

“Happy” New Year? Looking Back & Looking Ahead

Philippians 3:12-14

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

December 31, 2023 a.m.

Introduction: We stand today at the threshold of a New Year. How should we say “Good-bye” to 2023 & “Hello” to 2024? Let’s consider Paul’s words here in Philippians 3 as advice for the New Year. Here in Philippians 3 Paul has used the imagery of accounting (:7-8) in describing his severance from self-righteousness and his dependence upon Christ’s righteousness. Now in verses 12-14 he moves from accounting to athletics. Paul uses such athletic analogies elsewhere (cf. I Corinthians 9:24-27; I Timothy 2:5; II Timothy 4:7). Paul likens the Christian life again to a race, with a goal clearly in sight to be reached. He calls this the “*one thing I do.*” Paul is single-minded. Notice here as we find Paul seeing the goal (or his **purpose**), Paul seeking the goal (or his **pursuit**), and Paul seizing the goal (or his **prize**).

I. Paul sees the **goal** (or his purpose) v. 12

A. The goal not yet reached

1. Paul has not “*already attained*” – received or obtained

a. Indication > “Paul had not received everything” (Gromacki).

b. Illustration > Paul is not running a 4 by 400 relay, where one athlete runs a hundred meters and then hands off the baton to the next runner. Paul is running the entire race – all the way to the finish line.

2. Paul has not become “*already perfect*” – teleioo – to reach a goal, to fulfill a purpose (cf. Ephesians 4:12 “*perfecting of the saints*”)

a. “I have not been perfected” – perfect passive indicative > a past event with results continuing to the present

b. Paul did not believe in “sinless perfection.” Rather, there was always room for personal, spiritual growth.

Explanation: “*I am apprehended of Christ*” – laid hold of me; grasped > “A good dose of memory about one’s beginnings in Christ can serve as the proper shot of adrenaline for the continuing race” (Fee). Paul’s calling was to salvation, spiritual maturity, and Christ-likeness. Application: “Sadly, not all believers, not even all Christian leaders, adopt the stance that Paul views as normal and normative. So look around carefully, and emulate those who are continuing to grow spiritually, not those who are stagnating. Beware of those who project an image of smug self-satisfaction. Imitate those who keep on imitating Christ” (Carson, 90).

B. The goal to be reached

1. Grasping of the goal:

a. “*I follow after*” – “I press on” (NKJV, NASB)

b. Speaks of hard pursuit, even as a hunter pursues the game (also used of foot-racing).

2. Grasped by the Lord:

a. Paul’s call to salvation (his pardon) > Acts 9:4-6

b. Paul’s call to service (his purpose) > Acts 9:15

c. Paul’s call to sacrifice (his pursuit) > Acts 9:16

Note: “Paul wanted to lay hold of and pull down that purpose for which he had been saved. He wanted to do everything God had planned for him to accomplish” (Gromacki).

Illustration: William Borden: “No reserve, no retreat, and no regrets.”

II. Paul seeks the **goal** (or his pursuit): v. 13

A. Forgetting the past

1. His past successes (accomplishments) > avoid pride.

a. “*Count*” - to think something through to a conclusion (Gromacki) – No selfish complacency or sinful contentment.

b. *“Forgetting”* – “He will not regard it as having any bearing or influence upon his present spiritual outlook or conduct” (Martin).

Illustration: Fee references the “miracle mile” race of 1954. Two runners finished the mile in under four minutes. John Landy led the race until the final turn. When he looked back to see where Roger Bannister was, Roger then passed him on the other side and edged by him for the victory.

2. His past failures (disappointments) > avoid shame

a. Could have caused him to be discouraged – we can be discouraged after falling, quit & give up.

b. Could have caused him to be depressed – we can be preoccupied with self (which leads to depression).

Illustration: 1923, Eric Liddell, 440 yard race.

B. Focusing on the future

1. *“One thing”* - hen de

a. “He is evidently much moved as he dictates. His thought is agitated, his speech staccato, his words abrupt” (Martin)

b. His whole life is one thing – the pursuit of Christ.

2. *“Those things which are before”*

a. The work he was compelled to achieve – the goal is always Christ (cf. 1:21).

b. *“Reaching forth”* – as a runner strains with his entire body to reach the finish line.

III. Paul **seizes** the **goal** (or his **prize**) – (:14) [the *“one thing”* of verse :13?]

A. Striving for the goal:

1. *“Press”* - dioko – “vigorous, concentrated pursuit” (Gromacki) – cf. Hebrews 12:1-2.

2. *“Mark”* (goal) – skopos from skopein – to look; hence, that which one keeps his eyes on (it - the finish line?)

Contrast: Those trying to make the present eternal – “North Americans are probably the most death-denying culture in the history of the race. How else can one explain cosmetic surgery’s having become a multimillion-dollar industry?” (Fee).

B. Seizing the prize:

1. *“Prize”* – same word used in I Cor. 9:24.

a. Christ Himself?? See 1:23.

b. To know Christ even as he is known of Christ > I Cor. 13:12 & I John 3:2.

2. *“High calling”* – an “upward call” [cf. *“holy calling”* in II Tim. 1:9 & *“heavenly calling”* in Heb. 1:3.]

a. The human analogy > The presider over the games (at times even the Emperor himself) would call the victorious athlete to the platform to receive his *“corruptible crown”* (I Cor. 9:24-27).

b. The heavenly award > Christ stands to award the victor – II Tim. 4:8 (cf. Acts 7:54- 60).

Summary: “God has chosen people in Christ Jesus to be saved & sanctified. The prize itself is a gracious gift, but attainment of the goal requires human effort. God’s goals for believers are always forward & upwards, designed to strengthen & improve them” (Gromacki).

Conclusion: In a day of hopelessness & helplessness, a day of despair & despondency, Paul’s words speak of confidence & certainty. In his opening paragraph to these Philippians (1:6), he spoke of the good work begun in each believer that would be continued until brought to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. The only way to find meaning in life today is to consider the future. The goal of knowing Christ completely is a fitting occupation for our time here & will be a worthy occupation of our time continually in eternity. Each of us has been *“apprehended (laid hold of) of Christ.”* God has saved you & me & called us to fulfill His purpose for our lives. I challenge us all to *“press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* By God’s grace, may our lives be a continual pursuit of Christ-likeness. As we do, I trust we will experience God’s richest blessing as we honor Him with our lives in this New Year of 2024!