

Free to Pursue



Set Free

Philippians 3:7-16

I don't know about you, but it's such a blessing to be in a body that doesn't just think locally, but thinks globally. It's just amazing all of the places our church folks have been this summer. What a privilege it is to be sent by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I was in Lexington Monday and someone saw my bracelet, and it was a great opportunity for me to get to share Christ with them when they asked about what it meant to be sent. If you have your bibles, open to Philippians, and let's stand together. It is the last Sunday of July. Is that crazy, or is that crazy? We are going to finish our month long sermon series entitled, Free in Christ, or Set Free, as has been on the front of our bulletin cover all month long. Philippians chapter 3 is a very familiar passage of Scripture that we have shared with you many, many times, but it's a Scripture that I think is a fitting Scripture to conclude this series about being free in Christ. We have talked about being free from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and the pleasure of sin, and now we want to end positively on not what we're free from, but what we're free to. As we read this passage, I want us to realize that we are free to pursue the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, free from the penalty, power, and pleasure, but free to pursue the upward call of God. I pray you know what that call is in your personal life. Listen to what Scripture says beginning in verse 10. I want you to hear Paul's heart, his passion, and his emotions.

Scripture

"... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained."

(Prayer)

Father, what a privilege to gather in Your house on this first day of a brand new week. I just can't imagine all of the opportunities that you're going to have in store for us. Father, this morning as we get ready to listen to You, we believe that You're going to be getting us ready for that which You're getting us ready for, not just short term, but long term. Father, we want to use this passage from Philippians to conclude this series about being set free. We not only want to know what we've been set free from, we want to know what we've been set free to. That is this pursuing, this pursuit of the upward call that You've given us in Christ Jesus. As the world tries to pull us down, You're calling us upward. Father, may each one of us sense that this morning. Father, we're asking right now that You give is the same passion for this paragraph of thought that Paul shared with us that he had. May it become our conviction too, that with conviction we can say that I may know Him, that if by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. In Your precious, precious Son's name, do not let us be hearers only or a speaker only, but let us be doers of Your Word, amen.

I can't tell you how many times I'm in a conversation and at least two or three times a week someone will be talking to me and make this comment,

"Now, I know you know," then they will name somebody and begin to tell me things about that person and what's going on in that person's life. All of a sudden, I have to interrupt them and say whoa, whoa, I don't know this person like you know this person. You didn't even give me time to say I don't really know this person. I do know about the person, I do know of the person, but before you tell me anymore, I just want to make sure you know I don't really know them like you know them. They seem surprised that I didn't know the person they're talking about the way they know them. Have any of you ever had that happen to you? Paul says to the Philippian church, "...that I may know Him." He's expressing one of the strongest desires a Christian can have, and that's to know Christ.

Before we go any farther this morning, can we just pause and ask ourselves how would we answer that question? Can we with one hundred percent surety say I know Christ, or would some of us pause and have to say I'm confident to say I know about Christ? We know when we celebrate His birth. We know about what age He died. We can name His parents' names. We know there were some siblings involved in the family. We know He walked on water. We know He took some bread and fish and fed a lot of people. But do you really know Him? Or would some of us have to say I think I know of Him. I've heard other people talk about Him and how He's changed their life and I'm curious about what He's done in their life, and I'm hopeful He could do that in my life. See, we've got to be careful in a Christian culture because it's possible for many of us to be pursuing knowledge of Christ, but not really pursuing knowing Christ. Does that make sense?

This word, *know*, here has a preposition attached to it that just literally changes the word to where it's not talking about knowledge of in your brain, but about personal knowledge with. It literally is used to talk about an intimate knowing, an intimate relationship. It's used in the Old Testament world to talk about when Adam knew his wife, she conceived and bore a child. I think we would all agree that Adam didn't know about her, Adam didn't know of her; Adam knew his wife intimately. It is also used in Amos when it talks about God saying to Israel, of all the families on the planet, You only have I known. I don't think there is a one of us here

who believes the God in Heaven doesn't know the facts about all the nations and peoples on the planet. He knows about all of them, but at that time as he was writing to Amos, there was only one nation of people that He had set His covenant love upon. There was only one nation that He had an intimate relationship with where He knew them and they knew Him, and that was Israel.

Listen to what Paul is saying. Paul is saying I desire to know Christ. I desire to be intimate with Him. I want us to understand this. God freed us from the penalty of sin by putting His Son on a cross. God freed us from the power of sin by having His Son live in a body just like ours, defeating, and condemning sin in the flesh. We've been set free from the pursuit of the pleasure of sin because the penalty and the power has been paid and broken. But the gospel is not only negative; it's positive. You and I have been set free to enter into a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ where we can know Him intimately. This intimate knowledge with Him is going to be described in knowing the power of His resurrection, and sharing in the sufferings of His death for this purpose: that if by any means possible, I, Paul says, may attain the resurrection from the dead. Now I want to make sure you and I don't read this letter through our security of a believer lens. I want to make sure we don't read this through what we already know about the Bible, so that when we hear certain concepts, we just put it on autopilot. If we're not careful here, when we see Paul saying he wants to attain to the resurrection of the dead, our thoughts go forward to glorification when Jesus Christ comes the second time and our bodies are raised victoriously from the grave. That's going to happen, but what I submit to you is that's not what Paul is talking about here. I want you to know that I personally believe every believer is going to be raised with a new body at the second coming of Jesus Christ, but note this. In verse 10, Paul, when talking about identifying with Christ and knowing Christ, he says I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection.

The word, *resurrection*, in the language of Paul literally means 'to stand up again.' It means to stand up. But when you go to verse 11, the word for resurrection there is not the same word. The word there means to stand up, but then it's got a preposition 'ek' at the end of it, which means 'to

stand up and out.' Watch this. In verse 10, Paul says I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection, but in verse 11, the reason he's wanting to know Him and the power of His resurrection is so that he can attain to a place where he stands up and out from among the dead. What I'm suggesting is this, (I've suggested it before and none of you have ever contradicted me or proved me wrong) when Paul is talking about what he wants to attain, he's not wanting to attain something at the end of his life when Jesus comes back the second time; he's wanting to attain something right now in his present life. What he wants to attain is to stand up and out from among those who are dead. Many, many times in the Bible, the word, dead, is used for those who are not physically dead, but spiritually dead. What I'm suggesting is that Paul wants to live his life in such a way that as a believer in Christ, he doesn't just blend in with the world around him. He doesn't just stand up, but he stands up and out from those who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Wow...does that make sense? He wants to live his life in such a way that his life catches the attention of those who do not know Christ. Wow. Do you ever think about that? See, our desire to know Christ, to know Him intimately, helps us come to the place where we don't just blend in anymore, but we actually stand up and out. Wow, that's Paul's desire.

See, it ought to be just like when you go to a funeral. Have you ever noticed in America when people die and we bury them, when we see them for the last time, I've never went to a funeral home where the casket was standing vertically. I've never seen the mortician stand the body up and have the hand out. I've never had a hand waving position. You always know who is dead. If they're lying down, you know who is alive. At the casket, they're all standing up. Do you see this metaphor? The position of a corpse is he's dead. He's lying down. The position of a live person is they stand up. So what Paul is trying to say to us is his desire is to so live the Christian life in its fullness that he doesn't blend in, he stands up. He doesn't just want to know of Christ, he doesn't just want to know about Christ, he wants to know Christ; he wants to know the power of His resurrection, His ability to get up after He went down, and the ability to stand up again.

Do you remember when we were reading that letter to the church at Ephesus and Paul is praying that prayer for the church, he prays that we would know the greatness of God's power which is working in us, the same power that reached down and raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the right hand throne of Himself. Wow. He goes on to talk about that power that puts all things under the feet of Jesus and raises Him to the full seat of authority. Here is what Paul desires. He wants to know that power in its fullness, resurrection power. Do you ever think about that? Do you ever think about in your pursuit of knowing Christ, we should also desire to know that power in its fullness. What he is basically talking about is the resurrection of Christ has brought to us a brand new life to where we're free from the penalty, the power, and the pleasure of sin. That frees us to be who God wants us to be and to be able to accomplish what He wants us to do, because our doing comes from our being, and in Christ, we have been set free to know Him. In knowing Him, we can pursue this desire to truly be who God has called us to be. It would have been awesome if Paul had stopped right there and just said I want to know the power of His resurrection, but he says "and may share His sufferings, being conformable to His death." This takes this thing to a whole other level.

Have you ever noticed that every time you read one of Paul's letters, he always talks about suffering? I don't get how I can turn on my TV and pick up a modern day evangelist and how it seems like the whole Christian church today is pursuing to be set free from suffering. Yet Paul's desire was to not just know the power of His resurrection, but to share His suffering. Do any of you ever have that conscious thought that today I hope I get to suffer like Christ suffered? Would there be one of us here that has that thought? Yet we idolize the Apostle Paul, we idolize his theology, but very few of us idolize his pursuit of knowing Christ. Paul knew he would never really understand the power of the resurrection and truly be able to experience the power of the resurrection without first there being suffering. When he talks about suffering, he says being conformable to His death, so we're talking about the suffering that He suffered when He died on the cross. We're talking about the suffering that He endured that led Him to the cross, ultimately. I think everyone of us realize that when Christ went to the cross, He suffered because He was dying for sin. Does

everybody agree? In dying to death and suffering the way He suffered, He also died to sin. Does everybody agree? But watch this; Christ did not die for His own sin. Does everybody agree? Why? Because He did not have any sin. Does everybody agree? So whose sin did He suffer for? He suffered for our sins. He suffered for other people's sins. Does everybody agree?

What I want you and I to concentrate on is how can we share in that suffering that He suffered, how can we share in suffering that conforms us to His death and causes us to understand His death? I think we have to look at it this way; if I am going to learn to know Christ, I've got to be willing to suffer with others because of their sin. Did anybody get that? If I can be totally honest with you, sin breaks relationships. It breaks families, homes, marriages, businesses. Does everybody agree? There comes a point where sometimes some of us get so far in with somebody that because of their sin, we just have to back up and go whoa, can't go there anymore. I am so glad Christ didn't say that. I'm so glad He didn't say, Ricky, I can go with you this far, but that's as far as I can go. I'm not going any farther. I'm stopping right here. Paul is pursuing knowing Him fully, not just the power to get up when you get knocked down, but the power to suffer with those folks around us! Why? Because his desire is to ultimately stand up, but not just stand up, stand out. Without the suffering, we'll never be able to stand up and stand out. Without being willing to go that other mile, without being willing to turn that cheek, the people in the church will look like everybody else. We'll never get asked the question, how did you do that? The answer is because I know Him intimately.

Now, I love verse 12; "Brothers, I do not consider myself to have obtained this yet." That's pretty cool to know that Paul had a desire that he hadn't quite yet attained. So, it is ok if you haven't gotten there yet; but we can't not let that cause us to lose desire to be there or to sell ourselves short. As soon as Paul talked about not quite yet attaining this, not yet coming to full maturity in Christ, that's what being made perfect means, so because he hadn't come to full maturity yet he realized he hadn't quite attained this being able to stand up and stand out. But here is what he says. I love what the KJV says, "But I want to lay hold on that for which He has laid hold of

me." ESV says, "I want to make this my own because Christ has made me His own." You guys know my progression; I started out at Ledbetter Baptist Church with the 1611 KJV only, then came to Hardin and switched to the NKJV of the Bible and thought I was a liberal when I did it. Then I became an ESV guy, which means I'm probably a pagan, right. Don't we have a little saying if there's a dispute about ownership? "Possession is nine tenths of the law." This means if you and I are disputing a horse and the horse is on my property, the horse is probably mine. Listen to what Paul is saying. Paul is saying Christ owns me! How many of you can say Christ owns you? Show of hands. Why does He own you? He bought you with His blood on a cross! You wanted to be owned, so you and I turned from sin, put our faith in Christ, and came under His ownership; He owns us. Listen to what Paul says, I want to own why He owns me. Paul believed that when Christ bought him, He laid hands on him; He took possession of him for a purpose. Paul says that purpose for which He laid hands on me; I'm trying to get my hands around that purpose. I'm pursuing it. Wow. Does that make sense?

I think most of you would agree that everything you own, you own for a purpose. How many of you have things in the shed or garage that you own but don't use anymore? Have you ever cleaned out the attic, the shed, or the garage saying to yourselves that you'll never buy something again that you're not going to use? Celisa and I have this argument a lot. She'll say, "I'm never going to buy you something new again if you don't wear it." I have this terrible habit of buying new clothes and then every time I go to my closet I wear my old clothes. She will say, "Why do you do that?" I really don't know. I mean it's just common sense; if you own it, you ought to use it. Now, can we flip that around here? If you're owned by God in Christ, shouldn't you be used by Him for the very purpose to which He bought you? Got it? That's what Paul is saying here. He is saying I want to lay my hands on the very purpose God bought me for. What is that purpose? In verse 11, he says so that I'll stand up and I'll stand out, that I won't just blend in. How many of you are blending in? No, if you're blending in, you're like the thing in the garage, you're like the thing in the attic, you're like the thing in the shed that's never being used. You say why. God gives you a choice. He bought you, but in buying you, He doesn't

just arbitrarily use you. He wants you and me on a daily basis to be pursuing Him, Christ. As we pursue Him, we have this desire to stand up and stand out. I want you to know because you're free from the penalty, the power, and the pleasure of sin; you have the ability to pursue standing up and out.

So here is what Paul says I'm going to do. I'm going to forget what lies behind, and I'm going to strain forward to what lies ahead and press on toward the mark for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. He says I want all of you who are mature to join in with me in this; just keep pursuing God because He will bring you to this point. He says until we get there, we're going to keep living up to the level we've already attained. Did you get that? Here's what we've got to do this morning. We've got to forget what's behind. I don't know where you're at this morning, and you don't know where I'm at this morning, but Paul is switching metaphors here as he's talking about pursuing the upward call of God. He's using the picture of a runner who is running. Paul knows that every runner has this tendency to want to look back from time to time. I could tell you stories about runners who look back, and when they look back, they lost. Did you know they've done a scientific study that says every time a runner or cyclist looks back, they can actually measure the hundredths of a second they lose? Imagine being an Olympic level athlete to where times are measured in the hundredths of a second and you miss out on the finals by one hundredth of a second because three times you looked back and lost three hundredths of a second. How many of you would feel really bad? Quit looking back! God doesn't care what you did twenty years ago, or fifteen, ten, or five years ago. Quit letting what happened to you in the past define you! If you're a Christian, you're not a victim. You may have been, but you are not now because you are free to be who God has called you to be, no matter what has happened to you in your past, willing or unwilling. Please hear me. So many of us in the Christian life keep looking back to our failures, mistakes, and our sins, yet we come and sing about being washed in the blood, about there being a fountain, and we just took the Lord's Supper to signify we've been forgiven! Yet we let Satan and our flesh use our past life as an anchor to hold us back. Forgetting doesn't

mean you can erase your mind, but it means I will no longer focus on what lies behind me.

Can I say this about some of us? Some of us need to forget all the good that's happened in our past. I've about decided that old age is when you start living in the past all the time. All you want to think about is how it used to be. That's where some of us are as Christians when we talk about it's what we were doing. Yeah, in the past! Forget your failures, forget your accomplishments, and don't let that be the focus. If you're going to stand up and stand out, you've got to strain for what lies ahead, and what lies ahead is the prize of the upward call of God in Christ. That great theological letter, Romans, in the heart of the book, eighth chapter, when he tells us that all things work together for good to those who love God who are called according to His purpose, God called us with a purpose, and that purpose in 8:29 is He predestined us to be conformed into the image of His Son! What's the upward call of God in Christ? It's for you and me to be like Him! It's for me to be like Christ in every relationship I have, in every situation I'm in. I want to tell you I desire that, but like Paul, I haven't arrived yet. But you'll never arrive if you don't have the desire. You'll never arrive if you don't quit focusing on your past and strain.

I don't know if you have been watching the Tour De France. I will be sad because it's going to end. In every sprint stage, I love it when those sprinters go out sprinting right at the very end. They lack about a foot going over the line, and every one of those bicyclist lean over their handlebars, and for a second they quit pedaling and thrust forward with everything they've got to try to get their wheel over the line first. There are always a few photo finishes in the Tour where they measure by inches. How many of you are straining like that? I mean the mark you're trying to hit. You're in a situation, you're suffering because of what the other person is doing, but that suffering lets you know you can exhibit the resurrection power of Christ at this very moment, so you strain forward that in that situation you do not let your unredeemed flesh come through, but you let you likeness to Christ come through. Hear me. Every relationship, every situation, every moment of every day, this is our pursuit, and we're free to pursue it. We're free to hit the mark, and ultimately we're going to get the

prize. One day God will remove the presence of sin from us, and we'll be just like Christ. Until that day, we have a daily pursuit of that taking place on earth, not just when we get to Heaven. Would you ask God to give you the desire to want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, sharing in his sufferings, so you'll be just like Him in His death, so that you can stand up and stand out among those who do not know Christ? Why would God want to do that with us? Because He just might use you or me to get the attention of that person who's dead, to let them see what could happen to them too if they'll turn from sin and put their faith in the same Christ we've put our faith in. God is actually going to use us to bring them to an awareness of the change that can take place, but if we all just blend in, there's no hope.