

Homeward Bound

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn with me to Philippians chapter 3. If you have your Bibles, if not, the screen will have the words.

At our online New Year's Day service, yesterday we were in this particular chapter. I want to extend what we were looking at yesterday. Anyway, we were considering Paul's words that he gave about his desire, his true desire in life to know Christ, to know Christ Jesus as Lord, to know him more and more.

Well, we're going to move on from Paul's thoughts on his desire, his true desire to know the Lord Jesus and to know him more and more, even knowing him in suffering. And as we move on in this passage to consider what Paul tells us of pressing on, moving forward, even in this first Lord's Day of the New Year, that we apply what Paul tells us in this.

We just have to move forward, move forward in strength of God the Lord. Move forward in faith as God directs us. So let's read from the beginning of Philippians 3.

Paul writes, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs.

[1 : 22] Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised in the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

As to the law, a Pharisee. As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness, under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things. And count them as rubbish.

In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law. But that which comes through faith in Christ.

[2 : 32] The righteousness from God that depends on faith. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And may share in his sufferings. Becoming like him in his death.

That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I've already obtained this or I'm 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've 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. May God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word as we consider this morning.

This great theme that Paul brings before us. This theme of the homeward journey. The homeward journey of the believer. The homeward journey to the glory of heaven itself. And as Paul states in the passage, these three main aspects of this pressing on.

[3 : 41] This homeward journey. This, as he speaks of pursuing perfection in Christ. Pursuing this glorification of the Lord Jesus. As he does so, as he presses forward with intent, with purpose.

Towards his heavenly home. And where, as he knows, will be the case. He'll receive the prize. And we'll consider more detail later what that prize or what the prize refers to.

And as we consider this theme of the homeward journey. We do so in this first Lord's Day of 2022. I mean, any first day in any context. Particularly a new year.

It's a landmark. There's meaning. There's particular emphasis, if you like, on the theme of moving forward. Just as we noticed yesterday in our New Year service.

It's always good to begin a year in the context of worship. To do it under the Word of God. And yes, we do it on the first day of the year.

[4 : 46] But also the first Lord's Day. Because certainly a new year gives that perspective of looking forward. Moving forward. And looking forward in all the providence that God will give you.

Even as a congregation. Even as the Lord's people. And to help you in that perspective of moving forward. Then I pray that these words are going to help you.

So that in your desire to move forward in faith. That you do it with a Godward perspective. And to do it with Christ at the centre. Christ's focus.

And that's what we're going to look at here in Philippians 3. That Godward Christ focus perspective. Because those of you who were at the New Year's Day service yesterday online.

Remember. We were considering that great importance of knowing Christ. Knowing Christ and knowing him more and more. So that you have that true desire to deepen your relationship with the Lord Jesus.

[5 : 50] And as we said at the start. We're going to move on. We're going to continue really and reflect. And really that all important focus. Of moving on. Moving forward in faith.

And responding to that call that God gives you. To move forward in him. In that homeward journey. That you who are here. That you're on. And that Christ will keep you in that narrow road as you move forward.

Because you know. A new year. Doesn't just give perspective on the year ahead. A new year. Gives you might say added focus on eternity. Because we are.

Another year closer to glory. But another year. You who are. As you know that you're another year closer to your heavenly abode. This is another year to.

Really to bring before your heart and mind. The bigger picture if you like. The eternal perspective. And so. Really to bring home this sense of the homeward journey that you're on in Christ.

[6 : 52] Well let's see what Paul noticed of himself. And broaden that to you. To be encouraged with what he was saying of his homeward journey.

To be encouraged. Yes. As individuals. To be encouraged as a church. To be encouraged in your homeward journey. So let's see what Paul mentions first of all about pursuing perfection in Christ. In his homeward journey. I mean Paul knew that his relationship with God. He knew it was safe. He knew it was true. He knew he was eternally secure. Because the Lord Jesus had met him on that Damascus road.

He'd saved Paul. Paul knew that he was his. But he knew he hadn't yet reached heaven. He knew that there was that perfection and glory yet to come.

He mentions that in verse 12. He knew there was going to be a time when he'd be perfected in glory. And the glory of heaven where sin cannot be in the presence of a holy God.

[7 : 55] But Paul knew that while Christ is his saviour. He didn't yet know Jesus fully as Jesus is fully to be known. Paul knew that when Jesus returns and the dead in Christ rise first.

Paul knew that he's going to rise with the dead. He's going to rise to be with Jesus eternally in his new resurrection body. Then, he says, then I'll know Jesus fully.

But until then, Paul knows he's got to live his life in obedience to God. And he's got to show that obedience by his actions. He's going to show that he truly is in Christ.

And he's going to have to deepen his relationship with Jesus. Towards that point where one day he'll know perfection in the presence of a saviour. And far from being perfect in his earthly existence, Paul knew he had, yes, still far to go.

And at that time when he'll be perfected in glory. And so in his homeward journey, his journey to heaven, he makes it absolutely clear. He continues to strive.

[9 : 04] He continues to press on. He continues to pursue holiness. He's not going to sit back and hold back in his work as a Christian. He's going to continue to live for Christ.

And he's going to continue to tell others of the saviour. Because as Paul says, Jesus Christ has made me his own. Jesus took hold of Paul.

Jesus changed his life. Jesus saved Paul for himself and from Paul himself. Jesus saved Paul from his sin. He saved Paul from his delusions of grandeur.

Because Jesus stepped into Paul's life. Because Jesus converted him. Paul knows he's got this obligation to keep on. To continue in his heavenly journey and do it in true devotion to his saviour.

And what Paul's writing of himself surely has to be an encouragement to you this morning. To you who are the Lord's people. Because Paul's saying, Jesus has made me his own. Well, Jesus has made you his own.

[10:09] He's yours. You're a precious possession. You're his now. You're his eternally. You know, just dwell in that for a moment. The saviour of the world.

The one who has always been perfected in glory. The one who came from the perfection of glory to earth. To sin-stained earth. He wanted, he desired to come to save you.

He wanted to make you his own. To make you his own possession. You know, what I've got to take with you into the new year. You who are his.

You are his own. He bought you with a price. You're owned of Christ. You're owned in love. That pure love of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

And that love of the Lord Jesus towards you, it never diminishes. Our love for Jesus wanes and grows and then falls. But Jesus' love for you never diminishes.

[11:09] Think of that. You are his. You're his own. And if you're his own, then like Paul, it's for you to press on, press forward in Christ and press forward to Christ.

Because as we said, Paul hadn't, he knows he hasn't yet reached the perfection of heaven. But that didn't stop him in his pursuit of holiness. And that's where we're going to particularly focus this morning, verses 13 to 14.

Because Paul is telling us that he's pressing on, pressing on to the higher calling of God in Christ. But look at the manner, look at the way that he's pressing on.

Verse 13, he's forgetting what lies behind and he's straining forward to what lies ahead. What's the kind of language he's using here?

It's the language of the games. It's the language of the Greek, sometimes Roman games as well, these ancient games. And Paul's using what he saw there to reapply in the Christian life.

[12:15] Especially in this whole analogy of the race. You know, when Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy, 2 Timothy, he spoke in that letter of finishing the race.

He knew that God had given him a race, a journey to be on, to endure for the sake of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. And as Paul had witnessed these games, he brings back what he's written, what he's seen.

And he's going to write. Really, it's what he's seen in the games and bring it to a Christian application. He's writing here, particularly to the church in Philippi.

But he's using this athletic analogy to show the life of the Christian in all the, well, in all the aspects of Christian living and faithfulness, consistency, commitment, straining, straining every sign of your being for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

Paul would have noticed in these games, particularly the sprints, but not just the sprints. He would have noticed that the athletes kept looking forward. And he'd notice how every muscle in these athletes was strained to reach the finishing line.

[13:25] And if any of you have raced, and some of you have in particular sprints, but you know that the faster you go, the less you're going to look back. You look back, you're going to stumble.

You're not going to be as fit, as energetic as you might be. And see what Paul's saying then about pressing forward to Christ. He's saying his focus, his whole focus is looking forward, looking to Jesus.

He can't look back. He's going to forget what's behind. He's not going to look back at the life that he once lived outside of Christ. He's not going to look back at that self-satisfied, self-righteous living that he thought would gain merit with God.

He's not going to look back with any longing for the past sins that once held him down. He knows that if he looks back, that's going to hinder his progress. He's going to slow down his zeal for the Lord.

He's going to keep pressing on, pressing forward. He's going to keep looking to Jesus. He's not going to look back at these sins that once locked him down.

[14:33] And in this new year, in many ways, a renewed start in the race that God's mapped out for you. Don't look back.

Don't look back on your past sins. Don't look back on all the waywardness that you know had so slowed you down in your witness for the Lord. Don't let it lure you away from him again.

So turn your back on what was in your past that was outside of Jesus. Because you've got a race to run. And you've got a race that follows the Lord Jesus. And that race has got to be run now. You can't just stop and then run again, stop, and then move forward. No. God has given you as many days in this life as he's given to you to run that race now. Do it now.

The many days that God grants you the sign of eternity. Because you know that when you look back, you look back into the world, the world's going to drag you down.

[15 : 43] That looking back that God condemns. Remember the story of Lot. Remember the story of Lot and his wife. Remember as they were fleeing from Sodom. They were fleeing from God's judgment on that city.

Remember what happened to Lot's wife. She hesitated. She looked back. She was looking back longingly at what she was running away from. What she'd left behind. And her hesitation.

We look at Scripture. We can work out that the flowing lava had so engulfed her as she stopped that she wouldn't move away from it. And as Scripture tells us, she was turned into a pillar of salt.

Jesus himself mentions that when he was speaking about his return from heaven to earth. He warned. He warned against those whose hearts were still in the world.

Those who would want to retrieve their worldly goods and worldly possessions. Want to preserve a lifestyle that was still rooted in the world when he returned. And his warning against those who won't leave everything behind to be with Jesus.

[16 : 52] He said, Remember Lot's wife. Remember Lot's wife. And again, think of when Jesus was warning against half-hearted following him. That in fact, there's no following of Jesus at all.

What does Jesus say in Luke 9.62? No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. And it's a command of God in your life.

Don't look back. Forget the past. Know that what once held you in its grip, the grip of sin, it's no longer part of your life. Because it's so dangerous to your soul.

It's going to impede you in your progress as a believer. It's going to bring you more and more to compromise. And God calls you to have no compromise in your service for the Lord.

But your heart has to be holy and fully in Christ, for Christ, in service to Him. Just as Paul's heart was holy in the Lord and for the Lord.

[17 : 57] Again, it's a timely reminder. You know, 2022 has begun. An encouragement for you to be the more zealous, to be the more steadfast in your commitment to the Lord.

Forget what's past. Don't have any longing for these former things that so grit your heart. These idols of your own choosing. And run the race that God has given you.

Race is a run forward, not backwards. Run that race forward with all your strength, with all your heart and soul and strength and might.

Because the Christian life is not easy. The Christian life is tough. Because the Christian life demands discipline. It demands hard work. It demands just losing any sense of complacency.

Because your mind's got to be trained in the things of the Spirit. You've got to give yourself fully in your work for the Lord, in your acts of righteousness. You'll do it in strength of God the Lord, but you still do it.

[19 : 06] You're going to put on the full armour of God. You're going to fight in that fight against sin, that fight against the evil one. And you're going to put that armour of God on every single day of your life.

You can't be like these First World War generals who certainly, in many cases, stood back well far from the front line when the front line troops were killed in battle.

You're in the front line in that battle, in that war against sin and against Satan. You're in that front line and will be in that front line for your whole life.

So please resolve then to be the more disciplined in your heart, disciplined in your mind that you do what you do for the glory of God. So forget these past sins, even though this new year has begun.

Remember, these sins are forgiven in Christ. Don't look back even to a life and a lifestyle that one time you thought was going to give you true fulfilment, true joy, fulfilling every expectation.

[20 : 16] Well, the only true joy that's found is found in the Lord Jesus. It's He who calls you to Himself. Just as Paul rejoiced in that calling that he had in Christ.

You see, Paul knew fulfilment. He knew that his life was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. And so because of that he strained and he stretched out with all that he was in his heart to know Christ more, to love the Lord Jesus more, to serve Him more, to deepen his faith in Christ more as he was journeying to

his heavenly home to be with his Lord forever.

And so he pressed on, pressed on towards what he calls in verse 14 the goal, the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus, what we might call prize-giving in Christ.

In all likelihood, Paul was writing this letter in a prison in Rome, but he's still picturing himself as that Christian athlete. and he's running his race, the race that God has set out for him.

And he sees the finishing line. He knows that there will be a time when he departs this life for the glory of heaven. But he knows it's still some time away. That finishing line in his life, still some distance.

[21 : 37] But he's not going to quit the race. He's not going to give up. He's in an endurance race, probably more like a marathon than a sprint. And he's going to run that race as a true servant of the Lord Jesus.

But he still can see that finishing line. Some way off, yes, but that's the goal. That's what lies ahead. Because he knows at one point his race will be run. And as God's Word tells us, in that twinkling of an eye, he'll enter the glory of heaven.

He'll have finished his race, crossed the finishing line, entered heaven, entered the perfection of heaven. And until that time comes, he's going to continue to pursue that line.

He's going to press on to cross that finishing line. And he knows that when he does so, when that line between earth and heaven is crossed, he's going to receive from God, as he says, the prize.

The prize, the calling, the high calling of God in Christ. But what's Paul saying here? What's that prize that Paul's referring to? I mean, Paul would have seen the prizes that were given to the athlete that won the races, the prize of the laurel leaves, the laurel crown, the crown that was placed in the head of the winning athlete when that athlete crossed the finishing line first.

[22 : 58] And he knew at that point that that athlete had run his race and run that race well. I mean, what's this prize that Paul's telling us here when he knows that he's going to reach the glory of heaven, finish his race, cross that finishing line?

This upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Well, think of that call. Think of the call. That call of God that called Paul from darkness to light.

That call that led from the Damascus road to heaven itself. That upward call. The call to be raised heavenward. The call to be in heaven itself.

And surely that's one aspect of the prize that Paul's pressing forward to. The prize of being in the glory of heaven. Being raised to heaven itself. That's the prize won for him by the call of the Lord Jesus.

But then remember, it was God who called him. God called Paul to himself. And in the glory of heaven, that prize of seeing God, seeing him face to face, that's going to be realized.

[24 : 14] Paul had called God, God had called Paul to himself. And Paul was now safe in Christ Jesus. And Paul's looking forward to that eternal fellowship with the Lord Jesus and that sin-free, sinless relationship.

It's going to be fully realized in the glory of heaven. If that was Paul and his looking forward to the prize of the glory of heaven and the presence of his Savior forever, is that your prospect?

Does that prospect thrill you as you're running your race, as you're looking to Jesus, as you're pressing on, as you're going towards that finishing line, that goal, if you like?

Because you who were called by God to know Jesus as Savior, you've been called at the same time, called to that heavenly home. You've been called to know Jesus, to love him, to follow him. You've been called into his presence eternally. You know, as we said, a new year gives you so much to look forward to from the vantage of the start of this new year.

[25 : 28] There are going to be new opportunities for you. There are going to be new experiences. There are going to be new prospects that will be realized. There's going to be new challenges.

But of course, all these have to be secondary to that main prospect that's before you that a new year certainly emphasizes. That prospect and that reality of the upward call of God and Jesus. Because you who are his, you who know Jesus as Savior, remember, he called you. He called you to himself. And as someone said nearly a hundred years ago, when God calls anyone, he bids him come and die.

In other words, dying to sell, bearing your cross, abandoning all the attachments that you've got to this world, even those things that you once held so precious. And God's calling you homeward.

And in that call of God, homeward to pursue the prize, the prize of his calling even to the glory of heaven itself. And I have to say this, that for some of you that prize is going to be maybe sooner than you expect.

[26 : 43] If none of us knows the day nor the hour when God's going to call you home. So I ask you, are you ready for that call? I mean, the Lord who called you once to himself, he called you to himself in faith.

He's going to call you again to that heavenly home where the prize of life and all its fullness in the presence of God and the fellowship with the Lord Jesus and yes, the fellowship with all the saints and glory.

You'll know that. Doesn't that encourage you the more to be fervent and zeal for the Lord? Yes, to bear your cross, to suffer for the Lord Jesus even in dying to self each day as you strain forward to the goal of the prize that's heaven worth.

But what if you haven't yet given your life to the Lord Jesus? What are you living for? You are going to strain and strive, but what are you going to strain and strive towards?

Because without Christ, your energies are going to be expended elsewhere. But anyone or anything other than the Lord Jesus is not going to satisfy.

[28 : 00] You'll crave more and more and you'll still be unsatisfying. Last Lord's Day we mentioned the words of St. Augustine. We'll mention them again. When he said these words of the Lord, you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

And you won't find any rest. You won't find any contentment. You won't find any true heart satisfaction unless you give your heart, you give your life to the Lord Jesus.

and you're going to strain for happiness and contentment elsewhere. But unless you strain and strive in the strength of God the Lord and give your precious life, your precious Saviour, you won't have that peace, that rest, that true contentment.

And so I pray that this new year will give you all a new commitment, a fresh commitment to follow the Lord Jesus. You who don't yet know him, give your life to him, repent of your sins.

Don't look back, but strive forward, forward to that place of glory that God promises, your eternal safety, your eternal security.

[29 : 17] Because tomorrow is not guaranteed. Give your life to Christ now. If you have given your life, keep on keeping on. Press on, press on towards that high calling.

of Christ in God. Amen. And let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we give thanks that you call your people to yourself.

That you give that call that will not be resisted in those whom you have gifted faith to believe. That we thank you, Lord, that that call is true, that call continues.

And may there be even one here this morning, whether in the building or in line, who will heed that call and give their life to the Lord Jesus.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue before you now in worship. We pray, Lord, your pardon for our many sins in Christ, we pray. for our ■■■■■ beings, Father, are we Ready?

[30 : 33] And let us know and