

New Year Service - Grace and Grit

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[0 : 01] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Philippians chapter 3, Philippians chapter 3 and reading in 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.

The apostle from the time that he was converted, his life, his way could be summed up really in two words, grace and grit.

That's the type of person he was. He was a man who simply never, ever gave up. Didn't matter what happened to him, didn't matter how often he was knocked down, and he was knocked down over and over and over and over and over again, but he just got up again and again and again.

[1 : 22] He really was a quite remarkable man. And so these two things of grace and grit define very much the apostle Paul.

Because when you read some of the things that he endured, when he becomes very personal, and in some of the letters he begins to tell some of the things he's had to go through, some of the things, the experiences that he's had for the sake of the gospel, you realize this was a quite remarkable man.

There's no doubt before Paul was converted, while he was still Saul of Tarshish, he was a religious extremist. You just have to read in Acts, if you go through Acts of the Apostles, you will read something of what his early life was like.

But he himself, in his own testimony, for instance, like in Timothy, he tells Timothy that he was a blasphemer, that he was a persecutor, that he was really a violent aggressor.

And I suppose you could almost say in today's language he was a religious terrorist. Because it tells us in Acts that he was breathing out slaughter against the church.

[2 : 37] His very nature, his whole being, he was passionate in his determination to annihilate this, what he saw as this new movement that was a threat to Judaism.

And he was going to do everything in his power. And that's how it described that he was breathing out slaughter. So that his whole being was to destroy and put to death and imprison Christians.

And so he was, he was a religious, we could say, he was a religious terrorist. And we know these are some of the most dangerous people in the world.

Because what they do, they do, and they make out. Now they say that it's the name of God. And that gives a justification to what they do.

But as we know, grace came into Paul's life, into Saul's life. And he became a shining light for the Lord. But something of this, which was evident in his pre-conversion days, that zeal, that determination of character, that just focus that he had, that remained with him.

[3 : 52] The Lord knew, of course, the type of person that he was transforming by grace. And there was a lot, when a person is converted, yes, they are being changed over and over, day by day, and being conformed to the image of Christ.

But a lot of what we are, the particular character that we have, if a person is very enthusiastic by nature, when they're converted, they remain enthusiastic.

If a person, the type of character that we still have our character, although it is being changed and molded into the image of Christ.

And so there's no doubt but that who Paul was, or Saul was, through the transforming power of God's grace, there was still this man. And, of course, all that he did do and achieved, it wasn't in

human resources and strength.

He testifies of that often. In this very letter, he says, I can do all things through his own strength, through his own will. No, through Christ who strengthens me.

[4 : 59] The apostle had come to learn and discover so much of God, even in his own weakness. And he acknowledges his own weakness often. Now, in this chapter, Paul is telling us what he is praying for, what is desire.

And he's very personal in this letter to the church in Philippi. Often to the other churches, he's telling them what he's praying for them. And, of course, he also says that to the church in Philippi.

He tells them what he's praying for them as well. But he is also telling them what he, his own personal desires and longings are. And that's, for instance, what he says in verse 10, that I might know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

So the apostle is very personal, telling what he is really deciding, what he is wanting. And it is a great thing that he is deciding. Here is a man who really knows Jesus.

Probably knew Jesus like few people in this world ever did. And yet he's saying that I might know him. And you see, that's what happens when you come to know Jesus. That you want to know more and more and more and more of him.

[6 : 27] And that's one of the wonderful things. You know, there are times in the Christian life where we can go through the motions, where we never stop reading the word, we never stop praying, we never stop attending the means of grace.

But there isn't a lot of heart in us about what we're doing. But that all changes when we come into an immediate sense of God's presence, when God makes himself known to us.

And when we catch a glimpse of him again, it may be the way that we did at the beginning or at an earlier stage in our Christian life. And then there is this desire, I need to know more and more.

There's a hunger. We're hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Well, that's how the apostle was. He was fired up, determined to know more and more and more.

And you know, that's one of the things that will make glory so wonderful. Because there will be an eternal discovery. More and more and more. of the wonder, of the God that we have served and worshipped here in this world.

[7 : 38] And yet, we long to be. We long to be in the presence. We long to be with our Savior. To see him as he is. It's an amazing thought.

And one day that will be fulfilled in our experience. If we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, this was the apostle's great desire. That he might know more and more of the Lord Jesus Christ. But then from verse 12, the apostle states that he hasn't yet reached what he desires. Or that he is yet perfect.

And of course, here is the apostle. Who, as we said, is one of the greatest Christians that ever lived in this world. With an incredible sense of devotion and commitment to the Lord.

A passion and a zeal for the glory of God. But he says, I'm not yet perfect. And we won't be. It's only at death.

[8 : 40] That's what Catechism tells us beautifully. That the souls of believers are at their death. Made perfect in holiness. So perfection belongs to glory. So some people may say, well, if that's the case.

If it's a case that you can't be perfect in this world. What's the point then in striving for it? If the Lord is going to, at death, make me perfect in holiness.

Then why bother in this world? Well, we've been hearing about that in the last couple of Sabbath evenings. They're the whole focus there on holiness.

But surely, it's the very nature of grace. The nature of grace is to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ.

The nature of grace gives a soul the desire to become Christ-like. That's what happens when grace transforms your life. It's an instinct.

[9 : 43] Before grace, your instincts are all natural instincts. When grace comes into your life, new instincts are born. And the instinct of grace is the desire to become more and more like Jesus.

And it is in glory that is the finished product. Because we're told in glory, we shall see him as he is. And we shall be like him. But here, it's an ongoing work.

And so, it is the desire of grace that we become more and more Christ-like. But you know, as time goes on, is it not true that we often feel more and more un-Christ-like? And maybe that's how you are today. You feel more un-Christ-like. You feel you're shrinking rather than growing. You feel sometimes that you're going in reverse. But the thing is that the more that we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, not only does that grace enable us to see him more and to desire him more, it also enables us to see ourselves more clearly. And the more we see of ourselves, the more we see into our heart, the more of our own failings and failures and corruption we see. So that is why, on the one hand, there is this growing desire, this longing to be like Jesus, and yet there is this sense of not getting there, this sense of just our own uncleanness and our own failure.

[11 : 23] And so, we often mourn over these things, and rightly so, because of the relics of sin that are left within us. So, Paul shows us how he is pressing on.

And Paul, there's no doubt that he has the idea of a race in mind. And the Christian life, in fact, all of life, I suppose to a certain extent, is like a race.

And one thing that we can say about it is that the further on you go in it, the faster it gets. I know that as people get older, they always say time goes faster.

But I think even the very world that we're living in today, because there is so much happening and communication is so quick, and there are so many demands from so many different fronts, that even young people are finding life going quickly.

When I look back on my youth time, weekends used to be quite long. A week was quite long, but not any longer.

[12 : 30] It's just, it's flying by. But it's not just older people are feeling that. Young people feel that as well. Our lives are going, and it's, I know it says it in the AV that in latter times, in the prophecy of Daniel, that everyone will run to and fro, and knowledge will be increased.

And what a definition of the day that we're living in. That's exactly where we are. That knowledge is increased, and everyone runs to and fro. Not exactly sure how the translation is in the ESV, but in the AV, that's how it is put.

But as we begin another year, and I know it's very easy when we come to the end of a year, in the beginning of another year, it's a time of resolutions and such like.

But a year just, there's only a, just one second runs into another, from the end of one year into another. But it's a good time to take stock. And a good time, especially spiritually, to say, right, where am I?

Where am I here? Am I growing? Have I the desire that the apostle has? We should have. And if we don't have, let us ask the Lord for it. And if by any chance today you are still outside the kingdom, make it your resolution.

[13 : 48] You couldn't make a greater resolution than that you will seek the Lord with all your heart. And if you seek him, you'll find him. And if you are here today as somebody that the Lord's grace has worked already in your life, but you have never publicly confessed him or professed him within the confines of the church by coming to his table, then say to yourself, I must this week, Lord, this year, Lord, give me the grace so to do.

And if you are one of his, make sure that this desire that the apostle has is your desire as well. So the apostle here is very realistic in his desires and in his focus and where he is.

And just like any athlete running a race, it involves any athlete who would be going for gold, whether it's at Olympics or wherever. And, you know, this is one of the great differences between the Christian life and an athletic meeting.

Athletes will prepare for, supposing it's the Olympics, which every athlete will put above world championships or anything else. It's the one that everybody wants.

What they will go through in order to try for that gold is unbelievable. They will sacrifice so much within their life.

[15 : 15] They will deny themselves so much. They will push themselves through so much. They will push themselves through so many pain barriers. They will push and press.

And their commitment and their zeal is extraordinary when only one is going to walk away with that gold medal. For the Christian, every single person who is running that race will receive the well done and the gold, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown that never fades at the end of the day.

But we have to strive just like the apostle did. So Paul tells us how he runs. And we see that there's this complete focus because that's what he says.

Brothers, I do not consider that I am made of my own, but one thing I do. You see, this is what the apostle is saying, right? This is what I'm on.

This is what I'm going to do. I am going to. There's only one thing. I remember way back, Daley Thompson, who was a great decathlon athlete. He'd won multiple records and I think he was two times Olympic champion.

[16:32] I remember reading, saying that he used to train six or seven hours every day and he trained Christmas Day because there was a German who was his great opponent and he knew that this German took Christmas Day off.

And he says, I've got the edge. That was the kind of self-denial. That was the kind of focus, the determination. And of course, while there were great natural abilities he had, it was this striving for excellence that brought him to get over the line.

And that's kind of what the apostle is saying. That's the kind of motivation, the drive that is within him. So how does he run? Well, he tells us that he is forgetting what lies behind.

And of course, we know that no runner who is running, keeping looking back, is likely to win.

Sometimes you'll see a runner take a quick glance. But particularly if it's a short race, a hundred or two hundred or even four hundred, if you're seeing a runner keeping looking back, looking back, even just looking, turning to look back, even that wee bit is slowing down the total focus, momentum, everything.

So they don't look back. It's a fatal thing to do. You often see it with little children at primary school sports, maybe at primary one or two, and you'll see somebody who's way ahead.

[18:02] And he or she is really aware. Oh, I'm way ahead. And they slow right down to turn around to see where the rest are. And then somebody who's slower goes past them. Well, the apostle says, I'm not going to be looking back.

My focus is straight on. So he's forgetting what's behind. He tells us what he's forgetting behind. All these things that meant so much to so many people.

He gives that list of the qualifications that he had where he was amongst the elite of the Pharisees.

There are many Jews. Many Jews would have given all their life savings. They would have given everything they had to have the qualifications of Jewish correctness that the apostle Paul had.

But he looked on these things. He says, I don't, they're refuse to me. I don't count them anything. I've just, I forget all about them. And we know that looking back can be dangerous.

[19:05] Not, not just for an athlete, but it can be dangerous when we begin to run the Christian life. Paul talks about Demas. Demas who seemed to have started out well.

And he looked back and the world seemed to have a greater grip on him. And he said it, how he had forsaken him. We remember it was always a warning of Lot's wife as she was rescued out of, out of Sodom.

The Lord Jesus himself says, no man having put his hand to the plough, looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. So we've got to remember, Satan will come to us.

And sometimes, particularly when you're vulnerable, and he'll bring before you how it was before you were a Christian. And he'll highlight some of the great moments that you had.

And the freedom that you had. And he'll say, you know, it was far better for you then. Since you've been a Christian, you've had nothing but hassles. Remember how free it was?

[20:05] But he doesn't show you the other side of how it was before you became a Christian. He doesn't show you sometimes the dark places that you were in. He doesn't show you the fears that took hold of you.

He doesn't show you the sense of sometimes futility that you had in life. He doesn't remind you of these things. He only brings before you the good things.

So Paul says, no, don't think about these things. Forget them. And I also mean, think that for the Christian, we are to forget the things behind, even some of the things within our Christian life.

Now, let me explain what I mean by that. that doesn't mean that we are to forget our conversion. It doesn't mean that we are to forget all the great lessons the Lord has taught us.

It doesn't mean that we are to forget the great experiences and joy that we've had in various fellowships. It doesn't mean that we're to forget our Christian journey.

[21 : 08] In fact, the Lord, when Israel were going through the wilderness, he told them to remember the way that the Lord, how he had humbled them and he had led them these 40 years in the wilderness.

So the Lord is saying, it's important that you remember the way I have dealt with you. So that's not what we're to forget. But we are to, if we're to use it this way, it means let us not live today on yesterday's experience.

experience. Yes, we can remember yesterday's experiences, but not live on them. Because the Lord supplies the grace sufficient for us.

And sometimes there is a danger that we will, because things went well yesterday, that they'll go well today. And so we don't bother today.

Supposing we've had our really good weeks as a Christian and we're saying to ourselves, ah, this is going well. And we slacken off with our Bible reading. We slacken off with our prayer.

[22 : 15] We kind of go into free will because we think that God is helping us all the time. Well, God, of course, promises never to leave us nor forsake us.

He will always uphold us. We're told that. But in order to run properly, in order to grow and to develop and to mature, we're not to live on yesterday's grace, but today's.

And that's what I mean, not looking back on, yes, give thanks to the Lord for all that He has done for us, for all that He has taught us, even in the dark times.

But we ask the Lord to help us for today. We must live today. It's like with the manna. Every day the manna was given. Every single day, the Lord said, they had to go out and collect the manna, sufficient for the day.

And that is how we are to move forward. But Paul also highlights that he is straining forward to what lies ahead.

[23 : 20] And the idea is there of just every part of him just straining to reach that finishing line. Again, you often see it in the athletic meetings that are televised.

And sometimes when they do particularly a slow motion, suppose he is 100 meters or 100 meter hurdles or something like that, it is the total determination and focus and involvement where every part which has been so finely tuned and prepared for this particular moment explodes into action and everything is involved in that straining towards the finishing line.

Well, the apostle says, that's me, that's how I'm going. It's foreign to the apostle's thinking that he might trundle along or trudge along or be lazy in his way forward.

He is straining to what lies ahead. Total concentration. And there's all this pressing and striving because you and I know that there are many sins to be mortified, many lusts to be fought against. There are probably many trials we have yet to meet, many new experiences that we have to confront, many blessings to receive. There is so much still ahead, but we must give it our all.

[24 : 46] And here on the first day of the year, it's very important that our mind is focused spiritually and we say to the Lord, Lord, this is how I want to go. Because time is short.

Maybe you're young here today and you say, I've got loads of time as a, if you're a believer, loads of time as a Christian. Well, we don't know, none of us knows. The Lord knows, but we don't know how many days or weeks or months or years we have.

But we're straining for the goal, for the prize. As the apostle says here, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God and Christ Jesus.

He began to run because there was that upward call, began on the road to Damascus. That's where the Lord entered into his life. That's where he was called.

He was called to be a Christian and he was called to be an apostle. And if you've been called by the Lord, if you have, well, there is a call going out every time the gospel is preached.

[25 : 48] There is what we would term a general call of the gospel that goes out to everybody. But there is an inward call where the spirit applies that call.

And that is what you, if you're here today, if by any chance you're here without the Lord Jesus Christ, ask the Lord today, Lord, help me to hear your call. I know it's there, but I haven't really heard it.

I haven't felt it personally to myself yet. Please, Lord, make it personal to me today. Help me to hear this is you calling me in the gospel.

The invitation is there. Today, if you hear my voice, harden not your heart. Today, begin running. And that's, we find here that there's this, Paul is saying, here's this upward call.

And that's what's going to happen. As we go on, there is one day where we're going to be, finally, we're going to be called up. Paul's day, the winner, would go up before the judges and they would receive a laurel wreath.

[26 : 56] Well, we will be called up to meet our Savior, to receive the well-done, good and faithful servant. Right now, we might feel anything but faithful servants.

But the Lord takes note of every single thing. And even, as we're reminded, even the cup of water given in his name, that's marked.

There will be loads and loads of things that you've done, that you've never really understood, have meant so much to the Lord. Because on that day, they're going to be saying, when did we do this, or when did we do that?

Oh, he said, as much as you have done it to the least of one of mine, you have done it unto me.

And so, it'll be a day full of surprises when that well-done is given.

And so, on that day, and throughout eternity, we will see how many of the crosses that you had to experience here, many of the sorrows, many of the dark places, many of the troubles, you'll say, oh, I can see now, that's what God had to use to break me.

[28 : 13] See, the Lord breaks us in different ways. What he uses, the rod that he uses for one person, might be different for another. But he does, he knows what will break us.

We don't want to be broken, but we have to. And, you know, the more, this is a funny thing, usually when somebody is broken and they're injured, they can't run. But, you know, in the Christian faith, the funny thing is, the more that we're broken and relying on the Lord, the better we run.

And so, we ask that this day and every day, not only of this year that we're in, but all the days that are left of our life, that we will run with this determination and with this focus, looking unto Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray that we will indeed be equipped to run well. We pray that you will energize us by your spirit and that we will have a focus upon yourself, desiring you above all others, and that we may run the race well, and that we may finish well, and that we may all here today receive that well done in time to come.

Bless us, we pray. Bless a cup of tea in the hall afterwards, and bless this day, a day so much of togetherness, and protect and keep. Be with those who sorrow anew today, we pray.

[29 : 45] Forgive us our sin in Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We're going to conclude singing in the 71st Psalm from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 71, and we're going to sing verses 14 to 17.

Psalm 71 from the Scottish Psalter. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. 14 to 17 of Psalm 71, But I with expectation. But I with expectation will hope continually and yet with praises more and more I will demagnify Thy justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show In all the day for I thereof the numbers do not know

[31 : 43] And I will constantly go on this strength of God the Lord And thine own righteousness In thy hallowed I will record For even from my youth O God By thee I come be taught And to earth to I have declared Thou wonderst as the road Both Mr. McKeever and myself will both go to the main door in order to wish you a happy new year Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.

Thank you.