

## Philippians - Part 6

A Prize Worth Pursuing

*Philippians 3:12-21*

Memory Verses: *Philippians 3:14*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

The prize for winning the Boston Marathon is \$150,000. In 2013 a bomb went off in the middle of the race tragically killing three people and injuring an astounding 264 people. Needless to say that no one collected the prize that year.

In April of 2014, a year later, the runners regathered to run the race again, and as you would expect, this particular race was filled with all kinds of emotions. In story book form, the winner added even more drama. For the first time since 1983 an American won the race. Add to that fact that he was the oldest person to win at age 38 in 83 years. Meb Keflezighi crossed the finish line in first place. As he crossed the line, people in the crowd were chanting USA. Meb reached his hands in the air, tears in his eyes. When he caught his breath and was handed his trophy and the \$150,000 prize, he put both aside and lifted up his bib with his race number on it.... in the corner he had written the names of the victims of the bombing the previous year. He said... this is my prize... I did it for them, for their memory, and for our great country.

You see, some races are worth running.... and not for a cash prize, or prestige and popularity. No, some races are worth running for a prize that transcends petty and trivial things. Where most would run for the cash and the trophy and the television appearances, Meb ran for something way bigger. So what are you running for?

Over the past 5 weeks we've been looking at the book of Philippians; Paul's letter to the small church at Philippi. Paul cares deeply for this little church because he planted it. And the one thing that Paul wants the church to run for more than anything else is Joy in Christ alone. And he's shown them (and us) how to find that joy; through ministry, through spiritual warfare, through unity and humility, through a lifestyle that shines in the darkness, and, as we saw last week, through God's grace. All of these elements added together are the key ingredients to finding true, life lasting joy in Christ.

Today we want to add a 6<sup>th</sup> ingredient... a prize worth running for. If you want to have life sustaining joy... you will find it in life sustaining purpose as you run after the greatest prize imaginable; the prize of Eternal Glory with Jesus Christ.

I would argue that the greatest reason Christians can't seem to find joy is because they haven't truly embraced their purpose in this life.

They know that Christ is their Lord, and they know that they will have eternal life when they die, but they spend their lives here on earth pursuing the same things the lost do. Here's the thing... when you run with **purpose** you **enjoy** the run... but, when you run without purpose it's just a **chore**. Stop running the Christian life as a chore and start running it with purpose as you run for the prize!

The Bible tells us time and time again that we are not running for the things of this world. Rather, we are running for a future kingdom, and all of our energy must be directed towards that purpose. **1 John 2:17** says that this world is passing away, but whoever lives for God lives forever. **Matthew 6:19-20** reminds us that we aren't running for prizes of an earthly nature that are temporary, rather we run for a heavenly prize that can never be taken away. And even in our passage today, in **Philippians 3:20** we see that our citizenship is not on earth, but in heaven and we live our lives here on earth eagerly awaiting the day when we receive our prize of going home. There is a race worth running and a prize worth running for, so run after the prize.

#### In A World Full Of Worthless Trophies There Is One That Is Worth Pursuing

Let's read our full passage this morning and then look at the prize that is worth running and how we should run to obtain it. Read with me; **Philippians 3:12-21**.

#### Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we see here is that.... **We Will Receive Glory When We Run With Humility**. Now this may sound familiar, and it should... cause we discussed this very thing at length in **Philippians 2:1-11**. Now here in **Philippians 3:12-13** Paul is once again stressing that humility is vital for the progress of a believers spiritual maturity and discipleship. Humility is a must, because without it we run the risk of thinking we've arrived when we indeed have not. If we think we've arrived at the pinnacle of spiritual maturity that means a few things. One, it means you think you have achieved a higher level of spiritual maturity than Paul ever reached, because Paul says he never reached it... he never obtained it.

Two, it means that you are no longer approachable, relatable, or teachable. Who wants to come to you with their problems when you are beyond their problems personally. Who wants to discuss their issues with the one person who has no issues. Who wants to learn from someone who doesn't think they have anything left to learn. When you feel that you've arrived you will not allow anyone to pour into your life... your cup is already full... you aren't teachable. This is so dangerous. My former pastor and mentor, Joel Wayne, had a phrase he always said; "**I will hire teachability over ability every time; hire the will, train the skill.**" You have to remain teachable, moldable.... in a state of growing. **Teachability** is the measure by which you will allow someone else to help you **grow**. Once you stop

learning you start decaying. Paul admits that he has not obtained the prize because he is not perfect. Perfect here meaning to be without sin, fully mature, practically righteous, full of spiritual wisdom. As we discussed last week, if anyone could be perfect... it would be Paul, but even he knows that he isn't and humbly admits this making himself teachable, approachable and relatable.

The prize that he hopes to attain is mentioned in **verse 11**, the resurrection from the dead, which is also known as glorification. We see the prize of glorification given more detail in **verse 21** where it says that after resurrecting our dead body he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

So... through humble recognition; that he, hasn't obtained perfection and cannot do so in his own power, Paul is elevating Christ who has made him his own. He is saying, "I can't, but Christ can, and when he does he will give me the prize of glory." By living a life of humility he will be given the prize of glory. **1 Peter 5:6** makes this abundantly clear, "humble yourselves before God so at the right time he will exalt you." Run with humility to receive the prize of glory. **In A World Full Of Worthless Trophies There Is One That Is Worth Pursuing.**

The second thing we see here is that... **We Will Obtain Perfection When We Press On For Spiritual Maturity.** Paul speaks of the prize that he hasn't obtained as if it were something that could be obtained in this life... and he likens it to spiritual perfection. Practical spiritual perfection is something that theoretically could be achieved in this life, although it won't. Why not? Cause the Bible makes it clear that Jesus will grant it to us after this life. So... the prize is perfection and the means is perfection. One day we will be made perfect if we pursue perfection in this life though we can't obtain it.

This presents a small problem. If we can't obtain it in this life, why do we pursue it. If perfection is the means to obtain perfection... and perfection in this life is impossible, then why does Paul say "i press on to make it my own?" Well, just because perfection isn't obtainable doesn't mean we don't try our best to better our way and improve our spiritual maturity. **We press on towards spiritual maturity, because by doing so faithfully, one day Christ will grant us perfection.**

The prize is perfection; meaning full spiritual maturity. When we achieve full spiritual maturity we will be able to understand all things biblically and because of this understanding we will always choose to shun sin and live in righteousness. We will be transformed mentally to choose practical perfection on our own, so one day you will always instinctively choose the right thing.... because you will finally recognize just how stupid sin is. **In A World Full Of Worthless Trophies There Is**

### **One That Is Worth Pursuing .**

The third thing we see here is that... **We Will Attain Heaven When We Strain For What Lies Ahead.** In **verse 13** Paul says he forgets what is behind him. To move forward we have to stop wasting our time focusing on what we did wrong. **You sinned, you repented, Jesus forgave you... move on.** And then we see that Paul strains forward to what lies ahead. What lies ahead? Eternity! In **verse 14** Paul presses on for the day when he will be called upward to Heaven. In **vs20** we see that Paul already considers himself a citizen of heaven... he just needs Jesus to give him a ride – that's what he's waiting for.

So, he strains forward to take hold of the prize of going home to heaven. So, how does he press on... how does he strain forward; by holding true to what he has already attained. And what has he already attained? Salvation. The grace of God in Christ, salvation from sin and the wrath of God, victory in the battle. The point is this... Paul knows that he's already won the war... so now **we fight to end the war that we've already won.** I strain forward to finish the fight that I know we've already won, so I can get to the prize of heaven. **In A World Full Of Worthless Trophies There Is One That Is Worth Pursuing.**

The last thing we see here is that... **We Will Gain Christ When We Walk In Perseverance.** When we see the phrase "hold true to what you've attained," we also recognize that this is speaking about perseverance of the faith... hold fast to your faith. How do we persevere in our faith? **Verse 17** says we hold fast to our faith by imitating Paul's example and the example of other faithful believers. This is why the church is so important to us as we grow in our spiritual maturity. In the church we see fellow believers living their lives for Christ which gives us examples to imitate. The church is how we sharpen one another for spiritual progress. We walk in the way of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ as observed in fellowship and discipleship.

We also persevere in our faith by shunning the example of those who walk as enemies of the cross. Look at **vs18-19**. We can't be like them because their god is their passions and desires. Meaning, they live by the motto; do what feels good. Their god is basically their own desires which they always will seek to fulfill. They have no restraint. They also take pride in shameful things. What is bad they see as good. What is good they see as evil. And, they have minds set on earthly things. They are only about this life... and have traded eternal life for this life. We must recognize that their end is destruction in hell.

If we follow the example of true believers, shun the example of the lost, and persevere in our faith we will receive the prize. What is the prize? It's Christ. The true prize is Christ. Look at **vs12**; "I press on for the prize

because of who;" Christ! Vs14; heaven is the call of God in Christ Jesus, meaning; the joy of heaven is Christ Jesus. Vs18; the opposite of the prize for those who are enemies of Christ. Vs20; we await a savior – Jesus Christ. What prize are we anxiously waiting for? Jesus. Vs21; who subjects all things to himself. Jesus makes everything about him... and draws us to recognize the same thing. Everything is about Christ. The end result is either Christ forever or without Christ forever. The prize is Christ. **The christian life is not an easy assignment... until you recognize the value of the prize.**

Which means we need to find the right perspective. For the right prize I'll do just about anything. I hate walking, but I walk with my wife. Why? Because, happy wife happy life. The prize of a happy wife is worth the torture of walking. Jesus is worth it. No matter how hard this life is, now matter how hard you have to work at growing in spiritual maturity... the prize of Jesus Christ is worth it. **In A World Full Of Worthless Trophies There Is One That Is Worth Pursuing.**

### Application

So, what is the application? Pursue the prize! The first thing I want you to leave here with is this...pursue! How to we pursue? We run with humility, we press on for spiritual maturity, we strain for eternity, we walk in perseverance.

The second thing I want you to focus on is... the prize! You run with humility, press on for spiritual maturity, strain for eternity, and walk in perseverance as to attain glorification, perfection, heaven, and Jesus Christ himself. You are pursuing glory, glorification, a transformed immortal body. You are pursuing perfection, a perfect mental understanding which leads to perfect righteousness. You are pursuing the prize of heaven, the place God has prepared for us. You are pursuing the prize of Jesus Christ... to be in his presence. **In A World Full Of Worthless Trophies There Is One That Is Worth Pursuing**

### Conclusion

Wrong Race, Wrong Prize - A world-class woman runner was invited to compete in a road race in Connecticut. On the morning of the race, she drove from New York City, following the directions -- or so she thought -- given her over the telephone. She got lost, stopped at a gas station, and asked for help. She knew that the race started in the parking lot of a shopping mall. The station attendant also knew of such a race scheduled just up the road and directed her there. When she arrived she was relieved to see in the parking lot a modest number of runners preparing to compete. Not as many as she'd anticipated; an easier race than she'd been led to expect. She hurried to the registration desk, announced herself, and was surprised by the race officials' excitement at

having so renowned an athlete show up for their race. No, they had no record of her entry, but if she'd hurry and put on this number, she could just make it before the gun goes off. She ran and, naturally, she won easily, some four minutes ahead of the first male runner in second place. Only after the race--when there was no envelope containing her sizable prize and performance money-- did she confirm that the event she'd run was not the race to which she'd been invited. That race was being held several miles farther up the road in another town. She'd gone to the wrong starting line, run the wrong course, and missed her chance to win a valuable prize. **In A World Full Of Worthless Trophies There Is One That Is Worth Pursuing**