

SERMONETTE: Delivered by Anita J Bishop-Johnson 12/31/17 Watchnight 9pm

God's Gift of Endurance: James 1:2-5 Philippians 3:1-21

In keeping with the December theme set forth by our Senior Pastor, who has preached all this month on looking at God's Gifts to us, we are closing out this evening's sermon by looking at God's Gift of Endurance.

An God's gift of Endurance is an appropriate one to look at as the year 2017 has only left but a few precious hours in it, and even as we look at the brightness of the youth of 2018 we still must pause and thank God because He has allowed us to the strength and the ability to Endure whatever 2017 brought to us in Jesus's name.

No matter what 2017 seemed to bring with it, anyone in Christ can attest to God's goodness, grace and mercy allowing us to, as Paul says "press on toward the mark of the High Calling in Christ Jesus.

It is Him that we move and have our being and we find meaning in Life.

And James tells us tonight that we "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything"

As a matter of fact if we look honestly at our lives and the blessings that God has bestowed upon us, we would find that in God, we not only survived the trials life sent our way, but we thrived... in Jesus name!

Making us not just survivors barely hanging on to existence, but thrivers moving from blessings to blessings, even when we couldn't see the way that God was making for us.

As we journey with Paul through our Philippians scripture this evening, we find that Paul has quite a bit to say to us as we thank God for what was behind and look forward in expectation, to what is ahead.

There are three things specifically that Paul says to us about moving forward in Jesus knowing that whatever comes our way God has gifted us with the ability to endure.

The first Point is : We MUST release the Past

In verse 13, he uses the phrase, "Forgetting what is behind".

Is Paul asking us to suppress troublesome and difficult memories from our past?
No, he is not.

Paul is talking about “properly stewarding” the things that have been. We have to let go of those things that would hold us back.

Many times we are tempted to wallow, linger and tarry in a moment that caused great pain, moments of great betrayal.

God says no. We must always release our past and let go of those things that would hold on to us.

How do we do that?

We have to give the hurts, the pains of the past over to God and allow Him to heal, repair and restore us.

If we don't release our past, two things will trip us up and keep us from walking into the marvelous light of promise that God has in store for us.

Two things will trip us up:

- 1) Dwelling on our past failures and
- 2) Dwelling on our past successes.

Why? Dwelling too long on past failures can trick us into thinking we are a failure.

Paul knew something about failure.

At the point where we meet him in our Phillipians letter, Paul had supervised the death of the first martyr of the church, a follower of Jesus by the name of Stephen.

Paul could have had a lot of guilt over his persecution of Christians before His conversion from Saul to Paul by Jesus on that Damascus Road.

Jesus made Paul into a new man, but even with that Paul could have wallowed in guilt over his mistakes, but rather, he said we need to release all of that past baggage to God.

Apologize to who we need to, seek God's forgiveness, and allow Him to remake and restore relationships.

Give it to God and let Him make it alright.

1 John 1:9 says “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

We need to let go of our failures and our successes to.

Why let go of successes?

Because if we concentrate too much on them we will rest on our laurels.

We will spend so much time basking in the glow of a success we run the risk of missing the next challenge that God has in store for us.

We become complacent and won't stretch ourselves to try new things and to reach new goals and heights in Jesus' name.

Paul had plenty of success to credit to his name.

Earlier in Philippians, he lists his pedigree and lineage as a learned Jewish scholar and Pharisee.

Paul tells us he was trained by the best of his day.

Yet, he said compared to knowing Jesus the Christ all his knowledge was worthless.

In Philippians he tells us

“⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them **garbage**, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹

In other words Paul was careful not to let his worldly successes go to his head.

Because he knows Jesus always has greater and greater levels for us to achieve in His name for His glory and for His kingdom.

So celebrate the past yes, as a testimony to what God can and will do. But after you've celebrated, you've got to let it go.

The 2nd Point of Paul to consider this evening is this: Reach toward you future.

Reach.

Reach is quite the action word.

It requires us to not coast through life passively waiting for things to befall us, but to actively reach into a future that we may not know what is ahead but having faith in God that He knows

Paul tells us in verse 13 & 14

¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul uses the image of a runner straining pushing themselves forward to cross the finish line.

The sprinter does not look back, but keeps his eyes ever forward on the goal knowing that there is a prize at the end of the race.

Victory is always in front and always in store, and certainly assured if they just finish the race.

Paul tells us we have to lean into the run and give it all we've got. All the while keeping our gaze on the finish and what a finish it will be my friends!

Our Goal....

Our Prize is the heavenward calling of God in Christ Jesus!

There is nothing like it on this earth.

Oh to arrive in heaven and hear the Lord say, "Well done my good and faithful servant"!!!

Romans 8:31 says "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Philippinas 1:21 Paul says "For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain".

This is not our home.

We are just ambassadors firmly planted and rooted in the God of heaven, and we have a mission here on earth to accomplish!!!

As we yield our past, run towards the bright tomorrow of 2018, we do so with our eyes fixed on Jesus and His marvelous work on the cross.

There our redemption was purchased and in putting our trust in Him our place in heaven is secured.

And finally, Paul's 3rd Point to us is this. And it is perhaps the most important point: We MUST grow closer to Jesus every day in every way.

Paul is consistent in this point in his writing to the church in Philippians.

Over and over Paul tells us his number one ambition is to know Christ.

The word "know" that Paul uses here is not mere 'head knowledge', as in one who would like to know more about the study of law or medicine or sewing, or any other learned tasks.

The word Paul uses for 'knowing' Christ is so incredibly filled with meaning.

Paul is saying as to know someone with whom you are in the closest possible relationship.

Like you would know your very best friend.

It means being in a deep relatable state with someone.

To grow closer and closer every day.

It's a knowing that is filled with joy and endless discovery and deepening love for the other person.

Paul said "I want to know him in two ways"...

In verses 10 and 11 Paul says, ¹⁰I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul says, to know Christ means to know the "power of his resurrection".

Think about the power found in mankind's greatest achievements of scientific power, hydroelectric dams like Niagara Falls, nuclear power, fission, atomic energy, the energy used for space travel, those things are power beyond what most of us can even understand on a mathematical level.

Yet as powerful as any of those are the power to come from death to life, to Resurrect as Jesus did is beyond any capability of any human being.

And in accepting Christ's atoning work on the cross, it is the power to turn Saul who was the persecutor of Christians to Paul who is one of the chief authors of our New Testament!

Paul says not only does he want to know all about Christ in the Power of His resurrection, but He loves Christ so that Paul even wants to know Christ and understand even Christ's suffering.

That's totally amazing - the depth of his desire to "know" Christ.

To have a deep intimate knowledge of His resurrection and His suffering in the cross.

It's amazing, because everyone wants to experience and know the joyous Christ of Easter Sunday morning, but very few run to the Christ in His groaning and agony on Good Friday.

But when you really really love someone, you want to know all there is.

What love is this that Paul expresses? The desire to know Christ fully, as we are fully know by Him.

In closing, Paul speaks to us in a moment when the old year is dying out and we can embrace with expectance the year that is to come.

Why?

Because the Christ who defeated death, hell, and the grave,

In Him we have the power to ENDURE.

We have to make it our daily ambition, to let go of yesterday, cling to God of eternity, knowing that our days are all in His hands.

Seek to know Him more and more each day, and in Him we endure till the end!!!

AMEN.