

Philippians 3:7-17

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[0 : 00] To sit down, as we come to God's Word. Early in the service I read from Psalm 27, and then moved on to Philippians.

We're going to be looking at another gospel passage as well, halfway through. We really want to focus on, well, I'm going to say I want to focus on one thing, and there's a kind of double meaning to that.

We really want to make kind of one point, and it's not going to be anything particularly radical. In fact, it's going to be deliberately a reminder. It's going to be very deliberately something that we should know, but it's always important to come back to.

And it's a phrase that comes up in Psalm 27. It's a phrase that comes up in Philippians. It's a phrase which will come up in a gospel account. I must admit it's not something that I necessarily spotted. I read someone else, someone else had spotted it, and I thought that was really powerful. It was a message I really needed to hear, so I'm going to pass that on to you this morning. But it's really an opportunity for us to come back to the main thing.

[1 : 06] Sure, like me, you live a very busy life, a life which is under a great deal of pressure. I thought my life was busy here when I was an assistant minister in Ealing. I am now, well, I was single when I first started here.

I'm married now. I've now got two kids, Alex and Emily, who I'm sure you'll see around. Life gets so much more busy when you've got small children and then being a pastor and just living the busyness of life.

I'm sure whatever situation of life you're in, you feel the busyness. And when life is busy, it's easy, isn't it, to lose focus.

It's when life feels stressful and pressured. And certainly that is what life feels like for many, many people. I'm sure you're one of them today as we come out the other side of the very difficult last few years.

And we're into, well, what feels like very difficult circumstances for many folk. It's very easy to get discouraged. It's very easy to have all sorts of things going on in our minds and pressures of life bear down.

[2 : 10] So often it's important, isn't it, to kind of perhaps strip back and focus and ask the question, what is it that I should be doing? How is it that I should be living? Particularly if you're a Christian here this morning, what should be your main focus?

What should be your main priority? So often churches need to do that. We can build up, can't we, programs and focuses and voters, all of those important things.

But so often perhaps we need to pause and just ask the question, what is the main thing? What should our main focus be? It's not just true for Christians and churches.

So often we need to do that in all aspects of life. Professional sportsmen. That's particularly the best sportsmen. Often surprised, aren't you, when you hear about them going back to kind of coaching and training sessions.

And they go back and they strip everything back to the basics to make sure that they are doing the basic, the essential thing well. And that they are not losing track and losing touch.

[3 : 20] Have you ever seen any of those TV programs where perhaps someone comes into a failing restaurant and tries to turn it around? What often happens?

I haven't seen many of those programs, but the programs I've seen, you get someone come in and they'll say, look, you're trying to do too much. You've got menus, lists and lists of food that you're trying to produce.

Just strip it down to the one thing that you can do well and focus on that. And then you'll build up the reputation and then people will come.

So really what we're going to do this morning is just ask the question, what is the main thing? What should be our focus? If you're a Christian here this morning, what should be your focus?

You get that right? Everything else should flow from that. If you're not a Christian here this morning, perhaps you've got in your mind all sorts of things that being a Christian means and looks like.

[4 : 20] Well, I want to just encourage you to focus and look at the essential. What's it mean?

What's it mean to be a Christian? And it was pointed out to me that the Bible actually speaks with a very clear voice, as you would expect, on this.

There are three passages. There are three passages, one in the Psalms, one in the Gospels, one in the New Testament letters, which talk about one thing, one thing we need to do.

And when you look at them, they're really saying the same thing, as you would expect. So let's just very briefly look at them. Firstly, let's just go back to Psalm 27.

Let's ask David. David, if you had to strip back your life and say, actually, what is your main focus? What is your main desire? What is the one thing, the one focus you should have?

What would you say? What would you say? Psalm 27, verse 4. One thing I ask of the Lord that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, to inquire in his temple.

[5 : 39] Now, this psalm, I'm sure you notice as I read it through, and I think we just sung a version of that, didn't we, just before I started preaching. It is a psalm written at a time of great crisis.

David is clearly going through a whole situation of persecution. Now, we don't know exactly what period of his life David is writing this. We are not told it. We're not told it in the kind of introduction capital letters at the top of the psalm, are we?

It might have been written by David in that period when he was anointed, between when he was anointed by the Lord and when he was then recognized by the people as king.

Do you remember there's this whole period at the end of 1 Samuel when he is chased around the wilderness by Saul. Saul wants to kill him, reject Saul, the rejected king who is still on the throne.

This might be the time of life. We don't know. Whatever the situation is, we see it as a serious situation. It is a deadly situation.

[6 : 41] So look at verse 2. He's got evildoers assailing him. They want to eat up his flesh. It's brutal, violent language, isn't it?

Speaks of the anger and the hate there is towards David. And it's not just the odd one or two, is it? Look at verse 2. He's got lots of them.

He's got adversaries. He's got foes. Verse 11. He's got enemies. Now it's just important to see that this is written in a time of crisis.

This is written in a time of trouble. You might be sitting there thinking, well, yeah, it's all very well to talk about stripping life down to the basics and the essentials and the one thing, but you don't know that the amount of things that I'm dealing with in my life, the amount of pressures there are.

We may not be under this kind of persecution, but certainly to know that David is writing this in a time of crisis. Well, that should ring bells with us.

[7 : 40] That should say, actually, if David focuses on one thing, when his life is at risk, then whatever the crisis is of our life, the troubles of our life, it should have something to say to us now.

We're all going to face trouble. We're all going to face struggle. Sometimes for being a Christian, the Bible says, if you're a Christian, you will face persecution of some sorts.

Just by virtue of being alive, we face these difficulties. And certainly right now, we live at a time, don't we, when the media just wants us to live at a kind of heightened feeling of constant panic.

And that's not good for any of us. But what does David ask of the Lord? What is his one focus? What is his one thing? It's striking, isn't it, when you look down at verse 4.

I know my life, whenever I suffer, that reveals my heart. That reveals my priorities like no other situation in my life. Does David ask of the Lord in the quietness of his prayer life that the Lord would take away his pain?

[8 : 53] Does he ask of the Lord that he will live a life of ease? Well, no, look at verse 4. What's he asked of the Lord? Well, I think in a way, you could summarize it like this.

David prays that he will have his relationship with the Lord grow deeper and grow richer through the means that the Lord has provided.

He prays that he will have his relationship with the Lord grow deeper and reap richer through the means that the Lord has provided. He kind of says, I've asked one thing of the Lord, and then he kind of lists three things, doesn't he?

But really, they are three things saying the same thing. One thing I've asked the Lord, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I will gaze on the beauty of the Lord, that I will inquire.

In his temple. He wants to dwell in the house of the Lord. That's a kind of picture, isn't it, of security and permanence in relationship with the Lord.

[9 : 58] He wants to live in the temple. Almost shocking language, if you think about the Old Testament, kind of what that means. What's the temple?

What's the tabernacle? It's where God dwells in his holiness. It's the sign and symbol that the Lord is with his people through his covenant.

David does not want to have God at a distance. He wants to be as close as he can possibly be to the Lord. That's underlined, isn't it? The next way he puts it, I want to gaze on the beauty of the Lord.

He wants to have who the Lord is. Now remember, whenever the Old Testament has Lord in capital letters, that's talking about God as our covenant God, the God who has committed himself to his people through covenant.

And David is saying, I want to just have who you are, fill all of my vision. If you've been anywhere, that it just looks absolutely beautiful.

[11 : 12] Perhaps you've been somewhere on holiday and you've seen an amazing landscape and you think, that is just amazing. I could sit here all day and just drink it in, the kind of beauty of the Welsh or Scottish scenery, that perhaps you go to the States and you see, I've never been to the Grand Canyon, but people say, actually the first time you see it and you're just awestruck.

Like perhaps when you fall in love and you just want to be with that person. And then that's the point, isn't it? To gaze on the beauty of the Lord, the Lord in his character, is so glorious.

The fact that the Lord is covenant God who's committed himself to us. That's what David wants. And he wants to inquire in his temple.

He wants it to be relational. He wants to relate to him, to speak with him. In the midst of crisis and difficulty and a kind of life-threatening crisis, what does David want?

He wants to know the Lord more. He wants to be as close to the Lord as he can possibly be. We might say that's not perhaps what we would expect, but David knows if he has that, then he will have protection through the difficulty.

[12 : 33] It doesn't mean to say the difficulties are going to go away, but it's going to be the Lord who will hide him and protect him in the day of trouble. He will conceal him under the cover of his tent and then lift him high.

That's a glorious thing that David wants. Now actually, the wonderful thing is this is what David has in the Lord. And it's what we have in a greater and a richer and a deeper way in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This Lord that David wants to know more is, well, it's our Lord. God, he has not changed. And he has committed himself to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And these things that David asked for are ours in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord has come and dwelt amongst us. And if we belong to him, we are united to him.

And we dwell in him. And we can know him in a rich and a deep way. And yet, we can still pray that these promises of the gospel may be more ours, that we grow in that.

[13 : 51] And that we want more to be who we are in Christ if you are Christians here. And so David challenges us, doesn't he, this morning.

If we're in a time of struggle, if we're in a time of pressure, if we're heading into this winter and we're wondering what this winter holds, ask us the question, well, what is the one thing we want?

What is the one thing we want? Is it that we have our relationship with the Lord grow deeper and richer?

Whatever we may face, actually the great day of trouble, we're hidden in the Lord Jesus Christ. We will not face the ultimate day of trouble, which is the judgment.

And he will love and care and protect us. So David, what is the one thing? What is the one thing that you want? What is the one thing that you want? Well, David will say, well, I want to know the

Lord more.

[14:50] Let's move on. Let's move on to a second passage. I didn't read this, so I'll read it now. Just turn to Luke chapter 10. We've asked David what's the one thing he wants. Let's hear from the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ in an instant in his life.

I'll read from Luke chapter 10, from verse 38 to verse 42. Jesus is publicly going from place to place, preaching, teaching, healing.

And we're told in verse 38 now, in Luke 10, as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.

But Mary was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.

But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her.

[16:01] So this situation isn't so much a situation of suffering, is it, that we saw David. It's more of a situation of service. That is the potential distraction from the one thing.

I don't know when you come to this passage whether you have every sympathy with Martha at this point. Just imagine, after the service today, the Lord Jesus Christ was going to come to your house for Sunday lunch.

I wonder how busy you would be. Can you imagine the cleaning you would do? Can you imagine the food that you would get ready? That's added, kind of piled on when you think of something of the cultural expectations of hospitality in the first century that Martha would have felt.

And so Martha is there. She's busy about, she is doing everything that you would expect her to do in this situation. But her sister, who she lives with, Mary, is just sat. And she is just listening.

And you can imagine that the frustration, perhaps even the anger, kind of boiling up within Martha. And yet the shock of this passage, isn't it, is that Jesus makes it very clear that Mary does the right thing.

[17:17] Now I think we need to imagine a very loving, very patient, very caring tone between Jesus and Martha at this point.

I don't think this is a harsh rebuke at all. Notice how Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you are anxious. You are troubled about many things.

This is the Lord Jesus Christ who does not break bruised reeds speaking to someone. But she needs to hear the gentle challenge. Jesus needs Martha to know that Mary has actually done the right thing.

The one thing that was necessary in this situation. Martha needs to recognize that. She needs to see why that is the most important thing.

And you see what Jesus says to Martha as she talks about his sister? Jesus is making the point, look, I am here. I am here with you. And actually, I am here and I give myself to you.

[18:25] I do not want you, Martha, first to serve me. No, I'm here to serve you with my presence.

The one thing that is needed is the one thing that Mary recognizes. The one thing necessary in Mary's life is to sit at my feet and to enjoy me and to listen to me and to learn from me and to be with me.

And if you notice how the one thing that Mary is choosing here is exactly the one thing that David himself was praying for. John makes it clear in the Gospel that Jesus Christ is, in a sense, the Lord tabernacled with us, made present with us in our world.

And Mary is there sat at Jesus' feet. Mary is, and don't take this in any way the wrong way, there is no sexual element of this, but Mary is, in a sense, gazing on the beauty of the Lord as she is having the Lord Jesus Christ fill her vision and fill her ears and she is getting to know the Lord Jesus Christ more.

She is inquiring of him. She is seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ is here and he has come as a servant to serve, not as a master to be served.

[20:01] One who calls us to know him and to be with him. It's a story, isn't it, this incident, this is a great warning.

It's a great warning against, well, against good things. Mary was choosing a good thing. But it's a warning of busyness, even busyness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even busyness of service which on the one, which kind of might look like service for the Lord Jesus Christ. It's interesting, that's not a minor theme.

Not a minor theme in the New Testament, is it? You get to the last book of the Bible. You get to Revelation where John is in exile on Patmos and at the start he receives these letters going around to different churches.

The first letter is to a church in Ephesus. A church that if you went to the church in Ephesus it just might look like a fantastic church. lots of things going on, lots of activities, lots of voters, lots of people.

[21 : 11] The church that I'm sure the other six churches wanted to be like. And what does Jesus say? I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Lots of service but abandoning love for the Lord. Abandoning this one thing. Busy. But actually the reason for the busyness has begun to drift away.

We can lose this one thing even when we are doing stuff for him. I saw a clip on a post online of Juanio Sullivan I think probably an interview I mean it may have been interviewed this week it may have been an old clip that's just resurfaced at a press conference or just an interview about him winning some match and he was just talking about how he basically it was tragic to watch how he's just going through the motions it's just a job sometimes he wins sometimes he loses and he just doesn't care anymore.

Still a fantastic snooker player and who knows whether that's true or not he's the kind of guy that says things doesn't he in interviews and you watch it and you think how awful would it be to have churches how awful would it be to be Christians to be like that doing stuff doing stuff perhaps even well but our hearts dead not caring not loving anymore and you see here's the tragedy here's where it gets really toxic when you look at Mary and Martha do you notice what's happened to Martha as she is busy and as Mary has chosen the one thing the good thing what is Mary doing she is blaming what is Martha doing she is blaming Mary Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone tell her then to help me she is blaming Mary for not being as busy as she is

Jesus had not said anything in this moment what do you think would have happened the moment Jesus left the house there would have been this almighty bust up wouldn't there between those sisters or the evening Martha I guess would have just been tempted to storm off or perhaps at one point just a flick would be switched in her head why bother why bother just doing all I do around this house and again you don't have to be in church life for very long to see when that happens to see that happen tragically in church life Christians who get so busy and get stuck in and yet there is a simmering resentment that builds because the kind of love for the Lord has kind of drained away a bit by bit perhaps without even being noticed and yet the busyness continues and yet that love for the Lord is replaced by perhaps increasing resentment of other people in the church and they suddenly suddenly almost overnight blow up and storm off tragic and we need to guard our hearts against it you see what

[24 : 27] Jesus is saying he's saying to us in a sense he does not need us what we need is him and we need to sit at his feet and we need to be with him and it is a delightful thing I wonder whether our lives show that the priority of knowing Christ and delighting in him sitting at his feet hearing his word worship is that a priority of our life what's the main reason we exist first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism we are to glorify God and to enjoy him enjoy the one who has given himself for us I wonder if our church life I wonder if your church life shows that see what we're doing right now this isn't just another activity on the list of activities that churches do no this is in a sense it's the purpose of our existence as we gather together to worship the Lord

Jesus corporately and to sit at his feet and to delight in him and to hear from him one thing one thing in the midst of busyness finally just briefly as we close just go to Philippians chapter 3 Philippians chapter 3 so we've heard from David we've heard from Mary and Martha or heard from Jesus let's hear from Paul let's hear from Paul Philippians 3 verse 13 brothers 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 I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus so we look at Paul and we hear that language of straining forward and pressing on and we think well finally a bit of activity but actually a closer look shows that really Paul is saying exactly the same thing as David and he's saying exactly the same thing that

Jesus said to Mary and Martha now the destruction here isn't so much suffering and it's not service but it's more our pride so as you look at Philippians 3 we see Paul looking back on himself as the

cleverest most zealous Pharisee there was but then in verse 8 he says nothing of that compares to well notice it's relationship again nothing compares to knowing Christ Jesus as Lord and knowing him he wants to know him more look at verse 10 and verse 11 I want to know him I want to know the power of his resurrection share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain to the resurrection of the dead verse 12 expresses that that zeal for knowing Christ because Christ knows him I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own and so and so that desire that forgetting what lies behind that straining forward to what lies ahead that one thing that

Paul says he does well that is that is that knowing Christ again that's knowing Christ more that's Paul's one thing that's Paul's zeal that's Paul's passion that's Paul's ambition all of those things are vital and they're important but Paul says I'm challenging them challenging channeling them in the right direction into knowing Christ and yes he says that might involve suffering so we're back back to where we were with David now remember if you know Philippians at all we know that Paul is saying this from prison don't we and we know that actually other people around may look in on Paul and say well he's not as successful as some of those other preachers around he addresses that in chapter one but Paul says actually I don't care the focus on my life the focus on my work as an apostle actually isn't on those things it isn't on those things that can be measured what kind of following

I've got the focus of my life is knowing Christ you see as with every other aspect of life the danger of Christian life the danger of church life is so often we can focus on the wrong things we can focus on the things that can be measured with our eyes in every part of life you think of education you think of hospitals you think of all sorts of things people authorities are very concerned about seeing whether we're doing things right and well but yet you talk to people who work perhaps it's you work in hospitals or work in universities or schools or whatever and the constant frustration is often those league tables where they don't measure the most important things and they end up putting focus on the wrong things yeah that can be just as true can't it for Christians and for churches it's very difficult to measure love and desire for Christ it's very easy to focus on other things which we can measure now just as we pull all this together do you see how those three passages how they agree the one thing that

[30 : 02] David has the desire in the midst of suffering the one thing that Mary chooses rather than Martha the one passion that David has the one thing well it's knowing the Lord Jesus Christ more everything else flows from that it's a recognition actually that that one thing isn't something that we achieve it's not something we attain it's because the Lord Jesus Christ has given himself to us because the Lord has come into covenant with us because Christ has gone to the cross and risen from the dead and yet if we know that we're going to want to know him more everything else in our life everything else in church life flows from that even evangelism it's right to have that passionate desire that others come to know Christ and yet if that is not driven from our heart love and worship of

Christ then well that's going to go off the rails as well without this one thing without having this one desire that is given to us by Christ discouragement is going to seep in there's going to be frustration there's going to be bitterness just to we close I'm going to read just to encourage us I'm going to read the words of Jesus from Matthew chapter 11 why can we have this one desire like David like Mary like Paul well it's ultimately because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done we have this one thing this one desire and hopefully if you're a Christian this morning your hearts have kind of lifted as we say yes I do want this and I want it more and we can do it because all things have been given to Christ so just listen to these words from Jesus as we close all things have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows the son except the father no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke on you and learn from me for I'm gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light let's pray