

Advent

Philippians 3:20-21

Sermon

Hobart, November 18th, 2012

Launceston, December 2nd, 2012

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Scripture Readings:

Philippians 3:8-4:1

⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. * For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

Pressing toward the Goal

¹² I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. ¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

¹⁵ Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. ¹⁶ But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

¹⁷ Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. ¹⁸ For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. ²⁰ But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. ²¹ He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

4 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, * stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.¹

* Or *through the faithfulness of Christ*.

* Greek *brothers*; also in 4:8.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Php 3:7-4:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

A. WE ARE ABOUT TO ENTER THE ADVENT SEASON:

1. It starts at the beginning of December
2. And is preceded on November 25th, by Christ the King Sunday, also known as “The Reign of Christ”
3. Today we are going to talk about the underlying meaning and value of the Advent season
 - a) By discussing what Advent is, and its focus for our lives
4. We are going to listen to some of what Paul wrote to the Philippians that hones in on the core of what Advent is about

B. PRAYER

BODY:

II. WHAT IS ADVENT?

A.

B. WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

1. It is a time Christians have chosen to focus on God’s overall plan and purpose for mankind, and the earth
2. It is a time to be reminded of the big picture
3. A time to let the Holy Spirit realign our heart, minds and lives with God and his plan for us through Jesus

III. LOOKING FORWARD

A. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T LOOK AHEAD OF OURSELVES WHEN WE WALK?

1. We are bound to run into, or trip over something
2. We have eyes so we can see what is ahead of us, and plan our steps appropriately

B. WHY DOES GOD INCLUDE PROPHECY IN THE SCRIPTURE?

1. So we have an idea of what lies ahead of us, so we can plan our spiritual steps appropriately
2. To help us live today, knowing that this not all there is
 - a) To live with the big picture of God and his plan in mind
 - b) Not living just for the moment, and just for ourselves

C. WHAT IS PROPHECY ANY WAY?

1. Is it future telling?
 - a) News of international events in advance?
 - b) Like the TV series where a man received tomorrow's newspaper a day before the events in it took place
 - c) If a child was reported to have been run over at a school crossing, he would try and be there and prevent it from happening

D. WHAT IS THE MAIN THRUST OF OT PROPHECY?

1. To remind God's people that he will never give up on them
2. That he had a future for them
 - a) That he would send a Messiah to rescue them from their problems, their sins, their bad leaders, their enemies
3. To encourage them to live in hope, to live in faith, to live with God, and not apart from him
 - a) To trust that he a wonderful, real, and certain plan for their lives and for all peoples
 - b) And to live their daily lives with that purpose in mind

E. WHAT IS THE MAIN THRUST OF NT PROPHECY?

1. That Messiah has come, that he is Jesus the Son of God
2. Saying;
 - a) "The New is in the old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed"
3. Prophecy gives us perspective for our spiritual journey and the direction for us to head in all we do

F. THE MAIN MESSAGE OF PROPHECY

1. That God has all things in his hands
 - a) That in Jesus he has come to be with us, and bring us into relationship with him
 2. And that we are called to participate and share in that life, the life of the Father, Son and Spirit,
 3. And that in the future, Jesus will come to be right here with us, face to face
 - a) And heaven and earth, the life of God and the life of all mankind will be joined as one
-

IV. IN PHILIPPIANS 3

A. PAUL HAS BEEN REMINDING THE MEMBERS

1. Of the importance of keeping the big picture in mind

B. PHILIPPIANS 2:12

¹² Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

1. This is our calling and purpose, to show the results of our being God's saved people

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵ so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. ¹⁶ Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of

Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless.

2. The encouragement to live as shining lights is put in the perspective of Christ's return, or *parousia*.

3. Gk; *parousia*

a) Usually translated "return" or "coming"

b) We often talk about the second coming

(1) **Which is in many ways misleading**

c) Jesus said he would never leave us or forsake us, he is still with us, but not face to face

d) He is now with the Father in heaven

e) But he remains in relationship and communion with us through the Holy Spirit's presence

4. *Parousia* means "presence" as opposed to "absence"²

a) At the *parousia*, Jesus will be present with us, and no longer absent

b) Talk some more about this another time

C. IN CHAPTER 3 PAUL TALKS ABOUT KEEPING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

1. Not letting false teachings or wrong focuses distract us in our Christian walk

Philippians 3:1

3 Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters,* rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

² Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. ³ For we who worship by the Spirit of God* are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, ⁴ though I could have confidence in my own effort if

² Paul's absence and return, Phil 1:26 And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

* Greek *brothers*; also in 3:13, 17.

* Some manuscripts read *worship God in spirit*; one early manuscript reads *worship in spirit*.

anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

D. 3:7

⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹ and become one with him.

E. THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF LIFE IS TO BECOME ONE WITH CHRIST

1. To be present with him, to share his life, to be like him
2. That comes through faith

^{9b} I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.* For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

F. THE MOTIVATION FOR LIVING THE LIFE OF FAITH AND SHARING IN CHRIST'S LIFE AND SUFFERING, IS SO AS TO ALSO SHARE IN HIS RESURRECTION

1. Clearly, Paul wants to fully experience and participate in Jesus' resurrection, the new life with God.
 - a) That is the "teleos" the goal, the "perfection" we reach for

Pressing toward the Goal

¹² I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

2. He hadn't reached that "teleos", but continually pressed on to achieve that goal, which is the reason Jesus first "possessed" him

* Or through the faithfulness of Christ.

a) The reason Jesus has saved us and brought us into his life

3. And what is that “teleos”, that perfection and completeness we long and press on towards?

a) The resurrected life--life with God in its fullness and completeness

b) No longer being apart, but fully present with him

¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it,* but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

4. What is that heavenly prize?

a) The resurrected life--being in the heavenly presence of God through Jesus

b) This will happen when heaven and earth are one

c) When the Father, Son and Spirit are truly with us here on earth, and we are glorified to be able to be present with them and see them face to face

¹⁵ Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. ¹⁶ But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

¹⁷ Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. ¹⁸ For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth.

²⁰ But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

5. We are already citizens of heaven, where Jesus is

a) When he returns, heaven will be on earth, and earth will be in heaven

b) We will truly experience being citizens of heaven

* Some manuscripts read *not yet achieved it*.

²¹ He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

4 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters,^{*} stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.³

G. SUMMARY:

H. IN THE LIGHT OF THE FUTURE HOPE, "STAY TRUE TO THE LORD"

1. Live as who we are,

a) Citizens of heaven, subjects of the Lord,

(1) The one who will be Lord of all the earth when he is again present here on earth

V. VICTOR FRANKL

A. YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF VIKTOR FRANKL

1. He wrote a brief but remarkable book based on his experiences as a Jewish survivor of the World War II, Nazi concentration camps
2. He was a psychiatrist, and after the war became the founder of the *Logotherapy* philosophy of psychology which he based on his experiences in the camps.
3. Frankl observed those he worked with, and discusses the difference he observed between those who survived and those who didn't.

B. GORDON ALLPORT SUMMARISES WHAT FRANKL WROTE:

...As a long time prisoner in bestial concentration camps he found himself stripped to naked existence. His father, mother, brother and wife died in camps or were sent to the gas ovens, so that except for his sister, his entire family perished in these camps. How could he--every possession lost,

^{*} Greek *brothers*; also in 4:8.

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Php 3:7-4:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

every value destroyed, suffering from hunger, cold and brutality, hourly expecting extermination--how could he find life worth preserving?

He learns what a human being does when he suddenly realizes he has "nothing to lose except his ridiculously naked life."

Frankl's description of the mixed flow of emotion and apathy is arresting. First to the rescue comes a cold detached curiosity concerning one's fate. Swiftly, too, come strategies to preserve the remnants of one's life, though the chances of surviving are slight. Hunger, humiliation, fear and deep anger at injustice are rendered tolerable by closely guarded images of beloved persons, by religion, by a grim sense of humor, and even by glimpses of the healing beauties of nature--a tree or a sunset.

In the concentration camp every circumstance conspires to make the prisoner lose his hold. All the familiar goals of life are snatched away. What alone remains is "the last of human freedoms"--the ability to "choose ones attitude in a given set of circumstances."

In such horrific conditions, we would expect the individuals most likely to survive would be the physically strong who were used to heavy outdoor labor. But ironically, they were amongst the first to fall;

1. Frankl wrote;

In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of the life in a concentration camp it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain (they were often of a delicate constitution), but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom. Only in this way can one explain the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than those of a more robust nature.⁴

2. One of Frankl's central points is that we always have a choice as to what we think, as to what our attitudes are, no matter what may be done to us externally.

a) He wrote

Is there no spiritual freedom in regard to behavior and reaction to any given surroundings?

⁴ Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

...The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. ...Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.

...in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him--mentally and spiritually.

3. Frankl also pointed out how hope played a vital role in the survival of these men;

Any attempt at fighting the camps psychopathological influence on the prisoner...had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward. Instinctively some of the prisoners attempted to find one on their own. It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future.... And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task.

The prisoner who lost faith in the future--his future--was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay.

4. The bottom line for Frankl is that we need to have a future hope, a purpose, a meaning for our life, for our existence.

a) He said;

...there is nothing in the world...that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*".

What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge for tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him.

b) How blessed we are to have such a meaning and potential awaiting to be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION:

A. N.T. WRIGHT

1. Says about the future hope that gives us meaning and direction to our lives;

There will come a time, which might indeed come at any time, when, in the great renewal of the world that Easter itself foreshadowed, Jesus himself will be personally present and will be the agent and model of the transformation that will happen both to the whole world and also to believers.⁵

2. This is the hope Advent reminds us of, and what Paul encouraged the Philippians to live in the light of

B. PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14, 3:20-4:1

I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,
¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

^{v20} But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. ²¹ He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

4 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters,* stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

C. PRAYER

⁵ N.T Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, Harper One, 2008, p. 136

* Greek *brothers*; also in 4:8.