead. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Retrospect - Looking Back

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, writes in our text *but one thing I do*. He was set on doing “*one thing*.” There were other things that he was doing. But this one thing he emphasises.

Now, what was this “*one thing*” that Paul did, upon which he laid so much weight? The answer is, “*forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.*”

“*Forgetting those things which are behind.*” That is sound advice! The inference, of course, is forgetting the unpleasant things which are behind. That is wise counsel to follow at the close of an old year. Forget the disappointments,

the trials, and the hardships that are behind. You cannot change them. It does no one any good to dwell on them. It causes hatred. It makes one gloomy. It saddens.

Paul, of course, does not only think of the trials and hardships of the past year but of his whole life. He was now Paul the aged. Here is this mighty man of God in the advanced years of his life — forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

He was not going to recall all the hardships, the needs¹ and the stripes² that he endured for Christ. He was not going to reminisce on discouragements and persecutions and complain about them or murmur because of them.

Instead of doing such an unprofitable thing, he is reaching forward to those things which are ahead, pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, what are some of the things behind us that we should forget? Let us forget our blunders. Who of us has not made mistakes? We are not thinking now of sin, but of the results of poor judgement, of unwise decisions, and of premature conclusions.

Perhaps it was in a matter of business, perhaps something that concerned the home or the family, or perhaps a blunder that concerned us personally and alone.

Well, let the blunders be forgotten. What is done is done, and in most cases you cannot change it. Calling our blunders to mind only hinders and cripples us in an effort to go forward.

Then forget your losses. Who has not had them in the last few years? Forget them. Crying over them will not bring them back. Be glad it was not the eternal home in heaven that was lost.

Rejoice that it was not the treasures in heaven that have disappeared. Be glad that the quality and quantity of God's mercy, of God's love, and of God's peace has not been reduced. Many and great may have been the losses in recent years. Forget them and, looking forward, start over.

A man lost his business through a fire. The expired insurance had not been renewed. With his face in his hands, he cried pitifully, "*I have lost all; I have*

lost all!” His little girl of five years came to him all puzzled and said, “*Why, no, Daddy, you have not lost all; you have me and Mum left.*”

We have not lost all. We still have food and clothing and shelter. We have loved ones, dear to us. We have God. We have heaven. We have Christ. Forgetting the losses, look ahead!

Forget life’s injuries. Do not hold a grudge. Do not harbour hate. Forget the nasty words and thoughtless criticism and unkind deeds. Dwelling on personal injuries eats at the heart and hinders one’s forward movements! Some people will even lie awake at night plotting to get even!

Resentment hinders. Men and women of God do not hate, do not retaliate. True Christians do not cherish resentments. True Christians refuse to let them fester like poison in the heart, interfering with the free and ready doing of what is right. Forget life’s injuries.

Forget successes. Success has turned many a person’s head so that he could not see to walk straight. Do not crow too loudly about any success you might have had. Do not be everlastingly patting yourself on the back. Remember that all that we have comes from God and that any success we may have had is a blessing from Him. Forget success. Do not let it ruin you.

In looking back, forget sorrow! Uncontrolled sorrow renders a person nearly useless. The Christians weep but not as those who have no hope. The hope and assurance of heaven eases a Christian’s sorrow. We dare not let the sorrows of the past eat and gnaw at our heart.

And now forget your sins also. If Paul had not learned to forget his sins of the past, he would have been utterly crippled even to his death. Paul consented to the death of Stephen. Paul persecuted the Church. Paul was a ringleader in this sin.

If Paul had not learned how to forget those awful sins after he found forgiveness in Christ, he would have gone with an accusing conscience and a broken spirit to the grave.

This does not mean that we should ignore sin. Paul did not ignore his sin, as we read in 1 Timothy 1:13, ***I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man.*** We dare not ignore sin. But after we have sincerely repented and

have laid our sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, we should know that God has forgiven and forgotten them and wiped them out.

Therefore we should not call them to mind and ponder over them and grieve over them, but rather we should rejoice in the Lord, glory in our freedom, and, reaching forward to those things which are ahead, serve Him.

God's Word says in Romans 5:20, *But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.* And in Psalm 103:12, ¹² *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.* And in Hebrews 10:17, *"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

God forgets our sins. Therefore we should not let them haunt us after He has taken them away, after we have forgiveness.

2. Prospect - Looking Ahead

When believers are brought to faith, they become possessors of eternal life. As long as they are in the world, they are like people who hold a title to property in a distant land. The title makes the property theirs, but the owners are not yet physically in possession of what rightfully belongs to them.

Similarly believers, although we are possessors of eternal life by faith and have the righteousness of Christ, we are still also sinners living in a sinful world. We have not yet arrived at the full, physical possession of the perfection of eternal life.

Paul vividly describes the Christian life as a constant reaching or striving forward toward the great goal and prize of eternal life that God's grace holds out to believers in Christ.

When Paul wrote these verses, he had been a Christian for many years. What Paul says of his own life here is an important key to viewing our own. As long as we are here on earth, we sinners will not reach perfection. That will come only in heaven's glory.

Nevertheless, our Christian lives of growing in Christ and living for Him ought to be a constant striving for perfection, with the goal and prize of eternal life always kept before our eyes of faith. Every Christian should run the race of his Christian life in that way.

At the turn of the year should we not strive to do what Paul did? We should forget those dark, dismal, ugly things which are behind, and should reach forward to those things which are ahead.

You cannot alter the past. You cannot undo what has been done. But you can seek to avoid the repetition of mistakes and try to improve the shortcomings.

Paul adds something to his reaching forward. It is not just a blind, unguided optimism, not just a zealous, enthusiastic going forward, without any definite or well-defined objective.

This great man of God who knew sin, vehemently persecuted the Church. But after he was converted and came to faith in Jesus Christ as his Saviour from sin he worked more abundantly than all the other disciples — *in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.*³

This noble ambassador of the King of kings writes, *but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul did not reach forward after worldly success, material possessions, temporal power, or earthly pleasure. Paul pressed toward the prize of heaven.

As a runner in a race, straining every sinew and ignoring all distractions, sets out for the goal with face set and muscles tense, so Paul would strain every nerve to lay hold on the prize of his upward call of God in Christ Jesus, which is heaven. Heaven is the goal.

To look back for a moment, — have you in the past year or years been pressing on toward the goal of the yonder crown of eternal life as you should have? Are you at present intent on reaching the goal?

As you start out in the new year, is your first ambition to reach the goal, to lay hold on the heavenly prize of eternal life? And are all material considerations, all earthly ambitions, secondary and subservient to that one great, grand objective?

Or do you allow earthly interests and mundane matters to interfere with your pressing on toward the goal up yonder? Are you gambling with the prize? Are you taking chances?

Do you claim that you are running the race of faith but are listening to these voices or to those, being distracted by this or that, instead of with determination pressing on unflinchingly and unwaveringly toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus?

What are the prospects? What is your highest ambition? What is your real goal? What are you striving for?

The Christian's one goal must be heaven. All things earthly must be given secondary consideration or, if sinful, no consideration at all. The Christian's one goal must be the yonder prize of heaven, and everything must be brought into subjection to that.

Look to the future. What is the one certain, unavoidable existence we are hastening to? Eternity! Other things are problematical and indefinite and perishable at best.

Are you striving first for a great fortune, for worldly success, for earthly happiness, and is your religion, your confession and following of Christ, secondary to the one or the other of these things? Then you are on the wrong track, then your goal is not heaven.

A true Christian must never lose sight of his prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. And a true Christian, as he looks into the future and sees heaven and its glories and blessings, fellowship with God and the saints, will not run chances by unfaithfulness.

In the year about to start press on toward the prize. The going may be hard, the race may not be easy; the pilgrimage maybe fraught with suffering; there may be crosses and earthly needs and many tribulations; but press on to the prize, do not look behind, forget the disagreeable past and think of the glory of the prize yonder.

Remember, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.⁴ There is no victory without fighting. There is no crown without a cross. There is no prize without effort.

Nothing else matters, nothing but Christ and God and heaven and the soul; nothing but the heavenly and eternal prize.

Some people have laid hands on it this past year. Will you be ready, too, at all times this coming year? Or will it slip through your fingers and be lost forever? God forbid!

Blessed will be our new year if we are faithful and true to the Saviour of our soul and press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁵

Keep us faithful, keep us pure,
Keep us evermore Thine own;
Help, O help us to endure;
Fit us for the promised crown. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Corinthians 12:10

² 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, 2 Corinthians 6:4

³ 2 Corinthians 11:23

⁴ Rom. 8:18

⁵ Hymn 559 v 6