

# Joyful Hope

Philippians 3:12-21

Please keep your Bibles open, or open the YouVersion Bible App and find our Event to follow along.

In Philippians 3:1 Paul said, ***“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.”*** He returns to this command and states it twice in 4:4 ***“Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS; again I will say, rejoice.”*** This means that rejoicing in the Lord is an act of the will not an emotion. Paul is not saying, “Work up a state of feeling,” but rather is exhorting the believers to decisively **fix their joy in Jesus, not in other things** as a proactive and ongoing choice.

Rejoice in the Lord is our theme for this fall – making Jesus the North Star in our hearts and in our church. Just like the Wise Men who sought the newborn King in Bethlehem, so we seek the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and rejoice to know Him, to trust Him, to love Him and to follow Him. He is our joy. He is our comfort. He is our peace and security. And as we’ll see again today – **Jesus is our HOPE.**

In the first half of Philippians 3 Paul **looks back on his past** and says that his best qualities as a Jew and his best achievements as a Pharisee were garbage when compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord. Now **Paul looks to the future**, intentionally forgetting what is behind and ***“straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”***

The image Paul uses here is of an athletic competition like ***a marathon***. I have never run a marathon but I have friends who have run them - and been in pain for weeks afterwards, which, when added to my innate dislike of running has prevented me from the marathon madness that mysteriously takes hold of people. But I have run in a couple of 5Ks, which is plenty of distance and challenge for me when it comes to running.

The point is: if you are **training for a race** or competing in a sport, you don’t go halfway – you ***give it everything you’ve got***. You discipline yourself; you push yourself; you press on toward the goal. Even when you are in pain part way through – you know, that third kilometer is a doozy – you strain forward to what lies ahead. And always in your mind ***you can see the finish line***. You visualize the goal. You do not waver from the racecourse; you follow the markers diligently. You follow leaders who are in the official race and don’t let yourself get sidetracked by those who are not in the race or by vendors along the raceway selling hot dogs or ice cream.

You ***RUN THE RACE TO WIN THE PRIZE***. For some of us the prize IS the hot dog stand or the ice cream truck. Whatever works for you to get the analogy. Run the race to win the prize. Forget what’s behind you, ignore all distractions and run. Focus on the end goal and go after it. And as you hear the crowd cheering you on in the home stretch, don’t let up and coast to the finish, lean forward and sprint across the finish line!

Two parts to the message today. First we will consider **what it means to run the race**, avoiding four pitfalls and following the path marked out for us. Then we will **consider the prize**, looking

ahead to our eternal home and the glory of being finally HOME with the LORD and fully PERFECTED in Christ! Run the race – to win the prize.

When Paul talks about **running the race** and winning the prize it is clear he is talking about **salvation**. Eternity is at stake. There is the hope of heaven but there is also the fear of being disqualified, of failing to endure to the end – of going off course and missing out on the prize.

This is what Paul is getting at in v. 11 “becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” He is not saying that his efforts and endurance are the BASIS for his salvation but that **his efforts and endurance are the PROOF of his salvation**, as they are for every true believer.

Verse 9 was explicit about this: believers are not trying to earn their own righteousness by keeping the Law of God, rather we have received the FREE, underserved GIFT of the righteousness of Christ which comes through faith alone in Christ alone. So here is the path marked out for us – here is **the way of salvation** along which we must run: **salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone**. This is the path of joy and the only way to eternal life – but we must RUN along this path and we must endure to the end to be saved. As Gandalf the Gray told Bilbo Baggins and the company of dwarves entering Mirkwood: **“Stay on the path.”**

Everyone who is new to Oakwood receives a gift bag with information about the church. In that gift bag is a little book called **How Good is Good Enough**. Andy Stanley, a pastor in Atlanta, wrote this book to help people understand what it takes to get to heaven and he addresses the ASSUMPTION that **good people go to heaven**. He says that if it’s true that GOOD PEOPLE do go to heaven, that is a surprising new idea because no holy book from any religion has ever taught that. Every religion requires much more than basic morally good behavior to reach heaven or paradise or enlightenment. Every religion also requires specific and usually rigorous religious beliefs and duties.

Of course, Christianity is different because unlike other religions that are about what you DO to earn salvation, **Christianity is about what God has DONE** to offer salvation as a free gift. But like the other holy books, the Bible does not teach that good people go to heaven. In fact, the Bible very clearly teaches that **there are not any good people**. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All of us. No exceptions. No good people.

Andy uses the analogy of **a running race**, saying that if the basis for going to heaven is BEING GOOD, then it’s like God put us all in a race, lined us up at the starting line and fired a gun to say “GO!” But there are **no signs marking the way**, there is no map to guide us, there are no mile markers or indications that we are approaching our destination. Because if good people do go to heaven **we have no way of knowing HOW GOOD you have to be...** how far do we have to run? How fast? What is our goal? What is our destination?

The central message of the book (I don’t mind giving it away) is the message of the gospel. **“It isn’t good people who go to heaven; forgiven people do.”** Andy Stanley, *How Good is Good Enough?*

That is why we give that book to all of our guests – we want everyone who comes to Oakwood to hear the Gospel and experience that life-changing good news. “It isn’t good people who go to

heaven; forgiven people do.” Isn’t it good news that your salvation doesn’t depend on your efforts at being good but on Jesus Christ – the only One who ever lived a truly Good Enough life?

And isn’t it a huge blessing that God HAS marked out the path for us AND He has given us leaders to follow in this race and brothers and sisters to run alongside?

So let’s run the race marked out for us. Let’s run with perseverance. ***Let’s run with all that we’ve got!*** A friend recently shared a quote from Beth Moore that expresses this nicely:

*“Life shouldn’t be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly shouting, ‘Wow! What a ride! Thank You Lord!’”* Beth Moore

So as we run the race, along the path of salvation in Christ, here are **four pitfalls to avoid** and four corresponding signposts to follow.

The first pitfall to avoid is **the deception of PERFORMANCE**. We are not running to earn a place in heaven but we are running because Jesus has earned us a place in heaven. We’ve already seen that this was the clear teaching of v. 9 and the consistent message of the gospel. We work to make progress toward maturity in Christ not in order to be saved but because we ARE saved. ***We are not working to earn the love of Christ but because we HAVE the love of Christ.***

Look at v. 12 ***“I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”*** If we were saved by our works – making ourselves good enough to go to heaven – this verse would say, “I press on to make it my own SO THAT Christ Jesus WILL make me his own.” But hear the gospel in this phrase, “Christ Jesus **HAS** made me his own.” Finished. Done. Past tense. Completed. Not because of anything in my performance but based entirely on His performance. Not because of what I do but because of what Jesus has done.

Avoid the pitfall of performance and **entrust yourself completely to Jesus Christ**. Don’t put even an ounce of confidence in your flesh. Lean fully on Jesus because He is the Almighty, All-gracious Savior. Don’t lean on your own weak, flimsy, inconsistent efforts that all amount to a pile of trash in the end anyway.

Watch out for the pitfall of Performance, but also avoid the opposite **danger of Presumption**. Salvation as a free gift of God’s grace received by faith alone does not give us permission to live however we want much less to indulge our sinful desires. That is a deadly form of presumption and a dangerous lack of reverence for God. Remember the warning and exhortation of chapter 2:12 – “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

The churches Paul had planted in ***Galatia*** fell into the pitfall of performance, adding the Jewish law to the list of what it takes to be saved. But the church Paul had planted in ***Corinth*** fell into the opposite error, presumptuously ***justifying all kinds of self-indulgent & sinful behaviors in the name of Christian freedom*** – even flagrant sexual sin – arguing that their souls were saved so they could do whatever they wanted with their bodies.

Paul confronted that presumption directly in his letters to Corinth, but he also addresses it here with this language about strenuous effort. ***“I press on... straining forward... I press on toward***

***the goal.***” This is not the language of passivity or self-indulgence. It is the language of discipline, hard work, training, sacrifice and strenuous ongoing EFFORT.

So avoid the pitfall of presumption – dishonoring God’s grace by indulging in sin or passively ignoring the many commands in Scripture to “live a life worthy of the gospel.” Instead, **work to make progress toward maturity in Christ**; and work HARD at it. Devote yourself to growth in holiness, fueled not by duty or obligation but fueled by joy in Christ and gratitude for all He has done for you.

Third, avoid **the pitfall of PERFECTION**. Some preachers in the past have taught a doctrine of a second work of grace. Some time after your initial salvation – these teachers said – a believer could have a second experience of God’s grace, surrendering himself completely to God’s will and reaching a new spiritual level. This teaching divides the church into super Christians and normal Christians or into Spiritual believers and Carnal believers.

Paul anticipates this kind of thinking and gets ahead of it. One might conclude from his earlier line of argument about giving up everything in his past – even his very identity – for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and having a fellowship with Jesus sealed by persecution and suffering – that Paul had reached a level of maturity in Christ that was perfectly holy.

But he clearly writes in v. 12 ***“NOT THAT I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own.”*** Again in v. 13 ***“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own but... I press on toward the goal.”*** So Paul was very clear that he had not reached a higher spiritual plane. In fact, he would later go on to say that he was the foremost of all sinners – not because he was a worse sinner than anyone else but because he had become that much more sensitive to the turnings of his heart to sin, selfishness, pride and idolatry.

Then Paul has this funny remark in v. 15 ***“Let those of us who are mature think this way.”*** The word there for mature is the same as in v. 12 for “perfect.” Paul had a little bit of the gift of sarcasm. “Not that ***I*** am already perfect, but the PERFECT will agree with me that there aren’t any perfect Christians.” The mature believer knows how imperfect he or she is. In fact, this is the test of maturity in Christ – that ***you have an increasing awareness of your sin.***

The closer you get to the light of God’s holiness the more you can see into the dark spots in your own heart and life. Avoid the delusion of perfectionism and **embrace the virtue of humility**, remembering that we all struggle with sin and we will until we die or Jesus comes back. And a growing awareness of our sin, feeding a greater humility and dependence on the Lord, should also make us increasingly gracious and forgiving to our fellow sinners.

The fourth pitfall is the **Distractions of the Past**. Paul writes in v. 13 ***“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”***

Any athlete knows that it doesn’t help to dwell on the previous play. The quarterback gets sacked for a big loss but he can’t let fear control him and has to follow the design of the next play. Similarly, just because a receiver makes a spectacular catch doesn’t mean he can take it easy on the next route or skip his blocking assignment. Just because a runner won his last race doesn’t

mean he can slack off in his training or let up in his pace for the next race. You have to forget whatever is in the past and press on toward the goal that is right in front of you.

Paul could have been tripped up by looking back *either on his failures* (since he killed and imprisoned Christians before he became one) *or on his successes* (since he had achieved the highest status and the greatest success possible in his day). But he cast all of that aside, refusing to let it distract him or discourage him and fixed his eyes on the future goal. He avoided the pitfall of distraction and **focused his entire life on the final goal** – the finish line.

It's like Paul anticipated the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and taught the Philippians how to ***begin with the end in mind*** and then ***put first things first***. He said, "ONE THING I do..." One thing. He cast aside every hindrance, he rejected everything of secondary importance and he focused his thoughts, his time, his efforts and energies on running the race marked out for him.

**Are you running the race?** Are you committed to your spiritual training? Are you going after Jesus as your ONE THING YOU DO? Or have you fallen into one of these traps?

- Does your independent spirit lead you to rely on your own performance? ***Reject self-reliant religion and entrust yourself completely to Jesus!***
- Does your self-indulgence make you presume on the grace of God and fall regularly into sin rather than letting your joy in Christ move you to become more like Him? ***Repent of your presumption and commit today to making progress toward maturity in Christ!***
- Does your pride make you feel you have reached perfection and that others should really pick up the pace to keep up with you? (That thought alone should be enough to convince you that you struggle with the sin of pride...) ***Confess your pride as sin and embrace the virtue of humility*** – rejoicing that Jesus came to save sinners, of whom you are the worst, just as I am the worst, just as Paul was the worst.
- Does your past hold you back either from desires to relive old victories or to escape the guilt of past failures? ***Forget everything that lies behind you and focus your entire life on the final goal – the finish line – the ultimate prize!***

### **Run the race to win the prize.**

Ok, so ***what is the prize?*** What is the goal? What is the finish line?

We see three glorious crowns, three incredible rewards for the one who belongs to Jesus. If you have given yourself to Jesus in faith then these three crowns await you at the moment you die or when Christ returns for us. We will be finally home, perfectly holy and completely whole.

The first prize when we cross the finish line is **coming home**. Paul again warns the Philippians about false teachers in v. 18 – ***"Many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."***

Here are false preachers who are not promoting the glories of Christ but are pursuing their own pleasures. They are using a version of the gospel message to manipulate people. Paul promises that their final outcome will be destruction, to their everlasting shame. In the end, since they are

focusing their hearts and lives on earthly things they will miss out on heaven; they will be disqualified for the prize.

So Paul contrasts the true believers with these false teachers: ***“But our citizenship is in heaven.”*** This world is not our home. For those who don’t know Jesus they have nothing else but to say, “Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” But this world is not our home – this is not where we belong, this is not what we were made for. We were created in the image of God as relational beings to dwell directly in the holy and glorious presence of God.

- Now we see through a glass darkly, then we will see face to face.
- Now we know God partially, then we will know Him fully, even as we are fully known.
- Now we fellowship with Christ in His sufferings, then we will fellowship with Him in the fullness of His joy.
- Now we await our bridegroom’s arrival, then we will celebrate at the great wedding feast of the Messiah.
- Now we fast and suffer and sacrifice and serve, then we will feast and rest and – amazingly – Jesus Himself will serve us and say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servants, come and join your Master’s happiness!”
- Now we are at home in the body and away from the Lord, when we die we will be away from the body and at HOME with the Lord.
- Now we groan to express our feelings and desires to the Lord and need the Holy Spirit to translate those prayers – then we will run freely to the Father’s throne!
- Now we live in a world that is groaning, that is broken, that is twisted and defiled, that is filled with devils and utterly corrupted by sin – THEN – oh brothers and sisters – then all sin and sadness, all evil and wickedness, all illness and pain – and death itself – all that is broken and bad in this world will be undone – burned up. And from the ashes of that final unmaking, God will remake the world – every last atom – restoring the sinless balance, beauty and shalom of His original creation He pronounced “very good.”

***THAT is when we will finally be home.*** That is when we will enter our Sabbath rest. That is the finish line; that is the prize; that is the crown for which we are running. So RUN. Forget what is behind you and run. Breathe through the pain and the cramps and run. Keep on running. Look up to the prize of the upward call of God – He is calling you – He is cheering for you – He has given you the Holy Spirit like a literal wind at your back. RUN. Press on. We will all be home soon.

Won’t that be fun in eternity to share stories about our races? To look back – like at the Cubs World Series run last year – and celebrate the amazing moments – like Zobrist’s RBI single? There will be a time to sit back and swap stories – but NOW is the time to RUN the race marked out for us.

We run the race to win the prize – of being **finally HOME**; secondly of being **perfectly HOLY**. Paul writes in v. 12 ***“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect.”*** This verse implies that the day will come when we WILL BE made perfect. Paul writes this in Romans 8 – ***“Those he predestined he also called, and those he called he also justified, and those he justified he also glorified.”*** Romans 8:29

John writes this in 1 John 3 – ***“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”*** 1 John 3:2

None of us could see God right now and live because the remnants of sin are still in us. We do not belong to sin anymore, we are not slaves to it, for we are free in Christ. **Sin does not REIGN over us, but it does still REMAIN in us.** “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). But when we die or when Jesus comes back there will be a final purification, like going through a flaming ***furnace to purge away*** the last of the impurities. This is the judgment of the believer, before the Bema Seat of Jesus and it will be very different from the judgment of non-believers before the Great White Throne of God.

The way I picture it is that Jesus will call us forward one by one to stand before him. In a moment everything you have done, thought or said will flash in front of you and Jesus will sandblast your soul with fire – not the fire of condemnation but the fire of GLORIFICATION, of purging away every last sin, pronouncing it all forgiven and introducing you to the Father perfectly holy. And then – listen to 1 Corinthians 4:4-5

***“It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.”*** 1 Corinthians 4:4-5

At that time – when you stand before Jesus – if you believe in Him and therefore belong to Him by faith then in that moment when your remaining sin is finally and completely purged away from you, you will receive your COMMENDATION from God. Not condemnation but COMMENDATION. “Each one will receive their PRAISE from God” is the NIV translation.

I believe each of our lives will boil down to ***a handful of precious gems in the hands of Jesus.*** Once he has burned away all of the selfish motives and pride – all the wood, hay and straw with which we mostly build our lives - there will be a few shining jewels left and Jesus will hold them up to the light, and project them out for all of the saints to join in praising God for things right now hidden in darkness; the things no one else has ever seen or known about.

At that moment we will be perfectly HOLY – all sin removed and the righteousness of Christ perfected in us – our sanctification will be complete and we will be GLORIFIED. The third prize we run for is that moment when we will be **completely WHOLE**, fully restored, unified and at peace.

This is so hard to imagine because everything in this life is conflict, tension and compromise. But listen again to the closing verses of Philippians 3: ***“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”***

We will be transformed. Remade. Upgraded. Darin Anderson 1 Zillion point 0. “He will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” In the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet sounds the return of Christ, the dead will be raised – the spirits of believers in heaven will be

reunited with their now glorified bodies, believers still on earth will be transformed where we stand.

***“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”*** 1 Corinthians 15:52-53

***“What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”*** 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Fully and finally free from sin. No more temptation or tension. No more internal conflict. We will be whole. Our hearts, minds, bodies and souls will be in one accord – at peace. There will be no more weakness, sadness, illness, tension or fear. Instead we will be filled to overflowing with the joy, peace, life and GLORY of God Himself. That’s why it’s called GLORIFICATION.

What the devil promised Adam and Eve in his world-crushing lie – that they would be like God – will be fulfilled for us in eternity through God’s world-building power. ***We will be like God.*** We will see Him face to face. We will be with Him – forever Home with our Father. We will be holy – perfectly reflecting the righteousness of Christ and joyfully celebrating our eternal union with Him. We will be whole – eternally complete, sound and at peace.

***Let’s run the race to win the prize*** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Run. With all you’ve got, run. Forgetting the past and casting aside every hindrance, run the race marked out for us. The finish line is just over the next hill, just around the next bend. Don’t let up in your pace – push yourself so we can push each other. The prize is worth it. Let’s run.

**PRAY**

**COMMUNION**

Luke 22 records the night Jesus instituted the meal we call communion or the Lord’s Supper.

***“And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, ‘Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”*** Luke 22:14-18

As soon as Jesus started his public ministry he went around preaching, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” When pressed on WHEN the kingdom would come, Jesus said, ***“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”*** Luke 17:20-21

So Jesus could say that the Kingdom of God had already arrived and was in their midst – and it was because the King of that Kingdom was standing right there and to the extent that the people would let Jesus rule in their hearts, the Kingdom of God was literally right in their midst. But Jesus could also look to the future fullness of the kingdom and say THAT is when he would eat and drink and celebrate Passover again with his followers.



The kingdom of God is right now in our hearts as we trust in Jesus and follow Him as our Lord. But the Kingdom of God is still to come when Jesus returns and will reign forever and ever. And so as we eat the bread and drink the cup we proclaim the Lord's death – His victory over sin and death – UNTIL HE COMES, looking ahead with joyful anticipation and persevering faith to that day when we will finally be home, when we will be perfectly holy and completely whole.