

Place: Lurgan Baptist 22:3:2015

## THE JOURNEY TO JOY

Reading: Philippians 3:1-16

### 13. GOING FOR GOLD

The famous preacher Charles Simeon said that whenever he looked at the portrait of Henry Martyn the missionary, these words seemed to ring in his heart, “*Don't trifle, don't trifle.*” The reason the minister felt this way is easy to understand. Martyn graduated with honours from Cambridge and had the prospect of a brilliant academic career. But he chose to serve the Lord in India. He was almost twenty five years of age when he arrived there and at the age of thirty one he died. Yet in those six years he translated the New Testament into three languages and only eternity will reveal how much his work meant to other missionaries and how many souls were saved because of it. Henry Martyn like the apostle Paul had a profound sense of the sacredness of time and the greatness of his obligation toward Christ.

It is said that Martyn's picture still hangs in a hall where students go to pray and that penetrating gaze still seems to say, “*Don't trifle, don't trifle.*” My .... Paul was no trifler. Indeed in this very passage he speaks of *following after* ( 3:12 ) *reaching forth* ( 3:13 ) and *pressing on* ( 3:14 ) In the opening part of this chapter we meet Paul the Accountant who discovered new values when he met the Risen Lord

Jesus. In the closing section we see Paul the Alien with his new vision looking for the coming of the Saviour. But in this middle section we meet Paul the Athlete with his new vigour as he presses toward the goal.

My .... Paul is going all out for gold. Is this not the aim of the vast company of athletes who assemble every four years from all over the world to take part in the Olympics ? For them to stand on the winner's podium, hailed as heroes, with the strain's of their home country's national anthem ringing in their ears, would make all the sacrifice worthwhile. Is the Christian life any different ? Here Paul takes us to the world of athletics to communicate truth about the Christian life. Bible students are not agreed as to the exact sport Paul is describing, whether the footrace or the chariot race. Either will do. You see, Paul is picturing the runner ponding down the track straining every nerve and muscle heading for the goal.

Paul is in the race. He is going for gold. He longs to hear the Saviour's commendation. He is living in the light of the Judgment Seat for Christ. Eternity beckons and he longs for that “**Well done.**” What about you ? Sadly Christianity has become a spectator sport. We sit in the stands and applaud or deride the people in the arena. We say, “*That was a good message this morning,*” or “*I never heard that truth before.*” The problem is that some Christians have never got out of the grandstand and got into the race. It was exactly the same at Philippi. Some of them, of course, were already in it and doing well, he described them as “*perfect,*” ( 3:15 ) or “*mature,*” some however, were “*otherwise minded,*” ( 3:15 ) they don't have the same

mind as Paul about it all, they don't agree with Paul. Why all this hurry and energy ? Why overdo it ? Sadly the track is littered with people who began the race with enormous potential and ended up being disqualified because they broke the rules. ( 3:16 ) What about you ? Are you “ *following after,*” “ *reaching forth,*” and “ *pressing on ?*” Are you still going for gold ? You see, if we are “ **Going for Gold,**” we need to keep a number of factors before us.

### (1) A MENTAL FACTOR; GUARD YOUR MIND

Now keep in mind that Paul is picturing the runner pounding down the track straining every nerve and muscle heading for the goal. If the question is asked, “ *Will this competitor succeed ?*” The answer is, much will depend on his frame of mind. If he tells himself, “ *I'm a sure winner, no matter what I do,*” he will probably experience defeat. My ... the same is true in the spiritual race, here much depends on our frame of mind. Did you notice Paul's attitude here ? Can you see,

#### (a) **THE ADMISSION OF AN HONEST MAN:**

Paul says, “ *Not as though I had already attained,*” He says, “ *I have not arrived yet.*” As Paul reviewed his past life he could think of the souls he had led to the Lord, the churches he had established, (1:1) the cities he had reached with the gospel yet in spite of all this he “ *had not attained.*” There was a time when Paul thought he had “ *attained,*” for he judged himself to be

“ *blameless,*” but now hear him, “ *not as though I had already attained.*” Sinless perfection was not the experience of Paul this side of glory. Indeed he says in ( 3:13 ) “ *Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended.*” Now Paul's goal was perfection, complete conformity to Christ, (3:11 ) but he had not attained it. I spoke with two men one evening in Portadown, and they told me they were nearly there, nearly perfect. Well, some well-meaning Christians may think they are sinlessly perfect, but Paul did not think so, rather he had a correct lowly view of himself. The dual use of the word “ *perfect,*” in ( 3:12 ) and ( 3:15 ) explains his thinking. Paul has not arrived yet at “ *perfection,*” ( 3:12 ) but he is “ *perfect,*” ( mature ) ( 3:15 ) and one mark of this maturity is the knowledge that he is not perfect.

The mature Christian honestly evaluates himself and strives to do better. Often in the Bible we are warned against a false estimate of our spiritual condition. Do you recall what the Risen Lord Jesus says to the church at Sardis ? “ *Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*” ( Rev 3:1 ) They had a *reputation but no reality.* My ... is that you ? The church at Laodicea boasted that it was rich, when in God's sight it was “ *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*” ( Rev 3:17 ) Samson thought he still had his old power, but in reality it had departed from him. ( Jud 16:20 ) Do you know something ? A sanctified dissatisfaction is the first essential to progress in the Christian life ! Many believers are self-satisfied ! Do you know why ? Because they compare their “ *running,*” with that of other Christians, usually those who are not making

much progress. My .... have you compared yourself with Christ recently ? (a)

**(b) THE AMBITION OF A HUNGRY MAN:**

For while on the one side of the coin of perfection were inscribed the words " *not attained*," on the other side were penned these words " *I follow after*." ( 3:12 ) My .... the fact that Paul knew he was not perfect and that he would never be perfect this side of glory ( 3:21 ) did not stop him from striving for it. He says, " *I follow after*," " *I press toward the mark*," again its the picture of the athlete pounding down the track, straining very nerve and muscle heading for the goal ! Paul is seeking to lay hold on that for which Christ has laid hold on him. *When* did Christ lay hold of Paul ? On the Damascus Road. *Why* did Christ lay hold of Paul ? What end did the Lord have in view ? Well, there was ***God's General Purpose !*** To make Paul like His Son ! Do you realise that's why God saved you ? To make you like Christ ! ( Rom 8:29 ) Are you like the Lord Jesus ? In your temper ? In your speech ? In your conduct ?

There was also ***God's Special Purpose !*** Do you recall what the Lord told Ananias ? " *For he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles.*" ( Acts 9:15 ) So do you see Paul now ? He's not only striving for perfection, but he is striving for a life in which the purpose of God is fully realised. My .... the Lord has laid hold on you for a purpose. There is His General Purpose to make you like His Son. For every believer wears a sign around their heart that says,

" *Under Construction.*" The Lord is still working on us as the little song says,

***He's still working on me  
To make me what I ought to be.  
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,  
The sun, the earth, Jupiter and Mars.  
How loving and patient He must be;  
He's still working on me.***

That is His General Purpose, but what about His Special Purpose ? Do you know what it is ? Are you following after it ? Oh, how tragic to come to the end of life's journey and stand before the Lord who left nothing undone to accomplish your redemption and confess that you hid your talents, and that your task was left unfinished. (1)

**(2) A SPIRITUAL FACTOR: GIVE YOUR BEST**

Now remember Paul pen's these words with the figure of the Greek runner very much in mind. He pictures himself as one who is giving of his best, doing his utmost, making every effort striving for perfection. As far as Paul was concerned it was not " *let go, and let God*," rather it was exertion and effort. Giving our best, will mean for us that we need to,

**(a) FOCUS CLEARLY:**

My .... can you picture the athlete ? With his eye on one and only one objective ? To press toward the goal for the prize ? Nothing is permitted to divide his aim or

to distract his attention. Is this not what Paul is getting at when he says, “ *One thing I do.*” ( 3:13 ) Incidentally, have you noticed the “ *one things,*” of the Bible ? “ *One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.*” ( Jn 9:25 ) That was the testimony of the man who Christ healed. When the rich young ruler came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him how to be saved, Jesus said, “ *One thing thou lackest.*” ( Mk 10:21 ) When Martha was arguing with Mary over what was really important in life, Christ said to Martha, “ *One thing is needful and Mary hath chosen that good part.*” ( Mk 10:42 ) This was the desire of David, “ *One thing have I desired of the Lord that will I seek after.*” ( Ps 27:4 ) Is it not true that too many Christians are involved in “ *many things,*” when the secret of progress is to concentrate on “ *one thing.*”

It was this decision that was a turning point in D. L. Moody's life. Before the tragedy of the Chicago fire in 1871, Mr. Moody was involved in Sunday School promotion, Y.M.C.A work, evangelistic meetings, and many other activities, but after the fire he determined to devote himself exclusively to evangelism. “ *This one thing I do,*” became a reality to him. As a result millions of people heard the gospel. “ *One thing I do,*” that was the focus of Paul. My .... everything in Paul's life was to centre around this “ *one thing.*” The daily routine, the trials, the suffering, all must be used to achieve Christlikeness. “ *One thing I do .....*,” Is it not true that a multiplication of earthly things dampens our pursuit of eternal things ? We dissipate so much of our energy on making a mark in the world that we have little left for reaching

the mark of God. My .... have you been distracted ? Has your home, family, job, business, or children, so crowded into your life that this one thing has been crowded out ? (a)

### **(b) FORGET CONTINUALLY:**

Can you imagine what would happen on the track if the runners started looking behind them ? My .... the athlete is not concerned about the distance behind him, its the distance in front that matters. He must not be affected by the opponents who are behind, he must forget about the mistake that he has made at the last bend. Indeed he must forget about everything and anything that would impede him from reaching the mark. “ *Forgetting those things which are behind.*” Now don't misunderstand what this word “ *forget,*” means. It does not mean “ *to fail to remember.*” There is no way you could ever erase the past totally from your memory. In the Bible “ *forget,*” means “ *no longer to be influenced by or affected by.*”

I heard about a man who went to see his Doctor, and said, “ *Doc, you've got to help me.*” He said, “ *Well, what's wrong ?*” The man said, “ *I'm suffering from amnesia, what should I do about it ?*” The doctor said, “ *Just go home and forget about it.*” My .... before you can be all that you need to be for the Lord today and tomorrow, you've got to go forward and forget about what has happened in the past. You know what our biggest problem is sometimes ? *We remember what God forgets, and then we forget what God wants us to remember.* “ *Forgetting those things which are*

*behind,*” Winston Churchill once made this statement, “*If the present quarrels with the past, there can be no future.*” Well, Paul was determined not to let his past hinder his present or hurt his future. You see, there were several things that Paul had to forget.

### **1. Paul had to Forget Past Sins:**

In ( 3:6 ) he recalls those days that he “*persecuted the church.*” I’m sure that those were days that Paul longed to put behind him and forget. Are you haunted, hampered, and hounded by past sins. . My .... do you know one of the subtle devices of the Devil to impede our progress ? Pre-occupation with past sins and failures. I heard about a business man that was notorious for saving everything that came across his desk. Consequently the office files were bulging. One day his secretary asked if she might dispose of the old material. He was reluctant but finally he said, “*Well alright but be sure you make a copy of everything before you throw it away.*” Is that how you handle your past sins, failures and guilt ?

### **1. Paul had to Forget Past Sorrows:**

Paul had suffered terribly. He had been beaten, shipwrecked, scorned, left for dead, alienated, and probably ostracized by his family. But he had to forget the sorrows of the past. ( 2 Cor 11:23-27 ) Thousands of Christians are bound, and bitter, by something someone did to them in the past. You may be bitter at a father than abused you, a mother than mistreated you, a friend that betrayed you, a pastor that disappointed

you, or a church that hurt you. Still today, it eats away at you like cancerous cells that erode the body. But, if you have any hopes of being all that God wants you to be, there comes a time, when “*You have to hang a wreath on the door and get over it.*”

### **2. Paul had to Forget Past Success’s:**

You see, as far as the church was concerned Paul was the “*toast of the town.*” He was a spiritual superstar, but he had to forget all of that. Sure, he could think of souls he had seen saved, churches he had seen established, and cities that he had seen reached with the gospel. But he says, “*forgetting those things which are behind,*” ( 3:13 ) Paul had learned a tremendous lesson. You cannot focus on where you are going, until you forget where you have been. You cannot run forward if you are always looking backward. I heard about a little boy who was listening to his Sunday School teacher tell about Lot’s wife and how she looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. He said “*Why that’s nothing my mother was driving a car to the grocery store yesterday and she looked back and turned into a telephone pole.*” I wonder do some of you need to put the past behind you ?

### **(c) FOLLOW CONSISTENTLY:**

Do you see how Paul puts it ? “*I follow after ....,*” “*Reaching forth I press toward ....,*” It conveys the idea of intense endeavour. The Greeks used it to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey. My .... the same zeal that Paul employed when persecuting the

church ( 3:6 ) he displayed in serving Christ. Come to think of it, wouldn't it be wonderful if Christians put as much determination into their spiritual life as they do into their recreational life ? Michael Angelo, it is told often slept with his clothes on, so he could get back to his work without losing time in dressing. Is it any wonder that he succeeded so brilliantly ? The words “ *reaching forth,*” also give us the picture of a runner headed toward the finish line. It is the last lap and he is coming down the home stretch. Every muscle is straining, the heart and lungs are pounding in their chest and they are gasping for each breath of air. They are giving everything they have, reaching forth, to finish the race and win the gold. My .... do you want to finish well ? Then, stay in your lane, don't look behind you, look before you and beyond you. Don't look around you, look above you. Don't be distracted, be diligent, determined and disciplined.

Forget what lies behind you. Focus on what looms before you. Someone once said to David Livingstone when he was back in England, briefly, after having worked for many years in Africa, “ *Well, Dr. Livingstone where are you ready to go now ?*” He replied, “ *I am ready to go anywhere provided it be forward.*” My .... are you looking backward into the past ? Or are you pressing forward into the future ? Are you giving of your best to as you go for gold ? (1) (2)

### **(3) AN ETERNAL FACTOR: GAIN YOUR PRIZE**

Do you see how Paul puts it ? “ *I press ....,*” or as another translation puts it, “ *I press on toward the goal*

*to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*” Look at,

#### **(a) THE GOAL THAT PAUL SEES:**

He speaks about the “ *mark.*” ( 3:14 ) ( skopos ) Is this mark not the finish line ? Paul was consumed with not only running his race, but finishing the race. He dreamed of the day when he hit the tape and crossed the finished line. Many a believer has started the race, but many did not finish the race. Some have dropped out, others have fallen out, and still others were kicked out. But thank God for those that did finish the race. In the 1992 Olympics Derek Redmond of Great Britain, about halfway through then 400 meters tore a hamstring. Redmond hobbled the rest of the way with the help of his father who rushed from the grandstands to help his son. *He came in last but he finished.*

During the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the last runner to finish in the marathon was an athlete from Tanzania, his name was John Stephen Akhwart. He'd had a difficult race, to say the least. He'd stumbled at one point and ended up bruised, bloodied, and with a broken leg. But he didn't quit. Even though everyone else had already finished the race and gone home, he kept at it. Finally, at 7pm in the evening, he straggled into the near-empty stadium. There were still about 7,000 people on hand to witness his finish, and all 7,000 stood, giving this battered athlete a standing ovation as he finished his last lap. When this dedicated marathoner was asked, “ *Why didn't you quit ?*” he simply said, “ *My country did not send me halfway*

around the world to start the race, they sent me to finish it.” ( Rick Warren, “Running the Race,” ) I don’t about you but I want to finish well. (a)

**(b) THE GLORY THAT PAUL SEEKS:**

Paul not only wanted to finish the race, he also wanted to win the race. “ *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*” The “ *high calling,*” literally speaks of an upward calling. In those days, when a contest was over, the winner would be taken to the winner’s stand where they would say, “ ***You have been called up.***” The winner would then be presented with the victors’ wreath. Paul longed for the day when he was called up to the winner’s stand and presented with his prize. It seems to Paul, that the goal and the glory were one and the same. Paul does not pause here to say what the prize is, but we know from other Scriptures what he would have in mind. There is the *Soul-Winners Crown:* ( 1 Thes 2:19 ) there is the *Crown of Life:* ( James 1:12 ) there is the *Crown of Righteousness:* ( 2 Tim 4:8 ) there is the *Crown of Glory:* ( 1 Pet 5:4 ) and there is the *Incorruptible Crown:*( 1 Cor 9:24-27 )

My .... Prize Day is coming. Are you looking forward to it ? Will you stand before the Lord on that day as one who has lived with eternity's values in view ? As one who has striven for perfection ? Or will you be ashamed ? Yes, you were in the race, but you fell behind. A Christian, but why overdo it. Take it easy. Don’t make yourself a nuisance to the devil.

My .... one day each Christian will stand before the

Judgement Seat of Christ. ( Rom 14:10 ) The Greek word for “ *judgement seat,*” is “ *bema,*” the very same word used to describe the place where the Olympic judges gave out the prizes. On that Prize Giving Day will you hear the Master's, “ *well done ?*”

In 1904, William Borden, a member of the Borden dairy family, finished high school in Chicago and was given a world cruise as a graduation present. While traveling through the Near East and the Far East, he became greatly burdened for the lost. After returning home he spent seven years at Princeton University, the first four in undergraduate work and the last three in seminary. While in school, he penned these words in the back of his Bible. “ **No reserves.**” Although his family pleaded with him to take control of the business, which was struggling, he insisted that God’s call to the mission field had priority. After disposing of his wealth, he added, “ **No retreat,**” after the words “ **No reserves.**”

On his way to China to witness to Muslims there he contracted cerebral meningitis in Egypt and died within a month. After his death someone, looking through his Bible discovered these final words, “ **No regrets.**” “ **No reserves, no retreat, no regrets ?**” William Borden was “ **Going for Gold,**” are you ?

