

September 13, 2009
Pentecost 15
Philippians Sermon Series

“The Heavenly Walk of Every Christian”

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. ^{4:1}Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Last Sunday afternoon my wife and I had the opportunity to go for a long walk along Pismo Beach. The tide was very low. It was early evening. A warm breeze was gently blowing from off shore. You could tell by the way people were walking that they thoroughly enjoyed the experience as much as we did. There were smiles on their faces.

Look at the smile on the face of Paul, the prisoner in Rome, as he writes to these dear people in Philippi. He calls them his joy and crown. He wants them to follow his example and live or walk the way he lived his life. Even though he was in chains there was a spring in his step, a smile on his face and song in his heart. He lived each day with the joy of knowing Jesus his Lord and Savior had risen from the dead. He knew that that all the ugly sins of his past life were forgiven because of the resurrection. He knew he would be raised to life again bodily on the last day because of Jesus' resurrection. He knew Jesus, the risen Christ, was in control of his life, because Jesus was alive. Even his chains had become an opportunity for Roman soldiers to hear about the resurrection.

This morning the Apostle Paul invites us to walk with him down the road of life with a spring in our step and smile on our face and song in our heart. We walk differently from the people of this world who have no hope in Christ and his resurrection. We walk differently because we believe in a bodily resurrection that waits for us on the last day.

Shedding tears for those without hope

This resurrection on the last day is so real to us. It breaks our hearts to see people lose their hope in this resurrection and the joy it brings. Listen to Paul plead with his dear Christians in Philippi to continuing walking with him and not lose this hope in the resurrection. "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." The word for "take note" is the Greek word "skopeo" from which we get the English word "scope." This telescope I have in my hands help me see distant objects and scope them out. Scope out Paul and other Christians who can help you stay focused on Jesus and his resurrection from the dead.

Why is it so important to say focused on the resurrection? Enemies will try to pull you away from this hope. Look at the tears in Paul's eyes as he writes, "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." The natural human heart is an enemy of Christ. In Romans 8 we are told that "the mind of the flesh is hostile towards God." See the tears eyes as Paul thinks of the people who came to know that they were saved entirely by Christ and his death on the cross, but then were being led astray by enemies of the cross who said you had to add obedience to Old Testament laws to be a true believer and truly saved.

A couple of weeks ago we held up a pure bottle of water to illustrate how Jesus atoning sacrifice for our sins and his perfect life takes away all sin and provides us with the righteousness we need before God. The source of our salvation found in Jesus is pure and unpolluted. How foolish it would be to open a sealed bottle of water and pour in some dirty water. The enemies of the cross of Christ were suggesting that believers had to add works, works that were impure and sinful, to what Christ has done. Paul says that their end will be destruction because they will have added something impure to what Christ has done. There is no way anything marred with sin could save them on the day of judgment.

"Their god is their stomach." Ingrained in every human heart is a deep hunger and yearning in the stomach, a gut feeling if you will, to want God on our terms instead of his plan to save us. "Follow your heart!" "Follow your feelings!" These are the mantras of this world. "Their glory is their shame." It makes us cry to see how people can turn away from the hope they have in Jesus to shameful acts of sin that they justify in their lives. They keep making shameful excuses for themselves as Judas once did with Jesus. They make excuses until their hearts are hardened against the Lord. They are destined for destruction because they have given up this sure hope.

Paul was filled with joy as he writes this letter. He is also filled with tears as he thinks of people giving up what they have in Jesus for what this life offers them without Christ. He pleads with these dear Christians who were his joy and his crown to stand firm in Christ and his resurrection.

Rejoicing with those who share our hope

What a glorious hope we share with people who believe in Jesus' resurrection and with those who look forward to their own resurrection on the last day. Paul writes with great joy: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

The Christians living in Philippi were part of a Roman colony. They lived permanently in Philippi and yet they were citizens of Rome. I am holding in my hand a passport with my name in it. This allows me to travel to foreign countries, and it shows that I am a citizen of this country, the United States of America. My real, lasting citizenship is not in this country, but the place that Jesus has prepared for us, our eternal home of glory, that is already ours through Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul compares our lives on this earth to

living in a tent. "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." Jesus said, "I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." It is easy to travel light in this 21st century if you know where your real home is.

Listen to how the book of Hebrews describes the heroes of faith who looked forward to the place Jesus has for us. "And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for country of their own.... Instead they were longing for a better country- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11: 13-16).

When your eyes are fixed on the future it enables you to rise above your problems and troubles in this life. 2 Corinthians 4 tell us: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Or listen further to what Romans 8 tells us about the profound effect our future has on our every day existence: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us." And to this list we can add the words of 1 Peter 1, "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you... In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."

It is no secret that Christians have buried their dead with the hope of a bodily resurrection on the last day. Visit the Catacombs of ancient Rome where Christians were buried over the dead bodies of the heathen Romans from previous centuries. Their tombs were engraved with palm branches and religious symbols and words that spoke of a far greater victory to come in the bodily resurrection. Our text tells us, "We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies so that they might be like his glorious body." Listen to how this transformation is described in 1 Corinthians 15: "For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality."

One Christian man said, "I do not think that in the last 40 years, I have lived one conscious hour that not influenced by the thought of the Lord's return." We have what the Bible calls a "living hope." It is like a heart that beats away inside of us filling our lives with the hope of glory we have in Jesus. Do you know that your heart pumps about 8000 gallons of blood throughout your body in one day? We are even more amazed at how the Holy Spirit keeps injecting into our lives these thoughts about being raised to life again on the last day. Romans 8 says about this amazing work of the Holy Spirit, "We have the first fruits of the Spirit" and we "groan inwardly as wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Jesus will transform our lowly bodies. How lowly our bodies appear as they rot and decay or as they are reduced to ashes and dust! Everything around us says there is no way our bodies will ever come to life again. But then we look at Jesus and how he raised himself from the dead. He even appeared to his disciples with the nail marks still in his hands. It

was Jesus who said, "Because I live you shall live also." Paul reminds us that Jesus will do this by his power that "brings all things under his control." How powerful is Jesus? Listen to the words of Ephesians 1 that tell us, "And God placed all things under his feet." The loving Shepherd who carefully micromanages every facet of your life, and controls everything in our universe, will use his power to raise us up on the last day. Listen to the testimony of Joni Tada Eraeckson, a quadriplegic who has spent most of her life in a wheel chair. "I look down on my feet and know that someday they will dance." The Lord will wipe away all tears from our eyes. J. R. R. Tolkien, author of the Lord of the Rings has said he will make "everything sad come untrue." Here before us this morning is another week of life on this earth, another week to live for the glory of the Lord as we look forward to being raised to life again in the last day. This puts a spring in our step, a smile on our face, and song in our heart. Amen.