

Sermon Text: Philippians 3:12-16

" Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

Fellow Christians,

On your mark,... get ready... get set... GO!!!.....

Remember when you were a child, and you were challenged to a race?

Most of you can probably recall the way the blood seemed to surge just a little faster through your veins as you took your mark and the way you maybe bit your lower lip just a little as you got ready to run.

You can remember the anticipation and fierce determination you felt.

You looked forward toward the finish line, the goal,... and the over-whelming desire to cross the finish line swelled inside you.

It didn't matter if you were running against someone who beat you in a race before this one, ...that was in the past,and you weren't going to let that bother you or stop you from crossing the finish line!

This time you were going to make it! You were going to give it all you had. You were going to do your best to win! You felt the thrill of the race even before the race was even started.

Then, as the race began, you took off running. With the wind in your face, and every fiber of your body straining for the finish line, you JUST HAD to cross that finish line, you WANTED to cross that finish line more than anything!

It was as though nothing else mattered more than finishing the race and achieving the goal, NOTHING!

Well, today we want to focus our attention on another race,... a very unique race.

The reason this race is so unique and so very different from any other race we've ever run before, is that while we are yet in the process of running this race, we are already assured of possessing the grand prize at its finish-line!

Yes! The victory is already ours! All of us are winners of this race.

Would you like to know more about this race?

As with all things in the life of a Christian, let us see and take to heart what God's Holy Word has to say about:

Firstly: Why we running this race,

Secondly: What glorious prize awaits us at the finish line, and

Thirdly: How we are to run this race

(Prayer)

Holy Spirit, we pray that you open our hearts to hear, and grasp firmly, in faith, the Truth of your Word, that we, your servants, may be strengthened to run the race and reach the goal set before us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, Amen.

How many of you would like to receive the most precious, most valuable prize ever

I'm talking about a prize that far out-values all the gold, silver, diamonds and other precious gems this earth can produce.

Knowing its true worth, it is valued by those who possess it more than all the gold, silver, or bronze metals given to winners of the Olympic Games.

Dear Christians, the Creator of this world, God Himself, before we were even born, designated such a magnificent prize for the winners of this race, that it compares to no other prize.

In fact, not a one of us, whether you are a man, or a woman, or a child, have ever seen, or heard about such a prize!.

And, furthermore, even if you have a degree from the most prestigious college or university in this country, or if you have only just begun kindergarten, you could never in your wildest human imagination ever truly conceive or comprehend the true glorious worth of the prize which awaits the Christian, you and me, at the end of this race!

We read in the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter 2, verse 9-10.

" But it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

So why would we want to run this race?

We can't see the prize that awaits us.... We can't touch it,... and we can't place it in a trophy case where we can admire it as something that we have accomplished.

So what is it that motivates the Christian to run such a race, especially when we know from God's Word that the race is long and fraught with much difficulties?

The answer will become quite evident to each if we will but make an honest and most serious examination of our lives.

You and I, on account of original sin, (the sinful nature and curse we all inherit because of the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden), and the many sins we have committed ourselves, have upon our heads... upon our very souls... the curse of the Law and righteous condemnation of God.

None of us; no, not a one of us, can do anything to save ourselves from the everlasting torment of hell's fires which we all deserve on account of our sin.

Our own good works could never atone for our sin. It is only through the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross that we are saved.

Salvation is a gift freely given to us by God and received by us through faith alone in the promise of God.

We read in Romans 3:19-26

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

And so the answer to the question what motivates the Christian to run this race, lies in the words of our text,

St. Paul declares that though he has not yet attained, or reached the goal,... yet he runs after the goal, the prize, because the Holy Spirit has brought him to Salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He is apprehended, or belongs to the Lord.

And this we too can, and ought to, declare with St. Paul!

For Jesus Christ, through the shedding of His precious innocent blood, has purchased and won you, me, and all believers from sin and from the power of our enemy, the Devil.

We have everlasting life through faith in Christ Jesus. The victory over sin and spiritual death, Jesus has given us already.

But what then, is the prize that St. Paul is here speaking, when he says that he has not yet attained it?

He is not here speaking of Salvation, which is his and ours already through faith, rather he is speaking of that which shall be ours in heaven; the state of perfection, complete fulfilment and enjoyment of all the blessings of the resurrection of Christ Jesus.

As with Paul, We have not yet attained the state of perfection. For though we strive to live a holy life in word and deed, we cannot here attain perfection. For while we are yet here on this earth, we still have all the weaknesses of our sinful flesh.

But when we are brought home to heaven to live with Christ, we will be given beautiful crowns of glory, and we shall have, with all believers in Christ, perfection and great joy unspeakable! For then we shall be shed of this body of death, which is our prison here on earth because of the sin that dwells within it.

This is what motivates St. Paul, and also us as well, then; to run this race, to reach the goal of heaven, the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

And so we run the race, pressing hard toward the mark, straining with every fiber of our being for the goal of heaven, for what we know awaits us through the redemption given us through Christ Jesus.

And, yes, we have had, and will continue to have, battles in this life, bearing the hatred of this world, and the constant temptations of the devil and our own flesh, but we must keep our sight on the goal.

We ought not let the things that are behind us; the afflictions we bear, nor the sins in our past, nor the concerns of this world, to dissuade us from doing the Lord's work and seeking His Kingdom first and foremost in our lives.

Did you have an abusive childhood?

FORGET IT! AND PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL OF HEAVEN!

Did you lose money in a business deal gone bad last year?

FORGET IT! AND PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL OF HEAVEN!

Were you in bad health last month?

FORGET IT! AND PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL OF HEAVEN!

Did you stumble in sin this past week?

REPENT AND FORGET IT! God no longer sees, nor remembers your sin, for you are washed CLEAN in the blood of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world!

PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL OF HEAVEN!

For as we read in Romans 8 verse 28:

" And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

And those of you who are able: Help,... Support..., Defend..., and Encourage... with the Word ... those among you who are facing the many trials and temptations of this life.

Deal with one another in love, and continue to press on toward the goal of heaven.... This is how we ought to run the race before us.

Let there not be any lack of doing good among you, but rather let your light so shine among men that they might see your good works and glorify God.

This is our reasonable service to Him who has called us, who were dead in trespasses and sin, out of darkness into the marvelous light of Salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

And now, may the Peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.