

Citizens running for the prize

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[0 : 00] We're reading the third chapter of Philippians, beginning at the 12th verse. Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own,! Because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

For many of whom I have told you, now I tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame.

[1 : 24] With minds set on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven. Commit we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to be subject, to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, my brothers, who I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Well, good morning, everyone. Just a quick word about small groups before we jump into the passage. It would be great if every adult could be part of a small group.

Just to give you a perk of small groups, our group got the first pictures of the baker's baby. So, you haven't seen the baker's baby yet, but anyway.

Is that both? I just want to talk about which group for a moment, rather than the motivation of why to do small groups. Can I just say, we don't want loyalty to one particular group.

[2 : 42] You might be super indebted to your group leader for the many years they've invested, but we're on the same team here. We just want people in some group.

The new year is a great time to re-evaluate which group. You might be thinking, is there someone you could particularly encourage if you went along with them? Please be thinking about what's sustainable.

Don't pick a group that's an hour away. You're probably not going to get there, so please pick a group that's sustainable. For example, if you've brought someone to taste and see, if you think there's a particular group they might feel comfortable in, it might be worth changing groups to go along with them.

Anyway, I'm just putting it out there about have a think, have a reset of which group is going to be building up this church together the best.

Anyway, let's get into our passage because our passage gives us plenty of motivation to be running together towards the prize is what we're going to be looking at.

[3 : 47] How about I pray before we come to God's word if you'll join me in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you that the Christian race ultimately is empowered by you, caused by you, that you promise that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ.

Father, I pray that you would expose things in each of us that is taking us off course. And I pray that you would fill us with more of a gaze of what Christ has purchased for us, what is just up ahead, so that you will empower us to keep running forward.

So I pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's spiritually dangerous to have an attitude of, I've arrived.

You still come across people today who say they're sinless. I have no idea how they can think of themselves that way, but they claim to be sinless and they're often graceless too.

There's others who just have a head full of theology. And there's this attitude of, I've arrived.

[5 : 23] And there's the pride that just renders that theology almost useless. It's dangerous to think some sinful vice you've had in the past, you're completely free from now.

You'll never go back to that. It's a dangerous way of thinking. Pride comes before a fall. That's from the Bible, not just society. But there's also a danger of a casual, complacent attitude to the Christian life, which understands the doctrine of being saved by grace, of our assurance, as if we're just going to cruise into heaven.

If the motivation to pursue God and obey him is gone, now that fear is gone, is fear the only reason we were ever pursuing him?

That casual just cruise into heaven, that's not fitting for the Christian life either. So it's dangerous.

There's dangerous ways to think, I've arrived. Or I'm just going to sweep into heaven easily. But there's also a danger in thinking you can't make any progress at all.

[6 : 50] It may sound godly to say, I'm a sinner who can do no good. That may sound godly, but it's not Paul's way of thinking. He says it's God who is at work in us to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So on the one hand, it's dangerous to think you've arrived, but it's dangerous to think you're stuck. We need to think like Paul.

And I'm glad Sam really summarised last week so well. We need to think our way to rejoice in the Lord like Paul. Now how do we think our way to joy when we have a proper sense of how far I am from where I want to be?

If you're anything, I'm guessing most people in the room here, you are aware. I'm not where I want to be yet in my character and love of God.

How do you rejoice then? Well, we've got to think like Paul. Here's how you rejoice in the Lord.

[8 : 05] Be dissatisfied. It's a bit weird. Not a worldly dissatisfaction that you don't have enough.

Why me? I'm not enough. The church is letting me down in X, Y, Z. There's plenty of dissatisfaction that is just worldly.

But a holy dissatisfaction. Jesus said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Hunger and thirst.

You're not satisfied. Christ is all satisfying. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying Christ isn't enough.

He is all satisfying. But I'm not satisfied with how much I know him yet. A young man who has met a young woman and falling in love.

[9 : 07] He's really enjoying their time together. He doesn't, after a date, get out his diary and go, well, how does the 2nd of September work for you?

I'm a bit busy coming up. If you've been captivated by someone, you're not trying to squeeze them into your schedule. You can't get enough of them.

We all have interests and hobbies. If it's astronomy or cooking or how many shows on cooking are there? We can't get enough of it. If something has captivated your interests, you're not satisfied.

You want more and more and more. The mark of being gripped by Jesus is a holy dissatisfaction. You want more. Now, I'm not saying that we feel this passion day in and day out.

It fluctuates, doesn't it? I think you even want to want him more. I'm not satisfied with how much I want him.

[10 : 18] A holy dissatisfaction in your knowledge, in your character. They're a healthy sign that you know Christ.

Your holy dissatisfaction is growing. Because that's Paul's mindset. Notice in verse 12, I have not already obtained this.

He repeats it. He makes sure. It doesn't miss the point. Brothers, listen. I do not consider that I already obtained this. This is the Apostle Paul.

But I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Now, that's a bit hidden in our English translations. Make it my own there in verse 13 is the word grasp. Take hold. And there's two graspings.

[11 : 18] And the order of those two graspings are really important. I press on to take hold of it. Not so that Christ Jesus takes hold of me, but because Christ Jesus has taken hold of me.

Other belief systems, it's like if you accept these doctrines, if you put these principles into practice, if you put effort in, you will attain.

Christianity says it's not something you take up. It's something that takes you up or someone who takes you up. He's been grasped by Christ.

An atheist once said, I believe in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them. And from a philosophical standpoint, Christianity is not even the best.

Now, after seeing the meaninglessness of life, if there is no God, and the problem of evil in the world, lots of twists and turns in his life. But he said he was riding on the bus one day, and he had a sense he was holding something at bay.

[12 : 30] He was shutting something out. He could either open the door or let it stay shut. Now, this is C.S. Lewis, who wrote the Narnia.

He describes himself, I was the most reluctant convert in all England. Now, you may not have had a profound conversion experience.

Paul did, but most of us probably haven't. But if you look back over your life, the more you know the hardness of your own sin, you go, I would never have taken up Christ unless he first grabbed me.

He rudely invaded your life. He's taken hold of you. And because he has, he's set you on a totally new direction.

Verse 13, one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. He's using the metaphor of the games, the Olympic runner. A marathon runner, or I don't know if you're into jogging or not, Martin, you're into jogging.

[13 : 46] If they've got their watch on and they get a ping going, oh, wow, that last kilometre was the fastest I've run yet. They don't slow down.

They want to speed up. They want to hit that mark again. They are not looking back, either at their achievements or their failures. If they trip up, I don't know if anyone else is watching the tennis, but when they hit the ball into the net and it barely even makes it over the net, it was a really poor shot.

They don't wallow in their failure. They're like, next point. Their eyes are fixed forward. That's the description here. Like a runner, I'm just looking ahead.

Failures are in the past. Achievements are in the past. I'm looking ahead. Now, you can't forget the sin of your past. Like, good luck. Good luck forgetting.

You can't. He just recalled it for himself in verses 4 to 6. He can even help to call it to mind to go, it's worthless. I don't want to go there again.

[14:58] So it's not forgetting in that sense. But knowing you're found in the righteousness of Christ, there's a godly leaving your failures behind.

You get up and you go again. God deals with it. I'm going to leave my failures behind me. Paul could have boasted, look how many churches I've planted.

He's not talking like that. Some Christians, all they can talk about is some ministry they did in their past.

Let's stop talking like that. Leave it in the past. Let's look ahead, straining forward. Verse 14.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. We need some kind of appetite. What is the prize?

[16:01] What is up ahead? That I want to run towards it. He calls it the upward call of God.

Now he might be using the metaphor of the game still. When like an athlete comes up to the podium and the president, maybe the emperor goes, Adam Collison, step up.

I just thought you were falling asleep. So I thought, no, not really, not really. Come step onto the podium. Receive your prize. He could be using that metaphor.

God is going to call your name. Adam Collison, step up. He could be using that as a metaphor. That's going to be a good day. Look forward to that day when your name is called.

He might be using it in a theological sense like he does elsewhere in scripture. Not simply the general call of the gospel, come, come to Jesus, but the effectual call.

[17:05] When you hear that word, the spirit breathes new life into you and you respond. The call of God. I'm not sure we've got to choose between those two interpretations, but have a think about it.

It's upward. Notice it's upward. And we're going to see the enemies of the cross later are earthly. Their minds are on earth. God has called us upward.

Heavenward. What a privilege. What a prize. And it's in Christ Jesus.

Heaven is going to be heaven because we're with Christ and we're fully like Christ. And finally, we're all rejoicing, worshipping Christ fully.

It's in Christ Jesus. God has called me upward. Christ has taken hold of you. And therefore, we run forward for the prize he saved us for.

[18:15] Now, taking a step back, why is Paul giving us this autobiography? Why is he saying, here's how I approach the Christian life? Verse 17, he gives the command, the instruction.

Brothers, sisters, join in imitating me. Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. Paul might seem really zealous and impassioned, but he's not saying this attitude is optional.

We need to share his mind. And he says, the mature, you know what I'm talking about. If you're struggling with what I'm talking about, he's not leaving room for disagreement.

He's saying, my apostolic approach to life is the only Christian approach to life with the authority of God. If you're off track, God will reveal that.

He'll bring you back on course. I think it's actually a reassuring thing. God will keep you on track. He will reveal that to you too. Keep your eyes on those who walk and think and live like me.

[19 : 40] And there's others, Timothy, Epaphroditus, leaders. Now, why do we need to do this? Why do we need to think like him? And verse 18 tells us why.

The little word for, because many live or walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. There are many enemies.

Now, I find it really out of place when a Christian preacher or someone sharing the gospel with a friend speaks of hell as if they want to kindle the fires of hell right now.

He's weeping. He's weeping saying this. There are many enemies. But he's not writing to these enemies.

He's warning the Philippians. Don't let these enemies take you off course. Their end, their finish line is everlasting destruction.

[20 : 54] Why on earth would you follow them? Their God, their authority is their belly. Now, that sounds a bit funny. Not that they have a sweet tooth or something.

But they're earthly. They're fleshly. It's their desires that are their authority. Not Jesus. It's just, I've got a desire. I'll pursue it.

What they boast in is going to turn out to be the reason for their eternal shame. And their mindset is on earthly things.

They're completely opposed to the cross of Christ, this way of thinking. He doesn't specify who the enemies are.

I think there's many enemies to the cross. Many people who don't accept the implications of the cross. I just want to start with one obvious enemy that I'm still influenced by strongly.

[22 : 05] I've never had someone arrange a meeting with me as a pastor to say, I'm addicted to financial gain. I just want more and more possessions.

How much does that distract you as it distracts me from the upward call of God? That materialism. As if life consists in the abundance of possessions.

There's more insidious enemies who use Christian language. I think there's some who are just so complacent with sin.

As if it was a small thing for God to send his son to forgive and save us. There's some who are just, I'm not saying they're all non-Christians, okay.

There's a level of maturity and immaturity. But some are just so complacent. Don't they know the cross? Then there's so-called churches that have so many external forms of religion.

[23 : 27] Whether it's ritual and liturgy or great kids programs and social programs. But you won't find the cross in the teaching, in the conversation, in the church.

There's many online teachers. I love the wealth of resources.

I hope you're accessing the wealth of resources at our fingertips today. But can I just, I'm assuming you're listening to others besides me. I kind of hope you are. Because there's great resources out there.

But are they boasting in the cross? Are they obsessed with the cross? Are they encouraging you to share in the cross?

Humbly suffer with him, with joy and hope. Or are they saying something like, God wants blessings here and now. Here's some quick tips.

[24 : 31] I'm just trying to give us a taste. I'm sure there's many other enemies of the cross. But don't let earthly-minded influence take you off course in boasting in the cross and sharing in the cross.

And he gives the reason why we are on a completely different track. Verse 20.

He ends on a wonderfully positive note. Because we will share in Christ's exaltation. Our citizenship is in heaven.

It's not here. Now, I'm a dual citizen. And quite frankly, I don't care about my other citizenship.

It means nothing to me. I hope this citizenship means something to you. Our citizenship is in heaven. Now. This is not a future tense.

[25 : 31] This is right now. You belong there. We don't belong here. And that's okay. Because we belong there. Our authority is there.

And he tells us to obey the authorities here, by the way. But our authority is there. Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a saviour. Who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

This isn't wishful thinking. He says it's definite and it's well grounded. By the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. If he's in control of all things, it's a cinch for him to transform us.

The prize of knowing him fully. Our whole person inside and out being transformed is coming.

Resurrected. Imperishable. Spiritual, powerful, glorious body. Finally, free from sin.

[26 : 47] Fit for the new heavens and earth. The older I get, the strange thing happens when I play soccer. My mind knows I want my foot to go there.

And I want to be at that point, by this point in time, to get the ball. Now, I know what I want to do. But like a bad internet connection, there's this delay.

My body doesn't do it in the time and in the power that I want it to. There's a new desire born in each of us now.

We want to worship Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven. But our sinful, weak bodies in the image of Adam, sorry to use your name again, Adam, that hold us back.

My body, my sinful flesh holds us back. I'm not expressing the righteousness I want to be yet.

[27 : 58] But here's the power to rejoice. In the certain hope, I will be soon. You will be soon.

I've not arrived. You have not arrived. Your brothers and sisters around you have not arrived. But we will have arrived soon. That's the power to press on.

Free from sin. Glorified in power. On that day, we can say, I've arrived.

On that day, we can say, I know him fully, even as I am fully known. I love Jodie Erickson Tata's words.

Like, I'm sure I've used them before. But they're so good. As a quadripedic, in a wheelchair, in a church service, the minister said, everyone, let's kneel down and pray.

[29:15] And everyone, 500 or so people, got on their knees. And she started crying. She couldn't. She says, it made me think of the day when I, too, will be able to get up out of this wheelchair on new resurrected legs.

I can't wait for that day. Because when I get my glorified body, the first thing I'm going to do with my resurrected legs is to fall down on grateful, glorified knees.

The point of a resurrected body is we'll be finally, joyfully worshipping as we want to now. Can you almost smell it?

Can you almost taste it? Do you want that day to be today? Rejoice.

It's coming. And let's share Paul's mind. I don't consider I've taken hold of it. But one thing I do, straight ahead, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

[30:40] Now let me finish with this. The problem with the running metaphor is it's an individual sport. Paul's words here aren't individual. Verse 17, he doesn't say, imitate me.

He says, join. Join together in imitating me. You can't run the race on your own.

Fix your eyes on those who are running ahead of you, who are mature. Who are rejoicing in the Lord's righteousness, who have a holy dissatisfaction, but they're rejoicing knowing that they're going to be righteous soon.

Our fire quickly grows cold on our own. Enemies of the cross influence us continually and will take us off course.

I need your comfort. I need your encouragement. I need your correction. The church at Philippi was a great delight to Paul, but they struggled for unity.

[31:46] Two mature women, after these verses we've covered, Paul praises.

They've worked side by side with him for the gospel. Their names are written in the book of life. But they're letting some offense paralyze their progress. And the fact that he's stated it publicly, they're probably paralyzing the church as well.

We should expect friction in the family of God. We should expect it. That's a healthy sign. Because we love the things of God, we just disagree on how to get there.

And the closer you get to one another, the more you're going to see my blemishes. We should expect friction. But Paul's urging them, join together in this way of thinking.

We need to run together. That brother or sister, they don't have a righteousness of their own.

[32:58] But they're found in Christ. Can we think of each other like that? They're found in the righteousness of Christ.

As much as I'm hurting right now. That brother or sister, they have not arrived yet. I can see they're a long way.

But they're going to be transformed. They're going to make it. And God's even calling me to be part of that transformation.

He's calling us to run together. We need each other. And the confidence will make it. I want to end on this. God has no half-finished project sitting in his garage.

He who began a good work in you, plural, will bring it to completion of the day of Christ. He's taken hold of us.

[34:06] So let's take hold of him. Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Lord, I want to praise you for your grace in your upward call in Christ Jesus.

Left to our souls. Our minds will be set on earthly things. And our God will be our own desires. And what we boast in, we will be ashamed of forever.

And our end would have been destruction. But you have called us, by your mercy alone, to be citizens of heaven. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

And one day soon transformed into the righteousness and power of Christ. Lord, thank you. Fill us with a hunger for that day so that we might press on together.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen.