



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone*

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## **“Anchored in Eternity, Living in Time”**

**Philippians 3:17-4:1**

**GRACIE MICHEL UPDATE**

**HEALING SERVICE**

Sharon and I returned from Pacific Grove last weekend, after a terrific 4 days there, and then took time to do work around the house. It was a terrific break, and I needed it. I want to thank Preston for stepping up to bring God’s Word and to lead worship last Sunday. Thank you! I heard good things from a lot of our people!

Today we’re once again in Philippians, Paul’s letter to his Christian friends in and around the Greek city of Philippi. We think he wrote this letter toward the end of his life, from a prison in Rome. We will get in touch with Paul’s deepest passion today, as he urges us to join him in pursuing Christ, so that we are anchored in eternity, while we live in time.

Open your Bibles, please, to Philippians, chapter 3. Find verse 17, and listen for God’s Voice in the words of Scripture today—God’s Word for you and me.

*[text]*

If indeed, as we think, Paul is at the end of his life—perhaps suspecting that he will be sentenced to death in Rome—then every word he writes is precious to him; it might be his last chance to communicate with these friends whom he calls, “my joy and my crown”. I’m sure he feels the separation acutely—he in Rome, they in Philippi. So Paul makes every word count, every topic is his last, best effort to leave these dear people so they can continue to grow and flourish “in Christ”.

That’s one of Paul’s favorite phrases—“in Christ,” or “in Christ Jesus”. Earlier in this chapter 3, Paul had written, “I consider all my achievements and favored status as dog dung—worthless--so that I may have no distraction from gaining Christ. Because, it’s not about me, anymore. I want to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but to be found having the righteousness of GOD that comes through faith in Christ. I want to know Christ intimately, and know the power of his resurrection, even if it means being like him in sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death-- somehow, some way, I want to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, because I’m not. But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. No, friends, I do not see myself as having achieved it already. But here’s what I’m constantly doing: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I stretch my every effort toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:8-14, paraphrased from the NIV) There it is—in Christ Jesus.

There are two kinds of people in the church, Paul says. Some are ‘in Christ’, and some are not. The ones who are not, they live for their appetites—food, drugs, sex, greed, a passion for fashion—whatever. [The churches at Corinth were full of that!] These people not “in Christ” are totally worldly, whatever they say about believing in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. There’s a disconnect here; they use the word Christ, but it makes no difference in their lives. These people are—Paul is really harsh here—these are “enemies of the cross of Christ”. Enemies.

But the people who are “in Christ” know their citizenship is in heaven, not “here”. They are seeking the mind of Christ (as Paul puts it in First Corinthians 2). Christ is everything to Paul.

I can’t think of someone having such a firm grasp on Christ as the goal, without thinking of Helen Marsh. I met Helen in a convalescent home when I was serving in suburban Kansas City. Helen had run a playground equipment manufacturing company for years after her husband had suddenly died. But by the time I met her, she was well into her 80’s, and she was failing. At times, you could connect with her, as she lay in her hospital bed, recovering from a broken hip and from bed sores. Every time I went to visit her, she was radiating love. Somewhere in the conversation, she would talk about Jesus. She would always say, as Paul writes in Colossians, “that in everything, he (Christ) might have pre-eminence”. That was Helen’s first priority. With every conversation, virtually with every breath, Christ was becoming more and more real to her, closer, and she didn’t care about anything else. That’s what people are like who are “in Christ”. They may do many other “normal” things, but they “take every thought captive, and make it serve Christ”. (2 Cor. 10:5) For them, everything belongs to Jesus, who gave everything for me. As the Christ Hymn at the start of our chapter 2 says, Jesus gave up his divine nature, taking the form of a human, and humiliating himself (that’s the literal translation) to become a servant, and even to suffer death on a cross.” And because of that utter love for us, God raised Jesus from the dead, and has put him in the highest place, for one day everyone—in heaven, hell, or in-between—will know and confess that this Jesus is Lord—absolute ruler—who deserves all the glory and honor and power. Helen was eagerly anticipating meeting Jesus, and being done with the distractions of body and mind, which were both letting her down. She was anchored in eternity, even while she lived in time.

We’re not in heaven—have you noticed? So, what occupies your mind these days? Some of you are thinking ahead about what you have on your ‘honey-do’ list today, or about the errands you need to run on your way home from here. Some of you have been thinking about how many cobwebs you can see around this room. Some of you are excited about the way the stock market has been inching up. Some of you are wondering how you’re going to pay the bills, and you can’t think about hardly anything else. Some of you worry a lot about your health, and you have reason to. These are good things, but they are not God’s things. By these distractions, you and I—gee, this seems extreme, and it may be Semitic exaggeration, or just to make his point clear—we make ourselves enemies of God.

But I also hope some of you are hearing this message, and feeling more eager than ever to jump into Jesus’ arms. You love him, you try to do the things he did, to live out his values that showed us God’s heart. You talk with him—maybe even during the day—*and you listen, a lot!* You look on the world and its resistance to God, and you exercise control of your mind, taking every idea, every thought, and turning it to serve Christ. Everything reminds you of Jesus—positively or negatively. You are friends of God, and from time to time, you feel God’s pleasure

in and through you, as you produce fruit of the Spirit in your own life, and in others. You are on the path, in the race (as Paul would say it). You are practicing Jesus-imitation (as was Paul), hoping to get really good at it. You are seeking the mind of Christ; you are living the values of eternity--*in time*.

THAT's what any Christian leader should hope to see among his or her people. And when I see flashes of that in some of you, it's like the glint of gold in a prospector's pan—all my focus shoots in on that, and I rejoice like a man who just found a nugget in the stream!  
EUREKA!!

Some of you will remember reading Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, when we did that study together. One of his first short statements has stuck with me: "The purpose of life is to get us ready for eternity." How are you "practicing" for eternity? Teresa of Avila expressed well the point I'm trying to make, when she said: "Christ has no body on earth but yours [and mine]. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now." If we are "in Christ", we hear from Master Jesus, see things with God's eyes, have gifts from the Holy Spirit. We are citizens of heaven. Genesis 12, 1, 2 and 3--the most important verses in the Bible--tell us (we who are descendants by faith from Abraham) that we are to bless others with the blessings with which we have been blessed. You have been blessed time and time again in your life. You are the only "Jesus" some people around you are ever going to know. You are the only "Bible" some people around you are ever going to read.

Stay connected with eternity. Live the Jesus-life, with Jesus, in time.

This week.

Today.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on August 9, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]