

Press Towards the Mark

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- [0 : 00] I'd like us to turn once again to Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 3, and reading at verse 14.
- Philippians 3, verse 14.
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- [2 : 00] Paul, here at the beginning of this chapter, begins with the words which, you know, finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.
- Philippians 3, verse 14.
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- revert back to legalism, which was anathema to Paul. Legalism which, when he wrote to the Galatian church, he said, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?
- Having begun in the spirit, are you now going to make yourself perfect by the law? And these three verses remind us that there is no future in trying to live according to the law and make God accept us because of the way that we live.
- [3 : 27] And so Paul begins, he says, look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. These are those who are trying to invade the church he planted at Philippi, a church in which he had great affection for, and a church, as we go through this letter, we can see that that affection is returned abundantly.
- He says, for we are the true circumcision. We are the real Christians. We are the ones who really worship God.
- And we do it by the spirit of God. We are not bounded by traditions and man's regulations. We worship God in the spirit, by the Holy Spirit guiding us, leading us, filling our hearts and minds with truth and with hope.
- We also glory in Christ Jesus. He is the very focus of the attention of every Christian. We focus on him, all that he has accomplished for us.
- Our very lives are caught up in what he has done. He is our hope, he is our confidence, he is our everything. So we glory in Christ Jesus and we have no confidence in the flesh.
- [4 : 50] Nothing that we've done, nothing that we might attain to, nothing that might be our boast in confidence is anything. But our confidence is in Christ and not in the flesh.
- And then to expand on what he said, he says, though I myself have confidence in the flesh. He's looking at these Judaizers and saying, they have no reason whatsoever to boast.
- All their works are imperfect. All their law keeping is as nothing. I'll show you what I could boast of if I really wanted to boast.

And we see Paul here looking back at his life and saying, this is what I was. this is what my life was about and this is what I did.

You know, Paul was a man before his conversion, someone who was very boastful, very boastful of what he was. He was a hater of the Church of Christ. He's someone who did everything he did to destroy that church.

[5 : 58] And yet he was looked up to by his peers, all those whom he mixed with, all those who were in the Sanhedrin with him. if there was somebody who could be looked up to, someone whom parents could point their children towards and say, if you study hard, if you work hard, if you go about doing everything right and proper, you can grow up to be like Paul.

See that man, see what progress he's making, see how far he's progressed in the Jewish faith. If you work rightly and you're good, that's the way you'll be. in Paul's later life, as he found faith in Christ, as he gave up all things for Christ, that they would look at him and say, don't go near that man.

See what a shipwreck he's made of that life. He had everything at his feet and he's given it all up for Christ. Don't be so foolish.

Stay away from him and all those who are like him. But Paul here in this chapter looks both backwards and he looks forwards.

He looks backwards initially at what he was. He says he was off circumcised on the eighth day.

[7 : 22] He wasn't a proselyte. He was a real Jew. He was circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with the law. He was of the stock of Israel.

He was of the tribe or the people of Israel. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, the only tribe who supported the tribe of Judah when they separated the two nations from Israel and Judah.

He was also a someone who had no confidence in the flesh. and he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was someone who wasn't brought into the nation but whose both parents were Israelites.

According to the law of Pharisee he was the strictest sect. According to righteousness which is according to the law blameless. He did everything according to the man made laws of his own day.

And so in all these different ways he saw himself as faultless before his conversion. And that would have been his boast. That would have been his lifestyle.

[8 : 29] Then he goes on to say but whatever gain I had I counted loss for Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth or because of the surpassing greatness of Christ Jesus.

I want us to look at ourselves as to where we are. As to whether we have any boasts we can make of the lives we've been living.

Whether we can look at ourselves and say yes I've done this or I've not done that and my life has given me meaning because of all that I've accomplished. And whether we can respond as Paul here responds.

He wants nothing to do with it. He wants to lay it aside and go away. And Paul here says what is more.

He says I count everything. Indeed I count whatever gain I had I wanted to be counted as lost for the surpassing greatness.

[9 : 44] There's nothing to be compared to Christ and what he has done for me. It is beyond everything I can imagine. Beyond everything I could ever attain to.

And it is what I really want now. And so Paul looks back at his life after his conversion.

but also he looks at his life since he was converted. And we read some of that in Philippians chapter 11.

all that he suffered for Christ. And that also is a great boast that he could have made if he had so wanted. And looking at that boast as though Paul was really making it.

We see all that he did do for the cause of Christ. He was a greater apostle than all the others about them. He suffered more than they.

[10 : 46] He labored more than they. He went to more places than they had gone. in his own letter to Timothy. He calls himself the chief of sinners.

He calls himself as the one who has been saved and an example to others that no matter what your life might have been like, what you might have done in that life, yet there is safety and there is security for you in Christ Jesus.

But to return again here to the apostle. He is looking at that life and he's saying, if I really wanted to boast, I could boast of my beatings for Christ, I could boast of my shipwrecks for Christ, I could boast of the visions that I've had, I could boast of all these things, but I count all these things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for the surpassing greatness of that knowledge, that nothing can be compared with what Christ has done for me and what he has done in me.

And once again, we have to look at ourselves and examine ourselves to see whether we can stand up to this sort of scrutiny that Paul is bringing towards us here.

and then Paul goes on to say, 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 my own righteousness which comes from the law but that which comes through the righteousness that depends on faith.

[12 : 32] Paul talks here about the power of the resurrection. sometimes we look at this phrase and wonder what Paul is talking about but he's talking about here the power that comes from the throne of God and him justifying the ungodly who believe in Christ Jesus.

So often as we look at those who have been brought to Christ, we look at the lives they've led, we look at some of the activities and pastimes they've engaged in and suddenly they're converted, suddenly their lives are turned upside down and they are made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

And in him they have all things. Even as Paul who at one time called himself the chief of sinners, yet he could say that there is for him hope and there is consolation and there is a future and there is a life that will never end.

And then Paul says he wants to attain by any means possible to the resurrection from the dead. Now everyone is resurrected, both the believer and the unbeliever.

What Paul is here talking about is the resurrection of the just. And that's what he wants to attain to. More than anything, he wants to know that resurrection.

[14 : 06] The power that justified the ungodly Paul. The power that justified the man who wanted to destroy Christ's church. He wants to know that in his own life.

So that he might finally be identified with the Lord's people. salvation. He says, not that I have already attained this, because the resurrection is still in the future for all of us.

But all those who are in Christ Jesus are already on that path. We already know the experience of heaven here on earth, because we are in Christ Jesus.

Amidst all the unhappiness, all the despair, all the lack of hope. There is this deep joy within everyone who is in Christ Jesus, that we have a life that is never going to end.

We have a future that is going to be glorious, and we are all going to be kept in Christ Jesus because of what he has accomplished for us and for our salvation.

[15 : 16] And so as Paul looks at his life before his conversion and after it, we can think of a statement made or written by a man called David Dixon.

And in that he talks about a man who has led a life which has been very ungodly. And after his conversion he led a life which has been impeccable.

And as he looks back on his life, he sees what he has done in both areas of life. He says, I look at all my evil deeds and I look at all my good deeds and I bundle them all up together and I flee from them all to Christ.

I want to know nothing but the surpassing greatness and the surpassing knowledge that there is in Christ Jesus. And so here we have Paul pressing towards the mark.

He says, Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own yet, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, all that has been in my life, all that I have done in my ungodly life and all that I have done in the service of Christ.

[16 : 42] I forget what is behind and I strain to what lies ahead. He's painting the picture here of an athlete. He's painting the picture of a man who's waiting for the starting gun or the seconds after the starting gun has sounded and he's using every muscle and every sinew to hit that winning tape first.

That's all he's concentrating on and that's what he's doing and that's what Paul here is asking us to do. To strive towards a life of godliness.

To struggle for a life of holiness. Going on towards this prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

It is a prize that only Christ can give to us. That's only available to us in Christ Jesus. And as many of us who are here this evening, as many of us who are hearing the gospel and perhaps asking what is he really talking about?

Well, what I'm talking about is that here is the creator of the ends of the earth, our Lord Jesus Christ, who came into this world to seek and to save the lost, who left the riches of heaven and the riches of glory, came to this earth, offered up his life for us, hung on a cross, being pierced, hung on a cross, being mocked and ridiculed and put to death for you and for me, for your sin and for my sin.

[18 : 13] That's what the gospel is about. That we might know the surpassing greatness of that message. We might begin to understand it. We might begin to know what it means to be captivated by Christ and drawn to him more and more and more.

And what Paul does from here on towards the end of the chapter, he really expounds on what it means to be pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus or pressing toward the mark for the prize of God in Christ Jesus.

And in chapter 4, he expounds that so brilliantly. He says, rejoice in the Lord. And again, I say rejoice.

that is to be the very nature of every Christian. Not of complaining. No doubt there are many things in our lives we complain about.

Sometimes we even quarrel with God as to the providences that he has brought into our experience. But Paul is saying, forget these things. Rejoice in the Lord.

[19 : 29] And rejoice in the Lord always. In every situation, you find yourselves with prayer and thanksgiving. Give praise to God.

You know, one of the great sins of the people of Israel as they walked through the desert was there complaining. Again and again, they murmured and they complained against God.

And we're told that not one of those over the age of 20 entered into the promised land. And they all fell in the wilderness. They all died before they received that promise.

And so we should remember as we go on through our Christian lives, complaining is not on the list of things that we have to do.

We have to join the Lord and we have to rejoice in the Lord so that we might praise him for all things. And then he says once again, finally, brothers, whatsoever things are true, honorable, lovely, pure, commendable, if there's any excellence, anything worthy of praise, think of these things.

[20 : 56] As we look at our lives, we are not to think about those things which have caused us distress or unhappiness, and no doubt there will be many things in our experience.

Many of you will have experienced hardship, many of you perhaps will have known loss of jobs, many of you will have known death in your families, many of you have known disappointments in many areas of your lives, but Paul is saying in the face of all these things, whatever is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, think on these things, those things which are excellent, those things which give glory to God, think on these things and glorify him in it.

And then he goes on to say, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. See, Paul here is coming to the close of this letter in which he has great affection for this people.

You had no opportunity to show your concern for me, but not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

This is something that Paul had to learn. As we look back over the great trials and testings he had during his missionary journeys, Paul had to learn to be content in those situations.

[22 : 32] Nothing external was going to affect Paul's peace. He knew beatings, he knew scourgings, he knew shipwrecks, and all these things were external to his hope and his faith in Christ Jesus.

He knew visions, he knew how it was to be elated by these visions, but he put those things behind him as well, and he looked only to Christ Jesus.

He knew what it was to abound as he was fated and as he was given great honor in all the churches that he visited and planted and all the places he taught.

He knew what it was to be in need as he was beaten and as he was stoned and as he was cast out of cities for dead. He knew all these things but all and he learns in these situations to be content.

Even his own temperament was not to invade the peace that he had with God. His short temperedness his anxiety his depression his worries all these were outside the peace that he had with God and they didn't destroy that peace.

[24 : 01] And all of us know those sort of worries and anxieties in our own experience. And we are asked to go forward in trust with the example that Paul here has brought to us.

I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Whether we've been brought low or that we've known success, our eyes should be fixed on Christ. Nothing else is to invade that peace.

For we know that worldly success or attainment is only a shadow and is only for a time. And so also sorrow and heartache for those whom we've lost and those whom we mourn for.

It's only for a time. It's not to spoil the peace we have with God. It is something that's external to the faith that we have in Christ Jesus.

[25 : 11] And so as we look to that Christ who is in God's right hand, a prince now, a saviour, never again to be coming to this world in ignominy, in secrecy, but coming the next time with great glory and great honour and great majesty, all the authority and the majesty of sovereignty and kingship.

He sits there in God's right hand waiting for the great and wonderful day when he shall bring his people to be with him, when he shall return to this earth with all his holy angels, and all the dead in Christ shall rise first, and those of us who are alive shall be caught up in the air to be with him, and so you shall be forever with the Lord.

That is our future. What is happening here is a shadow of the things that are to come. You might know times of happiness and times of sorrow, but the centre path is like this line I'm looking at here through the middle of the church, that's where we keep our eyes fixed.

on Christ. He is the one who is our hope. He is the one who is our confidence. He is the one who assures us that nothing shall ever separate us from his love, neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come.

All things are ours in him. may the Lord bless again these thoughts. We shall conclude now singing to God's praise in Psalm 90.