

Living Forward
Philippians 3:12-16

Intro:

All of us have a story to tell. We all come from a certain place, from a particular family or maybe a peculiar background. For some of us, that history is rich with a great heritage and family background. For others of us, like me, that history is full of disappointments, brokenness, and struggle. Regardless, we all have a history, not only in just our life, but a history of how we have known and lived for Jesus.

But, have you ever known someone who always used their background, or their history as the thing that defines and qualifies who they are? Whenever they talk about themselves, it's rarely the "Hear & Now" (much less the future) that defines them. I can think of a couple people in my life that this pertains to. One was a guy I worked for once. He constantly used his great past experiences (like 25 years prior) as the story that made him worth believing in, or following. It was always, "Back when I was in a certain town, or with a certain boss..." It always struck me that his past seemed a lot better than his present. Maybe that's why he preferred to talk about it.

It's like Al Bundy, from "Married with Children." The best illustration of this kind of person would have to be Uncle Rico from "Napoleon Dynamite." Don't you remember Uncle Rico? The guy lived in a past that no one else missed, or even cared about. His van was old school, his clothes were old school, and he still lived in a dream world where he was an undervalued, 2nd string quarterback! If only his coach had put him in, they would have won some game, which would have catapulted him to the pros, to living in a mansion, sitting in a hot tub with his "soul mate." If only coach had put him in that last quarter... (Then of course, it's hilarious that he threw a steak in Napoleon's face)

Transition:

But it's so true of humans to live with the weight of our past, the weight of our "what ifs" looming around our minds to the point that we can't look forward in life enough to enjoy the present, much less be excited about the future. Just as much as that could be a negative, sometimes we never get past the good things that happened in our past, and we determine to live in that place forever! We wonder how our lives would be if... "What if I went to ___ school?" "What if I never met ___?" "What if I hadn't broken up with ___?" "What if I never ___?" "What if I had obeyed when ___?" "What if I retained that feeling of zeal I had after camp?" "What if coach had put Rico in 4th Quarter?" "What if I tried out for that scholarship, or reality TV show?"

We all do it! We wrestle with moments in our past and try to determine the how our lives would be different. Whether it's gloriously shining moments or the darkest secrets in our past, maybe it's the relationships of our past and wondering how life could have turned out, or maybe we live in regret because we didn't take a risk, or go after a certain thing we wanted for whatever reason, we all wrestle with our past in various ways.

Paul, in the 3rd chapter of his letter to the Philippians, brings up his past with some measure of detail. It's the first time in this letter that he really brings his story to light,

but he does in such a way that doesn't qualify him for the calling God has, but rather to qualify the hand of God on his life, in spite of his past!

Read: Philippians 3:1-16 (Focus on 12-16)

I. Paul's Set Up – v. 1-11

***He established who he was, what he was about, and he established his former mode of righteousness (v. 4b-6)**

***His back story was apparently pretty impressive, for the religious at least.**

***Zeal has been the source of “righteousness” in men for centuries, but as Andrew talked about 2 weeks ago, as it sets itself up against the Gospel, it's worthless! It's heresy to believe that our good works, or our past success merit us anything before God.**

*****The idea that our good works will please God, and bring him eternal pleasure is faulty, according to Paul anyway.**

***So, Paul sets us up to see his past as a great past according to his faith traditions, according to normal religious standards. But he then discounts that in V. 8 when he says that he counts it all as loss, as nothing, compared to knowing Jesus as Lord, the source of our true righteousness.**

***He finishes this first section with an admonition that our lives are to share in the sufferings of Jesus, becoming like him in death, so that by any means we may attain the resurrection from the dead. Our righteousness, our future hope, is not based on our past, but on the work of Jesus!**

II. Paul's confession – v.12-13a

*****Paul admits the fact that righteousness was not attained in his former life, and now he admits that he has not attained true righteousness! How often do we hear leaders in the church admit to this??? Not enough!**

*****For Paul, salvation is an eschatological reality! It's future tense! We are being saved, becoming righteous before God only through the work of Jesus! We haven't attained our righteousness just because we are justified before God. We are becoming righteous, in spite of our past “What ifs.”**

*****Hear it this way. Paul did not believe that he had attained perfection. In fact, he makes himself vulnerable by admitting the opposite. Romans 7 is a testimony to this attitude. (Some read Romans 7 as “pre-conversion,” but I read it as Paul's confession of his humanity!)**

*****So, he confesses that he is not perfect, that he hasn't attained perfection, but in the same vein, he says, “I'm striving ahead anyway!”**

III. Paul's Mindset – 13b-16

****Forgetting what lies behind...**

*****We're not being told to dismiss all of our past! Our past is a part of us! The “What ifs” in life have shaped and defined who we have become and will become,**

but living in the past (whether good past or bad) is not healthy, and is man-centered!

***PB – “Back in 1970’s... successful this and that... I’m great because of what I used to do, or because of what God did in me back then... Al Bundy...Uncle Rico...

*** “Forgetting” did not mean obliterating the memory of the past. Paul actually remembered his past 8 verses ago! So he obviously didn’t forget about it.

***So, “forgetting” is about a conscious refusal to let the memories (highs and lows, or what ifs in life) absorb our attention and impede, or prevent our progress.

***So, in our remembering our past, recognize it and affirm what needs to be affirmed, but know that God is moving us forward, not backwards!

***We don’t linger in our past mistakes or successes! The mistakes are forgiven, and the successes were given to us because God loves us and wanted to use those things for his glory!

***But when we live in that space, we lose sight on what lies ahead. And for Paul, he “presses on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus!

Illus: Anyone that is performance driven will understand this. When you run a race, or you perform a song, or you present a lecture, the goal is always the same: to finish! But how many of us focus not on how we finish, but we dwell on the time we tripped, or forgot a word in a song, or had a joke not go over well, or we mis-spoke! That’s a terrible way to look at progress, or a journey. We can’t look at our lives seeking failures, or past successes! We have to look to the future, to the goal, to press on to Jesus – his mission, his Kingdom!

2008 Olympics – US relays, men and women had bad handoffs back to back, but had to finish the race!

Sometimes we get so focused on a bad handoff that we forget to look to the finish line! (Uncle Rico)

Or, sometimes we revel in an awesome handoff and slow down and never finish! (It’s the story of the tortoise and the hare now)

Conclusion:

So, Paul is very deliberate to tell us that his past is his past, but it no longer sets the agenda for his future.

Then he tells us, “LET THOSE WHO ARE MATURE THINK THIS WAY.”