

A NEW DAY AND THE PRIZE-WINNING LIFE!
TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16 & MATTHEW 28:1-10
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INTRODUCTION:

I.

Today I want to talk about looking backward at our history and moving forward to our future.

II.

Is there a piece of furniture, or some possession, in your home which has sentimental value to you! If it has sentimental value it probably reminds you of your personal or family history. We have several such pieces. One in particular is a clock! Currently it is in our front living-room. It is a beautiful little piece of furniture. It is a mantle clock with a set of Westminster chimes. This clock ticks away in all of its glory.

This clock is special to me you see because it belonged to my grandparents. The clock sat on the mantle, directly across the hallway, from the entry way of my grandfather's home study in the Methodist parsonage where he lived and served God and God's people. Each encounter with this clock transports me back in time to my childhood with grandma and grandpa! Grandpa was a man who valued time, and was punctual and liked others who were on time! Precision and accuracy brought pleasure to his accounting background.

When I consciously focus on this clock, it seems as though the clock turns back the hands of time. There I am, playing Chinese checkers and enjoying an endless supply of Ice Cream.

Elizabeth Akers Allen writes in her *Rock Me to Sleep*;
 "Backward, turn backward, O time, in your
 flight
 Make me a child again just for tonight!"

III. However, we cannot turn back the clock of time. It is important to be careful while dwelling in the house of the past. Tarrying too long can be hazardous to our spiritual health and development. The past is over! Yet, we all experience a universal impulse..., living in the past.

Bette Davis once remarked in response to an invitation to speak to a college class;

"I came face-to-face with so many fresh-faced, clear-eyed earnest 18 year old young people then it hit me...My youth was over. I did not mind that I had misspent some of my youth, but that it was irretrievable!"

The past is irretrievable and we cannot turn back the clock.

BODY:

I. Paul and the Philippians' Church:

The Apostle Paul in our Epistle Lesson comments on this issue. The lesson is from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. Paul aims to strengthen the faith of the people in this church. Paul instructs them; "One thing I do is forget what lies behind...."

On this fourth Sunday in Ordinary time, this is a good Biblical idea. Forget what lies behind! Let it go! Last year is complete. It has been a remarkable year, which is wonderful! Even if it has been a tough year, forget about it! Either way, the clock cannot be turned back. It is irretrievable, and the only place where we can dwell in the past is in our memory. That is why Paul believes it is necessary to forget what lies behind.

We must *forget* what lies behind and *strain* forward to what lies ahead.

Far too many of us live in the house of the past. We receive too much emotional satisfaction from what occurred yesterday. God calls us to serve in the present with an accent on the future. We are supposed to forget the past. We are to claim the present and embrace the future and press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Three thoughts:

One is; *forget* in this context means letting go! Separate yourself from our regrets

over yesterday.

Two is; it is a *strain* to stay focused in the present. When regrets linger we allow fear of the future to rob from us our spiritual birthright. Strain in the context means that it requires effort, energy and work to stay focused.

Third: God calls us upwardly. This word indicates a promise of excellence and purity. Excellence also requires effort.

II. Matthew and Easter:

In our reading from Matthew, our text is the first stirring of faith on Easter. Mary and Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. These two women are called to go with God's urging. As they go, they are encouraged to believe and to share the news of the day and to rejoice in the Glory of God's promise early on Easter morning. This great promise of new life is revealed on the dawn *of a new day*.

These women hear the word. It is a new day. Go forward!

Every impulse in these women is to stay back on Friday. The man they loved died that day. Their hearts are filed with memories of the good times.

Ah, the good times! My cousins and I are at our grandparents. There is the county seat town in Indiana, the Methodist church, all the old friends, the laughter, the living room, the old clock. It feels so good! But it is over!

The women realize. God can't use them to God's glory in the past. The past is over! God can use us on the cusp of this new day. God wanted Mary and Mary Magdalene for his glory. *God wants us for God's glory. The glory train is out in front!*

APPLICATION:

I.

We are wanted in the future. This future is the upward call of God. This passage says no matter where we are; the call from God is to go forward and upward. The call is not to stay where we are, or maintain the status quo! The call from Christ

is forward and upward! Matthew says it this way; God calls us to the new life of Easter.

We have heard many things called "*prize-winning!*" For instance, there is the Prize-winning cherry cobbler at the Bladen County Fair. In a few weeks we will celebrate the movies which are prize-winners at The Oscars. There are prize-winning plays which at the Tony's! This spring and summer, horses will run to be Triple-Crown winners! Authors will be selected to be Pulitzer-Prize winners!

Today we are speaking of a prize-winning life!

A prize-winning life is encouraged to respond to the call of God in Jesus Christ. Failure to respond means we are just existing we will be losers.

CONCLUSION:

I. In a store at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina a Teddy Bear was sitting on the top shelf. It was a pretty brown Teddy Bear. But he had a problem. He had a on a pair of bib cover-alls. One strap was missing. The button to hold the strap had been lost and the strap hung by the Teddy's side. Parents had discouraged their children from picking this stuffed bear since it was "defective".

Then it happened, while I was in the shop. A little girl wanted the bear. The clerk and her dad tried to dissuade her. She was adamant. In fact she stated in a matter-of-fact tone; "I love him, and I think he will feel better once I dust him off and replace his button...!"

So it is with us...! We are not meant to be put on a shelf. We all have a past that makes us what we are today. We may even be missing a few buttons....not marbles....but buttons! We will all be made acceptable as soon as we allow God to dust us off and do something with usnow! No one or no congregation is here to sit on a shelf and collect dust....!

II. As for this clock. We cannot turn it back. But we can rewind it....! It is a new day!