

LOOKING AHEAD, PRESSING ON

Texts: Luke 9:62; 17:32

INTRO: Jesus encouraged His hearers to focus their attention on the work yet to be accomplished. Put your hand to the plow, go forward, & don't look back.

I. LOOK AHEAD. PRESS ON. READ PHIL 3:12-14.

A. I can't do everything--but I can do something. "One thing I do." Viewed from both a negative & a positive viewpoint.

B. Forget the past. 2003 is history. A year, much like any year, combined of events good & bad, triumphs & failures, achievements & disappointments. And whereas it might help us to occasionally reflect on those accomplishments & failures in order that we might learn from them, it is not wise to dwell upon them at length. You can't plow looking back. The race car driver cannot hope to gain the victory by focusing on the road behind him & what is happening there. The football team will never win a victory by looking behind them at the goal of the opposing team. The "Christian" whose focus is back to the things left behind "is not fit for the kingdom of God."

C. Press toward the goal. This is one of several passages where Paul used illustrations from the Olympic games or other athletic contests to prod his fellow Christians on toward victory in Jesus. READ PHIL. 3:20-21

II. SEEK THINGS ABOVE. READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-5a.

A. This message is for those who have been buried with Christ in baptism & have been raised to walk with Him in newness of life. READ COL. 2:11-13.

If you haven't done this, it is imperative that you do so at once. Nothing is more urgent. You have no hope of winning the race, you haven't even entered the stadium.

B. For those who have been buried with Christ, their lives hidden in Him, Paul contrasts 2 attitudes, 2 life styles and 2 destinies.

1. 2 attitudes: Things above vs things on earth, Col. 3:1-5a.

2. 2 life-styles:

a. The way you once lived vs what you should now do, Col. 3:5b-8.

b. The old man or life style vs the new man with his higher goals & aspirations, 9-11

3. 2 destinies:

a. One of these attitudes spawns a life style that ends with a display of God's wrath, vs. 6.

b. The other, the proper attitude, promotes a lifestyle that is conducive of everlasting glory, vs. 4

C. Read again vs. 5, 8-9 contrasted with vs. 12-15. This parallels the works of the flesh & the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:19-23.

D. Simon Peter makes a similar observation in 1 Pet 4:1-11.

III. SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

A. Put the past behind you with its victories & defeats. Learn from it, but don't dwell on it.

B. Press on toward your ultimate goal of heaven. Too often we make little or no progress because of improper goal setting.

1. No goals set.

2. Too many goals. Spread self too thin.

3. Goals not clearly defined. "Convert people."

4. Goals not realistic. Joke "10 in Sunday School"

C. The ultimate goal is often reached by reaching a succession

of intermediate goals, all reaching in the direction of the ultimate goal of heaven. The running back is content to make a first down on his way to the goal line. He does not expect every play to produce 6 points, but he sincerely tries to be closer to the goal after each play than he was before. And when there are set-backs, he simply gets up, dusts himself off, focuses his attention toward the goal & tries again & again.

1. Problem to overcome-a besetting temptation? Defeat it today. Don't dwell on having fallen short in the past. Don't worry about holding out for a lifetime. Just defeat it for today. "Yesterday's dead; tomorrow is blind..."
2. You want people to be converted. Pick 1 or 2 in particular-Pray for them. Speak to them about their soul. Send them a brief note, or pass an appropriate tract or bulletin along to them. Invite them to worship services, Bible classes. If they prove to be uninterested in the gospel, center your attention on some other individual you would like to see obey the gospel. Don't let disappointments defeat you. Get up, dust yourself off, & press on toward the goal.

CONCLUSION: Much could be said in making practical application of our lesson. Perhaps, there would be no better way to conclude this lesson than by sharing with you Paul's own summation in Col. 3:14-17.