

- **\*READ Ephesians 3:12-14\*** At the point of the writing of this letter, it is believed that the Apostle Paul finds himself locked away in prison. **(1:12,13)** Yet, despite his current predicament Paul still seeks to write words of encouragement to the church that met in Philippi. He took this opportunity of struggle in his own life to write words to others that centered around encouraging them to be strong in the face of their own difficulties as disciples of Jesus. In fact, Paul spoke to how his imprisonment had been for the betterment of the Gospel in the fact that the guards had come to know of Jesus and His causes.
- You see, the Apostle Paul was able to see the good even in a bad situation because he had a legitimate focus that was eternal in nature. But it wasn't as if Paul had decided this was the way to approach life, but it was the way he knew that His King approached life. In **2:1-8**, we know that Jesus didn't come to life because He wanted to suffer, but he came to this world because He had the end game in mind. He humbled Himself to suffer and die so that men might have a chance for eternal bliss with God in heaven. He did what He did for something that was beyond this world.
- I believe we can confidently say that the example of Jesus had a massive affect on Paul and the way he approach this life. But how might you describe Paul's approach to life? Let me suggest that the best way to describe his approach would be wise. Paul's approach to life was a wise approach because he had gathered an idea of what this life was about, and he was willing to put into practice a lifestyle that would allow for him to make the most of this life. I believe that **Philippians 3** is a perfect microcosm of the type of life that Paul lived and the wisdom with which he approached his life on this earth. I believe we would be well served to take some time this morning to examine the principles by which Paul wisely approached this life so that we might be able to find true fulfillment in the years that we spend here.

**I. Put no confidence in the flesh. (vv.1-7,18,19)**

- A. If any individual had done anything in this life that would garner him glory from his fellow man in regards to who he was and what he had achieved, it was the Apostle Paul. As Saul, he was of the purest blood of the Pharisees. He was zealous to the extent of persecuting the fledgling faith that sought to destroy his own. Any box that could've been checked to show his legitimacy as a Jew was checked not once but twice. He was a Pharisee's Pharisee.
- B. However, all of that changed when he witnessed the risen Savior, heard the teaching of the Gospel by Ananias, and was baptized into Christ Jesus. **(Acts 9)** With these events came a redirection in the walk of Saul who was now known as Paul. Where he would've once killed for his status as a Jew, he was now willing to completely denounce it. He put no confidence in it, and he counted it as loss. Even though he had put so much time and effort into ascending to the level that he was in Judaism, Paul was willing to count it all as "rubbish" as he says in **v.8**. Shouldn't that say something to us about the amount of effort, time, and energy, we put into the temporal thing of this life?
- C. That is exactly what it says to me. Paul's words in this chapter scream at me saying "Nick, stop wasting your time on the things that don't matter!" Not, don't ever give time to other things. There are things in this life (work, health, etc) that won't affect eternity that we must give time to because that is simply how this life works, but we shouldn't center our lives around things that wont matter in the end. Instead, we need to follow the example of Paul and avoid falling into the troubles of those who do put their confidence in the flesh. **(3:18,19)**
- D. Those who put all their confidence in the flesh and set their minds on earthly things will only ever be sorely disappointed because those temporal things will always let them down eventually. Case in point? Look at what is going on in southern Texas right now. Look at the devastation that the flood waters have caused. Yet, look at the Christians. SO MANY of them have lost so much if not everything of their earthly possessions, yet so many of them have positive attitudes. How is this?? While so many are broken in their spirit because their possessions are gone, how can disciples be of good heart? It is because our confidence is not in stuff, but it is in God and in the good brethren of whom we are joined together with because of the blood of Jesus. We will care for one another and lift one another up. We will put our confidence in God and know that He will provide just as He is doing. He must have our full confidence.

## II. Seek to know Jesus and be found in Him. (vv.9-11)

- A. If our confidence is to be in God then we must do as Paul does and seek to know His Son and be found in Him. Paul firstly declares that his confidence is not in the flesh, and then he follows that up by establishing what his effort is going towards. Paul was willing to count all things as loss if it meant that he was able to know Jesus. Some people might be willing to sacrifice a lot in this life, but they are only willing to do so if they have a proper motivation, and that motivation for Paul was Jesus.
- B. *"I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him"* (v.8) What a faith and mindset for this man to have even as he was in the middle of great suffering and trial. And he was able to have this mindset because of the wisdom in the way he approached this life.
- C. Paul knew that this life is temporary, and it is simply a proving ground for where we will spend eternity. He knew that eternity was coming, and he wanted to be ready and prepared. He knew that the only way for him to succeed in that last day was to know and be found in Jesus so that he might be able to experience the power of Jesus's resurrection from the dead. (vv.10,11)
- D. For us, do we live this life with the constant thought and reminder that the end will come and we will either be raised to life or the second death? If we keep this thought in our minds then it will shape how we live. It will shape the type of person that we are because I don't think any right thinking person, believing in the judgment, would want to be eternally condemned to hell fire. I just don't see that being the case. Instead, what I see much more often are people who claim to acknowledge a coming judgement, yet they live as if it will never actually come. They live a life that does not allow them to know Jesus, and they certainly won't be found in Him because they love this world and its sin. They love to be so intertwined in the workings of this life that judgment is the furthest thing from their minds.
- E. Paul would say that this type of approach to life is foolishness because these types of individuals will never get to experience the power of Jesus's resurrection to life and righteousness. Instead, they will be brought back just to die again and to wish they had never risen. Paul wanted to experience Jesus's powerful resurrection, yet he knew that would only happen through knowing and being found in Him.

## III. Press on toward the goal and the prize. (vv.12-17)

- A. But what kept Paul going even when the world is striving to pull him in the opposite direction? What kept him in the place where he would give such great effort to do these things, especially when the circumstances he found himself in were difficult? I think he answers these questions for us beginning in v.12. Paul recognized that he had not reached the goal, and he wouldn't reach the goal in this life. He would always be looking ahead towards something, and this shaped the way he lived this life.
- B. Paul pressed on. He pressed on past his mistakes. He pressed on past his guilt. He pressed on past the difficulties. He left everything behind him in the past. He reached forward to obtain the prize. But that prize would only be obtained if he did the two things we've already talked about. He would only reach the goal if he put his confidence in God and sought to be known and be found in Jesus, but what does that look like. It looks like a man who sought to imitate His King in everything that he did.
- C. Let's not forget that Paul is the man who twice implored the Corinthians to, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." (I Corinthians 4:16;11:1) Paul recognized the importance of pressing on towards the goal of being like Jesus in all things. But he also was humble enough to recognize that he has not and wouldn't obtain to be on level with Jesus in this life, but that wasn't going to stop him from giving every effort to live in that manner. Paul wasn't going to become complacent.
- D. The question is...are we willing to live in this manner? Are we willing to "have this attitude", live by this standard, and follow Paul's example? (v.15-17) If we are willing to press towards the goal and obtain the prize then we can and will live this life with the same wise approach with which Paul lived. I know many make the claim, "but Paul was a handpicked Apostle who could do that, and I just can't" But is this a legit claim? Let me ask...Can you put your confidence in God and not the flesh? Can you seek to be found in Jesus? Can you seek to be an imitator of Jesus? If you can do these things then you can and must continue to press on towards the goal and you can obtain the prize!

#### IV. Remember our true citizenship. (vv.20,21)

- A. Then lastly, Paul gives us a good tool that will help us to do these things, and that tool is to remember where our true citizenship lies. Remember the preceding verses detail the type of person that we should give every effort to avoid being because their end is destruction and not the prize of heaven. These people would fail because the only citizenship they thought about was their earthly citizenship. They only ever think about being an American, Canadian, Mexican, German, Russian, Brazilian, or any other type of nationality. They only think about what they can do that would better their present country. They only think about what they could do to bring themselves more pleasure and success in the here and now.
- B. Paul contrasts that with his mindset of remembering that his true citizenship is in the Kingdom of God and that is the only Kingdom that he is truly concerned with upholding. He knew that strengthening and serving in that Kingdom would bring him benefits untouched by anything his earthly citizenship might bring him. He knew that being a part of that Kingdom would bring him the opportunity to be transformed by His Lord when He returns for the faithful. Paul wasn't concerned with the state of this current world, but he gave every effort to uphold and strengthen the Kingdom of which he first and foremost was a citizen.
- C. We in this country are amazingly blessed with freedoms, and while they afford us the ability to gather and assemble and do many other things, it also brings with it some temptation. The temptation we face is to fight tooth and nail to keep things exactly as they are so that we can continue to do as we do. But the truth is that regardless of the circumstances, God expects us to continue to do as we do. He expects for us to continue to serve Him and seek to strengthen His Kingdom. Do you think Paul ran around arguing angrily with others about politics or the direction that Rome was heading in? I highly doubt he did because he was too busy serving the Kingdom! What could we learn from his example? More than anything else, we can learn that our focus and efforts need to be given to the Kingdom that will never be stopped or hindered. We need to stop arguing over foolish temporal things on Facebook and other social media mediums. The United States of America could very well fall one day, yet the Kingdom of God will continue to stand and strive. If that day ever comes, which flag will we be waving? The flag of defeat as Americans or the flag that says I'm still here and standing as a disciple? Paul would be waving the latter if he was still with us today. I hope we are approaching this life in a Paul-like manner so that we will be left standing if that day were ever to come.

While the scenery might have changed quite a bit from Paul's day until today, the basic bones of life have remained the same. The temptation to put all of our eggs in the basket of this world remain. We are tempted to put on blinders that only focus on the here and now. We are tempted to give no thought to eternity or the judgement. Yet, we can still live lives that glorify and please God by living lives that seek to imitate the example that is put forth to us by the Apostle Paul. His wise approach to this life in Philippians 3 ought to serve as a template for how we will approach our lives in 2017. May God give us the strength to forsake this life in order to obtain to the awesome glory which will come in the next as we live with our great God in heaven. **\*PRAYER\***