

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

Philippians 3:1-14

Introduction:

This is the time of the year when we hear a great deal about New Year's resolutions. And a week from now is the time when most people will admit that they have already failed in keeping them. Do you make resolutions? Do you keep them? There is a certain amount of validity to the idea of making resolutions. And New year's, as we move from the past year into a new unstained year ahead, is a good time to take stock of where we are and what we would like to see happen in the days ahead.

So, let me ask a couple more questions. What would you really like to accomplish in the coming year? What are your goals for 2013? (As many of you know, I am not a particularly goal-oriented person.) But it is a good time to consider the question of goals and objectives for the year ahead—personal goals ... family goals ... financial goals.

Then, what about spiritual goals? This is certainly the most important area for a believer. What do you want to see in terms of spiritual growth and development this year? I want to suggest a biblical resolution to consider for this New Year. We are going to look at the Apostle Paul and the goal he set for his life.

Turn to Philippians 3. In this chapter Paul discusses the things that he considers to be the most important in life. He begins by pointing out some of the things he once considered important before he met Christ and became a Christian. We are not going to spend long on that – mention a few of the things in Paul's heritage that were important to him.

When he met the Savior and became a believer in Jesus Christ all that changed. Note vv. 7-8a. That which had once been very important no longer mattered. In fact, he says those things that were so critical to his self-worth he now considered to be nothing but rubbish. They are loss to him—actually a danger to his life, because they produce pride.

I want to take you down to vv. 12-14 for a moment and then we will come back up to v. 10.

Read vv. 12-14 – Paul had a goal in mind for his life. He was well aware that he had not yet achieved his goal in full, but he kept on working toward it. A couple of notes:

1. His single minded commitment to the goal. "...this one thing I do..." He would not let the distractions of the world around, or the successes or failures of the past deter him. How often do we get distracted from the goals we have set for our lives? We try to do so many things, we end up doing nothing properly. Paul's passion was single-minded.
2. His eyes were always on the goal. What was that goal? "...the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The NIV puts it this way: "...the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus." So what is the purpose for which God has called us?

In the book of Romans, Paul gives us some statements that we are all familiar with. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." (Romans 8:28-30 ESV)

God's calling on our lives is for the purpose of making us like Christ. Paul just talked about that in the preceding verses here in Philippians, and that is where I want to take you to for the rest of our time this morning. In vv. 8-10 Paul makes two important statements indicating his goal: v. 8 – "...that I may gain Christ..." Then in v. 10 – "...that I may know him..." The goal for which God has called us is that we might know him in such a way that we become like him.

Paul's goal was to know Christ. What does that really mean? I want to suggest three areas of knowledge or really three stages in the process of coming to know him as we need to if we are to truly be conformed to his image.

The first step is knowing him intellectually. If we are ever to know him in any real way, we need to learn all we can about him. This is important in any relationship. *Discuss getting to know your partner in the early days of your relationship.*

The only way to really know anyone is to learn all we can about them. So how do we get to know God and Jesus Christ in this way? Well, primarily we learn about him through reading the Word of God. It is in his word that he has revealed himself to us. He tells us who he is, and what he is like. He shows us the things that he desires and the things that he hates. We learn about him by getting to know the things he has told us about himself.

The second step in truly knowing Christ is getting to know him experientially. In other words, experiencing his presence with us, getting to know him personally. It is one thing to know all the facts and details about a person but it is something else to have a personal relationship with them.

Think of the early days of your relationship with your spouse. Yes you probably wanted to learn as much as possible about them. But more than that, you wanted to spend time with them, to get to know them in a personal way.

The only way to know someone experientially is to spend time with them, to be with them, experiencing their presence. So it is with Jesus Christ. If we are to truly know him we need to be spending time with him. Not only in the word, but in prayer and meditation, in fellowship and communion with him, getting to know and enjoy everything about him.

There is a third element or stage to knowing Christ. That is to know him transformationally. By that I refer to the idea of knowing someone in such a way that it changes us.

When a married couple live together in a close loving relationship for a long time, something happens. They begin to change. As they get to know each other better and in a more personal way, they begin to change to become more alike. *Expand and discuss this idea – even beginning to look alike.*

That is what should happen in our relationship with Christ. I believe that is what Paul really meant when he said that his desire was to know Christ. Read v. 10-11 again. Paul's goal was to be like Christ, to be transformed into his image. And the only way to do that is to know him so intimately that we become like him.

Close with story – the Great Stone Face, a short story written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in the late 1800's. It is based on an actual place in New Hampshire where there was an outcropping of rock ledges on the side of a mountain which, when viewed from a certain angle, resembled the face of a man. The ledges of rock collapsed in 2003.

But the story is about a boy named Ernest... *briefly tell the story.*

The truth is that the better we get to know Christ the more like him we will become.

Paul wrote in another place, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Let's make it our goal this year to become more like Christ in every way.