



SERMONS

by

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Bible readings:

Philippians 3:4-14 and Isaiah 43: 16-21

Title: "Embracing Purpose: Moving Beyond Past Shackles to Future Fulfillment"

In our Bible reading from Philippians, Paul gives an account of his purpose, his own journey of faith—the highs and the lows—from his encounter on the road to Damascus. He does this to advise us to look to the future.

Before Paul's encounter on the road to Damascus, he was driven by guilt, fear, anger, and resentment. But after he found Christ, he emptied himself of all the things he once held so dear—his status, his zeal, his righteousness under the law. He regarded them as rubbish when he found the 'righteousness...that comes through faith in Christ' (v.9).

I recently came across an article on the website called "Success" by Simon T. Bailey entitled "What Is my Purpose in Life?" He writes:

"Years ago, I was living the American dream as it had been sold to me. I had a high-powered career at Disney, a big house, the best cars, a wife, and two amazing children. But I was miserable. I was successful, but I wasn't significant.

I was working for a great company, but I sat at my desk every day from 9-5, overcome by the frustration of stifled potential. What choice did I have, though? I had a family to support and a mortgage to pay. My bills were screaming louder than my dreams.

I knew I was more than I had become. I had just lost my way. I knew I needed to dig deeper to find my true purpose. I needed to go inside myself to find the answers. But I was afraid to make a change—to take a risk, to fail, to let my family down. I was scared of losing what I'd worked so hard to build over the years.

In my heart, I knew I wanted to speak and write. I wanted to consult and coach. I would do all of these things if nobody paid me to do them. I would do all of these things if I knew I couldn't fail. Because these were the things that made me come alive.

Fast forward to the present. I've now spoken to more than 1,600 organizations and consulted with a dozen companies in 45 countries. I've written nine books and personally coached more than 100 managers and leaders around the world, and I absolutely come alive every single day doing what I love."

We all want our talents, skills, abilities, and gifts to intersect with a void or a need in the world around you.

That is, as best I can imagine, the true definition of purpose we should all aspire to seek. But like anything else in the journey of success, it isn't a fixed point that you arrive at and stay forever. The world changes too often. We change too often. It is the constant search for that point that keeps us on target.

Knowing your purpose gives meaning to your life. Paul writes: "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." (Philippians 3:12).

For Paul, faith is never static; it is purpose-filled. If we are not moving forward, we are moving backward—that is why he twice emphasizes the importance of ‘pressing on’, constantly striving to keep on growing in Christ.

“Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance...” The greatest tragedy is not death. The greatest tragedy is to live without a purpose. Paul’s life had been transformed because the grace of Jesus had taken hold of him. This is why Paul can be so emphatic “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering.” (Philippians 3:10). Jesus had shown Paul love and forgiveness in friendship. Jesus had given Paul meaning and hope, a new purpose for living.

Without a God-given purpose to shape our life, we become driven by destructive influences, for we are all motivated by something. So how does this relate to us?

First, I think for many of us, we’re driven by guilt and fear. We’re unable or unwilling to hide from our past. “Guilt-driven people are manipulated by their memories” so that “their past controls their future”. But even though “we are products of our past” ... “we don’t have to be prisoners of it.” God’s purpose is not limited by our past. His purposes are not neutralized by the mess we make of life.

Without a God-given purpose for the future, many people are driven by guilt & fear from the past. That is why Paul insists, “Forgetting what is behind ... I press on toward the goal.” (Philippians 3:13). We must forget the past and look to the future!

Second, I think for many of us, we’re driven by Anger and Resentment. Holding on to hurts is incredibly destructive. If we don’t forgive and forget, we will remember and resent. “Resentment driven people internalize their anger or ‘blow up’ and shower others with the fallout.” Anger always hurts. Paul writes with sadness about some who were once friends: “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...” (Philippians 3:18-19).

If we do not forgive, Jesus warns, God will not forgive us. Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel—it is the purpose of the cross. To not forgive is to turn our backs on Jesus and what he has done for us. In Philip Yancey’s book *What’s so Amazing about Grace?* he writes “Not to forgive imprisons me in the past and it locks out all of the potential for change.”

Resentment always hurts you more than the one resented. While the one in the wrong has probably forgotten what it was that offended you, you will continue to be chained to the past.” Rick Warren says, “Listen: Those who have hurt you in the past cannot continue to hurt you now unless you hold on to the pain through resentment. Your past is past! Nothing will change it. You are only hurting yourself with your bitterness.”

This morning the prophet Isaiah writes:

“Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing.... I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert. The beast of the field will honour Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I give waters in the wilderness And rivers in the desert, To give drink to My people, My chosen.”

So what are the main things we can take away from today? First, brothers and sisters, this morning through the prophet Isaiah, I believe God is submitting to us that we should forget about all the past hurt, struggles, and disappointment that others have caused us and look forward to the promise of a new life. I'm suggesting to us that he has already started making a way in the desert for us.

I'm submitting to us that through unity among ourselves and perseverance he's going to set us free. And for the oppressors in our lives, the ones who occupy leadership positions but use them for their own evil agenda, or pretend to like us but really want our downfall, they will be exposed.

Second, let us focus more on our relationship with one another by doing the simple things: listening more to others, even a smile, a hug, and a thank you, eye contact, acknowledging what people mean to us or have done for us.

Third, brothers and sisters, we need to acknowledge the good and the bad of our story up to this point. A big part of this is learning how to let go of past guilt and regret, and to start living your life with conviction.

I'm suggesting we cannot change the past, but Jesus has changed the consequences of our past. So instead of crying out against others in rage, give them over to God. He will listen. He can take it and I believe when we get used to doing that, we will find eternal peace and our lives will never be the same. **Amen.**