

Pressing on Toward the Goal

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Friends, a very sincere welcome to the service this evening. I thought it was a very, very wild night now in the last half hour. As you can see, it certainly increased in intensity, so I don't intend to keep the service long, just so that you can get home in safety before the night gets any longer. One or two things just to pick up from the intimations. You can see that there is an easing of COVID restrictions, so we've decided now that both exits from the building can be used at the end of the services, both here and in the seminary. However, I think tonight that, because there aren't so many out anyway, I think that in order to prevent both doors being opened with the wind so strong, I think we will use this. This is the more sheltered side, rather than have the main door open as well. So if you can please just make your way through those upstairs as well and come through here, and that will be more sheltered from, because the wind is from that side. So that's, I think, what we'll do this evening. There's a Congregational Fellowship tonight, and that's at 8.15, and that's on Zoom, and you can find the link from the last time, or if you need to have a link, please just contact Marianne for that, and you can see the other intimations that are there regarding the services through the week. There's a special collection for Bethesda being taken at the services today, and you can contribute to that already if you haven't already. And we were sorry to record the death of Marilyn McCritchie last week, and we commend her family to God. Also, since the intimations were drawn up, we heard about the passing of Mrs. Annie Mary McLeod, widow of the late David McLeod, who was elder here in the past. I do commend to you also the Binding Brokenness

Trauma Healing Course that Marianne is running along with Joanna George. This is something that is really worthwhile, and I can assure you it will benefit those who might need some help in dealing with trauma. It's an excellent course, Bible-based, and very worthwhile. If you know of anybody, or if you have any experience yourself of suffering and loss and need to attend the course, you'll be very welcome to do that. There's an intimation regarding the prayer meeting this evening, which is, I don't know, probably still going to go ahead. I don't know, in the APC church, it's an LDOS prayer meeting. That's at nine o'clock tonight. And I've also been given an intimation that the Providence Christian School are holding a meeting for prayer tomorrow evening. That's at 7.30 p.m., and that'll be at the school, and Reverend George McCaskill is going to be leading that meeting for prayer. We're going to begin our worship now. Let's sing to God's praise in Psalm 145, the second version on page 444, and singing verses 1 to 7. O Lord, thou art my God and King. Thee will I magnify and praise.

I will thee bless and gladly sing unto thy holy name always. Verses 1 to 7. O Lord, thou art my God and King. O Lord, thou art my God and King. Thee will I magnify and praise. I will thee bless and gladly sing.

unto thy holy name always. Each day I rise, I will thee bless and praise thy name, time without end.

[4 : 17] much to thee praise and praise. And great God is, His greatest none can comprehend.

Praise shall thy works praise unto race, the mighty acts, the mighty acts, show done by thee. I will speak of the glorious grace, and honor of thy majesty.

thy wondrous works I will record. By them the might shall be extoled. Of all thy dreadful acts, O Lord, thy wondrous works I will record. By them the might shall be extoled. Of all thy dreadful acts, O Lord, thy thy greatness will unfold. by them the might shall be extoled. Of all thy dreadful acts, O Lord, thy greatness will unfold. They utter shall above.

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the might shall above. the might shall above. They shall above. the might shall above. the might shall above. o Forestle's patients dies O Lord, and ily thy greatness will unfold.

[5 : 56] The memory of thy goodness great, and shall sing graces cheerfully, as they thy righteousness raise.

Let's again join together in prayer. Lord our God, we give thanks that we are able to gather here this evening, and we give thanks for the reminder that the weather itself gives us of how small we are in your creation, of how weak against the elements of your creation, how much more therefore, O Lord, in comparison with yourself.

We thank you for these reminders that you give us of our need of your strength, our need to have our confidence in you, and to find you as our refuge in these times of need.

Lord, we thank you especially that we can come to the refuge that you have provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that whatever storms may blow in the course of life, whatever spiritual traumas we may mentally or physically, or even in other ways have to go through.

We thank you, O Lord, that you are above these, that you provide for your people that place of shelter, and that you invite us into that shelter that is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 40] We ask, O Lord, your blessing to be with our gathering this evening and all the gatherings elsewhere of your church during this storm. We thank you, O Lord, that as we look to you, that you are able to keep us and maintain us.

We pray that you would do so, O Lord, for the time we are here, and as we anticipate journeying home, we pray that you would help us to do so in safety. And, O Lord, we recognize that some have lost their lives in recent days, and we pray that the families affected throughout our country will know your blessing and your comfort.

And we pray, Gracious One, that at this time that you would continue to remind us as a people of our need of God, and that all of these great acts of your providence, along with your word, will come to be blessed to us and come to bless to us in such a way as would help us to have our trust, our confidence in the Lord alone.

We pray your blessing again upon your word this evening for us. Help us, Lord, as we listen to your word, and as we seek to preach from your word, help us once again by your Holy Spirit, we pray.

And grant to us, Lord, whatever our circumstances in life may be, that your word will be blessed to us tonight, and that we will know our hearts being assured and comforted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 03] And enable us, as we would seek to place our trust and confidence in him, give us the assurance, O Lord, that all is well with our souls when we come to do so. We pray for your blessing tonight for those who are heavy-hearted, who recognize those, Lord, in our congregation, who have lost loved ones in recent days.

We pray again for the McCritchie family. We ask that you would bless them in their loss. We thank you for the many years of faithful, beautiful witness that Marilyn McCritchie bore to your grace.

We pray that that will continue to be blessed, not only to her family, but also to all who knew her.

Remember, we pray to the McLeod family at this time as they mourn any Mary's passing.

Be pleased to bless them all. And, Lord, we ask that you would draw near to them. We pray, too, for the family of the little child who died earlier this last week.

In the Carnes, we ask, Lord, that you would draw near to them, though we don't know them personally. We know of these things through the way reports come to us. We pray that your blessing will be with her loved ones and ask that you would graciously provide for them and teach them, Lord, we pray, to confide in you and to draw their strength and comfort from you.

[10 : 22] Remember tonight the troubled places of the world in which we live. Lord, we know that there are even worse things than storms physically that we experience.

We know that there is much war and terror and strife throughout this world. We pray tonight for people who have the fear of their lives and for those who have lost loved ones, too, in these terrible conditions, O Lord, that we find in different parts of the world.

Remember places like the Yemen. We pray, Lord, for that country. We know that many child soldiers have been recruited over the last year and a half and that many hundreds of children have been killed while being recruited into the forces that are engaged in that war.

O Lord, God, we pray that you would bring peace. We pray that you would bless any of your people in that region. And we ask that every effort made to present the gospel in these difficult times, Lord, for them would be blessed by you.

Remember, too, the situation in Russia and Ukraine at this time of tension. O Lord, we pray that peace may come to be reached by negotiation, by talking to each other.

[11 : 40] And we pray, Lord, that the threat of war, which would undoubtedly escalate into more countries being involved, even the great powers, military powers of the world, Lord, we pray that you would prevent that and we pray that you would bring about a solution that would not require any such forces to be engaged.

We pray that you would bless the leaders of the world as they engage with such situations. And we ask, O Lord, that your blessing will be given to them, whether they acknowledge you as God or not. Yet, O Lord, we look to you. For you are required of us that we pray for peace. We pray for peace among all people. And we pray for peace, especially for the advance of your kingdom and of the gospel.

And now, Lord, we ask that your blessing will be with us here in the remainder of our service. Hear our prayer and forgive our sin. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Now, reading tonight is from the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 10, and from verse 19, down as far as verse 39.

From verse 19, Hebrews chapter 10, verses 19, through to the end of the chapter. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh.

[13 : 08] And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses, how much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

For we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[14 : 28] But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised. For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Amen.

[15 : 28] May God bless to us again that reading of his word. I will sing some more verses, this time Psalm 119, and this is the section on page 159, section 5, beginning at verse 33.

These four verses. Teach me to follow your decrees, then I will keep them to the end. Give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend.

Lead me in your commandments path, for there, O Lord, delight I find. Incline my heart towards your laws, from selfish gain, preserve my mind.

these four verses. Teach me to follow your decrees. Teach me to follow your decrees, then I will give them to the end.

Give insight and I'll keep your law, with all my heart to it attend.

[16 : 50] lead me in your commandment path, for there, O Lord, delight I find.

in Measuring my heart to order your laws, from selfish gain, preserve my mind.

O turn my eyes from worthless things, give life according to your word.

To be your servant, keep your pledge, so that you may be feared, O Lord.

Remove from me the shame I dread, your loss, excess and uprightness.

[18 : 25] O how I long for your decrees, preserving in your righteousness.

Let's turn now this evening to Philippians again, Philippians chapter 3, and we'll begin reading again this evening at verse 12.

Philippians chapter 3 at verse 12. Not that I have 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 have 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.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

[19 : 40] One day, a partially deaf four-year-old boy in America came home from school, having begun to attend school.

This is back in the 1800s. And he had a note in his pocket that his teacher had given to his mother to read. And the note said, your Tommy is too stupid to learn.

You should take him out of the school. So the mother read the note, and she answered, my Tommy is not too stupid to learn. I will teach him myself.

And that little Tommy grew up to be the great inventor, Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb and many other things that he invented as well.

And as he was working to try and produce a light bulb that worked, somebody said to him, after he'd been trying for a long time and had tried various experiments which failed, somebody said to him, you know, you should just really give up on that project.

[20 : 50] It's simply not going to work. You've just proved that it's not going to work, so just give it up. Start something else. No, he said, I have not failed.

I have just found 10,000 ways that didn't work. There was a man who was determined that what he had in mind, he was going to persevere with because he was convinced that he would one day get it to work.

And that really is, of course, an instance or an example of perseverance. And in this chapter, in this part of the chapter tonight, we have spiritual perseverance as the Apostle Paul following the testimony, the previous part of his testimony.

Now he's saying this is really what is true of me presently. He had spoken in these previous verses of how this was the purpose now in his life. He was driven by the need to follow through with what Christ had actually given him by way of spiritual life.

And this is now his goal, that I may know him, that I may share in his sufferings, the power of his resurrection, that I may be becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead.

[22 : 07] And that's really where we left it last time, at that wonderful height of Paul's objective as a Christian, looking forward to that final, final state and final experience of being a Christian in heaven.

And what he's saying now is, not that I have already obtained or I'm already perfect. I have not yet reached that goal. I'm not in this life still in a position where I can say I've obtained the very thing for which Jesus died, that is my life, my eternal life in heaven.

But he says, not that I've already obtained or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own. I'm pressing on until I reach that final goal, that final objective, that final state in which I will ultimately find to be with Christ forever.

And two things really that we want briefly to look at from this passage tonight. First of all, how it speaks about Christ's possession of Paul. Christ's possession of the Apostle Paul.

And secondly, following on from that, Paul's perseverance as a Christian. Christ's possession, Paul's perseverance, they wonderfully fit together in the passage.

[23 : 39] Notice what he's saying here about Christ's possession of him. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but I'm pressing on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And he is saying, I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. The old word in the older translations is apprehended.

And it's a wonderful emphasis that Paul is looking at his life as a Christian, as someone who has been taken hold of by Jesus. What does he mean by that?

How did that come about? Well, you recall his account in Acts chapter 9 of how Jesus met him on the way to Damascus. Paul was on the way to cause more havoc to the church.

He was willingly following instructions and fully involved in the havoc that he was causing, as he put it himself later, causing people to be thrown in prison and even giving assent to their death.

[24 : 42] But when Jesus met him, something amazing happened. And what he's doing here in this passage is really putting it in these terms. He's really basically saying to us, what happened to me on the road to Damascus is that Jesus took hold of my life.

Jesus apprehended me. Jesus took me into his custody. He took hold of my life. And from then on, that is really what motivated my life.

That is what took control of my life. That was the whole basis of my living as a Christian. A complete turnaround. The very person who had been so adamant that the way of following Jesus was simply ungodly.

Simply something he had to wipe out this gospel, this teaching about Jesus. And here he is saying, Jesus apprehended me. Jesus took a hold of me. Jesus just grasped me and made me his own.

He's now come into the possession, into the ownership of Jesus. Jesus. And what a wonderful emphasis that is. That is where his Christian race began effectively.

[25 : 49] And that's where the point of perseverance as a Christian also began for him. Because from that moment, as Paul came to recognize that Christ had taken hold of his life, and that Christ had taken hold of his life so that he, Paul, would eventually take hold of eternal life in heaven.

Now he is saying, in order to obtain that, on the way to that, this is what I'm doing. I'm living my life as somebody possessed by Christ. Somebody under the control, under the grasp of Jesus.

And that's all to the effect that, ultimately, I'm reaching forward, I'm pressing on towards the very thing for which he took hold of me.

The prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Now here is something immensely precious to ourselves, to every Christian.

That when Jesus takes hold of your life, it has a two-fold effect. It is a great challenge, first of all, as to how we live. But also it has a wonderful assurance along with the challenge.

[26 : 58] As you often find in the Bible anyway, the things that are challenging are also at the same time for Christians most assuring. And the challenge of it is that Christ takes hold of his people so that they will press on and persevere towards the prize, towards the goal of being with Christ ultimately in heaven.

Pressing on, persevering in that Christian life by the grace and the power of Christ's resurrection, as we saw in the previous passage. And that power of his resurrection is now what works in the apostle's life.

Christ, he says, has taken hold of me. I'm in his grasp. I'm in his possession. I'm owned by him. And now, because I'm owned by him, I need to make sure that every day is a day for pleasing Christ.

See, when he's under the ownership of Christ, it's the will of Christ. It's the mind of Christ. That he mentioned way back in chapter 2 there. That's what features as the guiding principle, the motivating principle of his life.

It's that Christ is in him. Christ is directing. Christ is everything to him. And as he's owned by Christ, his life is about pleasing him.

[28 : 14] And there's the challenge for ourselves as well as Christians, where Jesus has taken hold of your life, where you've come to know him as your savior.

If that is the case with you tonight, it's a wonderful privilege. And it's also a great challenge because Jesus has taken you into his custody, as it were, into his ownership.

You are not your own. You've been bought with a price. Paul said to the Corinthians, why is that? So that you will set out to please him who is your master, who is your owner.

And that's a great challenge for me and for you every day. But there's also the other side, too.

There is a wonderful assurance.

Because what Paul is talking about is being in the grasp of Jesus, being apprehended by Jesus. Being under the ownership of Jesus, Christ is a hold of his life.

[29 : 11] Christ is the sovereign manager of his life. What greater privilege is there than for you and I in this life to know, to our comfort and to our assurance, that come what may in this life, it's the

grasp of Jesus.

It's the hand of Jesus holding me. It's the power of Jesus controlling my life. That's what really gives me the assurance. It's like the little child. Whenever you see a little child holding the hand of the parent, that little hand, especially the infant child, the young child, that little hand as it's enveloped by the hand of the mother or father, you can see where the security of that child lies as he makes his way or she makes his way along with the parent, whether it's in a shopping center or wherever. However, where is the assurance? Where does the child get assurance from that he will not actually get lost in that big crowd? It's the grasp of the parent's hand.

It's not in the child's grasp of the parent, even though that can be very tight. And very often is tight as you experience a child in the midst of a big crowd holding on desperately to your hand.

But it's your grasp as a parent of the child that gives that child a sense of assurance that he's safe. They're safe. Everything is actually under control of the parent.

[30 : 34] And so it is for your life as a Christian. Where would you be tonight? Where would I be tonight if our progress as Christians, if our perseverance as Christians, if our running of the race as Christians depended on my ability, on your ability, on the strength of your grasp of the Lord's hand?

You know very well that that really would have failed many times. And you look to himself when you find trauma coming into your life, when you find in your mental or physical state that you come to worry or you come to anxiety, you come to be taken up with something that really you see is much greater than yourself.

Where is your security? It's in the grasp of Jesus, isn't it? It's in Christ's hold of you. And as a Christian tonight, I think I'm pretty confident in saying that you follow this yourself 100%.

That your thankfulness tonight is that he has you in his hand. That that's where your security and your confidence and your assurance lies.

And if tonight you're not yet in Christ, if you haven't yet taken him as your savior, who is guiding your life? Where is your assurance from?

[31 : 53] Where do you find a sense of being grounded, of being on a proper, steady base? When things come into your life that really test you, that really are traumatic for you, it's then that you need somebody that you see.

You need someone greater than yourself. And that person is the Lord. And when you give yourself to the Lord, which essentially is trusting in, when you receive him in the offer of the gospel, well, what's happening is exactly the same as happened for the apostle.

There may be nothing dramatic in it as there was for the apostle on the way to Damascus. But even that quiet, unseen movement of your soul to trust in Jesus, it's really putting your hand in the hand of one who will grasp you forevermore and never, ever let you go.

You know, on a night like this, it's so important that buildings are well-founded, that things are secured, lashed down if necessary, that people take heed of safety warnings and so on, and make sure that things are kept as secure as possible from the strength of the storm.

And how much more is the case in life itself? How much more is it necessary for your life and mine to be in the grasp of Jesus, in the almightiness of the hand of the Son of God, under the security that the death and resurrection of Jesus affords us?

[33 : 30] That is essentially what Paul is saying. I have been taken hold of by Jesus, so that I will now press on to make my own the very thing for which he took hold of me, that final glorious likeness to him that awaits for me in heaven.

And so that's Christ's possession of Paul, but secondly, his perseverance as a Christian. Well, he's saying, it's not that I'm already perfect. I don't consider that I have made it my own.

I've not yet reached the final terminus for which Jesus has taken hold of my life. I'm still in this world, he's saying. But I'm pressing on to make it my own.

That's essentially what perseverance, Christian perseverance is. Independence on Christ. The fact that Jesus has taken hold of his life, Paul has never ever come to the point where he's saying, well, that's enough for me.

I don't really need to worry about my contribution to my progress as a Christian. He's the one who's pressing on. He's the one who's seeking to reach the point where he can say, now I've taken hold.

[34 : 40] Now, finally, I have reached the goal for which Jesus took hold of me. It's Christ's grace he's depending on, not his own strength. But he's not under any illusion as to whether or not he has something to do for himself.

By the grace of Christ, he is pressing on for what? For the prize of the high calling of God or the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That's essentially what he's saying in the previous chapter, if by any previous passage, if by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection of the dead. I'm not there yet, he's saying, but that's what I'm looking forward to. That's what is in wait for me. And on the way to it, I'm pressing on. I must actually seek to make it my own. I must never actually think for any one day of my life, he's saying, that I can afford just to say, well, Jesus will do everything for me. And I don't need to worry about my spiritual condition or how I'm actually dealing with the word of God or with prayer or with other Christians. It's the prize of this upward call. It's going back to a lot of the imagery here, as you know, is borrowed from the athletic games of those times.

[35 : 56] Of course, you can still see it in the major athletic events still that you find today held in the world. And what he's saying here, this upward call, when people finished their exercises, their courses, their races, and so on in the Greek games, the prizes were not given out after each of the races.

Everything was left to the end, generally, and then people were called forward to receive their awards, their laurel wreaths, their laurel bands, or whatever they were. They were called forward as the prize winners on those occasions. And of course, you still find it, in a sense, the same thing as medalists are given or football team receiving a cup or whatever. They actually ascend steps so that they're seen to receive the award, the prize, the cup, whatever it is, from the person giving it away. And as they're on the platform, they're visible to everybody. And what Paul is saying is, I have an upward call from Christ Jesus. The call I received from Christ Jesus is not downward, it's upward. Because what's awaiting me is a prize in heaven.

[37 : 03] I haven't earned it, he's saying, but Jesus has earned it for me and I'm pressing on to make it my own. What a marvelous description of this upward call in Christ Jesus.

You know, when Jesus has called you into fellowship with himself, to know him as your Savior, that's an upward call. Your life from then on is upwards directed. And it's upwards directed until the award ceremony comes, when you come to receive from himself the gift of eternal life. Not that we don't receive it in this world, but to receive the very apex of it in heaven. And so Paul is saying, that's really what I'm doing now. It's so important to have goals in life. And there are many goals in life that are perfectly valid. Whether they're business goals or personal goals, there are so many things that we can have as goals in life. Whether it's to do with our health, our food, our intake, our relationships, whatever.

But there is one goal above all others. And it's this one. It's the goal of this upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The goal of not escaping from the pains of this life, but of coming finally into the everlasting joy of being with Christ in heaven.

[38 : 25] That's my, that's my persevering business, he's saying in this passage. This goal that I have, I press on. This one thing I do. You see how single-minded he is.

Reminds you of the likes of Psalm 27, verse 4. One thing I desire and that I will seek to obtain that I may be found or be in the house of the Lord forever.

That I may gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and admire Him. You'd almost say that was a New Testament text. The psalmist is saying, this is my one great objective above all others.

That I may gaze on the beauty of the Lord. That I may find a place in His temple where I can see Him in His beauty. And Paul is saying essentially the same. This is single-mindedly.

This is the one thing He is actually setting out on. See the difference Jesus has made to His life. It's turned things completely the other way around. His one single-minded goal before Christ changed His life, His heart, was to destroy the gospel.

[39 : 32] Was to destroy every evidence of Jesus as someone worthy to be worshipped, to be followed. And to destroy the followers of Jesus. See the difference Jesus has made.

It's a complete change around, isn't it? Now His great goal is to magnify Jesus. To glorify Jesus. To be found in glory with Jesus at last.

I am pressing on. Just like the person in the races of the Greek games coming, and you'll still see it coming to press on. And indeed, you'll find very often that the nearer they get to the finishing tape, the more they press.

They don't slacken just because less of the races left to them to run. They just seek to keep it up until the finishing tape is done. Friends, it's a great challenge to us, but what a great assurance that

we can run that race, that we can press forward with the strength that being in the hand, in the custody, in the grasp, in the possession, in the ownership of Jesus brings us. that's where your strength and your resolve comes from. So he says, forgetting those things that are behind and pressing towards the mark.

[40 : 50] Now he doesn't mean by this that everything that's happened in his life before now is really to be completely forgotten. That it's not worthwhile even giving the least attention to that.

He doesn't mean that he's never going to think of what he was in the past or anything that's been in his past as a Christian up to this point. He's been a Christian for over 20 years when he wrote this to the Philippians.

He's not saying what's now in the past is insignificant. All I'm concerned with is the here and now and what's ahead of me. Paul would never say that. What he's saying is I'm forgetting those things that are behind in the sense that I must not let anything of the past hinder me in my Christian progress.

You know, you can have things that work that way in your life. You can have regrets, for example. You can have the kind of regret, the kind of mind that sometimes would say I just wish I had done that differently.

And if I had gone about that differently maybe such and such a person wouldn't have got hurt. Things like that. And they can hinder you all of these kinds of thoughts, these negative thoughts.

[42 : 01] They can hinder you in pushing on with your Christian life. And Paul is saying forgetting those things that are behind. I can't undo the past. He's saying I can't live it again. I mustn't let it hinder me in my present progress.

You see, so tonight whatever it is in your life that maybe is just drawing you back and giving you somehow or other to lose your impetus as a Christian, well, Paul would say to you, don't look at the past in that way.

By all means take it with you. Remember it. But remember it positively. Don't let it become a great weight in your life. Don't let it come to be something like the epistle to the Hebrews says.

Lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily surrounds us and let us run the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus.

Because that's ultimately what you have to do. You have to keep your eye on Jesus himself. Why? Because, well, because for one thing he ran his own race. And he's not just the person who gives you the power and the resurrection of, the power of his resurrection working in your life.

[43 : 14] He's your great inspiration too. Think of the many ways in which attempts were made to deflect Jesus from persevering with the path that he was on in this life.

even the greatest attempts, the most, the most, attempts of the devil in his utmost seeking to actually deflect Jesus and put him off this path.

And yet, it was always the same for Christ. Not for a moment was he deflected. Not for a moment was he distracted. Not for a moment did he consider any alternative to pleasing the Father.

power. And so he pressed on until the race was done at Calvary through to his resurrection.

Friends, tonight, that's how to create inspiration.

It's more than an inspiration because if it was just an inspiration, like people speak about being inspired by somebody to try and follow and copy their example, well, that wouldn't get us very far because in order to follow somebody who is your inspiration, you need the strength and the ability to do so.

[44 : 23] Christ is more than an inspiration though he's not less than that. It's the power of his resurrection. It's not just an inspiration. He is the one who is working in you as a Christian to press on towards this prize of his high calling.

And so he's straining ahead, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward, straining forward towards the finishing tape. I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

There will always be examples in this world of people who give up on their Christian profession. It's always been the case.

And it's very sad when you see people who are prominent evangelicals in their own nation or somewhere in the world that have just gone back on what they once professed and are repudiating what they once professed.

And that causes great concern and anxiety and bewilderment indeed on the part of many Christians who want to keep running their race. But you know, as Jesus said to Peter when Peter asked him about what John might be doing in terms of his future, remember there in John chapter 21, what shall this man do?

[45 : 50] And you know Jesus' response, if I should say that he will remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.

In other words, Jesus was saying to Peter, whatever you see in somebody else's life, your great business and your great privilege is to follow me. You follow me and that's the life for you, Peter. So it is for you and for me tonight as well. You know, there are no first and second and third and fourth places at the end of the Christian race.

All who cross the line receive the same prize. Receive the prize of this upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Eternal life. Life in heaven. The fullness of life in heaven that Jesus died to procure and secure. And that's surely your own goal tonight, isn't it?

[46 : 59] If that's your own goal tonight, as surely it must be, then you, like Paul, must follow this Jesus in the way that he directs your life.

You must bow your will to the will of Jesus. You must come to set him first and his kingdom above everything else. You must have it as your great goal to press on towards the mark.

You must not be distracted by what you see in anybody else's life, particularly anybody who has repudiated what they once believed. I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Revelation chapter 3 verse 21, finishing that series of to him who overcomes, to the one who overcomes. And there at the end of that passage, the final overcoming passage, to him or to the one who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me in my throne just as I overcame and am set down with the Father in his throne.

There is Jesus speaking to us tonight. To the one who overcomes, whoever he or she might be, the one who has followed me and has pressed on and has overcome the things of this life, I will grant to sit with me in my throne.

[48 : 30] To reign with me in heaven just as I overcame and am set down with the Father in his throne. Well, you might say, how do I know that I'll reach the finishing tape?

Well, two things. Firstly, if you're in the grasp of Jesus, you will. And secondly, because Jesus himself has already done that for you, you will follow him.

Nothing is going to keep you back from sharing that eternal life with the rest of God's people that Jesus died to procure for you.

May he bless his word to us. Let's conclude by singing tonight in a final item of praise, which is Psalm 121. Psalm 121, the Scottish Psalter version.

I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come mine aid. My safety cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth hath made.

[49 : 33] Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will he slumber that thee keeps. Behold, he that keeps Israel, he slumbers not nor sleeps. The Lord thee keeps, the Lord thy shade on thy right hand doth stay.

The moon by night thee shall not smite, nor yet the sun by day. The Lord shall keep thy soul. He shall preserve thee from all ill. Henceforth, thy going out and in, God keep, forever will.

Psalm 121, I to the hills will lift mine eyes. I to the hills will lift mine eyes.

from whence doth come mine aid. My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made.

Thy foot hath made. He shall not let slide, nor will. He slumber, blood, in peace.

[50 : 58] Behold, he that keeps Israel, he slumbers not nor sleeps.

The Lord the Lord the Lord the Lord thy shade of my right hand of state.

The moon by night it shall not smite, nor yet the sun by day.

The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill.

hence for thy going and can live. God he forever will.

[52 : 18] As I said at the beginning, I think we should use this door to my left here. Those who are upstairs, if you can just please make your way forward into the church and we can everybody leave through this door just for safety's sake.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.