

***Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.***

When was the last time you really held on to something? I'm not talking about picking up a pen, grabbing your morning cup of coffee, or holding your child's ABC gum (that's Already Been Chewed gum) until you can find a garbage can. I'm not even talking about the 30-second hug relational healing technique we talked about a few weeks back, though that's heading in the right direction. I'm talking about wrapping up, holding close, and clinging with everything you have.

Maybe it's been a while, if ever, since you experienced that kind of hold on something. It might be the grip a mountain climber has on the ledge. It might be the grip a parent has on a child, when the lost has been found. It might be the grip between spouses when one has returned from a long tour of duty. It might be the grip the grieving share as they stand beside a casket.

As we continue our look at the biblical Book of Philippians through our Growth Group Series LIVINGHISTORY, we come to the pivotal point of Paul's letter. To this point we have been joining Paul in his joy and delight at the remarkable and miraculous hand of the Lord as we live His story through Jesus, through...

1. ◆ The love of Christ
2. ◆ The preaching of Christ
3. ◆ The life of Christ
4. ◆ The attitude of Christ

All of it leads up to ◆ this transformational shift – the grip of Christ - as Paul declares how our Savior Christ has done all of this for you and me, and then points us to the difference it makes in our lives. His love displayed for you, his words promised to you, his life lived for you, his selfless attitude towards you and for you...it all demonstrates the grip, the hold that he now

has on you. As Paul declared, ***Christ Jesus took hold of me.*** And it makes all the difference as we live his story.

The Greek word for ***took hold of*** is an interesting and descriptive word. It has two parts: the main word and the prefix (the part that's added before the main word). The main word ◆ is λαμβάνω and it means to take or receive in the same way we might take a card from the deck or receive a handshake on the way out of church. The prefix ◆, κατα, however, is an intensifying word in the same way we might use "very" or "really" before another word: I'm *very* sick or I'm *really* tired.

In this case, when it is all put together, καταλαμβάνω has the idea of the wrapping up, holding close, and clinging with everything you have that we talked about a few minutes ago. To put it another way, the grip and hold could also be described in the athletic terms of a soccer goalie "keeping" the ball in a dramatic save. Or a wide receiver catching and clutching the football on a game-winning touchdown pass.

And while Paul will continue this section of Philippians with another athletic illustration, that of racing, I'd like to import into the message today for our purposes another, perhaps more intimate illustration, one, most famously, from the Prophet Isaiah: ***We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8)***

Think of it in terms of God's original creation in all of its creative splendor, its perfect holiness, and its unfathomable timelessness: Righteousness, innocence, and blessedness as God intended. And yet, sin enters the world and it all comes crashing down. As Paul wrote to the Romans, ***All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23).*** ◆ Falling to our eternal destruction, we would be lost...

...if not for the grip of Christ. Just as we heard last week, he who is God did not consider his God-ness the only thing worth holding on to. In the depth of his love for you, holding himself to his promises to you, putting his life on the line for you, he willingly lived and died for you, grabbing

hold of you by grace through faith, catching you while on your eternally destructive fall, to lift you up for his restorative purposes – the creative splendor, the perfect holiness, and the unfathomable timelessness he always intended for you.

The catch and hold happened as the Spirit created faith in you through the Word and through the Word and water of baptism. And now, as he holds you closely, he works in your life ♦ like a potter works the clay. Take a look (and spoiler alert - we're the worthless lump of clay!):

♦ [video]

With the same word Jesus used from the cross to declare the completion of his redeeming work, Paul refers to us, the finished project, as the *prize* – the restored perfection won by Jesus, guaranteed by Jesus, and held before us by Jesus as we run our daily race until we cross the finish line of life into eternal life. *Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

I know, some days as you live His story, you just want to be a finished product, right? When those same temptations pop up on us; when the bitterness creeps up on us; when the anger wells up in us; when the victim in us wants to give up...*press on!* Paul says, *All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.* <sup>16</sup> *Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

You see, when you were two and didn't get your way, flopping on the floor and screaming may have been how you handled it. Now at the age of 9, 39, or 79, you handle it better (Lord, willing!). All of us can look at back and ♦ see the difference that Jesus is making in our lives as holds us in his hands and forms us for his purposes.

And if you're having trouble with that, just remember who you used to be, look at the person you have now become, and anticipate with Paul, the person you will be in Jesus. He writes, *Join with others in*

*following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.* <sup>18</sup> *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.* <sup>19</sup> *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.* <sup>20</sup> *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,* <sup>21</sup> *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.*

There is that old adage "As Christians we live in the world, but we don't let the world live in us." It can't be expressed more compellingly than it is with these verses from Paul. Here is all the reason those Philippians, all the reason that we ourselves, keep the faith with Jesus. Everything that counts, everything that matters, everything that is going to last is in heaven. So our eyes look heavenward, expectantly, excitedly, eagerly, continually watching and waiting for the Lord to return so that we can take our place right beside him. This is the ultimate rags-to-riches, sinner-to-saint, earth-to-eternity story! For Jesus will refashion, retool, redo and rejuvenate that which sin and death have corroded and corrupted. He will gloriously and miraculously transform us into the best we can be - his perfect righteousness – as his glories become our own ♦ we will finally and forever hold that for which we have been held by him. Amen.