

Sermon: What Lies Ahead
Series: N/A
Speaker: Kevin White
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Happy New Year! It's 2023.
Didn't it seem like 2022 was only 6 months or something? It went so fast.

Today we're not in a series. It's a one-off message for the new year called, "What Lies Ahead." We'll be talking about Paul and a couple of powerful verses he wrote to the Philippian church. Earlier in his letter to the Philippians, he explains how everything that he thought was important is nothing compared to knowing Jesus. As we leave one year and enter the next, the words that Paul writes will help us to know what to focus on.

But first, we're going to talk about sports. I love sports. I love basketball, cycling, football, ultimate frisbee, and running... well I don't love running but it's still something I do.

How many people have competed for something before?

When I was younger, I used to be pretty good at track and field. I used to do the 100meter sprints as well as the 4x100 relays.

As I get older, I get slower. Still faster than you - but only if you're my age or older. But I'm a youth pastor. I'm always challenging youth.

My godson actually comes to this church and he's a bit of an athlete as well. Every year we race and every year I bet him.

But I'm getting slower and he's getting faster so I knew my time would eventually come.

In late 2021, we decided to have an official race on a track. I figured since we were going to race, I might as well get others to join in and make it like an Olympics. I even got someone to videotape it. I don't have time to show you the whole video but since the worship team got to use some video footage, I thought I might as well too.

Check out this clip from the Kevin Olympics (play from 2:05-2:52)
<https://youtu.be/KPKyFtKpBzU>

What a race!

It was a lot of fun and very humbling. It kind of reminds me of the passage we'll be talking about today. Let's turn to it so you can see why.

Philippians 3:12-14 (NLT)

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

No dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,

I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Vs. 12a - I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection...

A commentary I was studying was saying that by the time Paul wrote this letter he was a Christian for 30 years. He had done a lot in that time. A lot of good things happened. But he was quick to say that he hasn't arrived yet. Like a race, there's a finish line that he's still headed towards.

We are all at different parts of our journey with God. Some have been at it for a long time, others for a little bit and maybe some others feel like you haven't even started yet.

Whatever stage you're at, 2023 is not a year to plateau. It's not a year to feel like you've arrived. It's a year to keep on keeping on. To keep running towards the finish. Look at the second half of this verse:

Vs. 12b I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

Some beautiful imagery here. When Paul's talking about pressing on – the Greek is like a hunting term or like a racing term. He was probably thinking about the Greek games – with chariot races and foot races.

It means being in active pursuit... pursuit... see what I did there?

Paul is saying that God pursued him – caught up to him and got him. Like how Joshua caught up to me in the race. God got a hold of Paul and then Paul turned around and got a hold of God

What did that look like? How did God get a hold of Paul?
The story is recorded in Acts chapter 8-9.

In Acts 8, Paul is bullying Christians, he's hurting them, doing terrible awful mean things to them. He wanted to make sure that there were no Christians left.

He's running. But he's running away from God. In the book, "Gift of Being Yourself" Author David G. Benner talks about how Paul (formerly Saul) was consumed by personal ambition. But then on the road to Damascus to hurt more Christians, Jesus got a hold of him. He changed him. And then Paul started holding on to Jesus – his passion was directed from himself to Jesus. Instead of being driven by hatred, he's now driven by love. The same passion has a hold of him – possesses him, but now the focus is different. He's the same, but he's changed.

What a miracle!

I just went to a wedding of a former youth – from way back at the church where I was first pastoring.

I got to make a speech at his wedding. I roasted him a bit. I talked about how when he walked into the church, he was hungry for God – which was amazing. He was also a trouble maker. He did some damage to cloth chairs and the vending machine because he was bored. He ran to my house in the winter in his socks because he got in a fight with his parents and was so upset. He was always a really passionate guy.

After graduating from high school we lost touch for a few years and then caught up much later. I was so excited to hear how his life was going. God got a hold of him. And then he was holding on to God. He was taking his faith very seriously, had a bunch of mentors and his faith was at another level. He was pursuing the God who pursued him. So much so that he asked me to be the Bible boy at his wedding. He wanted me to be his sponsor and walk his Bible down the aisle.

His passion directed him to Jesus. Jesus got a hold of him and changed him. He's the same. But he's different.

What a miracle!

I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

Paul doesn't say exactly what that perfection is but we know it's not that he's going to arrive at perfection in this life. Otherwise that would mean that you could work your way to God. It's not that at all. In fact the verses before this are saying the opposite. It's more that perfection seems to be complete knowledge of Jesus – so it's something that we move towards but the finish line is when Christ returns.

Vs 13b. I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead...

You wanna talk about the past? Paul had a past. From being the person who hated Christians the most to the person who wrote like a third of the New Testament.

He went from a person who tried to take the lives of Jesus followers to one who gave his life for Jesus.

But to him, that's not the focus. And as we look at what lies ahead, the past shouldn't be our focus either.

One of the Bibles I was reading said **we break the power of the past by living for the future.** We can't change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past. We have to set the past to the side and put what lies ahead in its place.

We break the power of the past by living for the future. That's our main point for today.

For those of you kids who are using the sermon note hand out this is your chance to fill it in.

On yours it says - Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...

What's one good thing about 2022? Write it down, adults, think about it, thank God for it.

What's one thing you want to leave behind? Write it down, think about it and ask God to help you leave it behind.

What's one thing you're looking forward to in 2023? Write it down and look forward to what lies ahead.

What's one thing you're unsure about? Give it to Jesus.

Whatever your past victories or failures – in 2022 or before that – Jesus is calling you to forget about it and move on. To move forward to what lies ahead.

In his book *Crash the Chatterbox*, Pastor Stephen Furtik reminds us that the world says, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. But the gospel says, “those who do not forget their past are condemned to repeat it.”

You see the tension there?

So how do we forget our past?

I read that it's not losing our memory but leaving it behind as done with and settled. If we believe Jesus died for our sins and conquered them. Then we can confess them and leave them with Jesus.

We look to Jesus. As the book of Hebrews says, “we fix our eyes on Jesus.” We remember him and his benefits and mercies and we forget the shame and sin.

It's not that you're no longer conscious of it. It's that you're not controlled by it (paraphrased from Stephen Furtik)

The Greek word is like a continuous forgetting – it's the opposite of remembering – don't let your past have any bearing or influence on your present spiritual outlook or how you act.

How many people out there need to hear that?

What's the thing that you need to let go of?

It's a curious tension.

We break the power of the past by living for the future.

Like an athlete in a race – that's a metaphor kids – fill that in on your sheet. Paul challenges us to press on.

The Life with God Bible talked about the fact that we're not couch potato Christians. Jesus takes hold of us, and then we take hold of Jesus. We pursue him.

As I was preparing and praying for this message, I got the image of a relay race.

God started off with the baton, then he handed it off to Jesus. Next Jesus handed it off to the Holy Spirit. And for the final leg, the Holy Spirit hands it off to – you. To me. To the church.

We take hold of the baton – that baton is hope. We take it to the finish line and we win the race with and for Jesus.

We break the power of the past by living for the future.

My prayer is that as God is pursuing you, you would be caught by him. And held by him and then you would hold on to him. And that you would pursue a future with him with all of your might.

We break the power of the past by living for the future.

In the book, "Eternity is now in session" by John Ortberg – he tells the story of cellist Pablo Casals.

Someone once asked the famous cellist - since he was in his eighties and was the best cellist in the world - why he kept practicing for hours every day. He responded - because I think I'm getting better.

For Paul, he was already in the kingdom so why does he keep pressing on - because I think I'm getting better - repeat that - I think I'm getting better.

We're all on a race - we're all moving somewhere - where are you going? What direction are you running in? Are you running towards God or away from God?

Vs. 14b I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

I'm going to read the verses one more time, but from the Message translation:

3:13-14

I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward - to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

We break the power of the past by living for the future.

My prayer is that as Jesus gets a hold of you, that you would hold on to him. And together, you'd be off and running, forgetting your past and not turning back.

Sigh.

Take a moment to let go of whatever's in your past, so that you can press on to reach the end of the race...

Prayer

Benediction

1 Corinthians 9:24

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

We break the power of the past by living for the future.

Amen? Amen.

Thank you so much for joining us. Happy New Year!

Be sure to join us next week in person at either 9:30 or 11:30am or online as we kick off a new series "the joy of the Lord is my strength"

Be blessed and be a blessing.