

PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14**WHAT'S BEHIND AND WHAT'S AHEAD**

*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do:
Forgetting those things which are behind and
Reaching forward to those things which are ahead,
I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Today is Mother's Day. On Mother's Day one can look through the window of time both backwards and forwards. You can look back at what mother has done for you, and has been for you, in the past; and you can look forward at how you will honor mother in the future. Similarly, next weekend are the Graduation Days here in Lemmon and in Hettinger. Big days! Graduation is a look backward and a look forward, a look through the doorway going out and in. Graduation is the door out of high school, out of "basic training," out of classes for which you didn't see much value at the time, and the ones you did. You're done! At the same time Graduation is look forward. It is the door in—the door into the future of evermore adult life, whether working day by day to earn daily bread, making decisions on your own (don't ignore the good input from Dad and Mom); or—holding off on the workworld—entering the door of further schooling of your choice.

Paul, in our text, also talks about looking back and looking ahead. He is writing to the congregation which the Lord led him to start in Philippi of Macedonia. In a dream the Lord had specifically called him—sent him—to preach Christ in this Roman colony-city, the chief city of eastern Macedonia. There, Paul and Silas were unjustly flogged and imprisoned, but God sent an earthquake that night to open the doors of the prison and loosen the chains of the prisoners. The distressed jailer and all his family listened to Paul's message and came to faith in Christ that night; the jailer and his family were baptized. After Philippi, Paul continued with missionary travels proclaiming salvation in Christ. There were hardships and joys. At this writing, Paul was again confined in chains and under guard, in Rome—not in a dungeon, but in his own rented house—proclaiming Christ, unhindered, to many who came to see him (Acts 28:30-31) and to the Roman guards, even to the whole palace guard (Philippians 1:13). He sent this letter or "epistle" to the Philippians for the expressed purpose of telling them not to sorrow for him. These sufferings were part of his marvelous joy in preaching the Good News of salvation in the crucified and risen Jesus.

He rejoiced that Christ was magnified by his suffering. "For me to live is Christ; to die is gain!" (1:19-21). He also explained how Jesus had taken the lowest humiliation—death on the cross—only to be exalted in the future by every tongue and knee on the last day (2:5-11). Paul warned these believers to beware of those who twisted the Gospel of Christ so that Christians would put their confidence in their own deeds of the flesh. Paul himself, having been converted to Christ, had given up all confidence in himself and his flesh to attain righteousness before God and to attain the resurrection at the last day.

He says, *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended.* In other words, "I [even I, Paul] do not claim that I have already attained the ultimate stage of the righteous resurrection from the dead—that is, heaven. I'm not there yet." *But one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!* He says, "We must forge ahead in Christ every day." Each day is like a window or door into time. It does no good to live in the past. You cannot live as if your "kids" are all still home and under your supervision, as if your health is what it used to be, as if "the times" are still as uncorrupted as they seemed to be sixty years ago, as if the old ways are still the way things are. It is like running a race, actually an obstacle-course-race. To reach the goal through faith in Christ your Savior is the point. Like such a runner in such a race, you cannot reach the goal by looking backward, taking pride in what you have already done. Looking backward, unaware of what's coming, the runner will "crash and burn." The same for you. Do not dwell on past life. You must look ahead to the hills, ditches, fences, and tunnels. Through forgiveness in Jesus and through faith in Jesus, you will overcome.

Forget those things which are behind. Do you look back? Is it the sin in which you have been, and are, caught? “Well, I got myself drunk, I might as well get good and drunk now. I upset my wife or husband, so I might as well get them good and angry now. I have been stealing, lying, breaking laws, committing adultery—so I may as well wallow in them now.” Repent of your sins, and look ahead to your Savior for forgiveness and for the will to stop. Do not despise Him. Or is your looking back a looking back because of guilt? You have seen your sin, admitted it, and switched your course, but you can’t shake the guilt, because someone got hurt? “I can’t forgive myself,” you say. God forgives in Christ. Are you bigger than God. Satan will keep bringing guilt from the past to mind, but fix your eyes and thoughts on Jesus. “If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, Who knoweth all things” (I John 3:20). God is bigger than you are. Or is your looking back a looking back of pride and self-satisfaction—like Paul the Pharisee before he was converted? “Look at what I’ve done, how great I’ve been, how over-and-above I have achieved, God will take me—I’m safe—just look back at my record.” Don’t go there! It’s a sure path to damnation. “Pride goeth before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Humble yourself. Or is your looking back a looking back of “regrets”—I don’t mean regrets over sin; we have already covered that—I mean, regret over decisions that seem to turn out badly. “Look what I gave up to marry Jake or Lysie. Look what I gave up to stay at home instead of going to college. Look what I gave up to have these children.” Regrets for sin is one thing (and they are forgiven in Jesus), but regret over decisions made in good faith under circumstances pulling you one direction vs. another are decisions that have not happened outside of God’s view and supervision. God bends even sinful decisions and actions to serve His will in Jesus and draw you and others closer to the Savior who gave up His last breath for you. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28). You are a dearly loved and forgiven child of God in Jesus. Do not look back.

Paul says, *Reach forward to those things which are ahead.* What are runners taught to do at the finish line? To lean into the tape! In your race of life forget about what’s behind, and stretch yourself out, reach forward in Jesus, to the things that are ahead. Don’t you plan ahead for a trip or a vacation, to make it more than a come-what-may drive or walk? Yes! In your Christian life plan to honor and show love to Mother. Do not just relegate her to household servant. If “reaching forward” to mother means setting actual dates and times, so be it; or establishing a routine, so be it. Life does not revolve around you. And mothers, plan to train your children for life in the Lord—top priority! They are not just something you have to put up with for eighteen years. They are gifts from God. All of you, look ahead! Plan to grow in the Lord. Plan to read from God’s Word at home, plan to go to worship on Sunday, plan to participate in the labors of God’s Kingdom. To leave it to “Well we’ll see what comes up” will not lead to the Lord. The devil will bring something else that seems more important. Reach forward to grow in Christ. Make it the top priority.

Paul says, *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* Press on toward the goal. Pursue the goal. This “goal” back then was a “visible” goal. Keep your eyes on it, or your “mental eye” on it. Press on. If time is running out in a basketball game or football game, the intensity level rises. Now is the time to act, to follow the plan, to play smart, to play hard, to play together. That is also how to “press on” in life. Not dallying. You don’t know when your time of life will expire. Death comes unexpectedly—for youths, or parents, or grandparents. Who wouldn’t say, “I thought I had several more years, one more week, another couple minutes”? When driving a race-car race, you better be ready to press on the gas. “Press on” in your life in Jesus your Savior.

Reaching the goal means receiving *the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* In the “games” back then or now, the prize was/is just some earthly garland or trophy, which can be lost, stolen, or destroyed. The prize given in the Christian race of life is never a reward for merit, but a treasured gift which one does not want to lose. It is *the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* Can you imagine being at an awards banquet, and unexpectedly being called up on the stage for a very honorable award? What a privilege! Consider the privilege of receiving the upward call of God in Christ Jesus! It is given as a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. Cling to Jesus! God calling out, “_____ (your name), please step up here! In My Son, you win!” Who would want to miss out on that? It’s God calling you up to heaven—by your first name—a joy not to be taken away!

Whether it’s Mother’s Day, or Graduation, or any day, remember:

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