Press On!

Philippians 3:12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Introduction
Saul of Tarsus was a dedicated man.

- A student of the law, a follower of the old paths, an ardent defender of the faith, he was a determined enemy of the cross.
- Paul was a devoutly religious man, he believed that he had a firm hold on God, He believed that he had a firm grasp of the scriptures and he believed that he was righteous in his aggressive persecution of the church.
- Paul was a man in pursuit of justice, a man in pursuit of godliness, man in pursuit of spiritual perfection.
- But, on the road to Damascus, He discovered that rather than being the pursuer, he was the pursued.
- And the thing that he was so ardently chasing after was in fact chasing after him.
- In all likelihood, it started on that fateful day when he watched Stephen’s trial.
- As he waited for the ardent defense of this servant of Jesus, he instead heard a life changing message of the mercy and grace of God.
- Even as he held the coats of those that would stone Stephen, he must have been shocked by what he saw.
- Stephen was not a defeated man, but even as they stoned him, the glory of God shone upon him!
- Perhaps, in looking back on his life, he would recognize that day as the first time that he began to feel the tug of God upon his heart.
- Even as he pursued Godliness, God was pursuing him.
- Even as he reached for the righteousness of the law, the righteous giver of the law was reaching for him.
- And, on that fateful day, when the glory of God caused the sun to pale in comparison and a booming voice from heaven spoke into his very soul – God apprehended Paul.
- That’s the nature of Paul’s conversion – God chased him down.
- God, who had been pursuing him through it all, caught him – he laid his hands upon him and forcefully apprehended him.
- Make no mistake about it, Paul’s conversion was literally in the nature of an arrest – he was seized by God!
- God grabbed a hold of him, cutting through all the facades, pushing past the religious tradition and getting a grip on his heart, God stopped him dead in his tracks!
- That experience is where the language used in our text comes from.
- Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ
Jesus.

- The word “apprehend” is from the same Greek word that is used earlier in the verse and is translated as “attained,” but, in this second and third usage, it is paired with a preposition, which conveys the idea of being “forced down.”
- It means to catch hold of something and pull it down, much like a football player who not only wants to catch his target, but wants to tackle him or, pull him down -- to fully apprehend him!
- That’s what happened to Paul – He was fully apprehended by God – He was seized by God!
- If you will – God tackled him!
- God laid his hands upon him and brought him to sudden halt.
- God apprehended Paul!

I believe that this verse contains the key to Paul’s life.

- He was an apostle born out of season, an incredible man of God, a greatly used vessel in the hands of God, but here’s the key to Paul’s life:
  - He understood that his conversion was not the end of the chase.
  - His apprehension by God was not the purpose of the pursuit.
  - God chased him down and, on a lonely road to Damascus, God apprehended him.
  - But that wasn’t the end of the story!
  - He recognized this critical fact – he was apprehended that he might apprehend!
- You see, this is where the football analogy runs out.
  - He wasn’t just tackled for the sake of being tackled.
  - As a matter of fact, the better analogy would be an aggressive game of tag,
  - Where once the player is tackled, it is now his job to pursue and tackle the one who tackled him!
  - Paul was apprehended that he might apprehend.
  - **God chased him down so that he would chase God down!**
- It’s a powerful point – **there is no finality in the Christian life.**
  - There is no stopping place.
  - Your conversion is not an end unto itself, but rather the beginning of a much greater pursuit.
- God didn’t apprehend you so you could stop developing,
  - God didn’t apprehend you so you could rest on your spiritual laurels and count the days until he returns.
  - He caught you, he apprehended you, so that you might seek to apprehend him!
- Paul’s meaning, in the latter half of our text is, “I would grasp that for which Christ grasped me.”
  - I would get a hold of that for which I was gotten hold of.
  - I would attain that for which I was attained!

There is a deadly cycle in the church, where people become converted to Christ but then eventually grow stagnant and cold in their walk with God.
• But here we find that Paul pointedly denies the possibility of reaching a place where there remains no more spiritual growth.
  o At this stage of Paul’s life he is an accomplished disciple of Jesus Christ,
  o a church planter, a missionary, a sojourner for Christ
  o a companion of the cross who has shared in both the suffering and the
    overcoming power of Jesus Christ.
• When he wrote this he had already accomplished the wonderful journeys described in the book of Acts.
  o He had already established the churches addressed in his epistles.
  o He has already endured the trials that are enumerated in his letter to
    Corinth.
• But he pointedly declares that he has not yet attained.
  o He has already been caught up into the third heaven and heard
    unspeakable words from God – words that he cannot share.
    ▪ But still he hasn’t attained.
  o The Lord, Himself, has assured him that His strength will be perfect in his
    every weakness – but still he hasn’t attained.
    ▪ He has been appointed of the Holy Ghost to preach the gospel to
      the Gentiles – but still he hasn’t attained.
  o He now stands among that number of Holy Men of Old who were moved
    upon by the spirit of God as they recorded the God-Inspired scriptures in
    which are life and hope
    ▪ but, even as the mouthpiece of God, – He still hasn’t attained.
• There’s a message here that you need to get – I don’t care where you are in your
  walk with God, you haven’t yet attained what God has for you!
  o I don’t care how long you’ve lived for God
  o or how short of a time that you’ve known him,
  o you have not yet apprehended that for which you were apprehended!
• That’s what Paul wants us to know:
  o The goal is still before him, not behind him!

There is finality in conquest:
• History says that Alexander wept in the confines of India when he realized that
  there were no more worlds to conquer.
  o But there is no finality for those who seek to apprehend Christ,
    ▪ there is no finality for those who seek to know him,
    ▪ there is no finality for those who seek to draw nearer to him.
  o For those that truly yearn for more of God,
    ▪ there is never a place where you fall to your knees and weep
      because there is nothing left to conquer, no mountain left to climb,
      or no glorious height left to attain.
  o No, my friend, as long as there is life in your body, you can rest assured of
    this one simple truth,
    ▪ you haven’t yet apprehended that for which you were apprehended!
• You are called not to do some great task, but to become Christ-like.
  o Not to accomplish some glorious success, but to apprehend that for which
Christ has apprehended you!
  o Until you finally grasp the very person of God you have not accomplished the purpose of God for your life.

• This may be difficult to grasp.
  o The problem is that we measure things in the finite realm of human understanding
    ▪ but God measures his purpose and calling for our lives in the infinite realm of eternity.
  o We may live within the limits of time,
    ▪ but our lives will be measured by the scope of eternity.
  o And we may measure success in accomplishments, degrees and earthly possessions,
    ▪ but he measures your life by the degree to which you seek to apprehend that for which you have been apprehended!

• There is no greater testimony to a life lived than that, in our dying breath as we slip from this life, our spiritual reach might finally lay hold upon the thing that has been the pursuit of our entire life!
  o That having been apprehended, we might, in turn apprehend!

Paul realized that he had not yet attained, and he further realized that he was not yet perfect.

• He has not yet reached the place where he can quit growing.
  o He has not yet reached the place where he gets it all right.
  o He has not yet come to the place where he passes every test, w
    ▪ here he never stumbles at the obstacles to his faith – he is not yet perfect!

• I’ve got to be honest with you today – I take great comfort in the fact that the Apostle Paul, this spiritual giant among carnal men, was not yet perfect.
  o Having come thru all that the scripture records of him,
    ▪ having shaken the serpent into the fire,
    ▪ having stood beside an angel on the deck of a roman vessel,
    ▪ having seen the incredible salvation of God
    • – He has not obtained perfection!

• Let me tell you why that means so much to me
  o – because if he wasn’t perfect, in every degree of his walk with God and his passage through this life
    ▪ – then there must be hope for a guy like me,
    ▪ and there must be hope for folks like you!

• I don’t know about you, but Hell delights in reminding me that I’m not perfect!
  o Hell delights in dredging up my every fault and failure.
  o Hell loves to tell me that I’ve neglected some area of personal dedication
    ▪ or I’ve let my anger get the best of me,
    ▪ or I haven’t handled some situation in the best possible manner –
      ▪ and Hell delights in telling me that I’m too imperfect to be used by God.

• Hell delights in declaring me a faulty vessel,
o with too many carnal influences,
o and too many spiritual shortcomings
  ▪ – and when the enemy of my soul,
  ▪ that great accuser of the brethren,
    • gets on a roll he likes to try to tell me that God can’t use me
      because I’m not perfect yet.
• But then I hear the words of a great man like Paul
  o -- Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I
  follow after…

I follow after!
• Oh, I love that phrase!
  o I follow after!
• Paul said, I realize I haven’t attained,
  o I realize that I’m not perfect
    ▪ but, instead of being discouraged,
    ▪ I’m further encouraged to follow after,
      • to pursue that which I am seeking to apprehend!
• When he recognizes his shortcomings,
  o he doesn’t throw up his hands and quit,
    ▪ instead he renews his efforts,
      • he keeps up the chase,
    ▪ he tries all the harder to apprehend that for which he was
      apprehended.
• He knows he hasn’t laid his hands fully on Christ-likeness yet, because he isn’t
  yet perfect.
  o But that evidence doesn’t discourage him,
    ▪ instead it encourages him to further pursue the lofty goal of more
      fully knowing Christ!
  o And so he redoubles his effort and he tries all the harder to follow after!
• The verb there, in the original language, would be better translated to “press on.”
  o The apostle’s meaning is that, in light of the fact that I haven’t yet attained
    and in light of the fact that I’m not yet perfect, I’m pressing on.
    ▪ It is a continuous present tense.
    ▪ It literally says: I AM PRESSING ON!

I don’t know exactly what ghosts that hell liked to drag out of his closet,
• I do know that Paul was forever haunted by the memories of Stephen’s tragic
  death,
  o but I don’t know what other things that the devil reminded Paul of in those
    moments when he came face-to-face with the fact that he wasn’t yet
    perfect.
• But, as I imagine Paul writing these words,
  o I can just see him shaking his fist at the Devil
    ▪ – I may not have attained yet,
    ▪ I may not be perfect yet,
• BUT I AM PRESSING ON!
• I’m not perfect yet, but I’m not stopping here!
  o I haven’t apprehended that for which I was apprehended,
  ▪ but I’m not done yet!
  o I haven’t fully accomplished God’s purpose for my life,
  ▪ but my life isn’t over yet!
  o AND I AM PRESSING ON!

Lest I be misunderstood let me say this, I’m not giving license to anyone today to go and live in sin.
• Some misunderstand Paul’s statements about the grace of God and come to the ill-conceived notion that they can continue in sin and simply trust that the grace of God is enough.
  o In order to get that from Paul’s life you have to ignore the very posture of his life – Paul wasn’t perfect, but he was pressing towards it!
    ▪ Paul hadn’t yet attained, but he was striving for it!
    ▪ He hadn’t laid his hands on the prize,
    ▪ he hadn’t fully embraced Christ-likeness
    • but the direction of his life was constantly towards it, not away from it!
  o He was pressing on!

• If you want to strike to the heart of this passage, not just this verse, but the whole message, it is found right here
  o – this is a purpose statement for Paul: I press on!
    ▪ This is the posture of his life: I press on!
    ▪ This is the summation of what it means to be crucified with Christ: I press on!
    ▪ This is the testimony that he will carry to his grave: I press on!
• On the road to Damascus he was apprehended by Christ,
  o in the years that followed he walked through many trials and faced multiplied persecutions
    • but his life was summed up in three words – I press on!
• Not looking to the right,
  o not turning to the left,
  o leaving behind those things which are behind,
  o I’ve got my eyes fixated on a goal that is ever before me
    ▪ and with everything that is within me
    ▪ – I AM PRESSING ON!

I realize that this is an odd Sunday morning,
• I recognize that there are a lot of things occurring today,
  o I know that there exists a great danger of just rushing thru this morning so we can get to the events of today
  o – but I felt God speak into my spirit last night and tell me that some under the sound of my voice today need to be reminded that you will find your
purpose if you will press on!

- Victory may not seem certain today, but press on!
  - You may feel like a failure today, but press on!
  - You may have come face-to-face with your imperfections this week, but press on!
  - You may have encountered discouragements this week, but be encouraged in the Lord this morning, and press on!
- No, you haven’t yet attained – press on!
  - No, you haven’t yet arrived – press on!
  - No you aren’t perfect yet – press on!
  - No you are not everything that God wants you to be yet – press on!
- This isn’t the last chapter in your life – press on!
  - This isn’t the final act – press on!
  - This present trouble is but a fleeting thing – press on!
- The valley you are walking through is for your good – press on!
  - The storm is making you stronger – press on!
  - The trial is working to reveal the grace of God in your life – press on!
  - The opposition will move you forward not drive you back – press on!
  - That which was intended to be evil in your life will work together for your good – press on!
- I hear a voice echoing from the eons of time, I hear the words of a great man of God, in the face of great opposition – press on!
  - He said, I’ve been stoned – but I pressed on!
  - They left me for dead – but I pressed on!
  - They laid stripes on my back – but I pressed on!
  - My own countrymen turned on me and sought to destroy me – but I pressed on.
  - Kings and rulers arrayed themselves against me – but I pressed on!
  - Everyone tried to silence me – but I pressed on!
- The most compelling testimony in heaven is going to be a voice that says,
  - in my moment of greatest weakness, I recognized that I wasn’t perfect,
  - I recognized that I hadn’t yet attained,
  - I saw that I hadn’t yet apprehended that for which I was apprehended
    - but I didn’t toss in the towel,
    - I didn’t throw up my hands and quit,
    - I didn’t roll over and die
      - instead I stood to my feet,
      - I squared my shoulders
      - and with a determination born of a desire to know Christ
        - – I pressed on!
- My goodness, someone in this place today needs to hear what I’m saying – It’s time to press on!

Close

- The 30th President of the United States was Calvin Coolidge. He served in the
  - Coolidge served in the tumultuous twenties and assumed the reigns of a
government that had been rocked by scandal.
• During the term and a half that he served, he restored public confidence in the White House, and left office with considerable popularity.
  o As a Coolidge biographer put it, "He embodied the spirit and hopes of the middle class..."
• At some point during his tenure he said these words:
  o Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.
    ▪ Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent
    ▪ Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
    ▪ Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.
    ▪ Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.
  o The slogan “PRESS ON” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.
• While I refuse to base theology on the words of a politician, I am reminded by his speech of a powerful passage of scripture:
  o Paul wrote to the church in Rome, in Romans 9:16
    ▪ So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.
  o Can I remind you today that if you make heaven your home, it won’t be because of your Talent.
    ▪ It won’t be because of your genius,
    ▪ it won’t be because of your education,
    ▪ it won’t be because of your will,
    ▪ or your might
    ▪ or your strength.
  o It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy!
    ▪ If you make heaven your home,
      • it won’t be because you were perfect,
        o it will be because God was merciful!
  o If you make heaven your home
    ▪ it won’t be because you got everything right all the time,
      • it will be because you never stopped striving to attain that which you have not yet attained.
  o If you find yourself walking on streets of Gold one day,
    ▪ it won’t be because of anything you did,
      • it will be because of the mercy and grace of God.
  o So, you’re not perfect? Press on!
    ▪ So you haven’t yet attained? Press on!
    ▪ So you’ve been reminded of late of your faults and failings? Press on!
  o The key to righteousness lies not in perfection but in pressing!
    ▪ The key that opens heaven’s door is the mercy of God not the accomplishments of men!
I have one message for you today – Press on!