

Press on!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 March 2009

[0:00] I'm reading from verse 13. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be dust-minded.

And if any thing ye be otherwise-minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Amen. Please be seated.

There's much more we could say in the context there, really, from verse 7. How the apostle talks about how he's not apprehended yet. He's not arrived yet.

And he's saying how he wants to be found in him. He wants to know him, the Saviour. And I haven't arrived yet. None of us have.

We're still on the road. We're all on the road to that wonderful time when we'll see him. And we'll be like him. And we'll see him as he is.

[1:22] In the meantime, it's still a growing process, isn't it? Just some thoughts along this text. It says this one thing. This one thing. Paul is committed to this one thing. A single great aim and ambition.

That all-consuming zeal and love. That purpose of soul that he had. A preacher put it like this about this one thing. He says, this is a picture of a racer, of a runner on a racetrack.

His agony of struggle and hope. You see him, every muscle strain, every vein kind of popping out. The quick and short heaving on his chest as he's there, ready to take off.

The big drops gathered on his brow. The body bending forward as with a frantic gesture. His eye now glancing aside with a momentary sparkle at objects so rapidly disappearing behind him.

And then fixing itself on the garland, the crown, in eager anticipation. The apostle is not leaving. He is forgetting the things behind.

[2:22] He's not merely looking. He is reaching forth onto those things before. Not only does he run, he presses towards the mark. Nor is he occupied, weakened or delayed by a variety of pursuits.

This one thing, I do. That's the commitment this man had. We could think there's a story told of some missionaries heading off to China. There's a young man from a wealthy family.

His family was saying, what are you doing? They sent him to Yale University, some big type of university to complete his degree. To enter a well remunerated career.

But God gripped this man's heart to go to China. The needs of China. And he volunteered to go to that country with the gospel. Much to the dismay of his family and friends, he left the US to go to China.

But he succumbed to a disease before reaching the distant shore. And after his death, a note was found in his possessions that said this. That summarised his life.

[3:25] It said, no reserve, no retreat, no regrets. This one thing was what drove that man to serve the Lord no matter what.

No retreat, no regrets. It's like David prayed, unite my heart to fear thy name. As he prayed to the Lord Jehovah. This one thing, to unite his heart, to fear his name.

To follow and to pursue. That one, that is all deserving of our all. This one thing. And then it goes on.

Paul says that he's forgetting some things. The things that are behind. He says what's behind us, let's forget those things. Those things that might draw our attention and maybe past memories or hurts or regrets.

He says forgetting those things. Now the sense of the word here is completely forgetting. It's a completeness of forgetting. It's not just a half forgetting and a forgetfulness, but a completely forgetting.

[4:26] To not let the past absorb our attention. And we can all think of things that have passed. Things that have happened to us. Things that

we're not proud of. We regret. We grieve about.

Paul says here to forget those things that are behind. To completely forget them. Maybe the past depresses you as you think back to what has happened in past days or years.

It's been said that one in four of us will suffer from depression this year. And sometimes a lot of depression is to do with what's happened. It's what's passed.

Paul says forget those things that are past. Over 17 million people in the US are depressed.

Clinically depressed. So they have been analysed and labelled as depressed.

You know, it's probably lots more. And it's been said that it costs the US over \$40 billion every year. From treatment, from loss of production, from all the after effects of depression.

[5:26] Depression, disappointment. Paul says forget those things that are behind. We can all think of regrets. Of mistakes. Of failure. Of failure. Maybe your past has been filled with discouragement too.

There was an advert in the US paper asking for people. If they were calling for people to make the first journey to another planet. And the 18,000 people applied.

They wanted to get off planet Earth. And go to another planet. And the psychologists had a panel to analyse these people. To work out what they were on about. What was driving them. And the vast majority of these 18,000 people.

They wanted to start a new life. Or another. On another planet. Because they were so discouraged by life on this one. And some people are like that, aren't they? Depressed.

Discouraged. Paul says forget those things. Forget those things that are behind. And when. Maybe we will go through the valley of discouragement. And that could happen. And maybe we're right in it.

[6:26] Might be there a few days. Yeah. But when you're in the valley of discouragement. He still is God. He still is God. And he says as we know. The psalmist said.

That even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death. Thou art with me. But go through the valley. Don't dwell there. Go through it. Leave it behind. The cure for discouragement is the scriptures.

The uplifting Bible verses that we can memorise. Things like. I know. A friend was telling me on the way. Here. That God. I can do all things through Christ.

Who strengthens me. And. Verses like. Today thou shalt be with me in paradise. Verses like. For I am persuaded that neither. Death.

Nor life. Nor angels. Nor principalities. Nor powers. Nor things present. Nor things to come. Nor height. Nor depth. Nor any other creature. Shall be able to separate us from the love. Of God.

[7:21] Which is in Christ. Jesus. Our Lord. Verses like. If God before us. Who can be against us. Verses like that. We can. Quote them.

Speak them to ourselves. In faith. Someone said. Look. Not back on yesterday. So full of failure and regret.

Look ahead and see God's way. And all sin confessed. You must forget. If it's a past sin. God's forgiven. God's forgotten it. If you're forgiven today.

If you've asked him. He's cleansed you. He's blotted it out from his memory. Never let a dark past cloud. A bright future.

Don't let a dark past cloud. A bright future. What's behind us. We can leave behind. Paul says. Forgetting those things. And then he says. That there's something ahead.

[8:16] There's something ahead. On this race track. Of life. He says. That we can go forward. In faith. He says. Looking forward. Going forward. Pressing on. Pressing towards the mark. Paul said.

I've learnt. In whatsoever state. I am there with. To be content. We can find a contentment. There's always things. That we'd like to have. You know. We see things. That others may have. You know. On the way to church. I saw this. Beautiful mini bus. 19, 9, 90. That would be great. To replace. One of our buses. But you know. As a church. We're building up some funds. And we thank the Lord. For your faithful giving. In time. We might have. The funds to get. Another bus. But you know. We can think about. The things we'd like to have. The things we'd want to have. But. Yet. God gives us what we need.

Doesn't he? And we can learn to be content. In whatsoever state. We are there with. To be content. And. Man's extremity. Is God's opportunity. Sometimes too. When we test it.

[9:09] And stretch. God's working. Here's an encouraging quote. About the will of God too. When you're going forward. Make sure you're going forward. In the will of God. Here it says stay in the will of God.

Someone emailed me this. In the last couple of weeks. The will of God. Will never take you. Where the grace of God. Cannot keep you. Where the arms of God. Cannot support you.

Where the riches of God. Cannot supply your needs. Where the power of God. Cannot endue you. The will of God. Will never take you. Where the spirit of God.

Cannot work through you. Where the wisdom of God. Cannot teach you. where the army of God cannot protect you, where the hands of God cannot mould you. When we say the army of God, we know he's the Lord of hosts.

He's the Lord of armies. He's got piles and piles of armies of angels that he's beck and call. It goes on, The will of God will never take you, where the love of God cannot enfold you, where the mercies of God cannot sustain you, where the peace of God cannot calm your hearts and fears, where the authority of God cannot overrule for you.

[10:18] The will of God will never take you, where the comfort of God cannot dry your tears, where the word of God cannot feed you, where the miracles of God cannot be done for you, where the omnipresence of God cannot find you.

How you can take heart in the will of God, that you can walk in the centuries well as best as you can determine it and understand it, that you can be where God wants you to be, doing what he wants you to do.

So Paul says, Leave those things behind. Press forward. Press on. Press on. With zeal, with fervour, with love, with ardour. Spurgeon describes zeal like this.

This zeal that presses us onward and upward. He says this, Spurgeon, If you never have sleepless hours, if you never have weeping eyes, if your hearts never swell as if they would burst, you need not anticipate that you will be called zealous.

You do not know the beginning of true zeal, for the foundation of Christian zeal lies in the heart. The heart must be heavy with grief, and yet must be high with holy ardour.

[11:27] The heart must be vehement in desire, panting continually for God's glory, or else we shall never attain to anything like the zeal, which God would have us to know.

As well, a chariot without its steeds, a sun without its beams, a heaven without its joy, as a man of God without zeal. Well, this one thing I do.

Have you got that focus? Have you got that purpose? Have you got that ardour, that devotion? A wonderful man of God, who was known for prayer, von Zindensorf, said this, I have one passion only, it is he.

It is he. Christ was his passion. Christ was the passion that drove that man to be a prayer warrior. And there was revival in Europe through his ministry.

Another quote here from Spurgeon again. If by excessive zeal we die before reaching the average age of man, worn out in the master's service, then glory to God, we shall have so much less of earth, and so much more of heaven.

[12:41] Now, of course, we need to be sensible and not ban the candle at both ends. But wouldn't it be good to have more of heaven? To have more of heaven. That's what we want, isn't it? George Whitefield said, I'm never better than when I'm on the full stretch for God.

To be on the full stretch, pressing forward towards the mark. The mark is what we're to press towards, the call, the heart of God. What is it that you're looking for?

What is it that you're looking at? Sometimes we look at life, and we think there's misery ahead. There's defeat ahead. There's disappointment ahead. Maybe you're having it right now.

Perhaps you can take a leaf out of Lord Nelson's book. There's a story. This Lord Nelson, he was blind in one eye. It was the Battle of Copenhagen. His senior officer raised a flag that said, Retreat. The flag was retreat. And Nelson picked up his telescope, put it to his blind eye, and he said, I do not see it. I do not see defeat. Press towards the mark.

[13:48] We see the victory that Christ has won for us. We see Christ looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. What is it that

you're looking at? We can look at our own situation, and our own miserable condition, and think how things are not how we want them to be. How much we're lacking, or missing, or wanting, we don't have, or we can be like Nelson and not see the defeat or the retreat. We see the victory. And what happened? When it seemed like defeat, he captured 12 Danish ships, and there was a victory.

Press on. God has not given to us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind. Trust God. We know, I don't need to give you so many illustrations, but they all seem quite helpful. The story of the chariots of fire. We know the story, the film, where it's been popularised. It's based on a Christian man. He actually was a man of God who served the Lord in many ways. And he was a racer on a racetrack one day in 1923, competing in the events of Scotland versus France. They were neck and neck, and there was this 440 race, 440 yards, and it wasn't his traditional race.

[15:02] And the runners were there, clad in their traditional 1920s white, and it came to the first turn when they were bunched tightly, shoulder to shoulder, when one of them was pushed to the ground and off the track.

And for a second he was down and then up again running. He was 20 metres behind, his knees high, his head back flying. And as the leader sprints of the finish line, he emerged ahead of them to win.

It was the famous win immortalised in the chariots, the fire, moving. What would most runners have done? 20 metres behind, what's the point? He'd have probably just waved a fist and dusted himself off and watched the outcome of the race.

Perhaps a few words exchanged at the end of the race in his disappointment. But this athlete in question, he was beyond the ordinary. And it's as if he was reading this passage, forgetting those things that are behind, forgetting the fact that he'd fallen, forgetting the fact that it seemed like everything was against him.

He just pressed towards the mark. He forgot what was behind him. He straying forward to what lay ahead with all that energy and devotion to fly to the finish. And friends, the Lord Jesus tells us, let not your heart be troubled.

[16:19] Don't think about those things. Don't dwell on that which troubles you. He says, let not your heart be troubled. He says, have faith. He says, I prepare a place for you.

And instead of being troubled, trust him. When the pressure's on, press on. God's life, God's heart would just urge us to get back on the racetrack.

Maybe you've fallen on the racetrack. You slipped and slid in your Christian life. You're feeling like you're stumbling. You can take a lesson from the Christian runner in this text in Hebrews 12 too about running unto the finishing line.

To use your resources, to lay aside the way, to run with patience, with endurance, to make up your mind, to press towards the mark. Looking unto Jesus, as it says in Isaiah 45, verse 22, the text that Spurgeon was moved by to trust Christ.

Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is none else. Do we have that look, that looking unto Jesus, that saving look, that look about his love, that look of his cross, that look of his work on your behalf, that look of faith, of trust, of receiving him.

[17:39] Hebrews 12 tells us of the race that is set before us. It's as if there's a different race for each of us. Some of us are running a tougher race than others. I know many of my Christian brothers and sisters here have had a much more rugged race than me.

And no, I take my hat off to you and I thank God for you, for your endurance, for the testimony of your faith to me. And we each have our own race to run, our own distance event.

It's a marathon. We need to just keep our eyes focused on the Lord Jesus. He's the one we have to run for. He's the race judge. He's the author and finisher. He's the one who gives out the rewards at the end.

He's the one who disqualifies. He's the one who qualifies. He ran the race ahead of us and he has completed the race. And as we run, we face the pressures of life, the race of life, we look at what he endured.

We can think he endured so much. It's listed here of some of the things that happened to our Lord Jesus. He himself suffered. Born to an unwed mother.

[18:45] Born in a stable. Born to poor parents. His life was threatened as a baby. He was moved as a baby. He was raised in a despicable town. A town with a reputation.

Nazareth. It's been considered that likely his father, his adopted father, of course, Joseph, died when he was young and that he had to support his family from a young age. That the Lord Jesus had no home where to lay his head. He was hated and opposed by people. He was charged with insanity. He was opposed by his family. He was charged with demon possession. He was rejected, hated, opposed by those who came to hear him speak. He was betrayed by a close friend. He was left alone, rejected, forsaken by all his friends. He was tried by the highest court in the land for treason. He was executed as a common criminal by means of execution. He's been through it all. He's been there, done that.

[19:42] He's the perfect coach. Our perfect coach for running the race and we can find our help in him. Friends, just to think about he's already run the race.

We can thank God for the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We can say with Paul, I've fought a good fight. I've finished my course. I've kept the faith. We want to end well in that race of life. To end well when the chips are down, when it comes to the closing chapters. We want to run well and stay with Paul. I've fought a good fight. I've run that straight race. I've kept the faith. And he's promised a heaven for us. He's promised that he will return for us someday. And that really, that sunshine is enough for the cloudiest day just now that his heavenly home is waiting.

He's preparing it. And some of you are going to beat me to it. And maybe I'm going to beat some of you to it. But there's going to be glory, isn't there? When we're reunited, those that love the Lord has promised that home for you.

[20:49] And he's preparing it. There's going to come a day when he's going to wipe away all tears from our eyes. When all sorrow is going to end, we're going to sit at his feet in glory with the Master. All the burdens from our shoulders will be taken.

Forgetting those things which are behind. Don't dwell on the past, especially the past failures, disappointments, depression, discouragement. Press towards the mark for the prize, for the mark, the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

You've got so much to look forward to. Looking unto Jesus, the author, the finisher of your faith. He is the one that we can take heart in today. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.