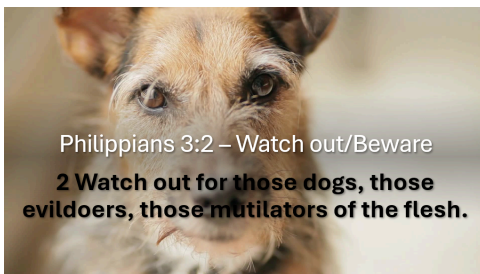


Philippines #7
Paul and Stephen: Past, Future, and Present
Phil 3:12-21

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Paul is inviting us to interpret our past based on our future (when Jesus comes back to make all things new) in order to know how to live in the present. Let's review a little from Mark's sermon from last week (Phil 3:1-11) :



This is a strong shift of Paul asking people to beware of the Jeudaizers who believe that to follow Jesus, you must also do the Jewish requirements. Remember, there was no synagogue in Philippi; all they knew about the Jews were what Paul had told them. They don't know about the OT or have any scholars to help them. So Paul talks about himself and his credentials as a Jew to authenticate his message.

Philippians 3:8

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them **garbage**, that I may gain Christ



Paul says all the credentials he has are like dung; the only thing that matters is Christ. When anyone adds onto this, Paul says don't listen to them. Relationship with Jesus is all that matters. Instead, listen to those who are obsessed with a relationship with Jesus.

Philippians 3:10 - 11

10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul wants to join Jesus even in his death with the hope that he will be resurrected. This is intense! I've never heard anyone say this to me. It helps to understand what is driving Paul to say this by knowing about Paul's past: The story of Stephen.



Acts 6 tells about a problem in the early church that different widows in the church weren't getting the food they needed. One of the people who administered the distribution of this food is Stephen: we don't know his background but we know he preaches and gets into trouble.

I encourage you to read all of Acts 7 where he was probably preaching in the same place Paul was (before his conversion). Stephen preached about the OT and how to understand Jesus in its context.

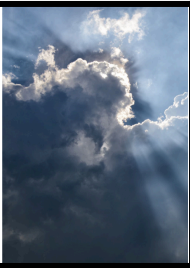
Acts 7:54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the **Son of Man** standing at the right hand of God." 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

Stephen knows the people are upset and I think he doubled down and went for it when he said the heavens opened and he saw Jesus (Son of Man) standing at the Right Hand of God. This was the comment that made things turn violent.

Acts 7:58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, **the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.** 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" When he had said this, he fell asleep.

When you read this, does it remind you of when Jesus died? Stephen was joining Jesus in his death in word and actions. Luke (author of Acts) wants to make a point that Saul had some authority in this situation. **Remember this as you watch Paul interpret his past in light of the future to know how to live in the present.** Paul said he was the chief of sinners, the one who wanted to snuff out the church. He was out to destroy everything, a catalyst moment in understanding Philipians.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to **take hold** of that for which Christ Jesus **took hold** of me.



I argue that Phil 3:10-12 is thinking about Stephen. Paul wanted to die like Stephen; he hasn't taken hold of it yet but he is trying to work out his salvation. **Stephen is the one he is imitating.**

Note: Dr. Sinclair Ferguson is the scholar who writes extensively about this comparison

13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. **But one thing I do:** *Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*



Vs. 13, 14: Paul reinterprets his past. Because Jesus has taken hold of him and is making all things new, Paul understands his past in a way that pushes him forward. Stephen becomes his inspiration.

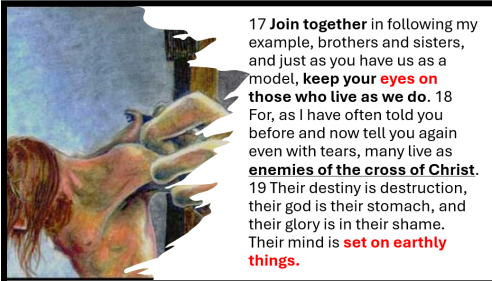
Some of us are very nostalgic about our pasts: we think of life as better "back then." When we do this, we have a lot of anxiety about the present. Conversely, other people dwell on their poor choices of their past which leaves them hopeless about the present. We are usually a combination of

anxiety and hopelessness about our pasts. Paul invites us to make sense of the past in a new way in order to move forward without anxiety or hopelessness.

Philippians 3:15

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 **Only let us** live up to what we have **already attained.**

Maturity is looking at the past and seeing how God has moved you into the present as he makes all things new. Vs. 16 is the key phrase: there is maturity but we are all in different places. We should work on the point where we are. This is not about more knowledge: we could spend a lifetime moving toward what we already know. Instead, line yourself up with what you already know. **This is what maturity looks like.**



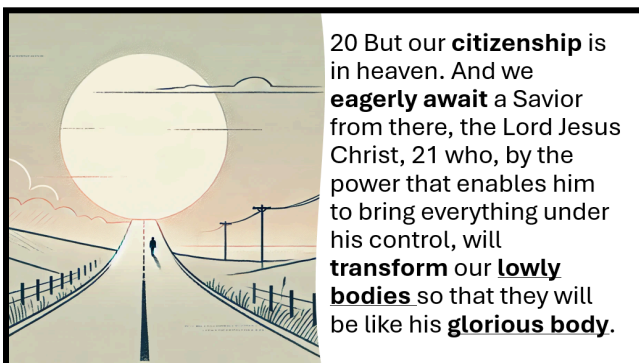
Paul wants to say (probably), “Follow me as I follow Stephen...”

When I was in high school, I had a neighbor, Ian, who loved to physically run everywhere. When we ran together, I noticed if I kept my eyes on Ian, I believed we could get to our destination. When I looked down, however, I wanted to give up because I was tired and our destination was too far. It’s the same in this community as I look at others for encouragement.

Example: When I was 25, a man named Mark Brians ran in front of me spiritually and took me under his wing and taught me how to counsel, how to preach, how to be a husband, etc. I spent hours with him every week for three years. Look around you: find people around you who are running ahead of you and get around them! Also, we invite others to follow us. Looking down is not a good idea.

We are all on a balance beam of truth: it’s easy to fall on either side to get it right by focusing on the things of the world. The way to stay balanced is to keep our eyes on Jesus.

Remember, Philippians was a Roman outpost with a Roman culture: Paul has strong words for people falling off on either side.



How do we press forward despite the things of our past? Two concepts:

1. Know where our citizenship is
2. Anticipate like a child waiting for their birthday. I had a wealthy aunt who would send a huge box a month early and we would long to open the box. We are to re-interpret our past by being eager for Jesus’s invitation to manifest in us, transforming us from lowly to great. We long to suffer with Jesus to find this glorious resurrection.

Unlike any other religion, the beauty of Christianity is that we are invited by the God of the universe to reinterpret our past in light of Christ and live in a new way because of Him.