

**You've Got Mail: A Journey Through A Few Of Paul's Letters**  
***VICTORIOUS* – A Letter To The Church In Philippi**  
**Message for September 1, 2019**  
**North East United Methodist Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

I am excited to watch football this afternoon...to follow the games over the next several months...watching as the Ravens run over the Steelers...and the Eagles continue to question, “What is a Superbowl?...I am excited to share SportsCenter with my son, Matthew, in the mornings before school...and live with great anticipation of watching the last few Ravens games of the 2014 season with Nate when he comes home for Christmas...

Thinking about Paul's letter to the Philippians...I was drawn to a football story...

On a balmy October afternoon in 1982, Badger Stadium...



...in Madison, Wisconsin was packed with over seventy-thousand die-hard University of Wisconsin supporters. They were watching the Badgers take on the Michigan State Spartans.



During the game the Badgers fell behind...the score lopsided in the Spartans favor...Yet there were bursts of applause and shouts of joy from the Wisconsin fans...regardless of what was happening on the field...

It turned out that seventy miles away the Milwaukee Brewers were beating the St. Louis Cardinals in game three of the 1982 World Series. Many of the fans in the stands were listening to portable radios and responding to something other than what was happening below them on the field...something other than their immediate circumstances.

This is how Paul lived his life...Paul fixed...and encouraged us to fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen...to look beyond the world we traverse...beyond the time we walk this earth...beyond...to victory...

Paul writes his Philippian brothers and sisters, ***“No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”*** Philippians 3: 13 (New Living Translation)

Why does Paul “*press on*” with such fervor?...Through sufferings and hardships?...Because Paul can see the “*end of the race*”...Paul can see “*the heavenly prize*”...Paul is listening in on God...not through a portable radio but through the Holy Spirit...and is responding to something other than his immediate circumstances...something other than what is happening around him on the field...

First, Paul “*press[ed] on*” with such fervor because Paul knew that he owed Christ everything...He writes, ***“We put no confidence in human effort. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us.”***

Paul had been a Pharisee...he had done everything right, followed the Old Testament law to the letter...yet, he understood that nothing he did could erase the sins he had committed against God, the persecution of the early church, holding the coats of those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to death in the streets. Nothing he could possibly do could cleanse him of those sins. Only through God’s grace...Christ’s sacrifice...did Paul experience new life and forgiveness.

Secondly, Paul knew where his value, his importance, his significance, came from...He knew who he was by knowing whose he was...

He writes about his past accomplishments, accolades, titles...he states, ***“I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him.”*** Philippians 3:7 (New Living Translation)

Paul understood that his greatest possession...was having a relationship with Christ...Paul understood the greatest moment of his life...was experiencing God’s grace, His forgiveness...the moment he was adopted into the family of God...

And thirdly, Paul understood what awaited him because of what Christ did, because of His willingness to sacrifice Himself, because of the “mighty power” that raised Christ from the dead...He writes, ***“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”*** (Philippians 3:20-21 NIV).

And until that moment, Paul had work to do...a mission to complete...a purpose to see unfold...***“Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”*** He would tell the world of what Christ had done.

Paul knew what awaited him and all who believed...He did not want them to miss out...

Paul was listening to a different game...preaching a different message...one with eternal consequences...A story in which he was a player...A story in which he knew the ending...and in the end there would be VICTORY!

And because he knew the ending, Paul could write...***“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*** Philippians 4: 6-7 (NKJV)

Paul understood, as Oswald Chambers writes, “[Jesus said,] *‘I say to you, do not worry about your life...’ (Matthew 6:25). Our Lord says to be careful only about one thing—our relationship to Him. But our common sense shouts loudly and says, ‘That is absurd, I must consider how I am going to live, and I must consider what I am going to eat and drink.’ Jesus said you must not. Beware of allowing yourself to think that He says this while not understanding your circumstances. Jesus Christ knows our circumstances better than we do, and He says we must not think about these things to the point where they become the primary concern of our life.”*

I stand here...having to admit that God’s Word...*“do not worry about anything; instead pray about everything...”* steps on my toes...challenges me...for I constantly find myself worrying.

I find myself worrying about how to bring about the change needed to reach more and more people for Christ, will I be successful in ministry or will I fail, how will I ever find the money to pay these hospital bills, and what about Deb’s cancer, my son thousands of miles away in Australia, my youngest starting high school...the list goes on...

I worry...Yet, I too...like each of you...have been told the ending...

Daniel ends, ***“as for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you.”***

That is God’s message to us...*“go your way until the end”* – persevere...*“you will rest”*...

The scriptures tell us, ***“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*** (Revelation 21:4, NIV)...

God tells us...Paul reminds us...such darkness, hard times, difficulties cannot last...will not last...not personally...not globally...for God will have the victory...and we *“...will rise again to receive the inheritance...”*...and the beast...all that is evil...will be *“thrown into the lake of burning sulfur...the lake of fire...”* (Revelation 20:10, NIV)...***“There will be no more night. [The faithful] will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”*** (Revelation 22:5, NIV).

Paul lives his life as one who knows how the game, the story, the play is going to end...with Victory...

In fact, Paul even looks forward to the day he will leave this world...the day he will come to the end of his story...but he is clear that until then he will do God's work...to help others see that this world is not all there is...that grace, and love, and adoption, and salvation are real...God is good...and victory is around the corner...

He writes, ***“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”*** (Philippians 1: 21-24, NIV).

But until that day, Paul will continue to preach victory in Christ...continue to point people to the one...

***“Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!***

***Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.”*** (Philippians 2: 6-11, NIV)

But until that day Paul would work and challenge us to work at becoming *“blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation”*...that we would *“shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.”* (Philippians 2: 15-16, NIV)

Should not those who know they have victory...SHINE...?

I recently heard a story...many of you I'm sure have also heard it...a story of a man whose faith shines forth with great intensity...Dr. Kent Brantly and his wife, Amber...



In July 2013, Dr. Brantly, stood in front of his congregation and professed a calling to mission work. He soon left on a two-year medical mission in Liberia with Samaritan's Purse.



While treating patients, Dr. Brantly contracted the Ebola virus that has made its way into Liberia...over 1000 people have died since March 2013...



What shines out to me about Dr. Brantly's story is not the fact that he survived the virus...a miracle...



...It is not even the fact that he sacrificed his salary and comfort of the states to serve God on the other side of the ocean.

What shines out to me is his description of how he felt after being diagnosed. He says he felt a spiritual serenity...He said to one reporter, *"I remember a deep sense of peace that was beyond*

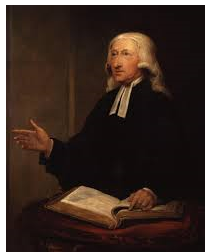
*all understanding... God was reminding me of what he had taught me years ago, that he will give me everything I need to be faithful to him."*

What shines out to me is his prayer as the symptoms of the Ebola virus began to get worse... He states, *"As I lay in my bed in Liberia for nine days, getting sicker each day, I prayed God would help be more faithful in even in my illness, and that in my illness or even death he would glorified."*

What shines out to me is that... even after all he has been through... he simply states, *"My focus remains the same... to follow God."*

I believe Dr. Brantly knows, like Paul, how the story is going to end...

John Wesley, in his sermon, *The Great Assize...*



...describes that day when the story ends...



*"See, see! He cometh! He maketh the clouds his chariots. He rideth upon the wings of the wind! A devouring fire goeth before him, and after him a flame burneth! See, he sitteth upon his throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour! Behold his eyes are as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters!"*

And Wesley calls on the believer...



*"He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"; by repentance to faith in a bleeding Lord; by faith to spotless love, to the full image of God renewed in the*

*heart, and producing all holiness of conversation. Can you doubt of this when you remember the Judge of all is likewise ‘the Savior of all’? Have he not bought you with his own blood, that ye might ‘not perish, but have everlasting life’? O make proof of his mercy rather than his justice! Of his love rather than the thunder of his power! ‘He is not far from every one of us’; and he is now come, ‘not to condemn, but to save the world’. He standeth in the midst! Sinner, doth he not now, even now, knock at the door of your heart? O that thou mayst know, at least ‘in this thy day’, the things that belong unto thy peace! O that ye may now give yourselves to him who ‘gave himself for you’, in humble faith, in holy, active, patient love! So shall ye rejoice with exceeding joy in his day, when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.”*

Like Paul, and many others who have gone after him, let us not forget...we have been told, gifted, the end of the story...



...it is not a mystery...for those who have put their faith in and lived their lives for Christ, like the mythical Phoenix, we will rise from the ashes...



In the midst of suffering, hardship, heartache, and frustration, we can be “*more than conquerors through him who loved us*”...we can hold fast for “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*”...we can be confident like Paul...



...that “*neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*”...



...we can “*be anxious for no thing*” as we “*eagerly await our Savior*” and, like Paul, “*looking forward to what lies ahead...[we can] press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us*”...