

Series Title / Forward: Our God-given Mission and Vision
Message Title: Straining Forward / Jeff Kennedy / 10/11/20

Intro: Last week we began a new series “Forward” and our message was about Looking forward. We discovered two individuals who had been looking forward to the consolation of Israel—Simeon and Anna. Their forward-looking spirit of hope, fervency and prayer is what we want to emulate.

This week we are talking about **Straining Forward**—*how do we press on to the high call of God in Christ in the midst of such cultural turmoil and upheaval?*

In the coming days and years, as a church, **we will be tempted to get pulled into the orbit of all kinds of causes and well-meaning, but superficial or even wrongheaded solutions.** And our vision must remain bedrock—true. This church is about the Christ and His community. We aren’t a seeker-driven church with a sexy hipster church name (“Destiny City”; “Intersection” “The River”; Epic Life; “The Encounter”; “Vertical Life Church”). We are about Christ and His Community gathered in this local church.

- We are called to **Gather disciples** to worship in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23).
- We are called to **Grow disciples** in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.
- And we are called to **Go** into all the world and make more disciples.

That is a gospel vocation.

There will be problems that arise in our culture that the church doesn’t have a cure or an answer for? Like a global pandemic. We’re not equipped nor are we called to solve that problem.

Every moral, ethical, and spiritual problems in our culture *only the church is equipped to solve them.* Every other “fix” in our culture is just a band aid for a deep cut—an ache of the heart that only Jesus can solve.

- **You want social justice?** Then you should read Isaiah and the sermon on the Mount and Matthew 23.
- **You want law and order?** Read the book of Romans—Paul spells out the reason why people are prone to lawlessness and gives the cure for it.
- **You want racial reconciliation?** Read Colossians and Galatians for heaven’s sake. In the cross all men, regardless of their ethnicity or social status or gender—we are all united in one community in Christ.

Now, all of those solutions are in the gospel, not apart from.

In the coming days, you and I will be tempted to abandon the gospel for every other possible solution.

Stay true to the Gospel (3:2-3). “Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh”

These two verses are difficult to translate into English because Paul uses Greek rhetoric to make the statement memorable.

Each of these words “dog” “evil doers” and “mutilators” are alliterated in the Greek language. We could translate it something like this.

- **Beware of the mongrels**—a street dog that scavenged and ate anything to stay alive. Street dogs were symbols of ritual uncleanness equivalent to pigs.
- **Beware of the malevolent**—these malicious and evil false teachers who show up to your church meetings as your well-dressed, friendly neighborhood rabbi. They distort the gospel.
- **Beware of the mutilators—the centerpiece of their heresy was to return to the covenant of circumcision as the sign, or the marker of their identity**—men who desired to impose the covenant of circumcision on first century believers in order to complete what is lacking in Christ’s atonement.

Exhibit A: The Judaizers.

He is referring to a group—a pseudo-Christian faction who broke off from the church in Jerusalem known as the “Judaizers.” The Judaizers wanted to add three things to the Gentiles salvation.

Circumcision

Kosher

Festival/Sabbath

When a Jew in the first century practiced these three things, it was their way of saying “we are the people of God; and here’s how we know it—these are our badges of identity, the markers of our election as God’s special possession.” God had revealed early on—both to Peter and to the early Jewish church in Jerusalem that salvation was by grace through faith first to the Jew, then to the gentile. But a faction broke away and apparently (we can piece this together from Galatians and 1 Corinthians as well as here) were following Paul and attempting to undo his work of grace in the life of the Gentiles.

Paul makes it clear—**when your atonement system is Jesus plus anything else—you’ve got the wrong Gospel.** The Philippians are to be on guard against a false Gospel that adds works of the flesh to the message of salvation by grace.

He states in no uncertain terms in 3:3 “For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh.”

Paul clarifies what he means by “the circumcision.” It is a title. This title is followed by an appositional statement which is an explanatory phrase describing what he just said “we are the elect people of God—all those who worship by the Spirit of God”

How can we steer clear of false gospels?

1. Resist adding any additional “work” of righteousness to “faith in Christ alone.”

Rom 3:20 “For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.” justification is the forensic, judicial declaration that you stand in the right in God’s court of law; the purpose of the law was to condemn you in that court—so what is the basis of God’s just declaration of us? **The only thing that could satisfy God’s justice is if there were a substitution who could take your place and take your punishment.**

²¹ “But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets.” The law and the prophets foretold of it, but couldn’t administer it.

²² “The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. (no distinction between Jew and Gentile in this regard). ²³ For all have sinned (both Jew and Gentile) and fall short of the glory of God;

²⁴ they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

“God presented him as the mercy seat by his blood, (propitiation; atonement; atoning sacrifice) through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.” The word *hilasterion* the lid of the ark of the covenant. in Greek refers to the Old Testament practice of slaughtering an animal and sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy bench; which is judicial. In the ANE Kings were also judges. The mercy seat is a symbol of both the throne and the judicial bench.

²⁶ God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.”

As a church we must resist the temptation to add anything to the gospel that is not God’s grace, received by faith in Christ alone, which produces a life of good works.

Phil 3:4-6 “although I have reasons for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.” Paul says, “I was *that* guy.” ***Paul was as Jewish as it gets and he was lost as a man could be.***

2. Recognize that we are prone to corrupt the gospel.

Why are we inclined to alter the gospel?

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?” The frustration of Jeremiah is because the heart of a man or woman is predisposed to deceiving ourselves.

“Prone to wander, Lord I feel it.” I have a metabolic urge to distort the gospel.

Left to ourselves every one of us would become accidental heretics. This is why we need the accountability of the community gathered around the Word. It’s a self-corrective mechanism that God has placed at the fountainhead of the church’s existence to keep us from metabolizing deceptive ideas into the blood stream and then perverting the good news.

Left to myself I will invariably morph God’s “Good News” into “ok news” “interesting, but incomplete news.”

Summary Statements (3:8-9)

“I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (all that I had achieved and gained in Judaism—is now a loss). Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith.”

As I read these verses, the big thought that emerges is: *staying true to the gospel means to embrace a life of loss*. Now, what you gain by comparison is far greater. But staying true to the gospel message brings loss.

We stay true the Gospel:

1. Resisting the temptation to add anything to the good news of Christ’s singular and all-sufficient work on the cross.
2. We must recognize that we are prone to corrupt and alter this gospel.

II. Persevere in the Gospel 3:12-14 “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

The upward call and perfection he’s referring to here is resurrection.

Notice the words he uses here:

Press on—pressing through in those difficult times when you just hit the wall and you feel like you cannot take one more step toward the finish line.

Forgetting what is behind—this means, to put it behind you and make your focus and your aim the goal to which Christ has called us.

Straining forward—reaching out with every last cell in our body to hit the tape at full speed—not giving up but stretching every sinew to win the prize.

Illus/Conclusion: In a thrilling contest—the women’s 400M final for the gold, Bahamian Shaunae Miller just barely beat the favorite—USA’s Allysson Felix to capture the Gold in a last second dive—throwing her body over the finish line
(Picture here)



Here’s another one of that same moment with Alysson.

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You can see both Miller and Felix stretching and straining every sinew in order to cross first. And this is Paul's metaphor of striving—leaning—straining forward to cross the finish line

What does this mean for us?

It means that we are going to put the past in the past, we are going to strain forward and press on to God's calling for us—to proclaim the life-saving message of Jesus the Messiah.

To keep that our focus every step of the way. This commitment has to be at our very center of our vocation.

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