

Seize The Day (A New Year's Sermon): Philippians 3:7-16

Adapted from sermons by Gregory Mc Donald & Jeffrey Smead @ sermoncentral.com

One of golf's immortal moments came while President Ulysses S. Grant was on a trip to Great Britain. It was reported that Grant was invited to the links to introduce him to this new game. There he took several wild swings at the ball, missing badly. Grant summed up the experience by musing: "I have always understood the game of golf was good outdoor exercise and especially for the arms. But, I fail to see the purpose of the ball."

President Grant made a statement that could also be true about many people's lives. There seems to be a fair amount of exercise but no purpose in their life. For all the busy-ness in some of our lives, Are we getting anywhere? Is there a purpose for it all?

Purpose is what gives our life meaning. It gives us the ability to say, "I know why I'm doing, what I'm doing!"

So the Question needs to be asked: do you have a purpose that gives your life meaning? Are you living or are you just existing day to day?



There is a tremendous difference. **Living** is defined as "*being vigorous, alive and full of life.*" **Existing** is defined basically, just "*being there*"...

How many people are just existing and not truly living? How many wake up and follow a routine every day, going about their business, but they have no real sense of purpose in their lives. Their happiness, their fulfillment in life depends largely on others or on their current circumstances. If they were completely honest, they would admit that inside, they are mostly empty; they are not filled with life.

Now, I am not saying that we all have to live wildly exciting lives with new changes coming with every day. However, we can live lives that have direction and are fulfilling, rather than being content with just existing; especially if you are a Christian!

The Bible is filled with purposes statements for your life.

At the start of his letter to the Philippian Church the Apostle Peter summarized his purpose as

For to me, living is Christ
and dying is gain.

Philippians 1:21

I suggest that this is nothing less than his summary of the more expansive purpose statement he wrote at the center of his letter to the Roman Church (12:1-2).

present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God ...
not being conformed to the world,
but being transformed by renewing your mind
so that you may discern God's good and acceptable will

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Now there is a purpose to direct every aspect of the rest of your life. And it even has a benefit statement! If you live a renewed and transformed life for God you will know what God wants you to do with your life.

Yes pastor, I would love to live that kind of life, but how do I get from where I am right now ... to where God wants me to be? Paul has an answer for that as. In today's text – which is what makes this a good new year's resolution sermon – he says *Carpe Diem!* (Seize the day)

Not that I have already obtained this
or have already reached the goal;
but I press on to make it my own,
because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Philippians 3:12

The way you start any change in your life is to seize the day: take the very next moment available to you and make your desired change begin to happen, and then do the same with the very next moment after that.

A young soldier and his commanding officer got on a train together. The only available seats were across from an attractive young woman who was traveling with her grandmother. As they engaged in pleasant conversation, the soldier and the young woman kept eyeing one another; the attraction was obviously mutual. Suddenly the train went into a tunnel and the car became pitch black.

Immediately two sounds were heard: the "smack" of a kiss, and the "whack" of a slap across a face.

The grandmother thought "I can't believe he kissed my granddaughter, but I'm glad she gave him the slap he deserved."

The commanding officer thought, "I don't blame the boy for kissing that girl, but it's a shame that she missed his face and hit me instead."

The young girl thought, "I'm glad he kissed me, but I wish my grandmother hadn't slapped him for doing it."

And as the train broke into the sunlight, the soldier could not wipe the smile off his face. He had just seized the opportunity to kiss a pretty girl and slap his commanding officer and had gotten away with both!

That young soldier knew how to seize the opportunity! In the same way, we are called by God to take advantage of every opportunity that comes our way to fulfill our purpose in life. Unfortunately, many times we get so caught up in the routine details of every day living that we just don't have the time to seize the next moment! We've got deadlines and commitments, problems, and priorities, distractions and obstacles, and though we really want more fulfillment from each day, it just doesn't seem to be within our grasp. No one wants life to be just average, at least not many of us are willing to admit it. By nature, we want our lives to be full and prosperous.

Advertisers know all about this basic human desire that we all have and turn it into slogans to push their product: Grab for All the Gusto, Just Do It, Satisfy Your Thirst, Life Is A Journey - Enjoy The Ride, and so on. I believe this was the Apostle Paul's philosophy on life – in a Christian sort of way - he grabbed for all that Christ would give him. His thirst was to share his faith with all who would listen and this certainly took him on a journey; not that he always enjoyed the ride, adventures are not necessarily fun.

In our text today, Paul outlines how we also can seize today; making the most of every opportunity to live our life for God to the fullest, no matter how hectic our day may seem.

SEIZE TODAY for GOD

1. Find Your Purpose.
2. Forget the past – bad & good.
3. Face the present

If I were to ask you today "What is your purpose in life?" I would probably get several different answers. "Be a good wife or husband, be a good mother or father, do my job better, be a good teacher, nurse, mechanic, salesperson, and so on."

Those answers are all good, but they are also **secondary purposes**. **The question is what is your primary purpose in life?** In other words, what is your reason for living? Everything in creation has a primary purpose, or a reason for existing. For anyone or anything to be successful, it must fulfill that purpose.

Here's an easy question. What is the primary purpose of an ink pen? The answer, of course, is to write. Here is a \$50.00 gold engraved pen that is out of ink. It may be pretty to look at, but it is a failure as a pen; it is not fulfilling its purpose. It is useless. So what will you use when the time comes to sign your paycheck and this pen doesn't work? You'll bypass the nice looking gold pen, and use a \$.29 Bic that works.

That may seem like a simple illustration, but just as a pen has a primary purpose, every individual that God has created has a primary purpose. Our lives will be without meaning - we'll be failures - unless we find out what is our purpose ... our reason for living.

Paul stated his reason for living ... Read (vv.10-11).

I want to know Christ
and the power of his resurrection
and the sharing of his sufferings
by becoming like him in his death
if somehow I may attain the
resurrection from the dead. (3:10-11)

Simply put, Paul's reason for living was to be like Jesus, as he earlier urged the Philippian Christians

Let the same mind be in you
that was in Christ Jesus ...
Philippians 2:5

This should also be our heroic purpose for living. This will give your life real meaning.

As author and founder of *Success Magazine*, Orison Marden said, "***There's no greater sight in the world than that of a person fired with a great purpose, dominated by one unwavering aim.***" Jesus was such a person, Paul was another; he was certainly practicing what he preached when he called for us to have *the mind of Christ*.

The second step in seizing today is in Forgetting the Past

I do not consider that I have made it my own;
but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind
and straining forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal ...
(3:13-14)

There are two elements of the past that we must forget.

First: "**Forget the Bad.**" Paul, just like all of us had a past to forget. He had tortured and murdered many innocent people. He had caused a lot of pain and had done much damage to the cause of Christ. Then as a missionary, he suffered a lot of abuse and pain in the name of Christ.

But, now he was faced with a choice. He could either dwell on his earlier mistakes and later defeats, letting them stop him from achieving his goal of knowing and living the life of Christ, or he could forget all about them and move on with his life.

Just like Paul had to make a choice, so do we. Maybe you've had a bad experience or you did something long ago that you regret. Maybe the memories keep coming back to haunt you keeping you from living a full life today.

Yes, some do. But many people have overcome the same or worse to live triumphant lives. As we learned last week, we certainly must forgive even if we can't forget that past harm done to us (or by us). It's over. It's done. It's gone. It can't hurt you anymore. There's nothing you can do to change it. The only thing that you can do is: move on.

On New Years Day, 1929, the Rosbowl game saw what came to be known as the worst blunder in football history. Georgia Tech was playing California. Late in the second quarter, Roy Regals recovered a fumble for California. In his excitement he became confused and began running in the wrong direction.

After racing 65 yards he was finally tackled by his own player at the California 2 yard line. California attempted to punt from deep in their own end zone, but the kick was blocked and Georgia Tech scored a safety.

In the locker room at half time, Roy Regals sat in the corner with his face buried in his hands, crying. The room was silent. The Coach didn't make his usual half-time speech, but shortly before the team was to take the field for the second half, he said, "*The starting team is going back onto the field to begin the second half.*"

The whole team left the locker room except for Regals, who remained in the corner with his face in his hands. Coach said, "Get up Regals. The game is only half over. You belong on the field."

Guess what? Our game is only half over. Regardless of the past, we still have the rest of the game to play. So What If The Enemy Scored Off Of You in The Past! God is willing to forget about the mistakes of the first half. And He expects us to do the same!!! God says...

I am He who blots out your transgressions
for my own sake,
I will not remember your sins.
Isaiah 43:25

I will forgive their iniquity,
and remember their sin no more
Jeremiah 31:34

Now in not letting the past hold us back from seizing the moment, we must not only forget the bad, but we must also Forget the Good.

Do you remember the Bruce Springsteen song, "**Glory Days**?" It's a very catchy tune, but what it is about is this guy who can't quit thinking about all the fun he had back in high school. He says, "*Time slips away and leaves you with nothing but boring stories of Glory Days.*"

Many people focus in on one good period in their life - and spend the rest of their lives trying to relive the past. Maybe it was high school, college, when you first got married, when the kids were young, or your time in the military.

It is not surprising that this is the same temptation that Christians and the Church often give in to. How many times have you heard people say, "Remember the days"

- when these pews were full,
- when we had 50 teens in the youth group,
- when so and so was still here.

Oh how things were good back then.

But Paul knew that a good past was not enough to guarantee a meaningful future. Listen to what he says about himself in verses 4-7

*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, 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. **Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.** (3:4-7)*

Paul was saying "I refuse to live in the past. My reason for living is to be like Jesus, and whatever happened yesterday, good or bad, is now ancient history. I will live for Jesus today."

One thing we can know for certain is this, "**God never consults your past to determine your future.**"

Do you want to live life to its fullest?

1. Find Your Purpose.
2. Forget the past – both good & bad
3. And Face the present

Paul concludes:

forgetting what lies behind
and straining forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize
of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.
3:13-14

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

It is easy to live in the past. It is equally easy to dream away the future. It's a real challenge to face the present, because it means we can no longer allow ourselves the luxury of saying, "One of these days I'll do something about my temper ... my commitment to God ... my health ... my responsibility to my family ... and so on.

The 11th chapter of John, tells the story of when Jesus' good friend Lazarus died. Though having heard that Lazarus was sick and near death, Jesus delayed going to his house. So, that when Jesus did arrive, Lazarus had already been dead and entombed four days.

Lazarus' sister, Martha, came to Jesus and spoke that classic phrase used by people who live in the past: "IF ONLY" She said, "*Jesus, if only you had been here my brother would not have died*".

Jesus said to Martha, "*Your brother will rise again.*" So Martha begins dreaming about the future and says, "*I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*"

She knew that Jesus had the power in the past, and she knew that He would have the power in the future, but Martha, like so many of us at times, wasn't quite sure about His Power in the present circumstance.

We have no problem believing that Christ performed miracles in the past; the greatest one of them all being, after his crucifixion, his return to life on the third day.

We also have no problem believing, that in the future, Jesus is coming back again to take us home with Him. But, Why is it we have such a problem believing Him at His Word in the Present Day???

Listen to what Jesus said to Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26).

Martha said "***Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. The one coming into the world.***" By this confession she was saying "Not Just Yesterday, Not Just Tomorrow, But Today I believe that you are the Christ. It was at that moment that Martha began to face the present and put her faith into action.

Like Martha, we need to say "*Yes Lord We Believe*" and grab hold of the rest of our life for His sake.

Facing the present means that we put our faith in Jesus Christ, and trust Him to be involved in every part of our lives even today.

Facing the present means that we choose to live life as it comes to us day by day. Not in the past, not in the future, but right here and right now.

God does not want us to waste our life. He wants us to "seize the moment" and live every day of our lives with a purpose. He's given us our primary purpose for living; to be like Jesus.

- It's not going to happen yesterday, so we must forget the past.
- We can't put it off till tomorrow, because tomorrow never comes.
- It has to happen right now, and it will - if we will Seize this Moment to make it our own,

So here's a new year's resolution worth the making and keeping: say, ***Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. The one coming into the world.*** Then get on with living your life for His glory, today.