

Having the mind of Christ in his hope

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[0 : 01] Good morning. So as most of you know, if you're regulars here, we've been working through the book of Philippians. And so we're carrying on in that series this morning.

And the focus of our sermon this morning is we've been talking about having the mind of Christ and how we can have the mind of Christ in various different ways. And we're going to be focusing this morning on having the mind of Christ in his hope.

So the passage we're going to be reading is Philippians 3, starting at verse 17, and just reading to chapter 4, verse 1.

So quite a short passage, but you can turn it up in your Bibles if you want. So I've got it on the screen there, but I realise it's a little bit small type. I was trying to be clever and fit it all on one slide. So Paul said to the Philippians, Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame.

Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

[1 : 46] Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

Amen. So next slide, please, Josh.

So those of you who were here last week, when John was talking about an early part of Philippians 3, and he was talking about remembering when he was growing up and the things that he wanted to be when he grew up, and he had a secret ambition to be a bus conductor, which never came to pass.

But we all have plans about what we might want to do when we grow up. But I want us to focus a bit this morning as well on who do you want to be. Sometimes when we're growing up, it's not so much about, I'd like to do this job or that job.

It's about, I'd like to be like that person. You know, we might aspire to be the next Taylor Swift, or Laurence Olivier, or Chris Hoy, depending on what your passions and your interests are.

[2 : 59] And I'm sure you can all think of people that you admire and you might aspire to be like. So if you're interested in football, I'm not at all, so I can't name lots of footballers, but you might aspire to be the next Christian Ronaldo or somebody like that.

And that's about the limit of my football knowledge. But we often think about who we want to be.

Next slide, please, Josh. Thank you.

But Paul, in this passage, is encouraging us to think about who we emulate, who we aspire to be, who we copy. Apparently one of the things you can be now when you grow up is an influencer.

When I was growing up, there was no such thing as an influencer. The internet hadn't even been invented. But apparently these days you can be an influence. You can get paid to promote products and things, and people listen to your opinions.

And apparently if you're good at it, it's very good money, and you get all sorts of nice freebies and things. But so we hear a lot about influencers. We might even follow some influencers, if you're on Instagram or something like that.

[4 : 05] But I want us to think about who are our spiritual influencers. Who do we allow to make an impression on us spiritually?

John, we all know, is a big fan of Dallas Willard. If you've read his book, you know that books, you know they're very helpful and very encouraging. But there might be other people who we think, you know, when they bring out a new book, I really want to read that because they have some good things to say.

They encourage me in my faith. But I just want to encourage us this morning to think about the people we look to when we want to understand more of what it means to follow Jesus.

Who are our spiritual influences or influencers? Paul, in this passage, was encouraging the Philippian believers to follow his example.

He says, use me as a model. If you read the New Living Translation, it says, pattern your life after mine, which I think is a lovely way of phrasing it.

[5 : 09] What patterns do we have in our life? Where do we get those patterns from? But Paul says, you know, pattern your life on mine and others who follow our example. Elsewhere in the New Testament, he talks about, you should imitate me just as I imitate Christ.

So Paul is saying to the Philippians, look at me, look at those who behave like I do. And we are good people to model yourselves on. Not in the sense that Paul himself is good, but he has good practices.

Now, you might think that this sounds a bit arrogant. You know, if I came here and said, you know, you all need to behave like me, you might think, what are you on about it? You know, I saw why we shouted at that person when you were driving the other day.

And, you know, I know you were lazy the other day and you didn't help that person out. You could probably pick all sorts of holes in why you shouldn't emulate me. So it might sound a little bit arrogant.

So I think it's important here to understand it in the context of the earlier part of the chapter. So John was talking last week about Paul saying, talked about the fact that Paul had, you know, been a Pharisee and he'd been, you know, accounted very righteous.

[6 : 20] And in terms of spiritual tick boxes of the time, you know, he could tick all the boxes, but actually said, all of that is rubbish compared to knowing Christ, following Christ.

And I know that I'm not perfect yet, but what I am doing is striving to follow Christ and to take hold of what he has for me. And I think that's the sense that Paul's using here.

He's saying, not that I've got everything perfect, but follow my example, use me as a model in my determination to let go of the former things and to pursue Christ and to hold onto him.

So he talked about the things that were formerly important to him, sorry, counted as nothing and how he strives to follow Christ. And so he's encouraging the Philippines here to focus on the things that really matter.

He's saying, pattern your life after mine in the things that really matter and where your focus is. And in the context of having the mind of Christ in his hope, again, copy Paul and other believers in looking to what is ahead.

[7 : 26] The passage talks later on about us being citizens of heaven. And we're going to talk a bit more about that, but it's have that hope that Christ had because he was looking to what was ahead.

He wasn't looking at all the rubbish bits. He knew where he was going, what his father's will was. I think it's also important that following on from that, if we're talking about emulating others and looking to others who can be a good example, is that we make good choices about who we copy or allow to influence us.

You know, if we look at that famous pop star, you know, it might be great to sing like they can, but maybe if we look at their lifestyle, it's not quite what God would want for us. You know, and I'm sure we could say that about lots of people.

So we need to make good choices about how we look, how we copy other people and how we allow them to influence us. If you read through the Old Testament, one of the big beasts that God had with the Israelites was that they were always copying the people around them who weren't good examples and good models of behavior.

In Ezekiel chapter 11, he said to the Israelites, you've refused to obey my decrees and regulations. Instead, you've copied the standards of the nations around you.

[8 : 41] So they were making poor choices about who they copied, who they emulated, who they were using as a model. And it's good to ask ourselves who our influences are.

Okay, obviously, our first focus should be Jesus, but it's okay to learn from other Christians around us as long as we make good choices. So let's look for those who are steadfast in following Jesus. Not necessarily who've got it perfect, but who are determined to follow Jesus and his ways. And don't just look for people who are famous. It's easy to get attracted, you know, even in the Christian world, by those who are sort of in the spotlight.

But look for those around us. One of the ways we can encourage each other as a fellowship is by helping to develop good habits and patterns. And as we're doing that, we need to take care that we don't put anyone on a pedestal.

You know, we might say, that Christian over there has really helped me grow my faith and there's some things that they do that really help me. But if we start putting them on a pedestal and say, everything they say is marvellous, you know, we're setting ourselves up for a fall and also that person as well.

[9 : 51] And we're in danger of putting them in the place of Jesus. Jesus. Next slide, please, Josh. Okay, so we're going to think a little bit about where our focus is.

I like this picture because you're stood on top of that rock, which I promise you I wouldn't be because I don't like heights. But, you know, you could look down and think, goodness, that's a long way down. I'm scared.

Or you could look and say, wow, what a fantastic view. Isn't that amazing? You know, isn't God's creation beautiful? Beautiful. So I'd just like to think a bit about where our focus is and the dangers of focusing in the wrong place because this is what Paul goes on to talk about in this passage.

So come to the next slide. Thank you, Josh. So it's really important that we don't focus on the wrong things, first of all. Anyone remember, it's quite an old film now, but Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark, the first one that came out.

Yeah, quite a lot of you. And if you remember the baddies, they were digging and digging, looking for this ark, but they got their measurements wrong. And Indiana Jones said, they're digging in the wrong place.

[10 : 59] They were looking in the wrong place. And often, if we're not careful, we can look in the wrong place. This description of Paul here, or how he describes himself, really made me think here because he said, he was distraught that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

And he said, this brings me to tears or this makes me weep. And the Greek behind this word and the root of it means to weep aloud, expressing uncontainable, audible grief.

So he's not just having a little sniffle and thinking, oh, that's sad. He is really distraught that people around him are living in opposition to Christ. It's the same root as the word that was used when Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

And he talked about, you know, how I'd long to gather to me, but you wouldn't. And it's that sort of really raw expression of grief and upset. And I found that quite a challenge to me personally because it's easy to look around and see examples in the world of people who are living in opposition to Christ's commands.

You have to turn on the news or look at the internet or something. But it can be really easy to respond out of anger rather than out of grief. And it's easy to get judgmental and say, well, you shouldn't be doing that, you shouldn't be doing that.

[12 : 22] But Paul is grieved about it because the name of Jesus is being dishonoured, but also these people are separating themselves from God. And it really made me think about how I respond to those who live in opposition to the ways of Jesus.

Do we grieve over that? Or do we just get a bit indignant? Or a bit holier than thou? Paul goes on to say these people are seeking after earthly pleasures.

Focused on the here and now. They're concerned with the things of this earth. Paul doesn't go into lots of specific behaviours. He does that in other places in his letters.

But he doesn't talk about lots of specific behaviours here. He's more concerned with their attitude, that they think it's okay to live as enemies of the cross of Christ, to live in opposition to the ways of Jesus.

And he's focusing on their attitudes and their passions. And I think that's a good way for us to examine ourselves because it's easy to say, well, you know, Jesus says you shouldn't do that. Well, I don't do that, so I'm okay.

[13 : 27] And forget to look at the attitudes in our hearts and our passions. But Paul talks about, he says, God is their stomach. They're controlled, basically, by their appetite for earthly things.

These people are looking for things or experiences that will bring them temporary pleasure and satisfaction. But they're not looking for the lasting satisfaction that comes from knowing Jesus and belonging to him.

They are very self-centred. It's all about what feels good to me, what do I like to do, what makes me happy. But it's not about what makes Jesus happy. What do I do to serve him and to honour him? Paul goes on to say they take pride in their shameful behaviour. And it makes us think that actually, if we're fixated on doing what feels good to us, you know, it's easy to go through life saying, well, this feels good.

You know, this makes me feel fine. I'm going to do this. If we're not careful, our sense of right and wrong becomes distorted. And so the things that should cause us shame, we're not bothered about anymore.

[14:34] We think, actually, that's okay. I'm doing what feels good for me. So we need to be really careful that we don't allow our sense of shame or sense of right and wrong to become distorted.

Paul isn't saying, by the way, that we should never think about earthly things. Okay? He's not saying you're not allowed to go out and have a nice meal and enjoy it or whatever it is that you like doing, but we need to ensure that these earthly desires are not controlling us and directing us. And that's when it becomes an issue. If our focus is more on the things of earth than the things on heaven, then those things start to direct our paths and to lead us. And we stop looking at the things of Christ.

Christ. And we need to remember we can't have the hope of Christ if we're focused on earthly things. If we keep looking at those things, we lose sight of that hope that we have in Jesus. Next slide, please, Josh. Okay. So, Paul contrasts that. He says, this is what some people do. They live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

[15:50] Their appetite, their focus is on the things of this world, on earthly things. But then he goes on to talk about how he views life, how he views its relationship with God and what's important to him.

And you can sort of sum it up in this idea of looking ahead. I love this image of the long straight road because you can't actually see exactly where you're going to, but you can see the direction you should be going into.

The way ahead is really clear. And we need that sense of looking ahead. Next slide, please, Josh. So, Paul reminds the Philippians that we are citizens of heaven.

Jesus talks about, you know, going to prepare a place for you. My father's house has many mansions, many rooms. He's not just saying that as a nice thing to say, he's saying that you have a place with me.

I have gone to prepare that place for you. We are citizens of heaven. And Paul says, you know, this is what you need to hold on to. We are citizens of heaven.

[16:58] We're waiting for Jesus to return from there and take us to be with himself. So, Paul's contrast is here about how we should behave and what our attitude should be and what our focus should be.

I'm just going to read a little bit from Colossians 2, if I can find it. Sorry, Colossians 3. Because it's a great reminder of where our focus should be.

Paul, when he wrote to the Colossians, said, since then you've been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on earthly, sorry, set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

So Paul is saying to the Philippians, that's where our focus needs to be. The fact that we're citizens of heaven, we need to set our minds on things above.

[18:11] We need to be thinking of the things of Christ, the things that please him, the things that honour him. We need to allow him to speak into our lives so that we can become more like him, so we can have the mind of Christ and that hope of eternal life with him.

And that's something we can really encourage one another in, you know, Heather sharing answers to prayer this morning, looking at our prayer chat and the answers to prayer there, reminding ourselves, and John puts verses up a lot of the time and thoughts and prayers, just reminding us to fix our gaze on Jesus and to set our hearts on things above, not on the things of this world.

So we need to set our mind on things above. Jesus himself said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Where is our treasure?

Where are the things that are really important to us? As we do this, we are emulating Christ, going back to that idea we had at the start about we need to choose who influences us and think about who we emulate, but the most important example that we have is Jesus.

Jesus is our example, he is the one that we need to look to and to copy. Hebrews 12, 1 to 3, very famous passage, but talks about since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

[19 : 58] For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Just love that reminder that talked about Jesus. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross. It wasn't that Jesus didn't go through difficult experiences.

We know that he did, but always his focus was on his heavenly father and the task that he had been given to do. He knew that he had a really painful experience to go through, but he knew that after that, he would be his father and he would have made a way for us to join him.

For the joy set before him, he endured the cross. He scorned the shame. And so, the writer of Hebrews says, consider him, consider Jesus who endured such opposition from sinners so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.

Anyone ever feel weary? Anyone ever feel discouraged? Yeah? We need to keep our eyes on Jesus and when we're struggling with that, we need to encourage one another to keep our eyes on Jesus so that we can keep going, we can persevere in our faith and we can follow the example of Jesus.

[21 : 27] Jesus kept his eyes on his father. He was focused on that hope, so we're coming back to that mind of Christ in his hope. He had that hope that, not just a sort of nebulous hope like a hope that the sun will shine tomorrow, but that certain hope that once his ministry on earth was completed, he would return to his father's side.

He would be seated at the right hand of the father, interceding for us. Just as a side, doesn't that amaze you every time you read that verse, Jesus is at the right hand of the father and he's interceding for me.

That's amazing. So, but Jesus had that hope, that sure and certain hope. And Paul also reminds us, made me smile reading this bit, that when Jesus returns we'll be transformed.

He says he'll transform our lowly bodies so they'll be like his glorious body. When you get to a certain age like me, you know, the idea of having a new body is quite attractive really as it starts sort of not working quite as well as it used to.

But Paul's talking about our spiritual selves and that we will be transformed and at the moment we're talking about being like Jesus but we know when we go to be him we will be fully like Jesus.

[22 : 39] We will be fully transformed John in the first of his letters which we're doing in our life groups at the moment but when you get to chapter 3 it says we know when Christ appears we shall be like him because we'll see him as he is.

It's a great promise, a great reminder. We might find it a struggle some days to feel like we're getting anywhere in our trying to be more like Jesus but John in his letter reminds us that actually when Christ appears we will be like him and Paul's saying the same thing in his letter to the Philippians that we will be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

And then we just go into chapter 4 for one verse. Next slide please Josh. So Paul summarises what he's been saying and I love the way he just starts this I know he didn't write it in chapters but the chapter starts with this reminder to the Philippians or this little aside about you know my joy and my crown the people I long for he just gets so excited about the Philippian church because he has this strong passion and affection for them.

It's not just a list of instructions but this is somebody writing to a people he really loves and wants to encourage in their faith and he wants to remind them how much he cares for them and he says you know this is how you should behave and this is how you should stand strong in your faith in the Lord.

So I'd just like to leave us with a couple of questions to take away and think about. John gave us a bit of homework last week about waking up and saying you know trying to pray at the start of the day you know help me to rejoice in you today and it's a great prayer and I've really been trying to do

that this week John and it's helpful thank you but I'd like to leave you with a couple of questions to think about as well.

[24 : 39] Firstly who or what are your influences? Who are the people that you when they speak you take notice you pay attention and particularly we need to think about that in terms of our Christian life you know who are the people who will help us to become more like Christ and hopefully that will be more than one person because if you're just looking at one person probably that's going to cause difficulties but who are the people who are going to allow to influence us?

Are there people who've got an influence into us that actually aren't that helpful at the moment? You know we need to be discerning about who we look to but just ask God to show you who are my influences?

Are there other people I should be looking to in terms of copying their attitudes and their patterns of behaviour when they seek to follow Christ?

And also where is our focus? Is our focus on earthly things? And I'm sure for all of us a lot of the time it's yeah you know I've got to go to work tomorrow I've got to do this I've got to do that and it's easy to get sucked into that day to day routine and those things are important but we need to do them with a sense that Christ is at the centre we need to have that focus on Jesus in our day to day lives not just when we're sitting here on a Sunday morning when it's easy because we're in a room full of Christians and it's really easy to focus on Jesus and think about what he's saying and we've had Andy leading us in worship and reminding us of some of the precious truths of our faith but when we go into our day to day lives are we continuing to look at Jesus in the midst of all the other things that we have to do so two questions to think about who or what influences you and where is your focus where is our focus skill