

Friday, 2 November, 2007.

PRESSING TOWARD THE MARK

Introduction:

I was reading the Introductory Edition of *Our Daily Bread* recently and I came across the story of one John Stephen Akhwari, the marathon runner from Tanzania who finished last at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. As I understood it, no last-place finisher in a marathon ever finished quite so last. He was injured in the way, he hobbled into the stadium with his leg bloodied and bandaged. He returned to the Stadium more than one hour after the rest of the runners had completed the race. Only very few people remained in the stand when he arrived and finished the crossing line. Asked why he continued running despite the pain, he said: "My country did not send me to Mexico to start the race. They sent me here to finish".

That is what set the tone for our message tonight.

In **Phil. 3: 12- 14**, Paul was passing four crucial messages:

1. Not Counting Ourselves to have apprehended
2. Forgetting the things which are behind
3. Reaching forth unto those which are above.
4. Pressing toward the mark for the ultimate prize.

Not counting ourselves to have apprehended:

Paul recognized that there was the possibility for him to begin to bask in the euphoria of what can be considered as ground-breaking success. He knew that he had not arrived and he need to know that whatever he had achieved was not comparable to what he could still achieve.

The story of the Rich Fool is very instructive here. In Luke 12: 16-20. There was a certain rich man who owned much land. And his fields and vineyards were so productive that when the time of harvest came, he had not room enough to store his corn and fruits. So after much thought he said, "This will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater ones, and there will I store all my fruits and my goods. Then I can say to myself, 'I have great store of goods laid up, enough for many years; now I can take mine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said unto him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast hoarded?"

When a man begins to celebrate his achievements, he is already placing himself in a place of stagnancy. There are still a lot we must always strive to achieve. The record of yesterday is meant to be the benchmark for today and the ridicule of tomorrow.

Forgetting the things that are behind:

Paul knew that God created yesterday for a purpose, today for a purpose as well as tomorrow for a purpose. **Yesterday was created to help us to learn, today is created to give us opportunity and tomorrow is there to give us hope.** If you got it wrong yesterday. Congratulations. You still have today and if you missed it today, you still have tomorrow.

Looking back at the past might present us with endless list of failed opportunities. **See Isaiah 43: 18.**

Stop beating yourself over the failures of the past. We have all failed before. We have all missed it before; but always give us another opportunity. Another chance.

Reaching for the things which are above:

Living as I said earlier gives hope for tomorrow. Isaiah 43: 19. God will also bring new opportunities. He will always make all things to work together for good for us **Rom. 8:28. In Joel 2: 21-27**, the promises of a bright restoration is great there and we can always hold on to it.

Reaching for the things above might be painful and costly: **2 Cor. 11:23-33.**

It may even involve taking risks: **Mt. 10: 9-10.** The lepers in **2 Kings 7:3-11** took the risk which eventually paid off and also changed the economic landscape and fulfilled the counsel of God at that time.

Pressing toward the mark:

Pressing may have to including pushing along. The journey may be difficult; but press still. There is need to P-U-S-H. (Pray and Work Until Something Happens). Paul in his letter to Timothy: **2 Tim. 2:3-6.** As we run the race, his grace is sufficient for us: **2 Cor. 12:9; Heb. 12:2; Phil. 4:13.**

Paul concluded his letter to Timothy by stating some very important principles about how to run and complete the race: **2 Tim.4: 5**.

Finally, in **2 Kings 13: 14-19**, the King of Israel lost the opportunity to defeat his enemies permanently by not pressing to attain the mark and that was really very calamitous for him and the children of Israel.