

Sermon

Oct. 8, 2017

Based on Philippians 3:4b-14

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Do you all remember that famous radio DJ who did the weekly top forty, Casey Kasem? What was his signature line he said at the end of each show? “Keep your feet on the ground and keep reaching for the stars.” That’s a nice little piece of advice.

It’s good to reach for the stars. We always need to be growing and learning. It is good to set high goals and strive to achieve those goals, to have a dream and then work to achieve that dream.

Of course, not all of our dreams come true. Part of life is coming to terms with the reality that what you hoped to accomplish or who you hoped to be will not come to pass. Maybe your dream was to own a beachfront property in Myrtle Beach or to spend your retirement years in the Smokey Mountains. But life circumstances ultimately ended the possibility to fulfill that dream. Or as the years went by you had less interest in retiring to the mountains or owning a beachfront property where a hurricane could potentially come in and wipe your place out. So our dreams change. We have new dreams, make different goals, become passionate about different things as we go through life. Few of us have the same dream all our lives.

What stars are you reaching for? What is your dream, your one big goal in life?

Paul’s dream was to be the best Jew possible. His singular goal was to be blameless in the fulfillment of God’s commandments. Whatever God’s laws and commandments were, that’s what Paul would fulfill and nothing would deter him from that effort. As he writes in Philippians 3, he was a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. In a word, Paul’s whole life was focused on his religion. It’s all he cared about.

But then things changed for Paul. As he was walking on the road to the Syrian city of Damascus to arrange for the persecution of the

Christians who lived there he met with Jesus Christ himself. This revelatory experience shook Paul to his core. It was a radical shift of which Paul, who went by the name of Saul back then, could not turn back. Yes, this transformation was so powerful that Saul changed his name to Paul.

Saul, now Paul, had a whole new focus for his life. He considered his past life as rubbish in comparison to the life he was now leading, a life focused on knowing Christ. That's all he cared about. It's all he thought about. Knowing Christ was his dream, his singular goal, that which directed his whole life. Everything he did, everything he had to deal with, every situation he confronted in his life, he dealt with it with the goal of knowing Christ. Not knowing about Christ but knowing Christ, trying to imitate Christ in his daily living. His dream was not to become Christ, obviously. But he wanted to conform his life to Christ, to know Christ inside and out, to live like Christ, walk like Christ, talk like Christ. That's what Paul's dream was.

Is there one thing you focus on? Is there one thing or person that directs your life?

Paul's focus, his dream, the star he was reaching for, was to know Christ. This focus kept his feet on the ground. You see, Paul's dream to know Christ did not put his head in the clouds. He was not on some kind of theological head game. He wasn't day dreaming about Jesus. He wasn't using his focus on Jesus as a way to avoid life. No, like I just said, he wanted to know Jesus in his daily life, in every aspect of his life. He writes, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death." See, Paul wanted it all. He wanted to experience the resurrection power of Jesus as well as share in the sufferings of Jesus. He knew that Jesus' life wasn't all rainbows and unicorns. We talked about this a little last week. Jesus knew what it was to experience loss. Jesus is sometimes called the man of sorrows. Paul considered his past life as loss in comparison to knowing Jesus. Paul was prepared to deal with life, the highs and the lows, with Jesus. He wanted to experience times of celebrating with his people with Jesus. He wanted to experience times of arguing with his adversaries and fussing with his churches with Jesus. He wanted to

experience his times in jail, his beatings, his sufferings with Jesus. He wanted to experience his death with Jesus. Paul's wanting to know Jesus was not a construction of some fantasy role play. He wanted to deal with real life with Jesus. Paul's wanting to know Christ was not a means to escape the struggles of life but a means to redeem those struggles, to give them a purpose, to use those struggles as opportunities to experience Christ, to know Christ, through the struggles.

Keeping it real with Jesus, that's how Paul kept his feet on the ground. This is what is powerful about desiring to know Christ, to focus on Christ, to want to experience Christ through struggle, through suffering, and even when we face our own death. But not just the tough times of life but also to experience Christ in good times, in our friendships, with our family, in times of joy and satisfaction. There is power when we focus on doing life with Christ. It's like living life on solid ground.

I have found that in times of struggle and stress, if I bring my focus back on Jesus, not to avoid dealing with the struggle but to remember that Jesus is with me through the struggle, that my life is in Christ, that I belong to Jesus no matter what, that mentally putting Christ back in the center helps me breathe, settles me down, puts me back on solid ground. Do you know what I mean? It's not a magic elixir, it doesn't instantly solve the problem or take the pain away, but it does get you grounded again so that you can face whatever life is throwing at you and not get run over.

Carren and I were talking about this at book study Wednesday night. She mentioned this song her mother used to sing. Maybe you know it too... "Stayed on Jesus."

I woke up this morning with my mind, stayed on Jesus
I woke up this morning with my mind, stayed on the Lord
I woke up this morning with my mind, stayed on Jesus
Hallelu, Hallelu, Halleluiah

I'm walking and talking with my mind stayed on Jesus

I'm walking and talking with my mind stayed on the Lord
I'm walking and talking with my mind stayed on Jesus
Hallelu, hallelu, halleluiah

Now I don't wake up every morning with my mind stayed on Jesus. Most of us have other things on our mind: things to do that day, problems we are worried about, people that are weighing on our hearts and minds. But it doesn't have to stay that way. One of the things we have control over is what we have our minds stayed on. Now I understand that sometimes our brains don't fully cooperate with our will. Due to chemical imbalances that can trigger clinical depression or brain trauma it's not always easy to control what's on our minds. But as we are able we can strive to follow the example of Paul and keep our minds stayed on Jesus.

Now, I know we can't only have Jesus on our minds. We have lots of things on our minds all the time. Our minds are usually noisy places! There's a lot going on in there. It's a crowded place, our minds. We are thinking about people and situations that we have to deal with. We are thinking about problems and how we are going to solve those problems. We are thinking about decisions that need to be made.

But we can have Jesus on our minds while we have everything else on our minds. We can recall that in that crowded room which is our minds that Jesus is *always* in the room. And in fact we can invite Jesus to be in the center of that room. Or we can take that decision that needs made and place Jesus right beside that decision and ask him, "What should I do?" What I'm trying to say is that if we recognize that Jesus is with us, if we keep Jesus on our minds along with everything else that's on our minds, that this helps us stay grounded as we make our way through our days and as we reach for the goals, dreams and aspirations we set for ourselves. So let's keep our feet on the ground by keeping our minds stayed on Jesus while we reach for the stars with our Lord.