

Looking back and pressing forward

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[0 : 00] Okay, so we're coming to the end of 2014 and I think the end of a year is a time where many! of us spend a lot of time in contemplation and we look back at the things that have happened and! things we've done and I think moreover we look to the future and we think about next year and we think about all the things that we'll be doing. So tonight we're going to be looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians and we'll also look a bit into Paul's background and what God thinks about the way that we contemplate the time that we have here on earth. Okay, so we're already in Philippians.

So after encouraging the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord in verse 1, Paul begins with a very strong warning against the Jewish teachers of the time and he refers to his warning as a safeguard for the Philippians and the Jewish leaders were claiming that you can only earn God's favour by outward works and ceremonies.

that salvation was possible only through these things exclusively. And Paul delivers the warning with some pretty strong words labelling these Jewish teachers as dogs and evil doers.

Now I believe dogs was a metaphor for a couple of things but I read it, I think it was a person teaching corrupted things.

So I just wanted to express the point that he's not talking about small fluffy huggable things. So he challenges also the Jewish teachers directly in verse 3 and he says that as Christians, we serve God by his spirit.

[2 : 16] And our confidence isn't in our actions or in our bodies, but in Jesus. So Paul is saying quite categorically that this way of being, putting all your confidence in yourself, it can't lead anywhere good.

I think, you know, most of us would agree with that. Most of us have had some form of experience which, you know, suggests that. In verses 4 and 5, Paul goes on to emphasise this point by reflecting on his past.

And he does something quite unique. He reels off a list of his personal accomplishments and qualifications. And he says quite boldly, That is pretty bold.

And these are things that were probably highly respected in the eyes of the world. Excuse me, my tablet's doing strange things.

And he obviously had a high status. And as a Pharisee, he would have had a strict and very intimate knowledge of the Mosaic law. And I think it would be a safe bet to say that before the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus, that he took a lot of pride in these things.

[4 : 08] These were things that he held very, very close to him in his personal life. And he confirms that in verse 7 here, when he tells us that he considered them all as things that he gained.

So what Paul is saying, I'm paraphrasing, is, look, if anyone is qualified to put their confidence in the flesh, it's me.

And it makes me wonder how we consider our own list of achievements and accomplishments. Excuse me.

I have a bit of a winter cold. So, quick show of hands.

Who here is on Facebook? No, not as many as I thought there would be. You are, yeah. I know you are. Oh, okay.

[5 : 16] One of those. Well, if you are signed up to Facebook, you have probably seen the option recently to share a brief overview of your year.

You can share this with your friends and leave a comment about how you feel your year has been. Interestingly, you can customise it, so you can edit out all the shady bits.

And have it appear in such a way that may or may not reflect the truth. I haven't taken advantage of this option. Yet, yes.

But Paul wasn't on Facebook. So, what did he think about his accomplishments? From verses 7 to 9, again, I'm paraphrasing. He says that they're rubbish.

They're a loss. They're worth next to nothing in the comparison to the worth of knowing Jesus Christ. Everything else pales next to a life in Jesus.

[6 : 25] And by faith in him, we can rely on God's righteousness as granted to us by his grace. But Paul didn't edit out the sketchy bits either.

In 1 Timothy, he also referred to himself as a former blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. So, as this picture of Paul and where he puts his confidence starts to build up, it becomes pretty clear why he's placing no confidence in the flesh.

So, how does this affect our future? Well, we're not perfect either. I think if we're honest with ourselves, we won't have to think back very far to think of something that we shouldn't have said or something that we shouldn't have done or something even that we shouldn't have thought of.

And God's work in Paul's life makes for the ultimate example. Because when you think in these terms, the question stands very prominently.

Where are we going to place our confidence? Now, if you're not following Christ, it could be anywhere. It could be in your own ability to reason or to think.

[7 : 52] As we've established, that's a pretty precarious place to put all your confidence. We look at Paul's backstory. We can see here that, you know, he's not perfect.

We're not perfect. Or it could be in the hands of scientists or scholars. It's a very popular route these days. Some people place the whole way of thinking on other people and their qualifications.

And they trust that. And yet that was Paul back in the day. He was educated to the highest order.

And here he's saying that these qualifications mean nothing compared to the qualifications of God's son.

Because the righteousness we have in him isn't our own. It's his. But if you're a Christian, there is only one answer.

And there's only one place to put your confidence. And that's in Jesus Christ. So the pivotal point here is Jesus, isn't it? Well, what about all those things that we've done that we shouldn't have that I was just talking about?

[9 : 08] Well, if we go back to 1 Timothy 1, I'll read it for you. Paul writes, And there it is.

And there it is. Salvation, forgiveness, mercy, grace, patience, and the righteousness of God himself.

we clearly can't do all that by our own power. And here's the good news. It's free. All that is free.

But to attain this, we need to take an account of Paul's example. the example he gives us here, and live by faith only in Jesus Christ.

And Paul had a great desire to draw close to Jesus. You can see in verses 10 and 11, Paul writes, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

[10 : 47] We're back in Philippians now. I should have said that. And that sounds quite cryptic. It took a little while for me to get my head around. What Paul is actually talking about is a final and ultimate death to sin.

The interesting thing here is, maybe Maria can help me out a bit here, is he uses the word attaining, and in Greek, the word is, excuse my pronunciation, katando.

Is that right? Katando? Katando? I know, it sounded more Chinese to me. Okay.

Well, in Greek, apparently, it means, yes, it means an attaining, but in terms of arriving at a place completely different from another.

So, this isn't so much as a gain, but a permanent separation. It's a permanent separation and resurrection into God's kingdom through the power of the resurrection of Jesus.

[12 : 12] And that's a desire we need to have of the highest order. I'll read Romans 6, 1 to 5. It's very popular. I'm sure most people know this.

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means. We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer?

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. A fantastic promise.

So this isn't something any of us have attained yet. This is a goal.

[13:23] We're not completed yet. The separation for us hasn't quite occurred. When you look at the language that Paul uses, he says we will be united with him.

So this is a process. Paul says earlier on in the book of Philippians, for I am confident of this very thing that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul goes on to confirm in verse 12 and 13 that this isn't something he has already obtained but instead this is the goal.

this is the destination and that is the reason that Christ took hold of him in the first place. If you haven't read, I'm sure you will have, but if you haven't read the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, highly recommend it.

it's an absolutely fantastic, beautiful picture of someone so against the Lord Jesus being turned around in an instant.

[14:46] Paul was left blind for three days. So we're thinking about this destination and what does that look like for us as we go into 2015?

So Paul says in verses 13 and 14 Philippians 3, the one thing he does is forget what's behind and strains towards what is ahead to press on to win the prize that is the final resurrection in Christ and separation from sin.

Again, I paraphrase that to make that a little more clear in context of what he's been saying. There's little doubt that he's probably referencing some Grecian games here.

If you spend any amount of time on YouTube, you'll know it's not a good idea to run forward whilst looking behind you. I won't dig any further into that.

So I'm coming to my conclusion now. So Paul had a tough time as a person. He was in prison when he wrote the letter to the Philippians and in 2 Corinthians 11 he writes, five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one.

[16:19] Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move.

I've been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false believers.

I've labored and I've toiled and have often gone without sleep. I've known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food.

I've been cold and naked. It's probably unlikely that anyone here has been shipwrecked three times. But in one way or another, we've all had our struggles, and we most likely will as we go on to the future, to 2015.

There's an old saying that I'd like to share with you. I tried to look up who said it originally, but it's a little unclear when you Google it.

[17:33] It says, if the mountain was smooth, we wouldn't be able to climb it. But there is hope.

Because as we've seen, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He overcame death, death, and if we press on into 2015 by putting our confidence, our trust, and our faith in him, there isn't anything in this world, there's no struggle, there's no illness, there's no pain, there's no situation that can match up to God's tremendous power of resurrection.

Amen. Amen.