**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***Palm Sunday & The Upward Call***

**Philippians 3:12-21**

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

April 10th, In the Year of Our Lord - (Anno Domini A.D.) 2022

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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 For today’s sermon, we need to go back to verse 8 to set the context.

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ,

9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.  **(Philippians 3:8-11)**

 We can see leading into verse 12, we must consider the previous verses and the “resurrection of the dead” in verse 11. Paul then tells us in verse 12 that he has not already obtained the resurrection from the dead. Obviously, this makes sense because Paul is still in his temporal state. However, we can see that Paul anticipates his resurrection when his eventual temporal death takes place. It is of note that Paul proclaims eternal life for all Believers (Romans 6:5, Ephesians 2:6).

Notice, Paul ties ‘resurrection’ to becoming perfect. Remember that the resurrected life for the Believer is to be in a “glorified” state, which only happens after we leave this life. This is when/where there is not any more sin nature and therefore, not any more sin environment.

**Glorified Life:**

**Romans 8:16-17** 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

**Romans 8:30** and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

 Within these verses, we see in the same breath-of-thought, Paul spans from this temporal life to the resurrected life and back to him pressing-on in his temporal life to achieve the goals to which Christ Jesus called him.

**Philippians 3:12** Not that I have already obtained it [resurrected life]

or have already become perfect, [sinless state]

but I press on so that I may lay hold of

that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

From verse 13, we see that Paul is never settled with his current advancements and pushes forward under the direction of God’s Holy Spirit to constantly mature as a Believer.

**13** Brethren,

I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;

but one thing I do:

forgetting what lies behind

and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

We can see that Paul considers himself to be in pursuit of the temporal maturity for which he strives and the eventual resurrected life (glorification). Paul is fulfilling the works God planned for his life (Ephesians 2:10). We can receive the words “forgetting what lies behind” to be a reflection upon past accomplishments, but the ever-increasing maturity in Christ takes precedent. Paul is constantly reaching forward to what lies ahead. . . his glorification in Christ. We can call this maturing process “sanctification” (Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

My thoughts regarding Paul’s words. . . is for “us” to reflect upon each new day’s opportunity we have to grow in the Lord. When I was a teen-ager, I was asked by a senior man a challenging question:

**“Are you closer to God this year than you were last year?”**

**This is a question all of us can ask ourselves.**

In fact, this question about Believers being closer to God than they were last year really is a daily question. I know I am challenged to understand God more every day and the mission in life He has called me. But I do not think of this challenge to be a pressing overburdened order. I receive the question to be an opportunity to improve and advance my life under God’s upward call and improve upon the many relationships I have. I know we all like to receive a second chance when we fail or realize we could have done better. So, every day with God. . . is a new opportunity to improve our lives. With God, Believers get lifelong second chances.

**Upward Call with Meaning, Direction and Purpose**

In verse 14, Paul refers to his mission from God as an “upward call”. In the completion of God’s “upward call”, there is a prize. . . which is the attainment of our glorified state only possible through Christ Jesus because we are joined to Him. On our own, we will fail to achieve glorification.

**14** I press on toward the goal

for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

People need to understand the “upward call” God has for their lives. God’s “upward call” starts here in this life and conveys us through to our eternal life with God.

**To begin with, God desires for people to have a positive opinion and attitude about themselves and their meaning, direction and purpose in life.**

I have preached on the fact that all people are created in the image of God. This is a game-changing understanding considering the alternative secular teaching that our existence started through a random process without meaning, direction or purpose. We, Believers, know God created us with His **meaning, direction and purpose**. Let us look at each one of these components of God’s creation. These three are overlapping in definition and therefore, work together to achieve God’s plan.

**Meaning**: What people stand for and represent reflects upon our intended existence. All people are meant (intended) to have a loving relationship with God, and therefore have the ability to convey His love to our neighbor the way God wants. We see God’s love defined in 1 Corinthians 13 consisting of patience, kindness, not being jealous and does not brag, nor arrogant, or act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, doesn’t take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.

**So, the meaning (intent) for our lives is to love.**

**Direction**: Webster’s dictionary defines “direction” to be:

guidance or supervision of action or conduct**:** management working under the direction of the doctor.

Therefore, our “Director” and “Great Physician” is God, and we are directed to mature in the image of God. What is the image of God? God defines himself as love in 1 John 4:8. We have just reviewed 1 Corinthians 13 to define love. We received additional understanding about God and His love in 1 John 4:16-18.

16 And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

 17 By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

 **So, our direction is to mature in God’s love.**

**Purpose**: We are created in God’s image. We observe that God operates through His choices. God chose to love us first (1 John 4:19). Since God has a choice, He created us with the ability to choose and have what is called *free-will choice*. This means we have decisions to make. To start, we are called by Him to choose to surrender to His will operating in our lives. This affords us the ability to attain a life without fearing God. With God operating in our hearts, there is not any fear of Him. This is exactly what 1 John 4:18 declares that “There is no fear in love”.

**So, our purpose is to conform to God’s image to live without fear.**

**Therefore, our meaning is love,**

 **our direction is to mature in God’s love and**

 **our purpose is to conform to the image of God leading to**

**no fear.**

None of these are attained through ritual religious practices. These three are part of God’s creation that only a fool would deny. In fact, the denial of these three components leads to death and destruction. Believers receive and understand God’s meaning, purpose and direction in our hearts. Therefore, we do worship God with all three of these components at work.

**Let’s Talk About Fear**

Fear is the hallmark of a person who is in rebellion to God. Criminals constantly look over their back to see if anyone is following them to hold them accountable for what they did. Evildoers always have guilt following them. Criminals always have to protect their proceeds from the crimes they commit. They have to protect them because they live in fear of the people from which they stole might one day come looking for their goods and/or hold them accountable for their crimes. Their guilt produces fear. Sooner or later the criminal’s fear strikes and destroys lives in order to maintain a criminal enterprise.

**Current Fear at Work**

It is reported that the current war in Europe is due, in large part, to a fear that Russia has of being militarily attacked by N.A.T.O. From what I know, N.A.T.O. did not have any plans to attack Russia. However, the Russian leadership self-generated a fear thinking they had to have geographic buffer states (like the U.S.S R.) between them and the N.A.T.O alliance. In fact, most of us know that N.A.T.O was created to protect its member states from the aggressive godless-socialist-communist state of Russia that is run by criminals who govern through fear and intimidation. **Evil governs through fear**. We all know that the Russian criminal government has stolen from their own people for decades and now seeks to steal the assets of their neighbor state, Ukraine, in addition to gaining a buffer state.

**My Experience and Scripture Tells Us There is No Fear in God**

**It is obvious, that the enemies of God choose to govern by fear.**

**However,**

**God’s purpose for our lives is the exact opposite.**

 **God created our lives to have a loving meaning. . . directed towards a maturity in God’s love. . . purposely conforming to His image leading to no fear.**

**Attitude**

Continuing to follow Paul’s teaching, we see that he is focused on what God’s plan is for our lives, not what fallen people think God’s plan is for their lives.

15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, [mature as 1 Corinthian 2:6]

have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude,

God will reveal that also to you;

Greek Note: English Mature/perfect for τέλειοι which means free from deficiency in being complete relating to personal character. Paul is not identifying people who are sinless but mature in understanding. The ESV, NKJ, CSB translate τέλειοι as “mature”. So, “perfect” in context means perfected understanding.

16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

 17 Brethren, join in following my example,

and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

 18 For many walk,

of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping,

that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

19 whose end is destruction,

whose god is their appetite,

and whose glory is in their shame,

who set their minds on earthly things.

 20 For our citizenship is in heaven,

from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior,

the Lord Jesus Christ;

 21 who will transform the body of our humble state

into conformity with the body of His glory,

by the exertion of the power

that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

With Paul pressing on toward God’s goal for his life. . . which is pursuing the “upward call” of God. . . it is better than a “downward call” with which the world pounds us every day! I see that we are all challenged every day to make a decision to choose to follow the “up-ward” call from God or choose to get sucked into the downward spiral of the world’s fallen events and desires. So, how do we fend-off the downward call from Satan? In response to this question, there is what to do and what not to do.

We have a failed example almost all of us know very well with Adam and Eve in what not to do. In analyzing the events of the Fall of man. . . what was the first element?

**First**, I see that God gave the best instruction for life. The best instruction means that there are other choices that are not as good and, in fact, are bad. Therefore, we are to be attuned to the best good plan for our lives. The best good plan for our lives is found with God our creator. Any other plan than God’s plan is bad. It is my experience and observation that all other plans lead to death and destruction.

We men are notorious for buying a gadget and putting it together without reading the instructions. We never inventory the parts list or use the correct tools. It seems like a hammer works fine for all applications. We end-up with leftover parts or may lose parts in the process. We put the parts together in a way that the thing (gadget) never works properly. Then our wives ask the question we men never want to hear, “Dear, did you read the instructions”?

God has provided us with an instruction manual. . . the Bible. And, if you cannot read, then read the creation around you and receive a basic understanding of God (Romans 1:18ff). I believe that God created us with innate understanding and heart-senses giving us the ability to know right from wrong. Without reading the Bible, I see that every person’s nature desperately wants to have meaning, direction and purpose. I see that every person wants love. I see that everyone wants to be secure in their property and relationships. Respecting another person’s property and relationships starts with loving them the way God wants us to do.

**Second**, I see that Adam and Eve allowed the Deceiver to have an audience with them. This tells us that we should not give our time or an ear to a sinful plan or distraction. Do not hang around fools. Jiminy Cricket says. . . “I’m no fool, no Siree! . . . I wanna live to be 103”! In addition, my father taught me. . . “If you are not there, it cannot happen to you”.

**Third**, we have a failure in Adam’s leadership. Adam was the first man to whom God gave a choice. Adam did not protect his family. He was there and said nothing (Genesis 3:6). We need to seek biblical leadership or become a biblical leader for our families and others. God’s intent is for parents to be the spiritual leaders for their children. God’s plan is for the husbands to be the spiritual leader and protector of their families (Ephesians 5:25ff).

In summation, God’s life-plan is simple. People need to receive God’s best good plan for life, not giving their ear to alternative bad plans, and seek Godly leadership.

In pursuing God’s “upward call”, we can do this. **AMEN**