

9/28/11

THE EPISTLE LESSON Philippians 3:4b-14

(The priority of Christ)

4 . . . If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. 7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 21:33-46

(The Parable of the Tenants)

33 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. 35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Reader: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is

ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which **God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

INTRO ó What makes someone try something really difficult? How about you? About 5 years ago I went on a diet. I was very strict. I decided it was important to my health. But, it was a lot of work. It was hard, and there was always a desire to eat what I couldn't. I've kept some of it off, but not all.

- I. In today's lesson Paul says, in verse 12, **12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**
 - A. Paul is working, he is pressing on, He is doing something very hard, to live as a child of God.
 1. It is important that Christians seek to live holy lives.
 2. That is what God expects from all His creation, people living for Him.
 3. But, it is especially what God expects of those who know God's saving mercy, His sacrificial forgiveness that came at the cost of His only Son.
 4. If Christ died for me, I should live for Him because of the gift of His love.
 - B. But, there can be a problem when people do what Paul says, when they press on to take hold of what God has planned for them. We can focus on our effort, rather than the reason we work so hard.
 1. When people work hard to be holy they are going to fail. We are all sinful.
 2. So, sometimes people give up, because they have failed. Have you ever tried to go on a diet and it isn't working the way you want, so you give up all together and eat worse than you were before. Or, maybe there is some other difficult task you have tried and failed. How easy is it to give up?
 3. And, sometimes people give focus so hard on how much they have worked, they cannot admit their failure. Those are the folks that Paul talks about earlier in this chapter. He is more a good Jew than they are, and still falls short. But, if we can't admit failure, then God's children can become blindly arrogant. I worked hard. Therefore I'm holy. Therefore I am better than others who did not work this hard.
- II. So, Paul says He presses on, but why do this? Why work hard to be holy if we are sinful anyway? Why work hard to be witnesses as children of God if we might focus on ourselves rather than God? Why even try?
 - A. Paul gives a glimpse that helps us to understand that thinking right, can give us a right attitude toward this difficult task.
 1. He says, **but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**
 2. Think about this, it is not Paul who has taken hold of Jesus, though He is working to do so.
 3. Jesus has taken hold of Paul. He has called Paul to faith, to forgiveness, to serving God.
 - B. In fact, verse 14 says, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which **God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**
 1. It is God who is calling Paul heavenward.
 2. It is not Paul who is ever earning his way to heaven, no matter how much he presses on.
- III. God does want us to live holy lives.
 - A. Sometimes it might seem like THINKING we can earn heaven might make us want to work even harder to do the impossible.
 1. But, we have already said everyone is sinful. That is why we need a Savior.

2. When we fail, do we give up? Do we ignore the truth?
- B. When we realize it is God we count on it makes a big difference.
1. We want to serve God, because He has called us, He has called sinners to heaven. We don't deserve it. We surely want to serve the Lord of mercy.
 2. We want to serve God because He has taken hold of us, and is continuing to hold us through all of life's trials, through all our failures. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- C. So, when we fail and know the truth, we continue humbly seeking God's help to live for Him because Jesus died for us.
1. You see how much of a difference it makes to know that before we press on for God, He has taken hold of us?
 2. Do you see how the love of God changes hearts, and helps us to keep pressing on? His love never dies.

CONCLUSION ó I heard a story yesterday about a homeless person, a student actually, who slumped down recently in the hall way and said, "Who would love me? Look at me?" He was not dressed to well, but was at school. The counselor, a Christian who is pressing on to serve the Lord Jesus, pointed out the talents of this young man, and took him shopping for new clothes. Don't you think he will remember her?

When we are wondering why anyone would want us, it is hard to try to press on for the Lord. But, when we know what He has done, we want to serve Him, even when we fail, trusting His forgiveness and love. Guess who took hold of whom? Don't you want to serve the Lord, pressing on to live a righteous life to point to His love and mercy??