

Sermon 10-8-17 Jesus – Our past, present and future Philippians 3:4b-14

Dear Growing Saints in the Faith:

Some years ago at our District's church gathering of young people this question was asked of the teenagers who were assembled there:

What is the number one concern in your life?

A majority of the teenagers responded with this answer: My own faith.

How important is your faith?

In the book *Rumors* a Christian author describes how important faith was to the average person who lived in Europe in the 1500's during the time of Martin Luther:

“Although the world around Luther contained much hardship – poverty, disease, crime, near-constant warfare --- Luther took solace in the images of another world portrayed in his place of worship. He understood life on this physical planet as one small slice of eternity and sought to make connection with the spiritual world he could not see.” Philip Yancey

The author then writes about our world today. He says the average person in Europe today perceives the world this way:

“The average citizen of modern Europe perceives only one world, the here and now...he also believes that at the moment of physical death existence ends and there is no God....”

It is interesting to note that only 18% of people in Luther's home town of Wittenberg call themselves Christians today.

How important is your faith in Jesus? Where is our focus to be in this world or the one to come?

The Apostle Paul wrote: “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

The Apostle Peter wrote: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life...through these He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may...escape the corruption in the world.” II Peter 1:3-4

Peter then adds these words: “**...Make every effort to add to your faith** goodness; and to goodness, knowledge and to knowledge; self-control and to self-control; perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love...these qualities...will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive.” II Peter 1:5-8

How important is our faith? Peter says “Add to your faith...” How may I do this?

I. Fix our eyes on Jesus who is our past

A. The past of our heritage of faith

The Apostle Paul speaks about his spiritual past as a leader of the Jewish faith. Note how Paul describes himself as a Jewish believer in Philippians 3:5-6

- His Jewish heritage was pure being born to Hebrew parents and maintaining Hebrew traditions.
- His Jewish faith was a system of tradition and work righteousness
- He mentions his “zeal” as the highest single virtue of his religion
- To the Jewish believer “zeal” was the highest single virtue of religion
- Paul followed the law of the Jewish faith but his heart was still sinful and self-righteous
- Eventually Paul discovered that salvation was in Jesus and NOT in his righteousness

Therefore, Paul wrote vv7-9 of Philippians 3.

In these verses Paul uses the language of business to describe the spiritual transaction that occurred when Jesus redeemed him.

My profit and my loss and my gain

Paul came to realize that all of his Jewish religious credentials that he thought were in his profit column were actually “worthless and damning.”

- To know Christ means to know Him personally - He is MY Savior...MY Lord
- To be found in Him means to be united with Christ...to have His righteousness as my own
- Faith in Christ means the confident, continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus for eternal life

Do we have a religious heritage?

- We have been baptized in Christ
- We have been confirmed in Christ
- We have a rich tradition of the Reformation which we celebrate this month the 500th anniversary
- We have rich traditions in worship

Our religious heritage is a rich blessing to us. But, as with the Apostle Paul may we see Jesus and fix our eyes upon Him. He is the one upon whom we fix our eyes on as we ponder the past.

Many people have been baptized as infants and have been brought into the Kingdom of God through the “water and the Word.”

This is good.

But our faith doesn't stop at our baptism.

Jesus said that disciples are made by "baptizing and by teaching" Matthew 28

Baptizing and Teaching

There are people today who have been baptized but they are not being taught by God's Word because they...

- Have strayed from the Word of God
- Have strayed away from worship with their fellow believers
- Have strayed away from prayer and quiet time with the Lord
- Have not grown in their faith

On the other hand, simply coming to church every week or attending Bible study or daily reading of the Bible won't get anyone into heaven either unless faith in Jesus is in one's heart.

What does it mean to see Jesus as part of our past?

- Our focus is to be kept on Him and not on what we have done as life-long believers
- Our faith is to be in His righteousness and not our own righteousness or good works

See Jesus in our past....

B. The past of our sinful life and actions

Sometimes it's hard to let go of our past sins or the sins of others committed against us.

- Sometimes it's hard for us to simply believe that God has forgiven all of our past sins
- Sometimes we are stuck in our past...
 - We were hurt by someone's sins
 - We hold on to the guilt of our own past sins

But, remember, Jesus is behind the door of our past.

- He has changed our life
- He has forgiven our sins - He remembers them no more as Isaiah says
- Trust that God has completely forgiven past sins for Christ's sake
- God says He forgives us and He always keeps His Word Psalm 145:13b

This is how we grow in faith --- by living in God's grace of forgiveness.

“God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy...He gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 3:5; 2:14

Jesus is our past and He is our present, too.

II. See Jesus in the present

A. Paul says in verse 10 “I want to know Christ...”

Paul is speaking about gaining a deeper knowledge and intimacy with Christ during the here and now in our present daily lives. Paul is speaking about knowing Christ personally.

What separates Christianity from all other religions is that our faith connects us with God on a personal level.

- Buddhism for example does not have a personal god but follow illuminated teachers
- Hindus attend their place of worship sitting in small rooms facing a stone idol

God’s Word speaks of a personal God who is our....

- Father - Creator - Shepherd - Friend - Savior
- Our God is Someone we can relate to in a personal way

The late youth leader Mike Yaconelli once said: “Spirituality is not a formula; it is not a test. It is a relationship. Spirituality is not about competency; it is about intimacy. It is not about perfection; it is about connection...accepting the reality of our broken, flawed lives is the beginning of spirituality, not because the spiritual life will remove our flaws, but because we let go of seeking perfection and instead seek God, the One who is present in the tangledness of our lives.”

Paul here in Philippians 3:10 says “I want to know Christ and the...”

- Power of His resurrection
- Fellowship of sharing in His sufferings
- Becoming like Him

In 1900 the historian Henry Adams wrote an essay entitled “The Dynamo and the Virgin” which claimed that in the new industrial age the electric motor had displaced the Virgin Birth of Jesus as the power that drives history. Today someone might say that the computer chip is the power that drives history. It is interesting that a notable historian would settle on the Virgin Birth of Jesus as the key event in history.

“Jesus’ birth is an example of the unseen world impinging on the visible, God’s own Son entering the world of matter...such an ‘invasion’ would redefine history. No longer could we see ourselves as cosmic orphans, inhabiting a speck of a planet in an insignificant galaxy.” Philip Yancey

CS Lewis said: "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither."

As believers we aim toward heaven and trust the Lord Almighty.

- He created the universe
- He reversed the power of death by the resurrection
- We access this power by knowing him personally John 14:23
- Peter says that we believers "participate in the divine nature" II Peter 1:4

B. Paul says in verse 10 "I want to share in His sufferings..."

I want to share in His sufferings...

Helen Roseveare is a British medical doctor who worked for many years as a missionary in Zaire, Africa.

- During the revolution of the 1960's she often faced brutal beatings and physical torture
- On one occasion she feared God had forsaken her
- After she was delivered from her attackers she sat down and wrote about her experience with God:

"God did not stop the sufferings. He did not stop the wickedness...it was all there. The pain was just as bad. The fear was just as bad. But...it was altogether different. It was Jesus...for Him...with Him."

Helen said through the experience that she sensed Jesus telling her: "This is the privilege of being identified with Me...This is what I mean. These are not your sufferings; they are my sufferings. All I ask of you is the loan of your body."

Jesus is with us right now...even in the midst of our sufferings. This is how we grow in faith.

--- Romans 5:3-5

See Jesus in our past...in our present and in our future

III. See Jesus in our future vv12-14

A. We press on toward the ultimate goal – heaven

Paul uses the analogy of a runner to describe the believer's spiritual growth

- We are in the race of faith
- When Jesus returns "We shall be like Him" I John 3:2
- We will have a glorified physical body
- V12 "But I press on..." refers to the action of the sprinter in a race

What are we living for? What are we pressing on for?

A man in his early 50's said he was looking forward to retirement. He would say: "When I retire I am going to sit on the couch and watch TV all day every day."

Is that really something to look forward to?

"Growth is the goal of the Christian...if a child ceased to develop, the parent would be concerned, right? When a Christian stops growing, help is needed. If you are the same Christian you were a few months ago, be careful. You might be wise to get a checkup. Not on your body, but on your heart. Not a physical one, but a spiritual one." Max Lucado

We fix our eyes on Jesus who is our past, present and future with...

- God's Word
- Prayer
- Service
- Giving
- Fellowship
- Witness
- Worship

See Jesus and His grace in our past, present and future.

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Philipians 1:21

"Shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the Word of life." Philipians 2:15-16

Build yourselves up in your most holy faith...keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." Jude 20-21