Disciples Church

Joy in Exhaustion <> Philippians 3:12-4:1

Week of July 19, 2017

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Philippians 3:12-4:1 (ESV)**

**12**Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.**13**Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **14**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **15**Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.**16**Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

**17**Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. **18**For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19**Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. **20**But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21**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.

**4 1**Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

# Introduction

My topic tonight is joy in exhaustion. The definition of exhaustion, according to a quick online search is: a state of extreme physical or mental fatigue. Tonight, we must come face to face with the reality that life in Christ and life in general is full of blood, sweat and tears.

My journey of faith has been a journey of exhaustion. You see, it’s commonly taught in some churches that once we get Jesus, we get fulfillment in all respects of our being. In a spiritual sense, it is true that we are fulfilled, but when fulfillment is meant to imply temporal ease, comfort, and prosperity, it is dangerously false.

The truth is that we are spiritually liberated, blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and free from the dominion of sin. Sin is no longer our slave master. But to assume that this means we are infinitely happy people in the here and now and that we do not struggle in our new-found salvation is a myth. It’s minimizing the word of Christ that compels us to pick up our cross and suffer like Christ suffered.

You will suffer. You will be exhausted. To be told that we are free from this is simply the effects of false prosperity theology making its way into our own theology.

This changes our narrative, does it not? We are called to come and die to ourselves. We are called to come and be tired. We are called to sweat. And, without Jesus Christ as the central figure of this reality, any rational person would look at this and scoff. To the world, it is purely irrational nonsense. But, we aren’t called to come and die without Christ. We are His and we have received what our souls have long thirsted for: relationship with God—eternal union with Jesus.

You see, Paul would have known exhaustion.

He says in 2nd Corinthians 11:25-28 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

So, the chief question in this lesson becomes, with the reality of exhaustion, what is the Christian to do? And the chief answer is this: be joyful in our Lord!

My desire for you tonight is to see that because of Jesus, because of His work on our behalf, we are thusly commanded to be joyful in the most difficult and hard times in our life. When our bodies are failing, we exult the Lord in joy! When we can no longer think like we used to due to the damaging effects of diseases that ravage our mind, we exult in the Lord. When we are spent from dealing with our children, or our careers, or sickness, or all of these things at once – we rejoice in God, because of God.

The world tells us a different story, does it not? The world avoids exhaustion at all costs and the world certainly doesn’t preach true joy in exhaustion. It is insanity to be joyful in exhaustion. But why or how is joy in exhaustion even remotely possible?

With that, I want to start by reading our passage: Philippians 3:12-21 – 4:1 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained. 17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 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. 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

The overall theme of our passage today is pressing on while being comforted in and focused on Jesus. I want us to think about that as we start to get into the details of the text. What compelled Paul to press on? What was his motivation? Furthermore, we know that Paul had undergone an extreme amount of trials and exhaustion in his life. And so, how was he able to press on in the midst of his circumstances?

I want to break my teaching into five main sections tonight:

* The first section: Verses 12-16 ***Press On***
* The second section: Verse 17 ***Imitate Me***
* The third section: Verses 18-19 ***The Penalty***
* The fourth section: Verses 20-21 ***The Goal***
* And finally, our fifth section: Chapter 4, Verse 1: ***Stand Firm***

# Press On

Philippians 3:12-16 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

***Verse 12a***

Paul starts by saying, “not that I have already obtained this.” What does the “this” in this passage refer to? For that, let’s look back to verses 10-11. Paul says in verses 10-11: that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

What Paul is speaking of is not having already obtained a perfect knowing of Christ and experience of final glorification. Now, I’m sure that sounds odd. Obviously, Paul knew Christ. Christ knew him too. Indeed, all believers know Christ. But it is an imperfect knowledge. We know in part. We do not know Christ fully. Indeed, part of our saving is the reality that we’re saved to progressive righteousness and progressive understanding. We work toward knowing Christ more fully. Have you ever asked yourself why you desire to be righteous in Christ? Surely, it’s to *know* him more. When we grow in holiness we understand more and more the depths of His riches. That is what Paul was referencing. He looked forward to the day when he would see Christ face to face. He looked forward to the day when His resurrected body would be adorned and his earthly body would be forgotten.

Theologian John Gill says of this passage: “As sure as Christ is risen, so sure shall they rise; it is the exemplar and pattern of theirs, their bodies will be raised and fashioned like to the glorious body of Christ; and this the apostle desired to know, experience, and attain unto.”

***Verse 12b***

Paul has not obtained a full knowledge of Christ. He tacks on the phrase “or am already perfect.” This is to indicate to us that perfection, in the true sense of the word, is Christlikeness. Jesus is perfect. We are being made perfect *because* we are being conformed to His image. Since this being made perfect doesn’t happen in this life, Paul is building out a theology of final glorification. We (Christ’s sheep) will be fully sanctified and perfect with him in the future after our earthly bodies die and we are finally made perfect by God.

***Verse 12c***

Now, look to the next portion in verse 12: “but I press on to make it my own.” Again, the object of the “it” in this sentence is knowing Christ more and more and experiencing the power of His resurrection as stated in verse 10 in this chapter.

This gets to the point of this section. What is the duty of the Christian in this life? Press on. Persevere. We aren’t saved to idleness. No, we are saved unto greater righteousness. This touches on the doctrine of perseverance. Those who are truly Christian, will persevere to the end and grow in the process!

***Verse 12d***

And finally, the last portion of verse 12 says, “because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” We can gain insight into the nature of salvation and its relationship to works. If you look at Paul’s reasoning, he does not work to be a slave of Christ. No. He is already a slave of Christ. His salvation was a historical event, based on grace alone, and it is that reality that compels him to then press on to know Christ fully.

We speak about this a lot here, but it really gets to the core of the gospel. Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Because we are saved by grace, we show our appreciation and love for God by pursuing righteousness.

What is our source for pressing on? Christ, not ourselves. This is crucial to understand.

***Verse 13a***

Paul outright states this in verse 13. He says, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.” You see, Paul could not take credit for anything he had done. No Christian can!

This reminds me of one of my favorite passages from Paul in 1st Corinthians 15:10b “On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

***Verse 13b***

Up to this point, Paul has been focused on stating that His work of pressing on toward knowing Christ fully and knowing the power of Christ’s resurrection in final glorification is not a finished work and is not the result of Pauls’ own will. Now, the Apostle turns a point. This is an application point for Paul. Because of the reality that Paul hasn’t attained knowing Christ in full or final glorification– he must march on.

“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,”

This is action talk. This is the sort of speech Mel Gibson gives in Braveheart—but better. This is epic stuff. Paul’s point is this: we don’t look to our present struggles or our failings of the past; rather – we work hard toward our goal, focusing forward being comforted in and looking to Jesus.

Why don’t we look to the past? What is the danger?

When we’re exhausted, we are typically in a fragile state. This could be mental exhaustion or physical exhaustion. But when we’re exhausted, we have a tendency to critique our past actions or doubt our current trajectory. We say things like, “I shouldn’t have let it get to this point” or “I should have done something different.” When this kind of thinking ends on self and not on the grace of God, it is atheistic thinking.

This sort of unbelief attacks our heart and severs our trust in a sovereign God. Sure, you may have caused your current state of exhaustion by sinful action. But, let me submit to you that all that you encounter, all that comes to pass, is at the express sovereign plan of God. Hear me, I am not telling you to sin more or to sin with reckless abandon. That is anti-biblical. Rather, I am saying that all things that come to pass in our lives are by the plan of God for the good and growth of His people.

God gives us a legal order. What is it? Do not sin—instead, be righteous. We have violated that order and thusly we stand condemned. We violate this legal order daily. And so, we see that even though God has a command on us to obey Him and His law, he also sovereignly plans for our disobedience and orders things in reality in such a way that He uses it for His glory and our ultimate good. We are not allowed to blame God for our sin. The scriptures are explicitly clear, God does not sin. He governs the universe in such a way that He does not actually sin. But when we second guess the past, we are second guessing God’s sovereignty. We should not do that.

Instead, when we are exhausted, our response should be to submit to the plan of God. We echo the Psalmist in Psalm 73:26 ​“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

We uphold Biblical and Christ-like thinking when we are exhausted. How does the gospel help us think when we are exhausted? I am not abandoned by my failures. I am not unloved by a sovereign God. My salvation is sealed in Christ. I am His. We are encouraged by our bloodied champion who died for us, not because of how awesome we are, but because of how perfect He is. That is the sort of thinking that compels us to press on. This is a stark contrast to the atheistic thinking that says, it’s all up to me and because I’ve failed, I’m doomed. The reality is this: You have failed. Believer, you weren’t able to redeem yourself. Christ did it for you!

That’s how Paul can press on in the midst of extreme exhaustion and keep going. That’s how the parents in this room can press on when they’re at their wits end with their children. That’s how we can press on when we’ve endured a grueling day of work. But see this, it’s not just endurance. It’s joyful endurance.

You see, Paul says he is, “straining forward to what lies ahead.” This obligates us to ask the question. What lies ahead? Paul answers this question for us in Verse 14. And this is the object of our joy. This answer is how we are able to work through the mental and physical exhaustion and press on with joy.

***Verse 14***

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

He presses on with joy in his heart. Why? For the prize. The prize is God in Jesus Christ. Tie this in to the object of verses 12-13 and you see that Paul is able to press on toward Christ because Paul will one day know Christ fully and have the prize. He will be with God.

This is the quintessential answer to the cosmic question that every man to ever walk this earth should be asking: Why am I here? You are here because of God, and the ideal outcome for you is to be in a reconciled relationship with God.

And yet, in our spiritually dead state, we are not in relationship with God. We are separated from God in our sinful state. In our flesh, we seek to fill the “God-sized hole” in our being with everything but God. We buy into the lies of Satan that compel us to believe that so-called autonomy is better than submitting and living within God’s care, rule and provision.

When we’re overwhelmed, meditating on the gospel truly is the best medicine. I think sometimes we’re afraid to really share the gospel with other believers in the moment of exhaustion or pain. But, it’s the truth. It’s what we need. We need to hear that Christ did everything required to redeem us. We need to hear we’re saved by grace alone. We need to hear that God has sovereignly allowed for this moment to strengthen us and refine us. We need to know that we are moving closer toward Christ in those moments. We need to know that this exhaustion will be a blink of an eye in the backdrop of eternity. And we need to know that God does not leave us to begrudgingly submit to His rule and law, but rather our submission to Christ provides the greatest joy we can ever know.

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

***Verses 15-16***

Paul continues the epic language in Verses 15-16.

Philippians 3:15-16 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

In the context of pressing on, Paul exhorts us, the church, to think this way. It is valid to desire and press on toward knowing Christ fully. That is the mark of maturity as a Christian. What I find interesting about this verse is when he says, “and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.”

Paul submits to us mature thinking prior to these verses. But, then he submits to us the opposite of mature thinking. This is the opposite of grace. This is salvation by works. He says in verse 12 that Christ has made him his own. This is truth. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then Christ has made you His sheep. If you are not, and are looking for salvation in vain religious pursuit, then you are caught in the lies of which I spoke earlier. It’s the thinking that says, “It’s all up to me. I work to make my own way, I earn my salvation, I fashion God in my own image, etc.” This is thinking that is opposed to mature thinking.

And when Paul says, “God will reveal that also to you”, he means that the person remaining opposed to God will, in the future judgment, know the folly of their error. God will reveal it to them.

Paul finishes this off by saying: 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Again, press on with what you know. You know truth, as a Christian. Do not move past the gospel. This is not the mere starting point of our faith. It is the starting, middle, and ending point of our faith. We must never move past this. We must persevere unto our prize!

But, in error, often we struggle to press on by ourselves. When we look at Genesis, we see God say something remarkable, he says (Genesis 2:18) “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” We were not created to be alone. We were created for community and companionship. Thusly, as we press on, we shouldn’t do it alone.

# Imitate Me

***Verse 17***

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

As I studied this passage, I was hit with the sheer grace that this verse communicates.

Let me focus on the negative implication of this verse first. This verse teaches us that we are inherently lacking something. Let me put it to you this way, would God need to imitate anyone? No, obviously not. Why? Because he is wholly sufficient in His own right. So, obviously, there is a confession here that we (Christians) are definitely lacking in Godly character.

So, why grace? It’s grace because God has met us with the means to address our deficiencies. He knows we are weak, so he provides mentors and disciple makers to lead us.

Let us not take it for granted that God gives us these things! We are to look to our disciple makers, pastors and elders and imitate them. They still sin, they aren’t perfected yet, so we don’t imitate their sin. Instead, we imitate their gospel motivated good works and zeal for Jesus.

Paul knows the difficulty that believers walk in. Pastor Joshua and our elders know this as well. And the biblical exhortation here is this: let us walk according to their example.

A brief word here for how discipleship relates to exhaustion. There is a special place in Christ’s church for the exhausted to be encouraged by disciple makers. One of the greatest ways to see joy in the life of a Christian is to be in the midst of extreme exhaustion and trial but simultaneously experience the leadership, love, intercessory prayer, care and kindness of those who have been entrusted to disciple others. I could go on for hours with stories, but there are truly heartwarming and amazing moments where those of us in the church have been in trial and have been lifted up and cared for by those who are caring for us. This causes in us a desire to exult in our God! Why? Because we are not insignificant, no – we are bought with a costly price and we are greatly loved.

Let us look to their example and follow in their footsteps. When you cast this off and seek what’s right in your own eyes, you reject the means God has given and commands for us. Let us seek out and follow the leadership of more mature Christians.

# The Penalty

***Verses 18-19***

So far, we’ve covered what Paul was striving for and God’s plan to equip those pressing on with the example of our leaders and disciple makers. Now, Paul turns a bit of a corner and addresses a difficult reality. A reality that many of us have experienced.

Philippians 3:18-19 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

The reasoning here is plain, I think. There were many in Paul’s day who walked as enemies of the cross of Christ. This could be the Judaizers who followed Paul and tried to turn Christianity into a works-based faith. This could be false converts who walked with him for a season and then turned away. Nevertheless, it’s those who are not believers. They are caught in bondage to sin.

Let us focus on a few things here. Two words pop off the page for me. The first is ‘often’ and the second is ‘tears’. It is a sad reality that many who claim faith prove to be enemies of the cross, as well as those who do not claim faith, openly live and say they are opposed to Christ.

This is the reality of Christianity, as Jesus himself told us:

Matthew 7:13-14 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Even though this is plainly stated in scripture, we don’t play light with this truth. No, our beloved Apostle shed numerous tears because of this reality. We are broken when we see those whom we love reject our greatest treasure. We are broken when we see those whom we love prefer their flesh and fall further to the influence of the world.

So, what does lead to destruction?

19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

Paul highlights a few categories here. Their god is their belly is a reference to our appetites. As humans, we have various types of appetites. This could be physical or sexual or something else altogether. The point being that whatever that thing is, we’ve made it a false god. Secondly, Paul qualifies the level of idolatry. This is not merely, I struggle with a sinful habit. No, this is to “glory in shame.” This would be like saying, adultery is good and I’m going to start a campaign to end the shame of adultery. Or murder. Or gluttony. Or theft. Or…fill in the blank. It shouldn’t be too hard to look to our contemporary culture and see how opposed many ‘movements’ are to the Christian worldview. Do not be fooled. Do not celebrate those who “glory in shame.”

In the end, Paul admits that these things are all rooted on the earth. He uses earth as opposed to heavenly or righteous. This is synonymous with fleshly desires, things that are not of God.

A quick note here about this group of people. We don’t know the state of a person’s heart. And so, we don’t look to those who glory in shame and just throw up our hands, as if we know God’s plan for their lives. No, we continue to patiently love them and share the truth with them, according to the ways God’s word lines out. We call them to repentance and belief.

Paul uses verses 18-19 to really paint a contrast to his next point.

# The Goal

***Verse 20***

20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

A few things to note here. This is meant to encourage us. This is the refrain of the New Testament church. Our salvation is secured. We are not forsaken. This is temporary. Persevere!

This verse brought to mind another beloved passage:

1 Peter 1:3-9 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

To those that are exhausted: God is sustaining you. He is guarding you. In this exhaustion…rejoice! Why? Because you will see Jesus soon. He will stand before you soon. Let the reality of our exhaustion allow us to fall headlong into the arms of Christ.

1 Pet 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory

There is so much goodness here, it’s hard to move on. But, we must.

***Verse 21***

21 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.

In God creating us with frail bodies, we can be reminded by his mercy. The nights when we are exhausted are the greatest times for us to seek comfort in the cross. Look at the immense power at work in this verse. Jesus, who has subjected all things to himself, by the power of God, will transform you. He will take your broken body and make it new. He will fashion a made-new body to your redeemed soul. He will remove the years of abuse that we’ve endured by living in a fallen world. He will make us shine in His radiant glory!

This is the power of God. Let this be our hope.

# Stand Firm

***Verse 4:1***

Finally, because of everything I’ve spoken of tonight: persevering through exhaustion by looking to Jesus as the prize, following our shepherds for help, rejecting false idols, and setting our eyes on the rest of what is to come.

Because of all of this, Paul says:

4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Stand firm. Do not waver. Continue. Fight on. Rejoice in the Lord.

Let’s pray.