

# Philippians 3:15-4:1 (PM)

*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: 12 June 2022

Preacher: Rev. Ben Roberts

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, well, it's great to be back preaching at the evening service again. If you could find a Bible, find a Bible, open up to Philippians chapter 3.

There should be one in front of you. And we're picking up at verse 15. So, where we are in this book, Paul has just finished sharing his testimony.

And he's described how he gained Christ. And the joy and life he found in Christ. And he did that by letting go of his curated credentials.

So, he gave that whole list of all his accomplishments. He says, that's rubbish. Because I've received the gift of Christ's right standing with God. And now that he's been found in Christ, his life, he says, is shaped by radical satisfaction and radical dissatisfaction.

And what I mean is, he knows that everything he needs is already his in Jesus. But at the same time, he wants to know Jesus more deeply.

[ 1 : 0 3 ]     He wants to grow in faithfulness. And sometimes in church land, we use the words, the now and the not yet, to talk about this. This idea in the Christian life. So, for instance, we might say, now, right now, if we have faith in Christ, we're counted righteous in him.

And we have life and peace and joy. But we also know that we're not yet fully transformed. So, we often lose our way. We sin. We don't know Christ fully, even though we want to.

Now, where we pick up here in verse 14, Paul has been describing this experience of the now and the not yet in his life.

And it's gone up to verse 14. And he's speaking from experience. So, you'll remember this from last week. He says, I've suffered loss in order that I might gain Christ. I have not already obtained this, but I press on.

But if you look at verse 15, you see that there's a change there. He's shifting from testimony to takeaway. He's not saying I there. He says, let those of us who are mature think this way.

[ 2 : 1 0 ]     In other words, this experience that he just described in the first half of the chapter, all this amazing stuff, it's not just for Paul. It's for you and it's for me. And you'll probably remember, since chapter 2, we've seen example and example and example.

And now we're on to exhortation. So, he says, you've seen it in Christ. I've described it in other Christians. I've described it in myself, in my testimony. And now you, you Philippians, you Vancouverites, you must stand firm in just the same way.

Not being led astray by bad examples, but counting on the promise that we have in Jesus. So, I've got three points, three words to help us find our way through this passage.

So, the first is maturing. The second is warning. And the third is belonging. So, maturing. That's verses 15 to 17.

We just saw that word, didn't we? Those who are mature, let us think this way. So, Paul, back in verse 12, if you look up just a few verses, he describes his own maturity like this. He says, Christ has made me his own, Paul says.

[ 3 : 33 ] That's the now. He knows that he's Christ's. But, I struggle to make it my own. I struggle to claim it. I haven't obtained it. I'm not perfect. That's the not yet.

He's in it. He's not through it. I don't know if some of you can relate to that. I can certainly relate to it. This feeling of being unfinished. Something real has happened to you in Christ.

You know that you love him. You know that you need him. And you also know ongoing failure in your life in terms of pursuing him. And I think that what's extremely surprising in here, the message of verse 15, is that that's normal Christianity.

What I've just described. That that's not a situation that you need to escape. It's a situation you need to stand firm in. And so, when verse 15 says, Let those of us who are mature think this way.

He's talking about that thinking back in verse 12. So, in verse 12, that word perfect, when he says, I'm not perfect. That's the same Greek word as mature in verse 15. You can imagine, Paul, he's writing this.

[ 4 : 40 ] I don't know. Maybe he writes it with a wink or a smile on his face. And he's saying, Come on, Philippians. Join the club of the mature. Those of us that haven't made it. We haven't obtained it, but we want to.

We want to be like Christ. We're not like him yet. Those are the mature in Christ. The people in the messy middle. So, if you're someone that can see Christ's goodness, and also see your own lack, then you are on the road to Christian maturity.

That's how all of us feel. That tension, and that joy, that frustration, both together, that's a sign that Christ has gripped you, and that he is transforming you.

That's what transformation feels like. Like, I often, whenever I watch a movie, and there's a training montage in the movie, that's my favorite part, right?

So, like, there's, you know, there's, like, Rocky is the classic one, where he's training to be a boxer, and it's like, you know, he's running up and down stadiums, and then, you know, 30 seconds later, he's just a world champion boxer, and it's just great.

[ 5 : 42 ] But this is literally the opposite of that, what we're talking about here. This is not, this process of transformation, it's not a 30-second training montage.

It's grinding. It's lifelong. It feels like suffering. Often you feel like you're just losing. And it's because it's cross-shaped.

We're following in Jesus' footsteps. And you'll encounter, you will, if you're going to follow Jesus in your life, you will encounter a time where you need to pick up a cross.

And you'll know it when you encounter it. And the length of this process is the reason that he tells them to hold true, or to stand firm in what you've obtained.

So he says that right at the beginning of this section, and then he says it again in chapter 4, verse 1. Hold true, stand firm. Because it's very tempting to despair or to give up.

[ 6 : 42 ] And you might think to yourself, it just costs too much. This is too hard, this is too humbling, what Jesus is asking of me. There must be an easier way to follow him. But, this is the gospel.

This is how God transforms us. And we need to stand firm in this process. He says, if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Which is my new signature line in my email. But no, that's not what he's saying. He's saying, are you a spiritual superstar?

You are? Well, walk a mile further. Walk a year, or 10 years, or 50 years following Christ. And God will confirm in you and in your life that this is the way.

This is the only way. There's no secret to be discovered. There's no key to be found. There's no way to skip the pain of this process of formation. There's nothing better out there in the world that you will find.

[ 7 : 45 ] There's nothing better in your heart. You won't do better. There's nothing better than what we found in Christ's gospel. This is how God is transforming us into the image of Christ. And so, we need to stand firm in it.

And all this really helps us make sense of verse 17, this command. He says, Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me. And keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example that you have in us.

It's really interesting that this is the first command here that he gives. Join in imitating me. I think it can be off-putting, so I'm going to try to explain his posture here.

So, you have to know, I ride bikes around. I like riding bikes. I'm not by any means a world-class cyclist. But, I have taught all three of my children to ride bikes.

And I even taught a neighbor kid how to ride a bike. Because I'm just that good. I'm not an Olympian. I'm not as fast as Joel Strecker even.

[ 8 : 45 ] But I can ride a bike. And so, I can teach kids to ride a bike. And I think you see what I'm driving at here. Paul's not being proud. He's not a super saint. He's not better than us.

But he does know the trail. He knows what it means to press on and follow Christ. So, he says, Look at me. It's like this. Do it like this. Keep your eyes up.

Keep pedaling. You're a work of grace. It's deeply uncomfortable. That's normal. Forget what's behind and turn your gaze again to Christ. Now, every kid that I've taught to ride a bike has also crashed into a large Arbutus bush very painfully at some point.

And this is why we need good examples. It's so we don't give up. Our youngest child learned to ride the quickest of all the kids because her siblings just kept zooming down that hill while she was watching.

And she said, Well, I know it can be done. I know I can learn it. And that's what Paul's saying here. He's saying, Find someone that knows the trail. Find someone that you can follow.

[ 9 : 50 ] Someone that can encourage you in this. find other people that are honest about the cost and have chosen to embrace it.

People that share about their struggle and their sin and can also tell you that year by year through all of that trial, Christ is more desirable. He's more worth it. He's become more beautiful to them.

But Paul says, Keep your eyes on them. And that's what I'm saying to you too. Find good examples. Seek out mature Christians. If you see someone walking faithfully, that's the sign of maturity is that they're walking faithfully.

That's what Paul says. That's someone to keep your eyes on. And then, once you've located those people, you need to find a way to be in community with them, which is why we have community groups.

But that may not be enough. You may need to glom onto them. You may need to ask them for coffee. You may need to hang out at Soup Sunday or other opportunities when we can rub off on each other a little bit.

[ 10 : 55 ] So, Paul says, Imitate me, look for good examples, and watch out for bad examples. So, that's the second point. That's warning. First maturity, second warning. Watch out for bad examples.

So, he gives many good examples in the book of Philippians, and now he gives us a counter example, a cautionary tale. He says, there are many bad examples. And we don't really know historically who he's talking about here.

But Paul does say, I've warned you about this before. I've warned you about these people before. And his tears that he's writing with indicate that these people had some association with the church.

Perhaps they claim to be Christian teachers, but they're leading people astray. Whatever the case, we know that they're not walking in maturity because they walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

That's what he says in verse 18. Their walk, their manner of life is a contrast, a negative contrast to the good example of verse 17.

[ 11 : 56 ] Because they're opposed to, they're enemies of the cross of Christ. So, think about this. Think about the context. Paul writes from prison. He's writing from prison, this letter.

He's writing to Christians that are being persecuted. Every day, they wake up and they face physical suffering and mocking, perhaps death, for their faith in Christ. And so, their daily journey mirrors Christ's carrying of the cross.

Every day, they pick up their cross. Earlier in the book, Paul said, it has been granted to you not only to believe, but suffer for his sake. It's been granted to you like a gift, Paul says.

In verse 10, he said that part of pursuing Christ is sharing his sufferings. That's strong stuff. But what it means is that to make yourself an enemy of the cross, this way of walking with Jesus in this life is to reject Christ.

It's saying to yourself, it's too costly, it's too painful, it's too humbling, it's too difficult, it's not worth it. But in God's economy, the way things work, Christ's humiliation and his suffering, him picking up the cross, is the path to resurrection and victory.

[ 13 : 11 ] And so, if we reject Christ's cross, we reject his victory, we reject resurrection, we reject salvation. And that's why Paul says here that their end is destruction.

The reason they can't abide suffering is because, he says, their God is their belly. That's an interesting phrase. Their Lord, their God, is not Jesus, but their own appetites and pleasures.

Now, we shouldn't get the wrong idea about desires here. Many of our desires in life are really good. They're for things that we need. They're gifts of God. So, we get hungry and we need to eat.

We desire to have family and friendship. That's really good. Our desires can remind us that we look for ultimate satisfaction in God. That's a really good thing. But the issue here is not the presence of appetite.

It's not the desires in their life. It's ultimacy. So, it says they're ruled by their appetites. Their God is their appetites. They're consumers who are being consumed by the thing they worship.

[ 14 : 20 ] You may have noticed in your life that following appetites, following desires, is the path of least resistance. That's the easiest thing to do. But it's not the path of salvation. Our appetites are instable.

We're insatiable. And that makes them a very poor God. So, I have a silly example of this. Over the course of a year, I've observed that there were three fads at my children's school.

The first fad was Beyblades. Do you guys know what a Beyblade is? It's really cool. It's a spinning top. These guys know what I'm talking about.

You shoot the spinning top into the arena and then you fight another top with it and whichever top falls over or pops, it loses. That was the first fad and they were very into it. As are these girls at the front.

The second fad was Pokemon trading cards. Even more popular, it appears. Here's the third fad.

[ 15 : 28 ] You're not going to get, you're not, you would never guess this. The third fad was tennis balls. Oh yes, oh my. So like, the newer tennis ball the better.

If you brought it to school you were a king for a day. It highlights how silly desire is, right? But I think that we can agree that adult appetites are just as flighty.

And what we do is we put ourselves on a hedonistic treadmill. And so, as soon as we've gotten that one thing that we want, we're on to the next thing that we want. And it's a treadmill because our desires, our appetites are endless.

There's always a new thing. Satisfaction is always out of reach. And we can spend our whole life wanting the next thing and miss eternity. Along with the point of everything here on earth.

But these enemies of the cross, they don't stop with these insatiable appetites. They also glory in their shame. And so what's happening here is that once appetites become the ultimate thing, the most important thing in our life, we justify and promote them.

[ 16 : 34 ] And there's an amazing inversion that happens in sin where the thing that we ought to be ashamed of becomes a source of pride for us, a source of glory, becomes a badge of self-definition and authenticity.

So in Romans 1, Paul uses the same language of glory and shame to talk about sexual immorality. But we know that it can happen in lots of ways to us where we glory in a thing that we should be ashamed of.

But the final thing is the most telling description about these enemies that we should watch out for. And that's that their minds are set on earthly things. So, in chapter 2, you may remember, we were invited to share the mind of God, the mind of Christ, and to watch his example.

Earlier in this chapter, we saw an example of a mind transforms by Christ in Paul's testimony. In his own life, the light of heaven literally shone on him. And it made his entire world flip upside down, and things became beautiful and purposeful and hopeful.

But for us, think about what happens if our view is always below the horizon. It means that we catch none of that light. We have what Charles Taylor calls an imminent frame.

[ 17 : 45 ] An imminent frame means that there's nothing more than what we can see. There's nothing true beyond my experience. There's no purpose beyond pleasure and fulfillment. There's no life after death. There's no meaning in suffering.

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Or perhaps, more realistically, go to work, pay your rent, die alone. That's the Vancouver mantra these days.

These enemies of Christ have grabbed fully onto the now of this world, and they've lost sight completely of the not yet, of what is to come. And he started off this section by saying, there's many who walk this way.

And I would say it's many, if not most. The majority of our friends and our families, our colleagues, our neighbors, think this way. They live this way. They don't see anything wrong with it.

This is their world. And so if you want to stand firm in Christ, they cannot be your example. Our vision, our mind, has to be captivated by something else.

[ 18 : 47 ] And that brings us to the final point, which is belonging. Starting at verse 20. So Paul says, our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this gets right at the heart of what we're hoping for. The Philippian Christians would have connected with this right away. Philippi was a Roman colony.

They were granted a rare status in this empire as citizens, and they belonged to Rome, which meant something. It was great. It meant protection.

It meant Roman legions to defend them. It meant privilege, access to wealth building, legal rights. And from a Roman point of view, they would just have called it salvation. Caesar, in fact, used that term of himself all the time.

He called himself the Savior and the Lord of his empire. Just as he used the word gospel to talk about his victories, his conquering. Caesar alone could be trusted to bring peace and prosperity and victory to the people living in the Roman Empire.

[ 19 : 55 ] And I have to say, if you're earthly-minded, it didn't get better than this. In the first century, this was the place to live. This was the person to be a Roman citizen.

There's nothing better than being a Roman citizen in this time. So Paul's making a really strong statement here to his Philippian friends. He's saying, you don't belong to Caesar.

This eminent, this earthly frame, it's not your frame. Your salvation is bigger than Rome. It's bigger than the Pax Romana. It's bigger than this citizenship. You await a Savior from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You aren't looking inward and downward. You're looking outward and upward, where Christ is, who is coming. Now the New Testament uses this idea a lot, plays with a lot of variations on this idea.

Jesus says, we're not of this world. Peter calls us exiles, resident aliens. In Hebrews, we long for the heavenly country. And all of it is the language of expatriates, right?

[ 21 : 03 ] People who don't, they're not living in the country that they belong to. And our hearts are set on our true home, the place we really belong, the place we want to be. Now, often we use this language to speak about responsibility.

So if you're a Canadian, you know citizenship is about rights and responsibilities. I learned that when I took my test. But we often start with responsibility. So we think, if your true home is in heaven, then you should be living like it.

And don't get me wrong, this is true. This is what the Bible teaches. We should be living like it. We're called to think and live differently. We're called to walk faithfully and think maturely.

We're called to follow Paul's example. It's true, but it's not the first thing. It's actually rights that come before responsibilities. It starts with belonging, not behaving.

So Paul is not saying here, you're citizens of heaven, so shape up. You better do better. He's saying something much better than that. He's saying, heaven has claimed you.

[ 22 : 17 ] Heaven will always claim you. You belong to heaven. It's your home. It's coming for you. Because Christ has made you his own. He has gripped you.

You belong to him. You aren't accomplishing your salvation. Christ is bringing it to you. You just have to stand firm and wait. He's working it in you right now.

He's transforming you by his spirit who is within you. That's what's happening on this slow and painful road of maturity. He will bring it to completion. He says, he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Our cross-shaped life of suffering that we share with him now, this humility and lowliness that we embrace now is a prelude to the eternal weight of glory that is going to be revealed in his coming.

We started off by talking about this struggle of Christian maturity, the frustration of the now and the not yet, this work of sanctification, all the bad examples that might lure us from our hope in him.

[ 23 : 29 ] But here, we're talking about the end of that process. That struggle that we're in now, it's not forever. Your glorification is coming. When Christ returns, reveals his power, your transformation, my transformation will be made complete.

Our lowly bodies, our humble, incapable bodies will be made like his heavenly body, perfected and deathless. And we'll no longer need to forget what's behind and press on, we'll have arrived at home with Christ.

So, the eternal and unshakable and unbreakable reality of heaven has broken into the world in Christ. it has laid a hold of us. He has claimed us as his own.

And so, for now, we grab onto him in faith until it becomes sight. Day by day, forgetting what lies behind, we press on towards him, towards Christ who has claimed us as his own and will one day bring us home.

Amen. praise and forgiveness to them. I hear from you from around some