

Salvation

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[0 : 00] Many thanks for coming. This morning's meditation is from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 3, and starting to read there at verse 7, Philippians 3, 7 following.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the sparring worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuge in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own based on the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him and his death.

And if possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained or already been made perfect, but I press to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brethren, 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.

[1 : 52] I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded, and if anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal also that to you.

Only let us hold true to what we have attained. May the Lord bless us that reading, may it be to his praise and to his glory.

To grab the bull by the horns, so to speak, we are now in the year 2023, a new year, and we pray that God's blessing will attend to everything that we do, say, or think.

One thing that is common to each of us, whether it be Daniel, me, you, everybody, is that we are all in a new situation.

And I want to look at some verses from Philippians, which may help us to do something with the experience that God has granted to us.

[3 : 01] When we look at Philippians, we have to realize it is one of four letters, which are usually called the prison epistles, because Paul wrote them during his two-year imprisonment at Rome, as narrated by Luke at the end of Acts 28.

And the probable order that they were written in would be Colossians first, then Philemon, then Ephesians, followed by Philippians.

Studies are a group. There are great differences to be detected within them as one of some basic similarities. Similarities in Ephesians and Colossians are real because they speak of the body of Christ, but they have the theme of the person of Christ.

When we come to other letters, like Philemon, it is a personal plea that an esimist should receive Philemon graciously.

Whereas Philippians is basically a thank you letter to the church for all the support and money to read gifts that they have given to Paul.

[4 : 19] Look at verse 12. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

At the very beginning, he's referring backward to what he stated in verse 10. And verse 10 is a beautiful verse. Now the clue to all of what's going on in this verse is found at the very end of verse 12, where he says, Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Now the way you translate that literally from the Greek is like this. I have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.

Now that might seem a somewhat obscure phrase, but in actual fact, if we go back to the King James Version, it translates it like this.

Now when we think of the verb apprehend in today's society, it's usually associated with the long arm of the law catching up with you for some felon you may have committed, i.e.

[5 : 50] failing to pay your parking fee or whatever it might be. But when it refers to this action, it refers to an action that is sudden, unexpected, and has transforming results.

So if we translate this back into the experience of Paul, I have been apprehended by Christ Jesus, he's talking about nothing less than his conversion experience.

That conversion was sudden, completely unexpected, and far-reaching in its results. Now the conversion experience of Paul is narrated by Luke in Acts chapter 9, but he also relates it before the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and before King Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26.

So what can we say about this experience of Paul this morning? The experience was sudden and unexpected. Listen to how Acts 9 starts.

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

[7 : 21] So you get the impression from this, these opening verses, that if anybody had said to Paul, you'll be coming back as a convinced Christian and minister, he would have sneered in your face.

But we see something more. As he journeyed and approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him.

And that light is to be associated with the person of Jesus, who said, I am the light of the world. And so the light flashes about him and prepares the way for God's word. And he fell to the ground. So overawed was he with the presence of God and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

[8 : 25] And Paul, the bleak Saul, responds, who are you, Lord? And this question is answered. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

But rise and enter to the city and you will be told what you are to do. So the presence of the light has prepared the way for the presence of God's word in the person of Jesus, which brought with it conviction of sin.

And we find that Saul now responds to this challenge by entering the city, bringing with him a far different purpose from the one that he had set out originally.

He's no longer there to arrest believers. No longer there to persecute the Christian faith. He now enters to receive other revelations from Jesus himself which came through the person of Ananias. And Ananias is told this. The Lord said to Ananias, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.

[9 : 51] And I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. So at the very basic, what we're actually saying here is that Paul is got to do something with this God-given experience that he's now got.

And into this situation that we are emerging into, God is calling us to do something with the salvation that we have.

Now let me go on and I'll speak now of the results of salvation. Not that I've 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. Then he goes on and says, 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.

In other words, he had to make a tremendous adjustment in lifestyle. He had to find forgiveness for the way that he had treated Christians in the past before his own salvation.

[11 : 21] And he confesses it many times in his letters. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 8 to 9, where he's talking about the appearances of the risen Christ, to believers, he says, last of all, as one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. Then he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy, and he says this in verses 12 and 13 of chapter 1, I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus, our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

in other words, what he's actually saying is that all that time I was going around locking up Christians and persecuting them, I was acting, I was like it was in a kind of fog.

I didn't understand what I was doing. Now, in his speech to Herod Agrippa in Acts 26, he says this, another confession, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and I did so in Jerusalem, I not only shut up many of the saints in prison by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them, and I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

In other words, what he's now confessing is that prior to his conversion, he had what you might call a demonic hatred of Christian believers, and this, he had to confess before God and ask for his forgiveness for acting in this way, and thus it is in this way that the apostle would seek to forget, except on occasions when he would recite it to show the magnitude of God's grace.

[14:31] Forgetting. Forgetting what lies behind. You might not have had a demonic hatred of Christians, but I would submit that if we go over the past year, there are things that you and I, all of us together, would rather forget.

And we should be occupied with what he says in verse 10, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death.

So this is the goal which he has now set himself, but how is he going to achieve it? The tools that he'll use to achieve it are the tools that we can use to achieve the very same thing.

First of all, the reading of scripture and prayer. But of course, the scripture that Paul is talking about is entirely the Old Testament, because the New Testament was just in the process of being written. And he says this, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

[15:58] Here is the secret of Christian growth and development, the lifting of our hearts in praise to God. He gives Timothy similar advice, this time in 1 Timothy 4 verse 6.

If you put these instructions before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished on the words of faith and of good doctrine which you have followed.

So the great stress in Paul, speaking to Timothy, that the things he should concentrate on are the devotion to scripture.

But there's another thing that he wants you to concentrate on, and that is prayer. Now there are many great examples of prayer in Ephesians and in Colossians, but he sums it up, perhaps in Ephesians 6:18.

Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. And he goes on and says, pray for me, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, that I may speak the gospel as I am called to do so.

[17:31] Forgetting what lies behind, and putting in its place a far superior ambition. And finally, the fruit of salvation.

Not that I have already obtained this or I am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus had made me his own.

When you come to consider the fruits of his salvation, he must be evaluated against the command he gave to Timothy in his final letter. 2 Timothy 4, 5, he says this, As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Now, when you think of this command, do the work of an evangelist, it's very clear that this is something that Paul followed out to the letter in the many different locations he preached the gospel.

Now, if we were to build a timeline on the apostle's life, generally reckoned he would have been born in Tarsus about BC 5, and the date of his conversion is AD 35.

[18:58] when he comes to write the epistle to the Romans, which is about AD 56, i.e. 21 years further on, he's already looking for new locations to preach the gospel in.

Listen to what he says in Romans 15, 19 to 20. so that from Jerusalem and as far round as I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, thus make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man's foundation.

In 1988, I was preparing for my finals, and I did a course on the epistle to the Romans, and the lecturer said to me, do you know where Elykirkum is?

No, I said I don't. It's actually in northwest Italy. So in other words, what he's saying is, I've gone over the land of Israel, I've gone to many other locations, and I've also gone right up to northwest Italy.

