**“****Press On!”**

**Philippians 3:12-4:1**

*Introduction: TS Dismiss, CONNECT CARD.* Pg. 981

Last month our City Council passed a resolution initiated by Vice President Michael Marks (and approved by the city’s traffic commission) to reduce the speed limit for all city streets from 30 miles per hour to 25 (unless otherwise posted).

I am actually very thankful for this decision not only because I believe it will be safer for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians, but also because we live on one of the busiest roads in the city and have to watch our girls like a hawk anytime they are remotely close to the road.

That said, I don’t know about you, but I’m going to have to watch my speed because my natural tendency is NOT to take my time but to try to get to where I’m going with the greatest law-abiding efficiency possible. :)

In my utopian world, or to put it in biblical terms, in the New Heavens and the New Earth, my ideal travel scenario would have us getting where we want to go as fast as possible with no restraint. You feel me? All the lights are Green. Foot is on the gas. Speed limits, non-existent.

What if I told you your spiritual journey was like that? What if I told you it was like that right now?

What if I told you that when it comes to your spiritual progress, as far as God is concerned, there is absolutely no speed limit?

And what if God not only desires that you make progress with incredible efficiency but that he provided you the road map with the most direct route to your destination?

As we turn our attention to Philippians 3, we are going to see that Paul has a similar idea in mind. Using the imagery of a runner competing in a race, he says there is a destination, and we must press on to obtain the prize.

**The Point: Press on for the prize of Jesus.**

I want to give you a road map with 5 ways we can on toward the prize of Jesus.

Before we dive into the new section, we should remember what Jon shared with us last week. Paul’s life was controlled by a new set of values and a new goal. Though Paul had a resume any Jew would have loved to possess, once he met Jesus he scrapped all of those past credentials, so that he could press on to new goal of knowing Jesus, growing in Jesus, and pursuing the ultimate goal of resurrection with Jesus.

Look at *verses 10-11*. It’s in light of this that he says in *verses 12-14*

1. **Press on for the prize of Jesus with extreme effort (12-14).**

When someone runs a race, they run to win the race! That’s the goal.

* Paul has a goal here as well. His goal is to reach the finish line.
* One of the aspects of the Marathon I love is watching the runners embrace their loved ones when we they finish the race.
* Guess what? Someone is waiting for us. His name is Jesus. He is the goal of our race. Just as he was raised from the dead, so all who believe in him will experience resurrection and be united with him For-Ever.

With that glory, in his eye, Paul runs with everything he’s got! He says, “I PRESS ON.”

* Christians full of Christ don’t coast. Let me say that again: Christians full of Christ don’t coast.
* There is an underlying intensity about them, a sanctified dissatisfaction, a holy agitation, greedy for the things of God.
* “I appreciate how far God has brought me, but I want more. I’m not there yet, but I’m on my way!”

This pursuit involves a positive and a negative dynamic. Because he has not arrived, he presses on by…

“forgetting what lies behind”

* The idea here is that nothing in his past will slow his present stride. Look over your shoulder and you’ll get distracted and lose momentum.
* But what exactly might is Paul forgetting?
* We might automatically think it’s just forgetting the bad stuff. Anything that causes us shame or regret.
  + Time wasted. So many opportunities to live for God but we chose to live for ourselves.
  + Temptation given in so easily and so frequently.
  + If you want to live a life of regret, it won’t be hard. It won’t be much fun either.
  + We can allow our regrets to collect dust (you know what I’m saying? Leave them in the past!) because of the cross of Christ. “There is no condemnation.” We’ve been free from a guilty conscience.
  + We forget our failures, but Paul means more.
* I believe this would also include a resolve to not dwell on past accolades and achievements.
  + If anyone had a lot of success in life and in representing Jesus, it was Paul.
  + I can take it easy today….
    - I just dished out 12 irresistible invites in one day (the people of Redemption Hill are shooting for that in a year). I can relax for at least a few days.
    - I just gave that person wisdom from heaven. I gave them 7 infallible reasons why they don’t have to live with fear and worry.
    - That new church I started in Corinth has now exploded into 5 new churches. Wow. God, thank you for using me.
* Yes, we honor the past, learn from the past, but what matters is today!
* Our past does not determine our present!

T: No, no, no. I gotta press on! “Forgetting what is behind and . . .”

“Straining forward to what lies ahead”

* Maximum effort.
* “Exerting oneself to the uttermost.”
* Laying it on the line. Leaning forward. Bearing down on the finish line. This was Paul’s approach to following Jesus.
* Paul’s life was driven by this one thing. Look at the beginning of verse 13.
  + “I want to KNOW Christ and the power of his resurrection.”
  + **Are you pressing on** to know that power **or getting passed by?**
* No matter where we are today, I deeply believe our passion and determination needs to rise to a new level. If you are saying: “Nah, I’m good.” You just told me you’re not.

This talk of pressing on may feel a little lofty.

* Like: “hmm, that’s great for you and some Jesus followers but I think I’m good with God. That’s a little extreme. I’ll down shift. I’ll pump the brakes. I’ll coast.”
* “After all, God knows I’ve got a lot of other pressures that I have to press on with, so he can take the back burner for a bit.”
* That’s not how Jesus people think.
* A culture of GRACE can have its liabilities. “I’m saved, so I’m good.” That’s a distortion of grace.
* A culture of Grace should push us forward. Why? Because gospel transformation is motivated by that same gospel. Always & Forever.
* Look back to verse 12: “I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”
  + We want more of him because he wanted us!
  + We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

Pressing on involves taking steps, and when you take steps, **STEPS CHANGE \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ what? \_\_\_\_\_\_** (that’s right) **[Slide 2: Steps Change STORIES**.] And here’s the beauty of it, like Paul, you’ll have your own story to tell. (I used to chase a different prize. I was captured by different dreams. But all that is like trash to me IN COMPARISON to Christ).

1. **Press on for the prize of Jesus with encouraging examples (15-17).**

*Read 15-17*

* Everyone who has reached a level of maturity will think this way.
  + And I love how Paul anticipates that not all will adopt the same attitude (of pressing on to know Jesus, of living for THEN, NOW).
  + In other words, he trusted God would show them to what degree they are “out of sync” with his desires for us.
* “Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”
  + The idea here is a vivid picture to “keep pace or run in line.” Don’t be “disheartened by the daunting distance to the finish line.” Keep running! Dennis Johnson

What will help us get there? Encouraging examples…

* So much of the Christian life is caught more than taught.
  + Kevin Hall… do anything for Jesus..
  + Bo.. Boldness & Prayer in the moment
  + Rush… diligent study
  + J. Greene… love the least
  + JP… the gospel moved him to tears
  + Chip Brown - love to serve.
  + Danny Akin - the humility of Christ
  + Dwayne Milioni - calm trust in the face of adversity

As we see these godly examples of those, we are to *imitate them*and *keep our eyes on them***.** We copy what we see in them (their thoughts, attitudes & actions) AND we watch closely “those who walk according to the example [of Christ.]”

**What are you learning from others? What are others learning from you?**

* Get in a Group. Solidify your commitment to the people around you through Membership. And as you live life together, imitate spiritual strengths you see in others as they press on (faith over anxiety; self-control over indulgence), AND
* Be worthy of imitation to encourage others (let your move from everyday earthly stuff [Which is important] to God-centered, kingdom conversation [which is much more important; show them how to love a neighbor that does not deserve it.).
* I don’t believe anyone who removes themselves from the community of faith with reach their God-given potential in Christ. Let’s help one another as we run this race, because sadly…

T: Not everyone serve as encouraging examples. Many are enemies of the cross, which is why we must . . .

1. **Press on for the prize of Jesus with focused worship (18-19).**

*Read 18-19*

Paul turns his attention to those who fail to live in light of the cross. They set aside the life Jesus calls us to, and Paul (with tears!) describes what this looks like. Our hearts should break over those who miss the power of the cross and even live as enemies of the cross.

Idolatry…

“God is their stomach”

* “They follow their lustful appetites…” (Merida)
* This could be a reference to gluttony, but probably has a broader allusion referring to those who are controlled to their own self-centered appetites rather than God-centered affections.
* Why do people choose to not follow God? They don’t want to.
* We replace our best attention, affection, and allegiance to God with lesser pursuits, which is the essence of idolatry.
* We chase the idols of comfort, achievement, Idolatry…

Not only do they willfully not follow God’s ways, but they celebrate that fact. They tout their evil ways.



Paul says, their have their “minds set on earthly things.”

And their end is destruction. They will die as they have chosen to live their lives, separated from Christ. This is a really good spot, I think, to pause and say, if you are not a friend of the cross, you are an enemy, but you don’t have to stay that way. Jesus wants to take your unrighteousness and give you his righteousness. He wants to take your death and give you his life. If you’re not sure where you’ll spend eternity or simply have questions about that. We’re here for you. (Connect Card?)

It is also a good spot to say to those who are friends of the cross, that we are not immune to this. No, sinful choices cannot disrupt our final destination if we prove we are in case, but it WILL disrupt our spiritual progress. “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.” - John Owen

This is why **LENT =** can be so helpful.

* Rhythm of **Fasting and Feasting**
* Sundays are mini-Easters.
* **LENT = MORE OF CHRIST**

1. **Press on for the prize of Jesus with confidence and joy (3:20-4:1).**

*Read 20-21*

* In verse 20, Paul offers a start contrast BUT, destruction is NOT our destination. We are citizens of the heavenly kingdom.
* And this is where it gets theologically interesting. If I were to ask you where we are going to spend eternity, what would you say?
  + Heaven?
  + Here?
* Heaven is coming down…
* “From it we await a Savior… our bodies will be like his…”
* **Revelation 21:1-2 — “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold the dwelling place of God is with man.’”**

Now, let me show you what Paul is doing and why it is relevant for us…. (And just so you know, I’m crystalizing a few insightful pages from an Anglican scholar named N.T. Wright on these verses…)

* Many people in Philippi were citizens of Rome because it was a Roman colony. Their job was “to bring Roman culture and rule to northern Greece, to expand Roman influence there.”

Now listen to Wright:

* Let’s suppose Philippi is under attack and in great danger. What would be their best hope? “That the emperor himself, who after all was called ‘saviour’, [and] ‘rescuer’, would come from Rome . . ., defeat their enemies, and establish them as firmly and gloriously as Rome itself.
* That is the picture Paul has in mind in verses 20 and 21. The church is at present a colony of heaven, with the responsibility (as we say in the Lord’s Prayer - [“your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”]) for bringing the life and rule of heaven to bear on earth. We are not, of course, very good at doing this; we often find ourselves weak and helpless, and our physical bodies themselves are growing old and tired, decaying and ready to die. But our hope is that the true saviour, the true Lord, King Jesus himself will come from heaven and change all that. He is going to transform the entire world so that it is full of his glory, full of the life and power of heaven. And, as part of that, he is going to transform our bodies so that they are like his glorious body, the body which was itself transformed after his cruel death so that it became wonderfully alive again with a life that death and decay could never touch again.”
* What does this mean? CONFIDENCE & JOY
  + We should press on with **confident expectation** in our coming final deliverance. That hope strengthens us to stand firm (as 4:1 calls for) and fulfill what Wright calls this the greatest challenge of the letter to maintain our “primary allegiance not to Rome (or America, or Boston) but to heaven, not to Caesar (Obama or Trump) but to Jesus.” He is the prize, and this is how they must imitate Paul.
  + So this future vision should compel our action today.
  + THEN influences NOW.
  + And we should live with **increasing joy**because Jesus is alive and we will reign with him. We were made to enjoy him now and more fully then.

*Conclusion*:

I want to invite you to look ahead, What do you see 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now? Do you see yourself crossing the finish line? Are you limping or are your strides full of power because you pressed on with maximum effort, through the encouragement of examples, focused on the goal, and absolutely confident that Jesus will deliver the prize of himself for us to enjoy forever.

Prayer: Bring your regrets to Jesus. Bring your passivity to Jesus. Fuel our passion to live in the present with power.