

Essentials for Victory Philippians 3:10-21

Wednesday 3/20/19

Victorious, abundant living never happens accidentally for Christians. While it is true that God is in full, sovereign control of everything that takes place in the universe, we should never allow that reality to rob us of living with purposed intentionality. We are responsible for living lives that are situated to bring glory to Jesus Christ. As we live those kinds of lives, we discover that we also live at high levels of fulfillment and pleasure. Paul's words to the Christians at Philippi reveal to us some of the necessary mindsets and actions that all Christians must embrace in order to live in victory. From the hungers of our hearts unto our assurance about eternity, how we think and who we follow are essential elements that will help determine the level of victory we each experience as we follow Jesus.

I. The Constant Heart-Posture of the Christian (10-14)

A. Cultivating the highest hunger (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."

Every single one of us is driven by something. Whether it is success, survival, beauty, entertainment, reputation, physical health or one of the other temporary priorities of our culture, there is a driving force behind each human's life. For Christians, there is a completely different set of values which motivate us in daily living. Paul hits the high-mark when he communicates that his own life's passion was to know Jesus intimately. There was no higher hunger upon which the Apostle could lay hold. Not surprisingly, Paul mentions his hunger to know the power of Jesus' resurrection. Paul rightly believed that there is spiritual power available to all believers which transcends and eclipses the world's view of power. Paul had raised the dead, healed the sick, cast out demons and performed many other powerful signs and wonders. Yet he could not rest in what he had experienced in the past. He knew that Jesus had so much more power to offer His followers. What may surprise us is that Paul's passion to know Jesus intimately also included a desire to know what it meant to experience suffering with Jesus. Though it sounds strange to our ears today, it makes perfect spiritual sense for Paul to mention his desire to share in the sufferings of Christ. If we are sincere to know Jesus at the most intimate level, then we cannot bypass the undeniable component of His own earthly

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life that was characterized by rejection, betrayal and suffering. Ultimately, Jesus was so despised that He was crucified by those whom He came to save. Paul communicates that His desire to grow in the knowledge of Christ was so intense that He did not prize his own safety and security (much less his own comfort) more than he prized experiencing with Jesus all that He underwent in His earthly experience. Ultimately, Paul knew that his destiny would climax in resurrection, just like Jesus. Because he was certain that this eternal triumph would find him, he was willing to undergo anything, including personal suffering, that brought him closer to Jesus as he lived out his days of faith on earth.

B. Refusing to settle prematurely (12-13a) - “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...”

What motivation must have hit the Philippians as they read this part of Paul’s letter. The great Apostle humbly confesses that he had not arrived. He did not count all his Kingdom accomplishments as sufficient to retire upon. He states that he has not reached his goal of fully knowing Jesus. He could not yet say that his race was complete and that he had accomplished everything for which Christ had apprehended him. In order to ultimately fulfil Heaven’s assignment for his life, Paul knew how essential it was never to rest in things in which he had previously experienced success and victory. It is true that, if we ever come to prematurely rest on our laurels, we will immediately cut ourselves off from whatever more the Lord has for us. Paul cultivated and maintained a heart-posture that was grateful for all that God had done with his life, but he was not satisfied that he had reached a place where he could prematurely cease from **pressing in for more** of what God had for him. His next words explain how Paul was viewing the remainder of his life.

C. Always pressing in for more (13b-14) - “...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.”**

Do you hear the intensity of Paul’s words? The man who knew better than all just how complete he was in Christ and how finished the work of Jesus was on his behalf, writes that his life was characterized by **straining**,

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pressing and pursuing the prize that awaited him. This is a necessary heart-posture for all believers. Though we are never to strive to earn something from God that He has already given us in grace, we are to exert energy, intentionally discipline and aim our lives in a way that brings forth the most Kingdom fruitfulness. The Christian life is not a vacation. Scripture reveals it in terms of a war, a race, a boxing match and a wrestling contest. We are those who are to reveal the glory of Christ in our lives, and that will NEVER happen accidentally. Paul uses words that remind us that living for Jesus is not casual, and usually not easy. Our own flesh opposes the Spirit, so we make war against our flesh. The world system provokes us each and every day, seeking to detour us from Kingdom paths. When we factor in the efforts of Satan and his demons, we recognize that the only pathway to victory includes a committed heart and a focused mind as we press in to the resources available to us from God. No matter who we are, what we have accomplished in the Kingdom, how gifted we might be in the Holy Spirit, we are never to stop pressing in for more. We rest in Jesus, but we never retire on Him.

II. The Determined Mindset of the Christian (15-16)

A. Submit your mind (15a) - “Let those of us who are mature think this way...” Referring to vs. 10-14

Here, Paul moves from sharing his own testimony concerning how he approaches the life of a Jesus-follower. He now moves into calling his readers **to their own course of action**. We are wise not to miss what he says here. He gently calls all of his readers who consider themselves spiritually mature, or those who desire to become spiritually mature, to adopt Paul’s philosophy for Christian living. He literally calls us to think the same way that he has just described for his own life. Only if he was convinced that his way was the best way for all Christians could he give such strong counsel for us to emulate him. Our hearts should be motivated to begin to make any and all adjustments about how we daily live so that our lives are more in line with what Paul has just revealed. None of us would debate the quality and value of Paul’s testimony and life-path. He is inviting us to live similarly as we embrace the manner of life that Paul committed himself to live.

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B. Open your mind (15b) - “...and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.”

I love the fact that Paul ultimately redirects all of their focus back to God. Lest he appear to be a dictator who is declaring that his way is the only way, Paul allows for the possibility that God might have a different way of leading his readers in certain nuances of what Paul has written. While it is clear that Paul is not inviting them to dismiss everything he has written about the healthy heart-posture of believers, he does leave room for God to fine-tune anything he has written. As a wise Kingdom leader, he points all of us to take what he has written and pray through it in the presence of the Lord as we seek clear direction about how to apply Paul's broad strokes to our own lives. We must have open minds and submitted hearts as we each seek the leadership of Holy Spirit concerning how to live our lives for the glory of Jesus. Paul expressed a strong confidence that God will direct each of our paths down to the details when we seek Him.

C. Discipline your mind (16) - “Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

Again, as a wise leader, Paul cautions his readers not to abandon the essentials that they have previously learned as Jesus-followers. God reserves the right to constantly enhance, refine or redirect our pathways. What God will not do is to overturn the key components of the Christian faith. In our present day, it is becoming more common to hear of Christians, schools, churches and ministries who are abandoning clear teachings of Scripture. Some cite their progressive revelation on biblical matters. Some believe that historical understanding of core biblical doctrines was erroneously communicated down through the years, so they seek to change those core views in their own day. Sadly, there seems to be “an evolutionary process” that many have embraced which is moving them farther away from foundational Christian truth. Paul strongly cautions us against this danger. He tells his readers not abandon the core truths of Christianity in our pursuit of all that God has for us. We must remain people of the Word. The Word of God is the measure by which evaluate every teaching. When Scripture is clear, we must stand in non-negotiable agreement. Where Scripture allows some latitude for differing thought, we must do the same. However, when anyone begins to question or change beliefs that are based on clearly understandable truth from the Bible, that person or institution has moved

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into heresy. We are to have no fellowship with them. We are to hold true to the Word of God.

III. The Potential Leaders of the Christian (17-19)

A. Those with an authentic testimony (17) - “Brothers, **join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”**

Each of us is following someone. Paul understands that, in his absence at Philippi, other people would seek to fill the leadership vacuum. Paul urges the Christians there to follow his own example, and the example of those who share his heart-posture and mindset. He actually tells his readers to focus on leaders who have authentic testimonies. Paul assumed that the Christians to whom he was writing would already have the spiritual discernment to differentiate between true and false leaders' testimonies. He calls them to get behind those who lead like he would lead if he was still there in Philippi.

B. Those with an adverse testimony (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.”**

Paul then highlights some of the traits that mark false leaders who were infiltrating churches at that time. Before he exposes them, he notes that his heart is broken that these false leaders were coming after people whom Paul had fathered in the faith and into whom he had poured his life. Ultimately, he weeps because these wolves in sheep's clothing were **the enemies of the cross of Christ**. He was not merely defending his personal position when he exposed them, he was weeping over their souls, the harm they brought to the Gospel and the damage they did to naïve Christians who chose to follow them. Paul clearly states that these leaders would die and go to hell. There is no getting around it - Paul is saying that these false teachers are damned and, unless they would repent, their end would be everlasting **destruction**. What presently marked these false leaders was that they served “their belly” rather than Jesus Christ. This could be a

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reference to the Judaizers who sought to enforce the Jewish dietary laws upon Christians. They made an idol out of kosher foods and attached their acceptance to God upon how faithful they were to keep the dietary regulations of orthodox Judaism. Paul wrote in **1st Timothy 4:3-4** that all foods are acceptable to be eaten by Christians. There is no longer any such thing as an unclean, non-kosher food item. Legalism in Paul's day sought to enforce these kinds of rules on Christians, seeking to add something more to the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. The result in this type of legalism was that the leaders gloried in that which was actually shameful. To boast about keeping the Jewish Law was typical for these types of leaders. Paul reverses the common understanding to teach that legalism of any sort is nothing to brag about - it is actually spiritually shameful. In the end, Paul reduces all of man's efforts to work for righteousness as being "earthly things". To be a Christian is to depend upon and to respond to the grace of God. We do not strive to get something from God. If there is any striving that should characterize our lives, it is found in the energies we exert in order to bring our entire life into alignment with the person of Jesus Christ. We deny our flesh, we take up our cross and we follow Jesus in obedience. These are heavenly matters. Keeping dietary laws or any other legalistic element is not spiritual at all. Ultimately, Paul tells us all to be extremely aware of who is leading us. If a leader tries to saddle us with rules and regulations in order to prove that we are sincere Christians, Paul calls us to leave those leaders and to find new ones that lead like he himself led others.

IV. The Unfolding Glory for the Christian (20-21)

A. A present belonging (20a) - "But our citizenship is in heaven..."

The last essential for spiritual victory which Paul mentions is the need for us to stay connected to our true identity as Kingdom citizens. Our lives are to proceed from an awareness that our loyalties belong to a different realm. **We are citizens of an unseen country.** We serve a King who is presently invisible and known only by those to whom Holy Spirit reveals Him. Our priorities are heavenly, not earthly. Our appetites are lofty, not lowly. We are people of the Spirit, not prisoners to the flesh. While we have earthly citizenships that are attached to temporary nations, these cannot ultimately

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identify us. I must be more heavenly than I am American. My life must reflect the heights of heavenly citizenship. When priorities as a Christian come into conflict with the priorities of my earthly citizenship, I will need to always pledge allegiance to Heaven's King. This does not occur when I arrive in Heaven after death. This reality owns and compels me in this present life. I belong to King Jesus whose throne is at the pinnacle of the heavenly Kingdom. I am HIS citizen.

B. A promised return (20b) - "...and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ..."

And what am I primarily looking forward to as a heavenly citizen? It is the arrival of my King. The entire context of the Christian life is found in our constant awareness that Jesus Christ is coming again to this planet. To say that everything will change when this time arrives is a vast understatement. **The entire context for reality will be comprehensively overhauled when Jesus descends visibly from the sky and establishes His rule on earth.** Every eye will behold Him. Every knee will ultimately bow to Him. Every tongue will confess His Lordship. In that moment it will not matter how earthly-successful we were. Beauty and fame will be meaningless. Money will be exposed for the idol it always was for those who lived to gain more of it. When Jesus Christ returns to vindicate His name and validate His followers, the only things which will matter will be those things which were intentionally attached to His fame and glory while we were alive. Everything else will prove to be valueless when compared to the immeasurable glory of Jesus Christ the Lord. Christians who are presently where they need to be in their walks with Him will live daily with the awareness that their greatest motivation in life is to behold Him in His glory when He returns. Nothing else compares to this.

C. A perfect body (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."

Finally, the Apostle reminds his readers that there also awaits a reality that all Christians can look forward to. The power that is present in Jesus will be released upon us at some future point, and the result will be that we will instantaneously be clothed with a glorified body. Our current bodies are

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subject to many things. Time, climate, toil, gravity, injury, illness...all these things impact the bodies in which we daily live. At the end of our faith-journey, Jesus has reserved an amazing gift for each of us. **We will receive a perfectly glorified body in which we will live for all of eternity.** This body will not be subject to anything that presently degrades our current bodies. We will have body similar to that of Jesus' body after He rose from the dead. No forces of nature will rule over our bodies. Sickness will never weaken us. All aches and injuries will be forever healed. Many wonder what those bodies will look like - will they be the bodies of teenagers, young adults, prime of lifers? We do not know the details, but we do know that they will be perfect. These bodies will be inhabited by our fully perfected spirit and we will be forever free from sin, sickness, and any debilitating force that impacts our present-day bodies. This is the gift of God to each of His children. The best is yet to come.