

Philippians Chapter 3 Part 2

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[0 : 00] Philippians chapter 3, and that's page 1180 in your Bibles. You might notice that it's the same passage we read this morning.

I'm sure it'll be a different message, but same passage. Philippians chapter 3, and we'll read the whole passage. Philippians chapter 3, and we'll read the whole passage.

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What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I might gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

[1 : 58] Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

All of us then, who are mature, should take such a view of things. And if on some points you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For as I have often told you, before and now I tell you again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven.

[3 : 12] 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.

Open in your Bibles. That will be a help as we look together at this passage and as we began this morning, particularly verse 13, recognizing that Paul's won a goal above all else, the thing that he strained for above all else, the prize he considered of greater worth than anything else, is the Lord Jesus when he says, one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, straightening towards what is ahead. And we recognize that this is Jesus he's talking about. It's knowing Christ. And we see that particularly in the verses leading up to that very verse, verse 7, where he says, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ, verse 8, that the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, my Lord, that I may gain Christ, verse 8, and then in verse 10, I want to know Christ.

So he's laid it out clearly. We know what this goal is, this prize, this longing. And these phrases, to gain Christ, to know Christ, want Christ, and so on, are all saying very much the same thing. They're all expressing his single focus in life was Jesus. His supreme goal was to live to know Jesus.

[5 : 00] That was it. That was everything to him. That was above all the other ministry he had in planting churches, in encouraging God's people, in serving the Lord in his life. He had one thing above all else.

And I sought, I hope, this morning to encourage you to make this your same focus, your same purpose, your same goal for 2020. Whatever other goals we may have, whatever hopes we may have, or dreams we may have for 2020, this above all else should be, dear friends, the very single focus of our hearts and lives.

And as I said this morning, I believe that I have the scriptures warrant for that because in verse 15 of the same chapter, Paul says, all of us then who are mature should take such a view of things. It's not something just my opinion or thought or idea for the moment. It's not the latest trend, as it were, for Christians. It is the, throughout the ages, the all-surpassing supreme goal of every believer, that we should seek to know Christ more.

And since that is the case, and Paul has presented us with what is ultimately not only his own will, but the will of God for us in 2020, we must be clear about what that means for us today.

[6 : 23] How does that impact us, affect us? So again, I want to, in one sense, clarify what Paul is talking about when he says, I want to gain Christ, I want to know Christ, and so on.

And it's helpful for us to rule out what he doesn't mean. I know you may feel that's a waste of time. I hope you don't feel it's a waste of time. It's important that we rule out what he doesn't mean because in the past, Christians have misunderstood the words of our Lord Jesus and the words of Paul and through the scriptures, and it's important that we do not miss out on what he's saying. Now, some of Paul's language that we have here, when he talks about his goal and his prize and that which he seeks to win, it sounds a lot like the language of being converted.

It sounds about that similar language when we become born again or say that I may gain Christ, to know Christ. When we talk about people becoming Christians, we might know, use similar language, oh, that person's come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his savior.

It explains coming to Christ for the first time. Now, that's clearly not what Paul is saying. Paul is not talking about his journey of faith. He's not saying, I'm on my way to becoming a Christian.

[7 : 39] I'm on my way to coming to faith in Christ. I'm on my way to coming to know him. He's not saying, I'm not truly in Christ yet. I'm still striving and working towards becoming a real Christian.

Now, how do I know that that is not what he's talking about? Because, of course, in the rest of the letter, even early in the letter, he's already declared his very obvious and real faith in Christ, which is his possession.

Already, when he talks about his death earlier on in chapter one, he says, for me to live is Christ. To die is gain. I already have Christ. I'm living for him today.

And then, when he talks about his own death, doesn't he, he says, I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. He isn't, he isn't, as it were, hoping to get and become a Christian. He knows that he is. He knows that he's salvation and that he is a believer. And again, he's not talking about having a greater assurance, as it were, of his faith in Christ.

[8 : 41] He's not talking about saying, well, I've had my doubts, whether I'm really a believer or not, and I hope to become more certain and more assured. And that's what I'm asking for, a real assurance that Christ has died for me and saved me.

He's not telling us that somehow by his religious efforts and zeal that he can gain this assurance. He can convince himself that he possesses eternal life.

No, he's not talking about that. He's, in fact, soundly refuted any idea that somehow we can, by our own efforts, gain the assurance of forgiveness or gain God's righteousness.

As he said before, not having a righteousness of my own. He's discounted works altogether as being some way of attaining God's blessing or attaining salvation or attaining even an assurance of God's goodness.

And lastly, he's not talking about the blessings of being in heaven. He's not just simply saying, I'm looking forward to heaven. I'm pressing on for heaven. That's all I care about.

[9 : 49] That is my focus. In one sense, there is some truth in that because we know that for Paul, he longed for that time when he would be with the Lord. He longed for that time when he would be with Christ.

As I mentioned earlier on in chapter one, he says, I desire to depart and be with Christ. But that's not what he's talking about here. He's not saying that the prize he's pressing for and hoping to gain and win is heaven because ultimately that is already his possession.

As I've said, he already knows he's going to heaven. It's not that. In pursuing this prize, in pursuing this goal, as it were, in his life, he is talking about something that is here and now in the present life, in his experience.

He's already righteous in God's sight. He's already got living faith in the Lord Jesus. He's confident that he's heaven bound.

So what more could he possibly want? If he knows all these things, how is it that he longs for more? And again, remember the language that Paul is using here, straining, pressing, forgetting what is behind, winning the prize.

[11 : 09] He's not talking about sitting back, as it were. There's a sense of dissatisfaction, if I can put it in the heart of Paul, isn't it? A holy dissatisfaction.

But the reality is, sadly for many Christians, and I'm sure it was the same in Paul's day, and in fact I think he is referring to these people in his day, later on, but for many Christians, they are satisfied with what they have in Christ.

He says there, all of us then who are mature should take such a view, a hunger, a thirsting, a zeal, a longing for God, and if on some point you think differently, there clearly were those who thought differently, and I would say that those that he's talking about there are those who, we might say, have no great desire and longing for more.

They've got to that point in their Christian life where they say, I've reached the top, as it were. I've got to that plateau, I've got to that place in my Christian life, and there's nothing more until I get to heaven.

That's it. I'm just sort of now coasting, as it were, on the way to heaven. Yes, they've attained salvation through faith in Christ. They know that their sins are forgiven.

[12 : 33] They know that they've received new birth by the Holy Spirit. They have a confident hope of life in heaven when they die. Now, please don't misunderstand me here.

All of these things are tremendous. All of these things are wonderful and glorious and above our wildest expectations and way beyond anything we deserve. They're the gracious gift of God for which Christ died for us.

The greatest need of every person in the world is to know these things that Christ died for them, to know their sins forgiven, to know new birth and hope of heaven. But, and here comes the but, that's not all that Christ has for us in this life.

Put it this way, I believe that the love of God is not satisfied in only saving us from judgment and hell.

Christ did not only die to rescue us from, but to rescue us to. And what has he rescued us to? He's rescued us to more, more, more, than what many of us rest content with.

[13 : 55] Think of this verse in Romans 8, 32 for a moment. He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, and this is the important bit, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Isn't there a sense in that? Paul is saying that, I mean, that God has given his son and those precious and wonderful gifts that he gave, but with him and the salvation he brings, God wants to give us even more.

Even more. God wishes for us to have more than just atonement for sin. He wants to give us more than the immense inheritance which awaits us in heaven.

And I'm not talking about God giving us, as it were, new sensational experiences. As many Christians sadly think, maybe that's what God means here, or Paul means here.

He doesn't just want us to feel maybe some supernatural tingling, or to speak in tongues, or to heal or perform miracles.

[15 : 02] All these things that we can often be caught up with are things that Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 13 are not to be compared with a greater price.

Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus in chapter 3 also has an expression in which he longs for something more for them as he does for himself.

Listen to his prayer. For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that being rooted and established in love you may have power together with all God's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now the question is this are you dear friend filled with all the fullness of God? Well I hope you can say no I'm not. But this is what Paul prayed wasn't it for these believers this is what he's talking about I believe in Philippians.

[16 : 23] This is what Paul longs for. His goal is more of Christ. The prize is to have a greater grasp on who Christ is. That which he strives to win is a larger portion of the Saviour.

Now we have all of Christ of course we do. Dear friends how much have we tasted of Christ? How much have we known of Christ? How much have we enjoyed of Christ?

If he is as he truly is the infinite God then surely like Paul what we have tasted should make us only crave more. As I said this morning and I mean it in the best possible way Paul was a Jesus junkie. He was a Christ addict. He was someone who could not have too much of Jesus. There's that saying isn't it? You can have too much of a good thing.

That's never true with Jesus. It's never true in the Christian life. The believer can never have enough of Christ. We can never have so much of him that it becomes bad for us.

[17 : 33] Perhaps over Christmas you overindulged. Had a bit of intergestion over something that you ate. Too much fizzy pot boys and girls isn't good for you.

Too much chocolate isn't good for you. No matter what it may be anything too much of anything is not good for you. I think too much exercise isn't good and I'm avoiding it like the plague to make sure I don't overdo it.

You know what I'm getting at. All of these things everything can prove harmful to us if we have too much but we can never have too much of Christ.

And Paul's prize, Paul's goal wasn't just something at the end, it was actually on the journey, it was actually as he sought, actually as he craved, as he devoured as it were the Lord Jesus, the more he enjoyed.

He was striving, pressing on, straining after. Now this is the question for me and for you.

[18 : 45] Is that true of us? Is that true of us? are we able to say, and put us, our own personas into the place of Paul and say, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

One thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward his head, I press on to win the goal, to win the prize, which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

Jesus. If this doesn't appeal to you, if you can't relate to this hunger, this desire, this longing for more of Jesus, I've got to ask you this, why on earth do you want to go to heaven?

Why on earth do you want to go to heaven if you haven't got a longing and a hunger and a desire and a thirst after the Lord Jesus? Because that's all that you're going to find in heaven. All that heaven entails throughout the whole of eternity is experiencing more and more of Christ, of enjoying more and more of his grace, of as it were, lavishly bathing in the very person of Christ.

So why do you want to go to heaven if you haven't got a hunger for him now? If you're satisfied with what you have, if you feel like there's nothing, more and I have no more desire for him, then in one sense I would have to say you probably aren't going to like being in heaven.

[20 : 26] But, as I hope you do, I hope you feel your spiritual taste buds tingling.

then you may be asking me, Peter, how do I go about gaining more of Christ? What am I to do that I might win this prize for which Paul is so determined to seek after?

Now I need to say to you, dear friends, and it may be something that we may struggle with to a certain degree, being men and women of grace, grace. But the language of Paul is not the language of sit back and let God do it, is it?

It's not the language of it's all over to you, Lord, and there's nothing I can do. It's the language of action. It's the language of straining. It's the language of doing.

And I guess that's why I suppose many Christians, and perhaps we ourselves, are tempted to do nothing. And say, well, I've got my ticket to heaven. I know that I'm going to be there.

[21 : 38] I know my sins are forgiven. I know that God is for me. I'm just, I'm content with that because I know that to take up this challenge of Paul, to take up this action of Paul, is going to require me to strain every muscle, to work, to desire, to be earnest, to sacrifice, to give, to put all things behind me, as Paul says here, to count everything else as loss, and I'm not willing to do that.

And I would say, dear friends, I pity you. I pity you. Because if you haven't got something of that longing for him, as Paul has, and I believe every believer should have, as evidence, as it were, of the work of the Spirit in your heart, then I pity you in two levels.

One, is it that you are not converted? And secondly, you're selling yourself so short, and you're selling Christ so short. Paul tells us the particular aspects of Jesus' persona, as it were, a ministry that he's most keen to improve upon here in these verses, particularly verses 9 and following.

And it's them that I'm going to concentrate on. And as I was preparing this, I've got to say to you, dear friends, I don't even feel like I've touched the surface on this passage. I really don't, so forgive me that I'm not able to draw out from it so much more that's there.

I would encourage you to go back to it yourselves in prayer. But here it is, that I may gain Christ, the end of verse 8. What is it he wants to gain? First of all, he wants to gain, as it were, that righteousness that comes through faith in Christ.

[23 : 32] He says, I want to know Christ. Yes, the power of his resurrection, the participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. Four things, I think, that are there.

And I'm going to look at them very, very briefly in the time we have left. But they're summed up, in one sense, the attitude by which we pursue these things is summed up in that attitude which Paul speaks about in many different ways, but as we have in our key verse, one thing I do, forgetting what is behind.

Forgetting what is behind. We forget what is behind when we count our own righteousness as dung. Remember I said that this morning, the Greek word there is for garbage in the NIV or rubbish or whatever it may be. It's much stronger than that. It's dung. It's the worst kind of rubbish of anything that we can think of.

Now, in one sense, dung, if we just live at dung, dung has value, doesn't it? At least those of you who are gardeners. I remember my grandparents going out with a bucket and a trowel and the horses had gone by and get in for the rhubarb and for the roses.

[24 : 44] Now, dung has some value, but dear friends, what anything that we have done or thought that we can do to please God or own his favor is not even that useful. It is utterly worthless.

It is utterly without value. We need to consider and recognize that the things that we do have no value before God whatsoever in the sense of making us right with him.

And that counters our own sinful nature because the question is, do I prize myself or Christ most highly?

Do I boast in myself or the achievements of Christ? See, the more I think about myself and what I deserve because of the way I've lived or acted and so on, the less I enjoy Christ's accomplishments and vice versa.

The less I consider my own efforts of worth and the more I consider his merits, his obedience, his goodness, his righteousness, the more I focus upon all that he has done for me and that I cannot do for myself, the more I will enjoy and gain and know and be certain of my standing with God.

[26 : 12] Secondly, he talks about wanting to know, and you might think it's a strange order, verse 10, I want to know God, yes, to know the power of his resurrection. Well, that's, he says that before his sufferings and his death.

Yes, to know the power of his resurrection. By delighting in our own weaknesses, we know his resurrection power. Now, this again is something which we learn from the Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians and chapter 12, where he had received such a great blessing, he'd had this vision of heaven, the Lord had caused him to suffer.

The end result of this, the lesson he learned from this is this, God said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, says Paul, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. The stronger I think I am, the less I will look to Christ for power.

The more I feel able to do it myself, the more able I feel or put confidence in myself, the less I will enjoy and receive the power of Christ.

[27 : 25] Christ. Car battery died the other week, completely dumf, dead. What did I do? I had to jump start the car from another source with leads.

I had to bring it alongside to get it started again. I had to look outside of that immediate power source for another power source. And so it is with ourselves.

As long as we feel confident and able, the less we will look outside of ourselves and draw, as it were, on the power of Christ's resurrection. That's why Paul, as he brings this letter to a close, says what he says.

He knew what it was. He says, I can do all this or all things through him who gives me strength.

Chapter 4, verse 13. In weakness we know his power.

In our unrighteousness we know his righteousness. Pardon me. And then he talks about the participation in his sufferings or sharing in his sufferings.

[28 : 31] What is he talking about? He's talking about meditating and concentrating upon the sufferings of Christ rather than our own sufferings. How much time do we spend licking our wounds?

Feeling sorry for ourselves. Believing that we're hard done to. Too much is the answer, isn't it? Too much. Whatever we have to endure in this life, dear friends, it is so small by comparison with the weight of sorrow that he bore upon the cross that it is not worth considering.

To share in the sufferings of Christ, to acknowledge my part in them, my sin that he died for. I want to share in his sufferings.

I want to recognize my part in them. I was the cause of them. Why did he hang upon the cross? Because he hung on the cross for my sin. He suffered in my place.

We're meditating on the cross, thinking upon what Christ has done for us there. We're sharing in. And then finally here he says, becoming like him in his death.

[29 : 46] Now we shall not die. You shall not die as a substitute for the sin of another person. That's not what Paul is saying, that he wants to die as a substitute or an atonement.

He's not even talking about dying on a cross. very likely we shall not be crucified. God's people and Christians have been crucified before now. But it's unlikely that is the case.

But it's not what Paul is talking about. Jesus' death was the greatest self-sacrifice that the world will ever witness. He gave himself totally and freely over to death.

And Paul has made mention of that earlier in chapter 2 and verse 8. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death. Even death on the cross.

He died as he had lived. Entirely surrendered to the Father's will. This was Paul's desire. This was his goal. This was his prize.

[30 : 46] For he knew that he could win a prize like no other in the world when his life and his death were completely given over to God.

The joy of Jesus was that throughout his life he counted himself free from selfish concerns. He was free from those things that consume our thoughts and consume our hearts.

He was free from them because he was totally and solely given over to the Father's will and therefore his death was just a natural end to such a way of living.

As I said dear friends I feel like I've only touched the surface and there's so much more here in this passage but ultimately what I would say to you for 2020 and what I would ask you to pray for me and for each member of our fellowship is this that we would press on into Christ.

That we would strain after Christ. That we would hunger after Christ. That we would be those who would put behind us as it were those things that are hindrances to our seeking Christ.

[32 : 07] That we would rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins. Yes that we would delight in the hope in heaven that we have but that we would rather make Christ our all in all. Dear friends let me urge you to strain every muscle to press on in every way.

I'll close with these words of Paul himself here in chapter 2. As he's spoken about Christ and Christ's commitment totally to the cross and to serving his father.

Therefore Paul says my dear friends as you've always obeyed not only in my presence but also now in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

This is what he's talking about. Not making yourself a better Christian or making yourself saved.

Work out your salvation. Live out it with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Well let's see you next time.