

Philippians Chapter 3 Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] and to Philippians, Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi, Philippians chapter 3, Philippians chapter 3, and if you have one of our red church Bibles, that's page 1180, page 1180 in the church Bible, and Philippians chapter 3. We're going to read the whole of the chapter, so beginning at verse 1 and following through. Philippians chapter 3, verse 1. Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. It's no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard to you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh, for it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh. Though

I myself have reasons for such confidence, if anyone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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 may gain Christ, 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.

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 point 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've often told you before, and now 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, and we eagerly await a savior 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. It will be very helpful for you if you have your Bibles open to Philippians chapter 3, to the passage that I read just a few moments ago, as we consider the words of God, the word of God spoken to us, given to us through the Apostle Paul, the words which are appropriate for 2020 and for every day of our lives. Let's briefly pray together now.

Oh Lord our God, we thank you that you are the living God, the unchanging God, the God who speaks, the God who makes himself known, the God who can be enjoyed and related to. Thank you that you are not a God who has hidden himself away. Lord, rather it is us who have hidden ourselves from you.

Lord, we pray that you would speak to us and make yourself known to us, and that Lord your word, your truth, which is of such great blessing, that Lord you would apply it to our lives by your Holy Spirit. Help us to understand it. Help us Lord by your Spirit to live it and to walk in the power of it.

[5 : 10] For we ask it all in Jesus name. Amen. So a new year, a new decade even. It's a perfect opportunity, isn't it, to stop and to think and to consider where is my life heading? Where am I going? For many people, of course, it's a time for reflection.

A new year, upon the year past, and a chance to plan for the future. A chance to set a goal, or goals particularly, that we can work towards in the coming 12 months. Some of these goals, of course, will be goals which are familiar to many different people. For many people, their goal this year will be to lose weight, or to get fit, or to give up smoking, or whatever it may be. Other goals, of course, are very individualistic, personal to us, our own dreams, our own hopes, the things that are upon our hearts that we long for. Most of all, perhaps this is the year that we will set apart for them. But what about us as a church, as a group of believers? Every Christian belongs to the family, God's family, the local church family? Yes, we're individuals. We have our own personalities, we have our own quirks, our own particular ways of doing things, or seeing things, or saying things. But we share many common goals, we share many dreams, many desires. We are one. The Bible calls us one body. We are one nation, a holy nation.

We are united together through our unity and relationship with Jesus Christ. We have a unity, a real, a tremendous, a living unity. Now, of course, we were once like everybody else in the world. Once we went through life basically drifting aimlessly from one tragedy to another. We had no hope because we had no God.

But now, by God's grace, we have been brought into a real living relationship with him. We were once far away from God, but now we are near. But also, we have been brought near to one another so that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. That is how Paul speaks to the believers here in Philippi, doesn't he?

At the beginning of the chapter further, my brothers and sisters. And even later on as well, verse 17, joined together in following my example, brothers and sisters. And chapter 4, verse 1, brothers and sisters.

[8 : 10] We are one. If you are a Christian, then you must, and you do belong to the family of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you should make every endeavor to belong to and commit yourself to a local church.

These are your brothers and sisters. They are not your competition. They are not ones that you are to put one over or to be better than. They are those who are dearest to your heart in the world, even more so than your natural blood relatives. Remember Jesus, when people said to him, your mother and brothers are outside.

And he said, turning to his disciples, these are my mother, my brothers. So it is with us. So as a church, then, we are united. And I believe that though we have our own individual and personal concerns and cares and goals for 2020, I want to point you to, all of us, one goal, one dream, one purpose for the coming 12 months and beyond. I believe it's a purpose that is common to every believer, not only in this fellowship, but in every church around the world.

And I think I have the authority of God's word to say that it is indeed something that should be our first concern. Jesus says himself here in verse 15, after he's laid out his own goal and purpose, all of us then who are mature should take such a view of things. This is not just my idea and my thoughts. I hope that it never is. This is God's word. He says for you, Christian, if you're a believer, if you're a mature believer, that is one who is known and trusted Christ and walking with him daily, this is to be your goal, your purpose, your desire. And I think it's very important that at the beginning of this year that we seek to understand this and to refocus ourselves upon this goal. We live in a world of great distraction. And even as Christians, all sorts of things may fill our minds and hearts, all sorts of concerns that we may have about many things.

But at times the world can sort of put our compass out of kilter, come to that way. It can draw us like a magnet. And so that instead of us pointing true north, we tend to find ourselves pointing in all sorts of ways. Our focus and our direction in life and our purposes tend to be misguided because we find ourselves under pressure around about. This, I believe, is the time and opportunity for us to refocus, to realign, as it were, our needle to the true north, the true goal.

[11 : 06] Now, Paul, of course, was a man, if you read anything of his life, a man who had a purpose, a plan. He was a man who was driven, driven to accomplish much. In fact, he would go days and nights without sleep. And he would go through all sorts of difficulties and trials as he was motivated and moved. He had many purposes, many plans, many longings and desires. He longed to see churches being established where there were no churches before. He writes to the Christians in Rome and tells them, it's always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. And so he traveled greatly around the Mediterranean basin, sharing the gospel and seeing churches established. He longed as well to serve God's people, the church, all his life to the very end. In Acts, he tells those he was speaking to, I consider my life worth nothing to me. If only I may finish the race, complete the task the Lord has given me. What's the task? The task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Those were his motivations, those were his driving forces. However, as he writes here to the Christians in Philippi, this Roman colony on the edge of what we would now know as Western Turkey, he writes to them of something which is even more of a motive, more of a goal, more of a prize. It's there in verse 13. Brothers and sisters,

I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. And this is the verse that I want us to take hold of. And the sentence, one thing I do. One thing I do. Now we know he did lots of different things, but one thing, one thing above all else, one priority, one goal.

One thing I do. Now we all have our dreams. We all have goals. We all have things that we long to see fulfilled in our lives.

And they may be in relation to our own family. I'm sure that yesterday for Martin and Ali was one of their dreams come true. And Marnie, their daughter, was married to Anaran in that lovely service that we shared. Those of us were here.

That was a dream, to see their daughter married to a lovely Christian young man and be in love and so on. It may be that we have dreams about our own bodies, our own health, our future, that we might be able to run a marathon or something, but we might be able to just run to the bus. But whatever it may be, we have a goal.

[13 : 50] We have goals as a church, a local church, to see people converted in this town, to see the church built up and strengthened in the faith, to see us growing in love and so on. But whatever your individual goal, dear believer, whatever our goals together as a church, I believe that we are to have this same goal as the Apostle Paul had here for 2020 and beyond.

And so this one goal is what is going to take up not only this morning's message, but this evening as well. And I would urge you, I would encourage you, seriously, whether you normally come to a Sunday evening or not, please make time to be here this evening. If God's word grasps your heart, and this is something that you believe as well with me, then please make time to be here.

This morning I want to simply lead us to the point where we recognize what the goal is, and then this evening expand upon that and think about how we can live that goal, how we can practically achieve that goal as God has directed us in his word.

So let's think about this one goal, this one goal that Paul pressed on to. Do you know this is a language he uses? It's a very strong language, isn't it? He talks about straining towards, pressing on towards.

He's not talking about something which is, oh, you know, I'm going to, I hope, I hope this will happen. You know, I've really got an inkling this would be a good thing.

[15 : 17] It's a nice feeling. It's just something, well, if it happened, it would be great, but I'm not all that bothered. No, here is a man who's consumed with it. It's a prize that we are to win.

It's the one thing that God has called every believer heavenwards in Christ Jesus for. As we go through, particularly tonight, we'll unpack this a bit more.

There's so much to tell us about this goal, this prize, this thing to be won and pressed on for and sought after. But also we find clues in here as to what it's not.

And this is what sets the believer apart from the non-Christian. It's that the goal of the believer is very different to the goal of those who do not have experienced God's grace and goodness.

We see here two things particularly I want to pull out. That this goal is not, what Paul is not seeking after, what he is not urging and longing for. But they are the things that many of us perhaps, and many people we know, long for and dream for.

[16 : 23] And the first thing that Paul is not seeking and straining towards is greater self-esteem. Greater self-esteem.

For many people today, 2020 is a year that they seek and desire and have as their goal a greater self-esteem. In other words, they say, I want to be able to look at myself later in this year and feel good about myself.

My goal is to increase my sense of self-worth. I want to gain it by dieting or gain it by exercising or gain it by plastic surgery if I have to.

But in some way or another, by a new job, a different relationship, a better education. All these things, I'm setting these goals because ultimately at the end of them I want to be able to say to myself, you're great, you look great, you've done great.

To feel good. Have some self-esteem. Now, the sad truth is that all of those ways towards self-esteem that many people will spend many hundreds if not thousands of pounds upon and hours and hours and sweat and tears and so on, none of those things will accomplish and achieve that sense of self-worth that they're looking for.

[17 : 43] The Christian who presses on after this prize and goal finds themselves elevated and realizes just how valuable they are to God, which is ultimately the only place where we value ourselves as we should.

The second goal that's here, I talked about self-esteem because it was there in verses 3 and 4. Sorry, I should have done that before. Where Paul talks about having no confidence in the flesh.

In other words, confidence in the natural person. Confidence in ourselves. Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. And he talks about these reasons why he should have self-esteem.

And we'll come back to them. Why he should feel good about himself. The other thing that comes across here as well, and again, is the goal of many people in our generation and days is, and it's not the thing that Paul seeks after.

Self-enrichment. Self-enrichment. In other words, getting wealthy. Having more money. Having a bigger house or a better car or a better holiday or newer clothes or whatever it may be.

[18 : 56] But ultimately, it's completely altruistic. It's all about self. It's all about me gaining possessions. Self-enrichment. That's our society, isn't it?

In 2020. Don't people wish you that? Somebody I met and just struck up a conversation with very kindly. He said to me, I wish you a happy and prosperous new year.

Prosperous new year. That's what we want, isn't it? Prosperity. More money. We want to be richer. We want to be fatter. But not fatter, if you know what I mean. Because we're dieting at the same time. But we want to be.

People with a lot of money. People's hope is to get richer. Paul talks about these sort of people there, doesn't he, a bit later on.

And he warns. With tears, he says. As I've often told you. Verse 18. Before, now tell you again with tears. It breaks his heart. And it should break the heart of us, dear friends, as believers.

[19 : 55] When we see the world around about us, scrabbling and grasping and seeking after these things, which are so, so destructive. Tell you, even, I often have told you before, now tell you again, even with tears.

Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. In other words, they live at enmity to God. Their destiny is destruction. That's the most terrible thing, the awful thing, for these people who live this way and who think that having more wealth or money or possessions or earthly things is ultimately the best thing they can have.

They don't realize that ultimately the trade, the money trade has to stop. And when it stops, there is a destiny, an end. And if we have lived for simply those things which are passing and earthly, those things which are simply crumbling in our hands and rust away, then we shall have no destiny with God but a destiny which ultimately, Paul says, is destruction.

But even so, dear friends, it's not just the end, but it's the way that people live their lives and the damage that they do to themselves as they pursue headlong these false goals.

Their destiny is destruction. Their God is their stomach. It doesn't just mean that they love to eat. It means their appetites, their lusts, their desires. They live for them. Their glory is in their shame, in the sinful pleasures that they partake in.

[21 : 21] That's what they think life is about. And their mind is set on earthly things, just on here and now. They have no concern about the spiritual matters, all with God. And it's not surprising, is it, dear friends, that many people that we know and perhaps even ourselves at times feel that temptation to get rich quick, to attain an amount, money, because we're bombarded, aren't we?

We're bombarded wherever we turn with false, false truths that say to us that if we play the lottery and if we do the bingo and if we go on any one of a dozen gambling websites or on our phone, you can't fail to win big.

And they show these pictures of people jumping about and having a lovely time because they're playing the bingo online. I don't understand that, you see, because when they show you these adverts, all these people having a barbecue and a party in the garden and having a lovely time, but when you're playing it online, you're just sat in your chair by yourself.

It's the most lonely experience. Isn't it false, isn't it? It's not true. But you're told, well, you're bound to win. There's no losers. And all these people who win this money, they're suddenly, they're so much happier.

And the reality, of course, is that they're not. But the wonderful thing is for the believer, for the believer who presses on to win this prize, presses on towards this goal, they find themselves to be richer than any jackpot winner.

[22 : 56] Riches that can't be measured by a bank balance. Those are just some of the empty goals that people set. They're not the goal that Paul is striving for.

Instead, the goal that Paul is striving for has very solid, life-changing consequences for those who pursue it as Paul did, who strain for it as Paul did.

And they leap out to us. We see the consequence and the reality of joy in the present. Notice how he starts his letter, starts chapter three. Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

Paul's letter is called often the joyful letter, or the letter of joy because over and over again through this letter as Paul writes to his Christians, he speaks of rejoicing and of joy on nine occasions through the letter.

It's there. But you might think, well, of course, there's Paul. He's probably sunning himself on a beach, you know, in Turkey somewhere.

[24 : 01] He's probably having a lovely life. No wonder he hasn't got all the stresses and the strains of life today in the 21st century. He's got this joviality because, well, his life is probably quite easy, you know.

He just writes letters and he sort of travels around. He's a travelogue sort of person. No. If you read this letter, you'll find that Paul is in fact in prison in Rome. And don't mean to be funny, Roman prisons are quite the same as the prisons of today.

He didn't have colour TV with satellite. He didn't have a pool table and a climbing wall and a squash court. He's writing from a Roman prison where he's shackled to a guard night and day.

And if you think, well, you know, that's not very nice, but it's not terrible, he's on death row. He tells us in his letter, not only is he in chains, in prison, but he tells us that at any moment he could be executed.

In verse 20 of chapter 1, he says this, I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or death.

[25 : 09] He doesn't know that he's going to live and die. He's on death row. But he has this joy. Rejoice, my brothers and sisters. It's a joy for me to write to you.

Rejoice. How can a man rejoice when he's in prison on death row? Unless he's some sort of masochist, some sort of twisted mind. No, he's not. Because the joy that he has is found in the prize that he's seeking, the goal that he's pursuing, that which he is straining towards.

And his goal and his prize is not that he should be released from prison and let off the hook. He's not expecting some change in his circumstances.

His joy is in the present, not in what might happen in the future. And for the Christian, that's exactly the same. The trouble is that, again, in our world and society, we're told, of course, that our happiness, our joy, our contentment is found in our circumstances.

If only things were better, if only I did have that larger house, if only I did have that better car, if only I did have that better job, if only I had that better partner, if only I had this or that, if only these circumstances can change, if only my health was improved, if only if I lost weight, et cetera, et cetera, then I'd be happy.

[26 : 30] No, you wouldn't and you never will be. For Paul and for every believer, their joy is in the present, it's in now, even in the midst of being in present and death row.

It's no matter what the circumstances are round about, that joy is based upon, not situation, not circumstances, but upon the prize, upon the goal.

There's another thing here that seems to come clearly through, not only that there is joy in the present, but there is freedom from the past for those who pursue this goal, a real freedom. Notice that verse 13, I do not consider to take hold of it.

One thing I do, forgetting what is behind. Forgetting what is behind. Paul had a very enviable past, if I put it that way. At least most of the people that he was writing to, if they were Jews, would think that they would love to be just like Paul.

He had such a great pedigree, a spotless record, as it were. He talks about it there in verse 5 and 6. Circumcised on the 8th day, that's exactly what the law said, that every boy, Jewish boy, must be circumcised on the 8th day.

[27 : 39] He was done that. He's of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the important tribes, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to law of Pharisee. In other words, he was the most religious person you could find.

He belonged to the elite of the Jewish religious people. He was spotless. Spotless. Exemplary. He had every reason to take pride in himself and what he was and where he'd come from and what he'd done.

And those who were Jews would have envied him. But Paul did not think much of these things.

He goes on to say, verse 7, whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I've lost all things.

I consider them garbage. Please don't be offended, but the NIV is far too polite because in the original, the Greek really says something like this. I consider them a steaming pile of manure, of dung.

[28 : 50] These things that people are so envious of, things that people would love to have, this past that seems so good, this heritage. But actually, to me, it's just a load of rubbish.

It's dung. All of us have a past. no matter how young we are. All of us have a heritage.

Those who our parents are or were. We have a past because of what we've done in our lives. The mistakes, the sins that follow us around like something unpleasant stuck to our shoe.

But whether your past is seemingly good or bad, it's, it's both the same if we allow it to hinder us in pursuing this goal, this prize.

If anything in your past keeps you from pursuing Christ and pursuing this goal that we have, then, then it, it's not worth anything. And it certainly isn't something that we can take pride in or otherwise.

[30 : 01] Let me put it this way. For some of you here, wonderfully, you were brought up in a Christian home, Christian parents, godly parents. Perhaps you did well in life and you accomplished much and you got a good education, a degree, a job and so on.

But these things can be a downfall, can be our downfall if we consider them matters of pride. You see, if we, if we look at these things, our parentage, our heritage, our past, our achievements, our accomplishments, our good life, as it were, in the past, that we can make us feel good about ourselves and cause us to become self-righteous.

That was the problem with Paul before he became a Christian. He calls it confidence in the flesh. It's confidence in anything of ourselves to feel in some way that we are acceptable to God just as we are, right with God, okay with God.

It's a confidence that can rob us of the desire for this prize and goal because we feel like we've got it. It can lull us into a false sense of security that we are okay with God and that he has nothing really to offer us.

being brought up in a Christian home is the most immense privilege you young people can ever have but you will waste it and ruin it if you think that it makes you a Christian as you are.

[31 : 33] If you do not seek and pursue and press on. And perhaps you've had a bad past. Bad parents.

Selfish parents. Parents that taught us to be selfish. Taught us to be thoughtless. To be self-centered. Perhaps you've got a youth which was spent recklessly.

Sinfully. These things can also be a terrible handicap to us in pressing on after the prize that God has called us to in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It can be a great hindrance to us because we feel a great burden of shame and guilt. It may not be that we've done necessarily terrible things but our parents have treated us in such a way or implanted into us some understanding that we were not worthy or not good enough or not anything and we feel shameful.

And we think that we're beyond God's grace. We're beyond his help. My life is too ugly. My past is too dirty.

[32 : 44] perhaps as well as sin does do our hearts have become hardened against God.

What do I want with a God who's allowed such sorrow and trouble in my life? Why should I want anything to do with such a God who has made me go through such heartache?

I'll make it on my own. I can manage fine without Jesus and without his interference in my life. Our past can be like trying to run a marathon with a hundred weight of spuds on your back.

Your past can be like an anchor dragging pulling but for Paul and for every Christian who set their hearts on pursuing this one goal they have broken free.

Free from that past that gives them some pride and self righteousness. Free from that past that makes them feel shameful and hardened. Paul says forgetting what is behind.

[34 : 01] Don't you want to be someone who knows the joy of living in the present where you are? Don't you want to know the freedom that comes from following this goal?

So I'm coming to a close. And perhaps already you've worked out what the goal is that Paul was so determined to strain after. Perhaps you've already worked out what is the prize that he was pressing on towards.

Of course it's not a what but it's a who. it is Jesus Christ. He is the one who is of surpassing wealth. It was so that he might know him that Paul considered everything else even the greatest gains in this life just a loss.

Jesus is the divine obsession of the believer. He is the beautiful addiction of our souls. Jesus is the pearl of greatest price for which we will swap all things.

He's the treasure of infinite worth. He's the most excellent amongst ten thousand thousands. Do you want to know more?

[35 : 22] You better come tonight. Thank you.