

“Reaching Forward”
Philippians 3:13b-14

January 5, 2014

A. Introduction

1. A Bi-Directional Gaze

2. Text: “... but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

B. Forgetting

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^A 1 Corinthians 9 (9:16), 2 Corinthians 11

^B Ephesians 3:7-8, Philippians 3:9

^C Hebrews 11:10, 13:14

^D Philippians 1:5-6

^E 1 Corinthians 9:24-26, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Matthew 25:21

^F 1 Corinthians 7:20-22

A. Introduction

1. A Bi-Directional Gaze

a. I grew up in an era when the adventures of Dr. Doolittle were books, not movies, written by Hugh Lofting - by the time I was nine years old, I think I had read all of them published before Lofting died

- (A) those adventures were fabulous - literally so – fables
- (B) but of course they enlivened and fed my childhood imagination
- (C) and of all the creatures to whom the Doctor talked, none was more fabulous than the ‘Pushmi-Pullyu’ – a deer-like creature with two heads, facing forward and back, able to see and to move in either direction with equal ease

b. Roman mythology

- (A) had its own two-faced creature – the mythical sun-god, Janus
- (B) who could rise turning either face to the nation, bringing either war or peace at his whim
- (C) our month, January, takes its name from this pagan god
- (D) it being a time when traditionally people look back to the year that has just past, or look forward to the one coming
 - (1) a time of nostalgia
 - (2) or a time of anticipation

c. Paul has something to say to us this morning about such looking backward and looking forward in our ...

2. Text: ... but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13b-14)

B. Forgetting

1. That Which Lies Behind

a. things known

- (A) there is something comforting in looking backward

- (B) for the most part, things and events are solid and certain
- (C) they are related to specific dates, times, people and results
- (D) all things that form part of ...
- b. things experienced
 - (A) no doubt you, as we, received a number of Christmas greetings this year in the form of cards and letters
 - (B) some may have only had a note of well wishes
 - (C) others contained a picture montage of significant events in the lives of the sender
 - (D) others with a letter summarising the experiences of the past year
 - (E) a pleasurable way of keeping up with happenings to our friends
- c. things accomplished
 - (A) is another reason it is pleasurable to look backwards in time
 - (B) I don't know what it is with you, but I am sure that there are a lot of little jobs and projects that when you finish them – cutting the lawn, baking and decorating a dessert – you just like to step back for a moment or two and regard and admire the result
 - (C) so for a year that is past, it can be enjoyable – or alarming – to sit back and reflect upon the things that have been accomplished
- d. but Paul sets us a different example: forgetting these past things

2. Not Literally, But Effectually

- a. the things Paul remembered
 - (A) there were many things that Paul had known, experienced and accomplished, that did not pass out of his mind
 - (B) they were there in his memory to be recalled at will
 - (C) for example in this very chapter we read of all Paul's Jewishness – his family, religious observance and training, his zeal on behalf of Judaism, his legalistic righteousness: he remembered the facts
 - (D) or, in 1 Corinthians 9 and 2 Corinthians 11, Paul defends the rights of his apostleship by recounting how he had ministered to them without charge and without sparing his own strength
 - (E) so Paul remembered these things, in a literal sense

- b. but they were things that Paul had discounted; effectually forgot
- (A) it was to illustrate and to hammer home an aspect of Christian truth that Paul listed the privations, the sacrifices, the self-denials that he had undergone in carrying out his ministry
 - (B) those lists were not for the purpose of boasting, things on which he could hang his laurels – no, these were to be no source of pride nor cause for satisfaction, as he himself said, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:16)
 - (C) as for all that religious training that Paul had undergone described in the earlier verses of Philippians 3 – to what did it all amount ?
 - (1) what he had once in human terms viewed as gain – steps toward the approval of God – he now discounted them to their true value
 - (2) in Paul’s spiritual gain and loss statement they were now set down as loss
 - (3) don’t tell Maureen, but there is a company 1-800-GOTJUNK, I think it is, that you call and you point and they take it away
 - (4) well, that what Paul did – he pointed to those achievements, labelled them rubbish, and they were carted off

3. Not Christ, But Ourselves

a. Christ

- (A) yes, there are accomplishments we have done, things achieved, that are best discounted; re-evaluated as rubbish
- (B) but never the relationship to Jesus Christ
 - (1) those things Paul discounted so that he might gain Christ
 - (2) of every thing in Paul’s past – the things that he now counted but loss – there was one that was never reduced in magnitude
 - (3) the amazing grace of God, not only in saving Paul but his appointment to, “the gospel 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,” (Ephesians 3:7-8)

- (C) never discount, therefore, your coming to Christ as Saviour, nor the relationship you have experienced with Him
 - (1) that you can look back with certain assurance upon the fact that you have 'through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith' (Philippians 3:9)
 - (2) it is that old nature of ours, not the new creation that we are in Christ, that needs to be effectually forgotten; laid aside

4. Both Failure and Successes

- a. depending upon our personality, it is as easy for one person to shrug off failures as it is for another, successes
 - (A) there is no such distinction in Paul's words
 - (B) hanging on to failures can be just as injurious as resting upon our successes in inhibiting our Christian walk and life
- b. what is taught here applies not only to each of us as individuals, but also to us corporately as a church
 - (A) each of you will have known in this past year
 - (1) some disappointments, discouragements, setbacks
 - (2) some things attempted which did not succeed
 - (3) some achievements made, some goals reached
 - (4) but, good or bad, these were not the end, not the finish line
 - (B) and as a church we have had such experiences
 - (1) our meeting place here has at times seemed in jeopardy, as we have been moved out and then moved back again
 - (2) we have lost a pastor, co-workers, friends in the leaving of the Fast family under the leading of the Lord
 - (3) for various reasons, others too have left our fellowship
 - (4) in a small assembly such as ours, these things can cause our enthusiasm to wane and our energies to dissipate
 - (5) on the other hand, God has brought others into our midst to join hands in prayer, worship and service

- (6) people have stepped into the breach of those departing to take up the burden and work of ministry as in Awana and in the Retirement Homes – for which we thank them and God
- (C) but these past things are not to be our dwelling-place, they were but a temporary residence of the past year
- (D) you will recall of Abraham that "... he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10) and so that "... here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come." (Hebrews 13:14)
- (E) forgetting what lies behind we are to reach forward to what lies ahead

C. Pressing On

1. What Lies Ahead?

- a. one thing is certain about what lies ahead for us
 - (A) both as individuals and as a church
 - (B) is that the future is uncertain
- b. before us lie opportunities, prospects, possibilities
 - (A) Maureen and I have been discussing some of the potential – and the problems – respecting having a VBS this summer
 - (B) certainly, our changed circumstances will mean changes in how that program may be carried out
 - (C) but as things change, pray that we may each one be alert as to how those changed circumstances can be used in new ministries
 - (D) one young couple shared with me their concern as to how we can meet the challenge as some of us who are older slow down – and they have taken the first step in doing their part
 - (E) and we can be assured by these words, as individuals, as a church – "5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:5-6)
- c. it was Christmas day, 1939
 - (A) four months before Britain had declared war upon Germany; the other Commonwealth countries followed soon thereafter
 - (B) King George VI was in Sandringham, dressed in the uniform of the Admiral of the Fleet, seated

before a table and two microphones

- (C) he encouraged his people, "A new year is at hand. We cannot tell what it will bring. If it brings peace, how thankful we shall all be. If it brings us continued struggle we shall remain undaunted."
- (D) and then closed with this poem,
I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,
'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'
And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness,
and put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be better than light, and safer than a known way.' —{2}.
- (E) when Paul said that he was pressing on to the goal and the prize, he was not doing so alone, but with God's hand upon him.

2. The Goal and the Prize

a. Paul had no uncertain goal, no nebulous prize in mind

- (A) "I press," he says, "on toward the goal" – in another translation it is "toward the mark"
- (B) Paul can see the finish line – like in a marathon it may be beyond his physical sight, but not so in his mind's eye
- (C) so he encourages us using himself as an example: "24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;" (1 Corinthians 9:24-26)

b. Paul didn't waiver in his boxing match, nor give up the marathon

- (A) so, at the end of a fruitful life of ministry his eye is still on the goal
- (B) "6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

- c. the prize before Paul – and before us – is the crown of righteousness
 - (A) the start of his – and our – Christian life was his reception of the righteousness of Christ in the place of his self-righteousness
 - (B) the destiny of his – and our – Christian life was the crown of that same righteousness, the words of the Master, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21)

D. The Upward Call

1. Vocation

- a. because God has a very distinct way of making known to a person that they should serve Him in some specific manner: as a deacon, elder or pastor; as a missionary or teacher
- b. it is easy to forget that one of the great rediscovered truths coming out of the Reformation was that every vocation, if it is where God would have you to be, is likewise sanctified by His calling

2. Purpose

- a. the point is that God has a purpose for every one of His children
- b. because He is Sovereign, fulfilling that purpose does not depend upon our circumstances, but upon God
- c. some of the Corinthian church were feeling that their positions might limit their Christians service
- d. to them Paul wrote, “20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave.” (1 Corinthians 7:20-22)

E. Conclusion

1. Jennie Evelyn Hussey (1874-1958)

- a. did not live an adventurous life, nor one we would call exciting
- b. she was of the fourth generation of a family of Quakers, the Society of Friends, and the term ‘friend’ is more descriptive of her than such compliments as ‘dynamic, vibrant, powerful’ used of modern women
- c. a real friend, she spend her life caring for a disabled sister and suffered arthritis herself in later years

- very little else is known about her
- d. except she composed over 150 hymns during her lifetime
- e. her best known hymn sums up how such a quiet, humble life can have an impact for God by reaching forward according to God's calling:

King of my life I crown Thee now—
Thine shall the glory be;
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow
Lead me to Calvary.
Lest I forget Gethsemane,
Lest I forget Thine agony,
Lest I forget Thy love for me,
Lead me to Calvary. —{3}.

- f. ... but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Colossians 3:13b-14)

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh

BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870

EBC – *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan

EGT – *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton

Gill – *Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament*, by John Gill, D.D.

Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site,

www.holwick.com.

RWP – *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson

2. ‘*God Knows*’, or, ‘*The Gate of the Year*’, by Minnie Louise Haskins (1908) from the collection, “*The Desert*”
3. ‘*Lead Me to Calvary*,’ by Jennie Evelyin Hussey, © 1921, renewed 1949 by Hope Publishing Co.