

Philippians 3:4b-14 Everything loss compared to Christ

We pray...

Can you tell me what this is?



There are all sorts of different trophies and medals in the world (you might even have a few yourself), many people strive for them, others show off the ones they have.

But if you wanted one for yourself, how would you get it?

It's relatively straight forward: you find some kind of competition (preferably something you're already good at!), whether it's some kind of sport, or some kind of baking or growing for the show... Whatever it may be, you put in the effort to practice and train, and when the competition comes round... You have to win!

That's what a medal, a trophy, a prize is all about. It's proof that through your efforts and work, you won a competition.

Today in our reading from Philippians, we heard these words from Paul:

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14

Paul, in describing the Christian life, uses this language of a competition. He was straining, pressing on toward this goal. Paul wanted deeply to 'win the prize.'

But hold on, isn't that a little worrying?

If our lives as Christians is striving towards a goal in the hopes of winning a prize, doesn't that mean we're competing against each other?

What would it possibly take to win this prize, this medal, that calls us heavenward?

How can I make sure that I've done enough to win?

Well, we could look at Paul. We could look at his life and see. In fact, in this passage, he does exactly that.

He speaks of his heritage, how he was born into God's covenantal promises.

He speaks of his deep study and knowledge of God's word and law.

He speaks of how he lived his life according to God's law...

I don't know about you, but if I'm competing with Paul, that feels like a pretty hopeless competition! In all of history, there's not many people who even come close to living their life for the Lord as Paul did!

But then Paul says something different, something that doesn't sound very competitive at all...

Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I

have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

Philippians 3:7-9

Did you hear that?

In this 'Christian competition,' Paul says that his family heritage, his deep study of God's word, his striving to live according to God's will... It's all garbage. All of it is nothing...

But we know these things are good things, we know it's of great value to study God's word and to strive to live according to it. But Paul says: 'I consider them garbage'...

Why?

Because when it comes to this 'prize', no family heritage, no knowledge, and no things that we do are able to win that prize.

So... What's the deal? How are we meant to win that prize?

Well, when it comes down to it, it's rather simple.

In this competition of life, we have to press on, we have to strive towards the goal to win the prize, as Paul said... But listen closely to exactly what he was striving after:

I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Philippians 3:12

I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Do you hear the power of these words?

Christ Jesus took hold of me, so I press on to take hold of what he took hold of me for.

When it comes down to it, in our lives as Christians, we so often get it backward. We live our lives striving to take hold of God.

We turn our life into a competition: If I'm a good enough person... if I give more to charity, if I read the bible more, if I pray more, if I take on a new role at church... Then God will love me and I'll be worthy of that great prize of eternal life!

But whatever striving we do to take hold of God, whenever we think that we can somehow attain God or be worthy of him, all of it is garbage.

It's trash. It's worthless.

Nothing that we do will ever make us worthy.

That's the result of our sin, our sin severs our relationship with God, and there is nothing that *we* can do to undo what our sin has done.

But that doesn't mean that all is hopeless.

See, this is why Paul said:

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Philippians 3:8

When we know Christ Jesus as our Lord, we see living for God turned on its head:
Being a Christian is not spending your life trying to take hold of God.

No, Christ Jesus has already taken hold of you.
Yes, this is that great joy of being baptised into Christ Jesus, because even as a
baby, even when you had earned nothing
Even when your hands couldn't yet take hold of a single thing
Christ Jesus took hold of you.

In our lives as Christians, we press on, not to take hold of him, but because he has
taken hold of us.

In all our questions of whether we have done enough for God, of whether we can
earn him or attain him

Paul declares that this way of thinking is worthless, it's garbage, trash, rubbish.

Christ Jesus has taken hold of you.
By his work for you on the cross,
He has attained you.
He has made you his own, and declared that you are worthy.
The prize is there for you because Jesus won it for you on the cross.

So we come back then to this phrase from Paul:

"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

In this wonderful realisation of what it is to be a Christian, we're drawn to a different
question:

What is it that Jesus took hold of you for?

Let me tell you, it wasn't a mistake.

You weren't drawn from a lottery.

No, Christ Jesus took hold of you that you would be his today, and that you would
be his for all eternity.

So as we are safely held in his arms, we can press on to take hold of his purpose in
our lives.

So here in his calling we are drawn to the cross:

This is where Christ Jesus took hold of me, and so I press on to take hold of that
cross.

And so our lives look different. We're not competing against each other in the hope
of winning the prize. We are 'running the race' as a team, pressing on toward the
same goal, to win the prize *together*.

So today, look at the person next to you.

Look at those in the pew in front of you and behind you.

Whoever they may be, they are pressing on toward the same goal that you are.

Christ has taken hold of them, just as he took hold of you.

As player on the same team, is there some way that you can support them to keep
on striving towards that shared goal?

Perhaps the person next to you today is struggling in their health, and are feeling
the burden on their faith.

Perhaps the person in front of you has been stuck in questions and doubts.
Perhaps the person behind you is filled and overflowing in their faith and has what they need to support you.

This is what it means to be together as God's church.
As we come together, we share life together.
We bear one another's burdens to carry others through the days that the goal seems unattainable, when the cross is hidden from their sight, and to be carried on the days when we are the ones who need a brother or sister to lead us back to the cross.

Because then, as God's church, as his people, he leads us as his people of the cross, to press on toward the goal to win the prize, as we take on the task of making him known in this world around us that others would join us on Christ's team to know the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord and to attain that great prize that was won for us on the cross.

So may the peace of God, which is far beyond our human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

♪ LH 54 When I survey the wondrous cross

Pastor Jeremy Smith