

Pressing on for Resurrection Power

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[0 : 00] Jordan Well, for those of you who don't know me, my name's Jordan.

I'm a regular at 6pm and I study at Ridley College. And it's a privilege to be back at the 10am morning service and it's a wonderful autumn morning.

I love autumn, I love the time around Easter. And it's a great time to be thinking about the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Well, self-confidence is a great virtue in our society, isn't it?

It's considered to be a very important thing. I did a quick Google search of the word confidence last night and immediately came up all sorts of advertisements and sites promising to boost my level of self-confidence.

Titles like The 7 Helpful Tips to Immediately Increase Your Confidence, Lift Your Self-Confidence, Self-Confidence for Women, How to Boost Confidence.

[1 : 20] One site, www.attractgreatness.com, offered to show me how to become unstoppable, to improve my self-esteem and to let my true potential shine through no matter what.

That would be awfully convenient. Now, of course, the site was tacky and it was probably some sort of internet scam. But these sorts of messages are scattered abroad in our society.

You only need to go down to your local bookstore and walk into the self-help section, don't you?

Now, confidence is a good thing if our reasons for being confident are sound.

But in Philippians chapter 3, Paul warns his readers and us against a sort of confidence that far from being sound is actually deadly.

And if we indulge in it, it will greatly jeopardise our relationship with God. The tone of Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of commendation and one of warmth of fellowship.

[2 : 30] Nevertheless, in chapter 3, when he turns to this issue of self-confidence, his tone becomes very stern. From verse 2, beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh.

Well, who are these terrible people that he's referring to? Well, they're the Pharisees who had become Christians.

They were ethnic Jews. They had come to trust in Jesus Christ in some sense. But they held that it wasn't sufficient to trust in Christ alone for salvation.

You also needed to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. Now, Paul utterly abominates this teaching. And if you want to read more on that, you can look at Acts 15 and particularly Paul's epistle to the Galatians, where he goes into this in great length.

He won't have anything to do with it. He doesn't want anything to detract from the sufficiency of Christ. But why does he call them mutilators of the flesh?

[3 : 41] That's a reference to circumcision, isn't it? Which they were insisting upon. But why is he so strong in that way? Well, if you look at the next verse, he says, So he is saying that Christians who have trusted in Jesus without the works of the law are the true circumcision.

That is to say, they are the true covenant people of God. Because circumcision had been the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament. Not only that, they worship in the spirit of God.

Under the Old Covenant, the chief part of worship was adherence to the law of Moses. To the statutes, the rules and the regulations that God gave them on Mount Sinai after he took them out of Egypt.

But with the coming of Jesus, there's been a change. We no longer worship God through outward adherence to legislation and rules. We worship him in the spirit.

And at that point, we need to say that we don't look at the New Testament commands for holy living as mere legislation.

[5 : 02] We see them as an outflowing of life in the spirit. It's a life that wells up internally and leads to outward acts of obedience and service. But we don't look at it as, we don't look at adherence to rules as worship.

Nevertheless, under the Old Covenant, adherence to the law was worship. But we worship in the spirit of God. And we boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Because you can see that with an outward form of worship that the law was, what inevitably happened, with sinful human nature being what it is, is that people started to put the focus on themselves and their own ability to keep the law.

Not only that, with circumcision and being descended from Abraham as being the mark of the people of God, it was very easy to see your standing as a Jew and your ethnicity as being something to be proud of.

But Christians, Paul says, have no confidence in any of that. So he calls these Judaizers mutilators of the flesh because they're trying to achieve something with circumcision that has already been achieved by Jesus and his work.

[6 : 23] And so they're reducing circumcision to a mere barbaric act and an act that has no real meaning. Now, they're very sharp lines that he's drawing in verse 2 and 3, isn't it?

It's us versus them. We are the true Israel. They are the dogs. It's a very provocative argument. And we can be sure that Paul never would have used it if salvation issues weren't at stake.

But what if someone were to accuse Paul of being jealous of those Judaizers and their privileged position of native Israelites? What if someone were to say, well, Paul, you call them dogs and mutilators and you boast of your invisible circumcision and your super spiritual advantages.

But aren't you just jealous of them? And what if the Gentile Christians were tempted to think the same of Paul? Were tempted to look enviously on their Jewish neighbors and their great heritage and their outward righteousness and to think, well, maybe they're right.

Maybe we do need to become circumcised and obey the law. Paul immediately undercuts that sort of thinking by insisting that whatever these Jews have by way of unique privilege and external righteousness, he also has.

[7 : 39] And to an even greater extent. He says, I too have reason to have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more.

And he lists his credentials. Circumcised on the eighth day. If you want to boast in circumcision, I too am circumcised. A member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews.

That is, I'm not merely a Jewish convert. And my parents were not Gentiles who converted to Judaism. I'm of the native stock. I'm a true descendant, physically speaking, of Abraham.

As to the law, a Pharisee. I'm not ignorant of my heritage. I know the law very well. Are they boasting in the law?

I know the law. Are they saying that they have a superior theology to me? I know everything that they know. And I'm not boasting in it. As to zeal, he says, a persecutor of the church.

[8 : 42] You couldn't argue that Paul was a Jew who was somewhat ambivalent about his heritage and wandered off to join the Christian sect. He was, in fact, extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers, to the extent that he persecuted the Christians bitterly because they didn't see the law of Moses as essential to salvation.

And the last one that caps it off. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. So Paul had kept the law completely.

He wasn't a failure as a Jew. He was an absolute success. And the keeping of the law was the most important thing to a Jew. It ought to have been trusting in God.

But to these Judaizers, the physical keeping of the law had become the top priority. Well, Paul had done that. So you couldn't argue that Paul was somehow envious of these Jews.

That he was eating sour grapes because they had something that he didn't have. And so he was lashing out at them and calling them dogs and mutilators of the flesh. No, instead he insists that the Philippians must be aware of this teaching.

[10 : 06] It was not a stranger to their views or their lifestyle. And he utterly abominated it and rejected it in the light of Jesus. Well, the problem of placing value in and relying upon standing, pedigree, gifts and works was not just a Jewish problem.

Or Paul wouldn't have needed to warn the Gentiles about it. It was a Jewish problem only because it's a human problem. We all have this desire to boast in the flesh.

To make much of who we are. And what we can achieve. And for some strange reason, it's especially so in the area of the worship of God.

I say for some strange reason. It isn't really strange. It's because we're sinners. But it is truly proof of our depraved nature that it's in the realm of the worship of God that we find we put the most confidence in our flesh.

When our eyes ought to be focused on him. We may not have the credentials that Paul had. But we can certainly find some reason to boast in the flesh, can't we? Baptised as an infant.

[11:19] Or maybe not. Maybe baptised as an adult. A member of the church. Of the tribe of Holy Trinity Doncaster. A reformed evangelical of evangelicals.

As to the scriptures. A student of Ridley College. As to zeal. A fervent evangelist. As to holiness. And discipleship. Persevering. See, there's nothing wrong with these things, of course.

And they're things that are very much to the glory of God when they are seen in the right place. But the problem is that we start to talk about these things.

And we start to think about these things. We start to dwell on these things that we're doing. More than we talk about and dwell upon the person of Jesus. And when we're doing that, we're actually putting confidence in the flesh.

[12:25] Now, theologically, we might think, no. I actually believe that it's only by the grace of Jesus that I'm saved. And yet, by our lifestyle, we can be denying that. By the sorts of things that we continually turn to in order to find our significance.

In the next five verses, Paul reaches the crux of his argument. It's an extended treatment of why he doesn't place any confidence in the flesh. It's the testimony of his Christian experience and his continuing aspirations.

We can summarise his argument by saying that he doesn't place any confidence in the flesh.

Because any such confidence would interfere with his salvation. And particularly his experience of union with Jesus.

Now, this is more than simply a defence of justification by faith. Though he certainly does touch on that. Paul's not simply arguing, I was a Jew of impeccable pedigree.

I was blameless according to the righteousness of the law. Yet I came to realise that self-righteousness would not justify me before God. And that salvation can only be found through faith in Jesus.

[13:36] Now, he says that very frequently throughout his letters, doesn't he? He dwells upon it at length in Romans and in Galatians. In fact, I don't think you would find a letter of Paul where he doesn't speak of justification by faith.

But here the question of how to be saved, though it's still present, has been subordinated to this great theme of the surpassing value of knowing Christ. The argument is an expanding one, starting at verse 7.

First, so since God revealed Christ to him, Paul has come to see that all the religious and the outward advantages he had as a Jew, the rigorous study of the law, the standing in the community, the pride in his ethnicity, circumcision, he comes to see that all of these things are loss.

That is to say, they're less than nothing compared to the value of knowing Jesus. But he expands even further than that in the next verse.

More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Not only peculiar Jewish religious gains that he had in the past, but anything, either past or present, anything in the created order, that could in any way be compared to Christ and put on the balance next to him.

[15:10] He's come to see it as loss. It doesn't come up as 1% of the value of Christ. You see, that would be an offence to the glory of God.

Nothing can be compared to Christ. Nothing at all. And he says that I consider them as less than nothing compared to the value of knowing him. Now we're not saying that God's good creation is not good.

But we are saying that it can't be compared to the value of Jesus. But he goes even further.

He says, Not only have I come to regard all things as loss, but I've actually suffered the loss of all things. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish in order that

I may gain Christ.

Now it's very easy for us to say that, well, our outward religious privileges, whatever they may be, you know, they're not as important as Christ himself, are they?

[16:21] And we constantly say things like, well, you know, our material advantages and whatever enjoyments we have in this life, they're temporal and they're not as important as God.

We have to keep him first. It's easy to say that sort of thing, isn't it? But what about when we come to the test? What about when, on the path of Christian discipleship, we have to part with these things, either voluntarily or when they're taken from us in unforeseen circumstance?

What then? Can we still uphold this? Or does it come crumbling down? Is Christ really that valuable? Or was it all talk? Well, we have the witness of Paul here.

He says, for his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things. They've all gone. My Jewish heritage, that's behind me. The ethnic Jews no longer hold me in any respect.

I have entered into a life of poverty. Not only that, he experienced the rejection of his closest Christian brothers at times. He experienced the anxiety of these fledgling churches at the risk of the devil and all of his power, turning them away from the true gospel.

[17:47] He was reduced to complete reliance upon God. And has he regretted it? No, he says, I continue to count all things as loss compared to Jesus.

I've suffered the trial and I uphold what I originally said. I regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. And so you see how he introduces now this element of purpose into it.

I regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. And even at the beginning of that sentence, for his sake, I have suffered these losses. So the loss that we experience as Christians is not merely coincidental to being a Christian.

It's actually ordained by God to create an emptiness, a vacuum, wherein Christ might become all in all to us in our experience.

Don't look upon your losses, the things that you've left behind or the things that have been taken away from you, as just simply coincidences.

[19:03] And don't look upon the merely sacrifices that you have made either. We can go even further than that and we can say that these things have happened in order that God has ordained it for us, in order that Christ may become all in all.

That's the purpose of it. That's why it happened. What have you lost? Can you think of things that you have either given up in your walk with Christ or have been taken away from you?

Anything at all. You lost that in order that Christ may be all in all to you. That's God's agenda.

So what we're to do is to get on board with that. All right then, Lord, if you have taken these things from me so that Christ may be all in all, then fill me with the knowledge of him.

Let me know him better. Let me know more of his power. Show me, who is this Jesus? I know something of him, but let me know much more. That is the way that we are to approach our losses.

[20:13] So Paul wants to gain Christ and be found in him. Next verse. Next verse. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ.

The righteousness of God based on faith. Now, Paul understands that he can't be saved through the law.

But you see, he doesn't even want to be saved that way. He wants to be saved in such a way that all the glory goes to God. He wants to be saved in such a way that Christ may be exalted.

And Christ is exalted when we put aside all our own righteousness and when we trust in his sufficient sacrifice.

And Christ died for us, taking the guilt of our sin and the penalty of our sin. And that is a sufficient thing.

[21:16] We receive it by faith when we trust in him. Not when we try to somehow attain salvation through our own religious efforts.

But by simple leaning heavily upon Jesus. Not trusting in anything at all. Paul wants to be saved that way because it exalts Jesus Christ.

And next, he goes on with those wonderful words. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.

If somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.

If somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. I want to be completely united with Jesus. I want to walk the walk that he walked. I want to know who he was.

[22 : 18] I want to have fellowship with him in his mission on earth which involved suffering. But it also involved the power of God so that we may be saved and so that God may be glorified.

You see, Jesus is not simply up there and we're down here. The scriptures teach that as Christian believers we are united with the Lord Jesus Christ by a bond that is created and upheld by his Holy Spirit.

We are one with him. And often Paul will use the illustration of marriage. The church is the bride of Christ.

It is every bit like a marriage. And in marriage we know we say vows. We say for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

And Paul is really saying the same thing about Christ here. I want to be with him. I want to have fellowship with him for better or worse. He trod the path of suffering on the way to crucifixion.

[23 : 25] I want to be a part of that because I want to be with him. And that suffering led to resurrection. And I want to know the power of that resurrection. How is it that he was raised from the dead?

I know it was by the Spirit of God. But I want to experience that power myself. I want to know more of it. I know some of it. I met him on the road to Damascus and he commissioned me to preach to the Gentiles and he equipped me for that task.

But I want to know more. I want to press on. Now it's easy for us to want the resurrection bit but be afraid of the suffering.

When was the last time you said to a Christian brother or sister you know I want to know more of the fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings. Have you ever said that?

I can't think of a time when I've ever said that. I think it's only in the last probably six months that I very feebly and very shyly offered a prayer to God saying Lord I can see this in the scriptures that I'm actually to want to share in Christ's sufferings.

[24 : 35] And so I prayed something along the lines of let me know something about that but please bear with me I'm extremely fragile. But look that's a good starting point isn't it?

We are to aspire to sharing the sufferings of Jesus. So let's get on board with that. Why? Because we're united with him. But also because suffering and becoming like him in his death is the entry point.

It's the entry point into experiencing his resurrecting power. And we all want that don't we? We want the power to overcome sin.

We want the power to enjoy that new spiritual life that we've been promised in the scriptures and that has been given to us. We want that to be increased. And finally we want to attain to the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

Now when he says in verse 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead he doesn't mean to say that it's improbable or only a possibility that he's not sure of whether or not it's going to happen.

[25 : 51] What he means to say is that it is something that lies in the future and that it is something mysterious but it is nevertheless something utterly certain.

So are you on the path of sharing in Jesus' sufferings? If you are you are on the path of sharing in his resurrection. But has there been no suffering?

Has your life been easy? Then you need to change you need to have a change of mind about this. Go to God and say Lord I want to have I'm missing out on something here.

I'm missing out on fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings and I want that even if it's only a little bit at a time. I want some of it so that I can know that I'm going to share in his resurrection.

Now this life that Paul is describing is very different from the life promised by the Judaizers isn't it?

[27 : 05] Theirs was a life of believing in Jesus but taking their eyes off him while they busy themselves with obeying rules and taking pride in their own moral character and external privileges.

But Paul's vision is one of being found in Christ and united with him in his death and resurrection. So what's your concept of the Christian life?

Does it have more in common with the Judaizers or with Paul's testimony? Jesus is in the picture somewhere isn't he? But what place does he have?

Is he of secondary importance and do you seek after him simply to maintain your own religiosity and sense of righteousness? Or do you understand that you are united with him? That you are treading his path of death and resurrection and that he is to be your all in all? Finally we come to verses 12 to 16.

[28 : 06] Here we're dealing with our response to God. Paul has just outlined an extremely high calling, hasn't he? Can you say that you've come to regard all of your attainments or earthly privileges and enjoyments as less than nothing when compared to Jesus?

I don't think any of us can say that we have completely come to that point in our experience? Can you say that you want to have fellowship in his sufferings? Do you long to be made like him in his death?

Well to some extent we do but we've got a long way to go. Now it's an encouragement to us that Paul felt the same way about himself. He says, not that I have already attained this or have already reached the goal.

I think the NIV says have already been made perfect. But I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. And Paul does not mean to say that he does not yet have security in his salvation only that some things remain in the future.

For all of us complete Christ-likeness remains in the future. Our final resurrection and heavenly home remain in the future. In the meantime we continue to struggle with sin with self-reliance with wanting to follow our own path rather than the path mapped out by Christ.

[29 : 22] But nevertheless we are to press on continue to move forward let go of a little more of our self-confidence embrace a little more suffering experience more of the power of Christ's resurrection grow in the knowledge of him.

Do we sometimes get discouraged? Of course. And Paul experienced that temptation himself. But what does he say? This one thing I do this one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ.

There are a number of encouragements in these verses. Firstly we have exhortation to forget our past failings. have you been a failure in the past?

Forget about it. Have you been a self-righteous Judaiser in the past? Put it behind you. Were you that way yesterday or even this morning?

Well all of us can look back on preceding days and see how we failed the Lord. Go to him for forgiveness but put it behind you and move on.

[30 : 40] The Christian life is not a life of being burdened with guilt. Christ died to set us free from guilt. So put it behind you and move on.

Secondly it's encouraging because we see here that we have not persevered in our own strength. Paul says Christ Jesus has made me his own. If Christ has taken ownership of us then who we are and what we become is entirely in his hands not ours.

And this is where we find our motivation to continue straining forward. We can say I'm in a race that I cannot lose because Christ owns me and will see me through to the end. On the other hand this doesn't make us lazy rather it gives us the freedom to push on with greater encouragement and vigour.

Now to balance those two things straining forward and relying upon God and his sovereign protection of us takes maturity. It's easy to fall into an excess isn't it on either side.

Either start relying on the flesh and looking to our own perseverance and our own progress or on the other hand to say look I'll be right Christ is going to save me and I'll just sit down and do nothing.

[32 : 05] That takes maturity. to say I'm straining on because Christ is persevering me. But I think there's encouragement even here because Paul says look this aspect of maturity of being well balanced as a Christian God will do that for you as well.

If you're missing something he'll make it clear to you. And he says only let us live up to what we have attained. So though we are to strain ahead to remember where we are at what we have thus attained and not to push ahead to try to run ahead of God I think Simon Peter ran ahead of God on the night that Jesus was betrayed remember how he said to Jesus though all forsake you I won't I'll be with you to the end and what happened he betrayed him three times because at that stage Peter didn't understand his own weakness Peter wasn't living up to what he had attained he was running ahead he needed to learn to pray before he could learn to persevere with Christ in his sufferings so

let's not overestimate ourselves but let's press on trusting in God so to conclude let's boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh let's stop placing so much currency on our own religiosity and outward righteousness and let's press on to experience more of our union with Christ to know him to be clothed in his righteousness to share in his death and resurrection and finally to attain the heavenly prize amen