

Achieving Vs Believing

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[0 : 00] Now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our heart be found acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. I don't know if you've ever been to one of the better-known jails in the country, but they have a lovely arrangement for people to talk to each other.

You're put into a very plastic kind of a room where there's a desk where you can sit with a telephone with no dial on it and a great sheet of clear plastic on the other side of which is a desk with a telephone and you sit and try and communicate with somebody in the ten minutes that's allowed to you.

Well, that's what I feel about short sermons. That it's... You have so much you'd like to say and so much love, perhaps, that you might want to express and joy that you want to share, but the setting is so awkward that you wonder what can be done about it.

Nevertheless, great things happen, and I hope they will this morning, by God's grace, as I share with you this verse from Romans chapter 9, verse 32.

And if you turn to it, it's on page 150 in the New Testament section of your Q Bible.

[1 : 36] It begins with the question, why?

Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works, they have stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Now, if you can make very much out of that, you get ten marks to start with, but the translation of that verse, which I want to put before you, is from J.B. Phillips, and it says this, and this is a paraphrase of that verse, which helps me a great deal and I trust will help you.

This is the matter that I want to preach to you about, and these are the words from J.B. Phillips. Their minds were fixed on what they achieved rather than on what they believed.

Paul's great sorrow is opened up to us. He says as this chapter opens, and you could go back to verse 1 if you like to follow it, but I'm still reading from the paraphrase.

[2 : 53] He says, He says, Before Christ and my own conscience in the Holy Spirit, I assure you that I am speaking the plain truth when I say that there is something that makes me feel very depressed, like a pain that never leaves me.

It is the condition of my brothers and fellow Israelites, and I have actually reached the pitch of wishing myself cut off from Christ if it means that they should be one for God.

Well, that's Paul's great sorrow. And when you turn to the epistle to the Romans, you must remember that at the heart of it is this heart-rending sorrow of Paul for his own people, the people in whose culture he had been brought up, the people whose language he spoke, the people among whom he worshipped, the people among whom he lived, the people who were his friends and cousins and relatives according to the flesh, the people nearest to him were these people for whom Paul said, I am very depressed, like a pain that never leaves me.

And the reason that he is very depressed is that he has come to have a deep faith in Jesus Christ and his people have deeply rejected Jesus Christ.

And why have they rejected Jesus Christ? Back to the beginning. Their minds were fixed on what they achieved rather than what they believed.

[5 : 00] Their minds were fixed on what they had achieved rather than on what they believed. Well, what had they achieved?

Well, Paul says they were a tremendous, they are a tremendously gifted people. And he says, just think what the Israelites have had given to them.

And this again paraphrases these first verses of chapter 9. Just think what they have had given to them. The privilege of being adopted as sons of God.

The experience of seeing something of the glory of God. The receiving of the agreements made with God. The gift of the law.

The ways of worship. God's own promise. All these are theirs. The patriarchs are theirs. So too, as far as human descent goes, is Christ himself, who is God over all and blessed forever.

[6 : 10] And they have rejected Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all that. And why have they rejected Jesus Christ?

Because their minds were fixed on what they achieved rather than on what they believed. And we live in a society now which has rejected Jesus Christ.

And they have rejected Him because of what they have achieved without Him.

They feel that they can ultimately stand before God justified in that knowledge. This is the kind of hurt, the kind of wounding, the kind of sorrow that belongs to parents who can say to their children, anything that you want for your good, I am prepared to give to you.

And the parents and the children are unable to receive. And as we come to know Paul, where he is so deeply wounded, out of concern for his own people, we see in one another the same kind of wounding has taken place.

[7 : 44] Where the longing we have for one another is like Paul's because what belongs to them they have not received.

And you see, this congregation is an achieving congregation. They have achieved in industry and in business and in politics and in society, in the law, in every way imaginable to Western man this is an achieving congregation.

But this faith into which this child is baptized this morning is not a faith that measures achievement. It's a faith in which we are called upon to believe with all our hearts in the God who has made provision for us in Jesus Christ.

It is a faith which is based not on what we achieve, but on what God has achieved for us in Christ, which we by faith receive.

[9 : 05] can I say of Philippa James that she is almost certainly bound to achieve great things in her life.

The place of her birth, her family, her schooling, her childhood friends, all will be the means of achieving. And by the time she is 19, when this century and this millennium turns into a new century and a new millennium, her room will be filled with the souvenirs and rewards of achievement.

because that's how our society works. But the purpose of this service of baptism is not to be a rung on the ladder of achievement, but rather to be an introduction to the person of Jesus, a putting to death of that life which is measured by achievement, and the beginning of that life which is based on an informed obedience of faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

My longing for this congregation is that we will know most certainly and that we will know personally and individually that we are justified before God not by the measure of our achievement, but by the fact of our faith in Jesus Christ.

It's hard work to tell a congregation of achievers that the basis of their relationship to God is not their achievement, but what Christ has done for them on the cross.

[11 : 24] There are two things that can happen. One is that you can say that you don't understand what Christ has done on the cross.

And I suspect within the Anglican communion there are people who don't understand that. But by and large in our society the problem is not that people don't understand, but understanding they have rejected.

And that's where Paul's sorrow came from. Not because people didn't understand Jesus Christ, but understanding Him they have rejected Him.

And I must solemnly tell you that we live in a world in which the faith we profess and the faith which we have brought Philip put Jane into this moment is a faith which many, many people in our society have rejected.

And we must assume that in part it may be because they don't understand what it's all about. in part, no doubt, it is because their minds are fixed on what they have achieved rather than on the importance of what they believe.

[13 : 12] But it is a faith that has been rejected. and it is no good our supposing that we can go along with the outward forms of the Christian faith unless there is at the heart of that an encounter with and a belief in what Jesus Christ has achieved for us and that our standing before God is on

that basis and on that basis alone.

That no matter how important it is in our world to achieve, we stand justified before God only on the grounds of what we've come to believe about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. our Father as we stand on the pinnacle of the achievements of our society and on the pinnacle of our own achievements achievements, help us to understand that the place to which you are calling us is not the pinnacle of achievement but the place of forgiveness, the place of reconciliation which is at the foot of the cross of Jesus

Christ. that our standing before you is because of what he has achieved for us.

Help us to deeply understand this in the circumstances of our lives that we might come to believe it with all our heart and to obey it in the obedience of faith.

[15 : 54] Amen. Amen.