

A Great Reminder

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[0 : 00] We're reading in Philippians chapter 3. So our time we're going to look at the first three verses here in this chapter. Philippians chapter 3, again we read at verse 1.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

For we are the real circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Are you someone who is easily distracted in these times when there's so much going on around us and our television screens are full of what's happening around our land?

We can maybe think to ourselves, well just before I go and sit and read my Bible, go and have my own quiet time, just for a few moments switch on the telly and just see what's happening now.

[1 : 05] Only an hour later, an hour and a half later, you're still sitting there watching what's happening. It can happen so easily in our lives, not just when there's some major incident going on, some major event, but day after day we can easily be distracted from the main thing that we should be doing.

And as we read in the book of Philippians, we read Paul writing to a people and to a congregation of God's people who were often in danger of being distracted by the things that were going on around them.

And what he's doing is he's writing in a real pastoral way, just bringing them back to what they are meant to be doing and where their focus is meant to be. That they are to be a people who rejoice in the Lord.

It's a recurring theme throughout this letter, the joy of the Lord and the fact that we are to rejoice in the Lord. So you find him saying again and again, this is what we are to be doing.

Now as you look at the beginning of chapter 3 here, we're in the middle, very center point of the letter. It's halfway through the letter in terms of the chapters as they are laid out before us.

[2 : 16] But you see, Paul begins chapter 3 by saying, finally, my brothers. It's maybe like a bit like a minister saying in conclusion, and you think to yourself, well, he's going to be finished early tonight.

But then he goes on and repeats everything that he said before. And he goes on for about the same amount of time again. Is that what Paul is doing here? Is he just saying finally, but then just going on to repeat himself with actually no real gain, nothing to be gained or no purpose in it?

Well, it's not at all. Although he covers the points again, he does so in a way where he's giving even more insight to what the people are to be doing, even more insight into the Lord that they are worshiping, even more insight into the glory that there is in Christ and the way that they are to live.

It's not just a finally in terms of we're nearly there. It's like a finally in sense of it's just pause for a moment and reflect on what we've heard already before we go on and look at it again in even more depth.

There is repetition in the points he's made, but they're profitable. And it's no great, as he says here, it's no trouble to me to say the same things to you because it's of benefit to you.

[3 : 35] It's good for you to hear these things again and again. Let us, he's saying, focus and prepare ourselves to go into the world in which we live, to face up to the challenges that are around us, to be aware of the distractions that will easily come our way and to be focused on what we are doing, rejoicing in the Lord.

And so in these days when we can be so easily distracted, let us always bear heed to what Paul is saying, what the scriptures are saying to us, that our first and main purpose is to be a people who worship God.

How many times do you have to hear something before you understand it? If you're like me, there's some things that almost doesn't seem to matter how many times you hear it, you still can't just grasp it properly.

It's like learning algebra in school. The teacher's repeating it again and again, telling you how to do it. It's just not sinking in. It's just not registering. No matter how many times you're hearing it, there's certain things that it really doesn't matter how often we hear it.

It's just not sinking in. Now maybe in our own lives, think about how many sermons you heard and it just wasn't registering. The word of God wasn't penetrating.

[4 : 54] You were hearing the word again and again, whether it was in church, in Sunday school, from other people around you. You're hearing the word, but it's not penetrating.

How often do you have to hear it to understand it? Well, the gospel is different in that sense. It's only by God's grace and by his spirit in opening our hearts that we begin to receive and to understand.

But as Paul is writing to the church at Philippi, as well as many of the other churches he wrote through in the New Testament, what you find is repeating the same things again and again, prayerfully, that that word would penetrate and work in people's hearts.

And so we keep hearing, we keep coming to hear, yes, it can sound the same thing again and again, but all the time it's working away in us and building us up in the faith, reminding us of who we worship.

And as we go on, we're strengthened in our faith. John Flavel once said, there was a time when 3,000 souls were born to Christ at one sermon.

[6 : 04] Again, about the day of Pentecost. And as Peter preached the word, 3,000 souls were saved. But he went on to say, it may now be 3,000 sermons may be preached and not one soul converted.

But does that mean we lose hope? Does that mean we lose heart? Because every time we come under the word of God or gather together around God's word, that it seems to be doing little or having no effect?

No. Paul, as he says here, he's just reminding them again and again to go on in faith, to go on in the strength of the Lord, always rejoicing in the Lord and always make sure that in your own heart, your priority is first and foremost to worship God, not to be distracted, not to be distracted by the devil and the way he'll try to discourage you, not to be distracted by things that are going on around us.

First and foremost, to always rejoice in the Lord. If you put on a fire and leave it, it's going to burn out. If you keep feeding that fire, it's going to keep burning.

And that's what Paul is saying here to the people. Keep feeding your souls. Keep coming to the Lord and being strengthened in your faith. Yes, you come to faith, but unless you continue to refuel your faith and come to the source of your faith, it's going to burn out.

[7 : 32] We are to be a people who again and again approach God in worship. And that's why there's wisdom in gathering in the middle of the week. Perhaps we're doing so in the midst of a busy week.

And in a busy week, all we're doing is giving out all the time, giving out of our strength, giving out of our time, giving out in our work.

We're giving to others as we serve in different ways. All the time giving out. But then there's a time when we come to take in, to take in what God is saying to us, to recharge our batteries, to refresh our souls, to refresh ourselves among one another and around God's word and in singing his praise, to delight and to worship God at all times.

Psalm 42 speaks about that and its sense of thirsting for God. It says that's the kind of people that we are to be and longing to meet with God.

I knew the psalmist says we should long to come together and worship God. We should be thirsting for our God. We all need to recharge and to come to the source of our faith, the Lord, and to refresh ourselves in him.

[8 : 52] That's what Paul was constantly doing, no matter where he was, whether he was on his missionary journeys, whether he was writing from a prison cell. He was able to rejoice in the Lord and find his strength in him.

So here in these first three verses of chapter three, Paul pauses to reflect here and he takes us back to the heart of worship with encouragement and warnings as well.

And these we're going to look at just for a few moments. He's taking us back to Christ. It's all about him. It's not about what we do or what we are.

It's about who he is and what he has done. So there's three things I want us to take from these verses, each verse individually. Verse one, first of all, tells us that we are to remember.

To remember. They're all reminders to us of what worship is. First thing is to remember. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

[9 : 55] To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. He's just reminding the people this is what it's about.

This is what our lives are to be focused on. This is where we are to look to at all times. Rejoice in the Lord. It's like a command.

A command to continue in this way. To go forward in this way. Otherwise, you're going to go off track. You're going to lose your way. If you start getting distracted by what's going on around you, what other people are doing, or what gods they are worshipping, or how they are living their lives, you're going to get off track.

But he's saying, brothers, rejoice in the Lord. And it's no trouble for me to say this to you. And it's safe for you. This is where you are to find your salvation and your safety.

It is always in the Lord. That is the great recurring theme in this letter. And what he constantly wants the people to remember. And what he repeats here.

[11 : 05] And what he repeats again, as you see in chapter 4, where he says in verse 4 of that chapter, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Repeating it again and again and again.

But it's for the people's good. And it's for our good to hear it as well. That we are to be a people rejoicing in the Lord always. He knows it for himself.

He knows the blessing that there is in this. In the midst of all his distractions, his own distractions, he finds his strength in rejoicing in the Lord.

And so what does that mean for ourselves tonight? Well, again, it's just this reminder. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, whether it's internationally, nationally, locally, or just personal to ourselves, whatever is going on in our hearts, whatever our troubles, whatever our joys, whatever our fears and worries, we bring them to the Lord.

We bring them to him and we rejoice in him. That he is a God who hears. That we are coming to a living Savior. That we are coming through the Holy Spirit, as he says here, that we worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus.

[12 : 31] This is our great privilege as a people of worship. That we come to a living God. And so we come and we come again and again and again.

We come together. We come in our own time. We come and approach the living God who is able to refresh our souls and to bless us.

And if we don't, what happens? We are in danger of falling. We are in danger of just slipping back bit by bit.

We are in danger of just our hearts being on fire but being quenched little by little. It is always the danger that we have, the warning we have throughout Scripture, do not forget the Lord.

You go back to Deuteronomy and it's a recurring warning in that book. Your people, Moses' people, God's people are going into the promised land with this warning ringing in their ears.

[13 : 40] Do not get distracted. Do not lose your focus. Do not forget the Lord. Remember, first and foremost, we worship God.

What is it to worship God? You were asked that question. How would you answer that? What does it mean for you to worship God? Well, some people have put it down in different ways.

But a man called William Temple, who was once Archbishop of Canterbury, he said this, defining worship in this way, as quickening the conscience by the holiness of God, feeding the mind with the truth of God, purging the imagination by the beauty of God, opening the heart to the love of God, and devoting the will to the purpose of God.

There's much in that quote, so much in it, but what is worship? It's about God, all about him, our conscience being crooked by the holiness of God, feeding the mind through the truth of God, purging the imagination by the beauty of God.

He becomes more precious to us, opening the heart to the love of God and devoting the will to the purpose of God. It affects change in us, not just by sitting and taking it in, but by going away with it and putting it out.

[15 : 13] We come in, we refuel so we can put out again. We come to remember the Lord as we worship him. Second thing we see here is in verse 2.

And here's just a warning, don't be distracted by what's going on around you. Refuse to get drawn into these things. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

What is he saying here? Well, he's reminding them here that there are many who will seek to take them away from what they are meant to be doing in worshipping God.

And in particular, he's talking here about those who are saying you have to be circumcised. Without circumcision, there's no way you can approach God. This is almost what's at the heart of worship for so many people around in Paul's day.

Without this, there's no way you can approach God. But Paul is reminding them, refuse to be drawn into this. Don't be distracted by this. Worship isn't about what you do, but what I do and what I have done for you.

[16 : 21] That's what he goes on to expand on in verse 3. We are the real circumcision who worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus. No confidence in the flesh.

So the warning is there. Don't be distracted by those around you who will seek to lead you away in another direction. And again, it's such a warning to ourselves today as well when there are so many things that will distract us, so many things that people will tell us are important and how we're to live, even how we're to worship.

What we worship is the living God, not man. And so we listen to what the word of God says to us. The Judea, the Jews around at this time were trying to force people to follow the law.

the law was a big thing for them. And if you didn't keep the law, you weren't right with God. There was no way you could come near to God and yet the law could never be upheld.

You could never keep it perfectly. You were enslaved in this way to trying to keep the law, something that was impossible to do. But what Paul is saying, refuse to get pulled into this.

[17 : 37] you come and worship God freely, not burdened by the law, but free in Christ who has fulfilled the law for you.

What we could not do, he has done for us. And so we have this freedom to approach God in this way. But are we?

Or are we still trying in our own way to satisfy God and to fulfill God's law and make sure that we are doing everything right ourselves? Human effort plays a big part in so many people's religion today.

It's about what we do. If you try your best, as somebody once said, even though you aren't perfect, God will say, I let you into heaven because you tried so hard.

is that the answer to life's troubles today? Is that the way to heaven? Well, the person went on to say, if that is what the Bible teaches, then it is so.

[18 : 44] But if it is contrary to what the Bible teaches, then trying your best to get into heaven is like trying your best to jump across the Grand Canyon.

You're not going to make it. No matter how hard you try, it's impossible. We cannot do it. And if we are thinking the way to heaven is to try our best, to do our best, we will not make it.

The only way is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we say, yes, my faith is in Christ. But yet there are times when we can still be pulled back into a way of thinking, but I've got to do this.

I'm letting the Lord down because I've done this or I haven't done this and feeling this burden of guilt. But on the cross he said, it is finished. It is done.

And you put your trust in me. Let us not be distracted by others who will say, you have to do this, that, or the next thing. You need faith in the Lord Jesus.

[19 : 55] And your faith will lead to works. Not works that will save you, but works that will fulfill you as you do all to the glory of God. Not adding anything to your salvation, but just doing all for him who gave his all for you.

So why do we do what we do? If someone was going to ask you tonight as you leave the church, what were you doing in there? What response would you give to them?

we were worshipping God. We were together singing God's praise. We were hearing God's word. Would that answer their questions? You may have to go a little further, but remember the scripture says you always have a reason for the hope that you have within.

To say, I was coming to worship the Lord who died for my sins. I believe in him, that I might have life through him. Something as simple as that, but you're giving a response.

If you leave here tonight and someone asks you, what were you doing? Well, I was just doing what I do every week. I don't know what I was doing in there. I don't know why I was doing it. That's not explaining it.

[21 : 10] We have to have an answer to give to people. There's a little story told about a church in Denmark. And every time the worshipers would enter the church, they would turn to the right and they would bow to the wall.

And someone was visiting the church this day. And he was seeing the people coming in, looking to the right and bowing to the wall and then going to their seats. And he was just so curious as to why they were doing this.

He was a visitor. He didn't know what they were doing, but everyone who came in who was local, they'd went through this motion. At the end of the service, he went to ask some of the people. He said, why were you bowing to the wall as you came in?

He said, the only answer I got was, we've always done it this way. It's a common answer we have to things today. We've always done it this way. We don't actually understand why we're doing it.

So the man wasn't going to leave it at that. He decided to go away and do a little bit of research. And what he found out was that the church used to be a Catholic church before the time of the Reformation.

[22 : 22] And in the church on the right-hand wall was a picture of Mary, a painting of Mary. Not a painting that we'd hang, but just actually on the wall. people would come in.

So as people would come in in the days of the Catholic church, they would bow to Mary as they were going in and then go and take their seats. And for years after the Reformation, even though the painting had been painted over, the ritual continued.

And over time, people, generations passed, and yet still the people, the only answer they had was, it's the way we've always done it. But it was no part of worship.

It was just a ritual. And Paul is saying here, don't let your worship become just a ritual. Don't let anyone come to you and ask, what were you doing? And you say, well, just doing what we always done.

It's the way we've always done it. Our worship is living and active, day after day, week after week. We're not just doing it out of habit, we're doing it out of love, out of love for our Savior.

[23 : 26] And that is where our focus is to be, to worship the Lord and no other, not to be distracted by anything else. Look out, he says, for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

Be on your guard against being led away from anything that isn't worshipping God in spirit and in truth. And the third and final thing we see here is in verse 3.

And again, it's just a reminder to us of what we are as a people of worship. We are the real circumcision who worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Our faith relies on Christ Jesus as Lord. Not confidence in ourselves, not confidence in anything that we've done, not confidence in the flesh.

We are the real circumcision. He says, our hearts are circumcised. Our hearts are melted by the glory of God in the person of Christ.

[24 : 34] Otherwise, we're relying on something that cannot save us, ourselves. Robert Murray McShane, I think I quoted him a couple of weeks ago, a famous minister in Dundee.

He died before he was 30 and yet he had such a powerful ministry in that city. And it was him that wrote the hymn Jehovah's and Kenyu. And if you hear the words of that hymn, it reminds you of what he was and what he became and how it all changed.

He was a stranger to grace and to God. Then one day it all changed. And he says in the hymn, when free grace awoke me by light from on high, then legal fear shook me, I trembled to die.

No refuge, no safety, in self could I see. Jehovah's and Kenyu my savior must be. He saw nothing in this world that could save him.

He knew only Jehovah's and Kenyu my savior must be. And he saw everything that he had placed his confidence in was just empty. He must have Christ as his hope.

[25 : 48] And that's what he found. My terrors all vanished before the sweet name. My guilty fears banished with boldness I came to drink at the fountain, life giving and free.

Jehovah's and Kenyu is all things to me. His life was transformed by meeting Christ, by coming to that living water, to drink at the fountain, life giving and free.

that is where he found what worship was. It was to love Christ Jesus with all his heart. Nothing else could save him.

What the Lord has done for us, as we look to the cross, as we see what he has done for us, it deserves our worship.

It deserves our all, all other forms, glory in the flesh, but through worship exalts Christ. It honors God and worship flows from a heart that is redeemed by him.

[26 : 59] So we come to him. We come to worship him, as he says here, as the real circumcision, who worshiped by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, putting no confidence in the flesh.

Is that how we come to worship? Tonight, tomorrow, the day after, this Lord's Day? Are we coming distracted, or are we coming focused on the one we come to worship, and what he has done for us?

Let us not be distracted. let us not lose our focus, but day after day, worship him, not losing heart, but living for him, and letting the love of Christ shine in our hearts, and going out and showing that love for others.

The more we come and refuel ourselves in him, the more we have to go and give out to others. So as the psalmist says, O come, and let us worship him.

May we go on in that way, day after day. Amen. May God bless these thoughts. Amen.