

Philippians 3

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[0 : 00] Do you be seated. And now we're going through the letter to the Philippians. And so, and we're going through that sequentially.! Looking at the next part of what God has to say to us through his word.

And I'm going to deal with the whole of Philippians chapter 3. I think there's a theme that binds it together. It's a big chunk. And so, yeah, I probably could have divided it into three or four.

But I think there's one theme that runs through which I hope will help us. So yesterday, I ran my parkrun personal best.

I beat it by one second. I'm not what I was. When I decided on Boxing Day, after getting onto the scales and tipping the scales at 14 and a half stone, and running 5K in 32 minutes, I thought I've got to do something about it.

So I'm not what I was. But I'm not what I will be either. Alright? Although it's my parkrun PB, it's not my ultimate PB.

[1 : 06] I can run quicker. I can get thinner. I've got the now. And there's the not yet. I live in the tension of those two realities.

And so do my family with me endlessly going on about it. The now and the not yet. And actually, that's very, very important for you and I to grasp as we seek to live the Christian life.

What it means to live as a Christian in this world. There is a now, but a not yet tension. The New Testament describes that Christian people, we have every spiritual blessing in Christ right now. We've rejoiced this morning, haven't we, already that we are God's children as we put our faith in Christ. We are given Christ now. We are loved now. We are holy now.

But at the same time, there's more yet to come, isn't there? We look forward to that day as God's people when we will be made perfectly holy.

[2 : 17] We look forward to that day when we'll live by sight and not by faith. When we'll see Jesus with our own eyes. We look forward to the day when Christ will complete the work of his kingdom.

And he'll remove all sin and suffering once and forever. And there'll be no more earthquakes. And there'll be no more death and no more suffering. But not yet.

And so we live in this tension. The tension of the now and the not yet. And I think Philippians chapter 3 is a chapter that teaches us incredibly clearly.

Because it tells you and I a lot about the blessings that we have in Christ. But it also speaks to us of what we still anticipate. So look with me at verse 12. It's 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, past tense, his own.

[3 : 21] So Paul is already saying, isn't he there, the apostle, that Christ has taken hold of me. He's grabbed hold of me. And yet there are still things in which I am pressing hold of.

There are things that I'm trying to take hold of. That's the now and the not yet. So they're the two headings. First of all, verses 1 to 9, taken hold of.

And then 10 to 21, taking hold of. And each heading, I want us to really think about Paul's personal experience. And then to draw out a number of applications.

It's interesting that the apostle Paul communicates by way of testimony. He speaks about what the Lord has done in his life. And so verses 1 to 9, he speaks about his own experience.

That he has been taken hold of. And at the heart of the first half of chapter 3, the apostle is saying, I was once someone very different to what I am now.

[4 : 21] He says, I was someone who put confidence in what he calls here the flesh. And what he describes here is really his former life as a very devout Jew.

So in verses 4 to 6, if you just look down there with me, he lays out his credentials as a very devout Jew. The first four are credentials that he has inherited.

So look at verse 5. I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

That's what he's inherited. That's what he's got. The next three are credentials that he's worked very hard. He says, well, as to the law, a Pharisee.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. Faultless. Previously, the apostle Paul had been a poster boy for Judaism.

[5 : 24] His descent and his circumcision showed this man is bona fide. He's the real deal. He's the genuine article. He's a Jew from birth.

But as an adult, the apostle Paul had become deeply knowledgeable about the Jewish law. Deeply diligent in following it through. And violently opposed to any kind of aberrations or deviations that people had from the law.

He couldn't stand that new Christian sect that had emerged. But all of that changed. And it changed in an instant. It changed when Paul encountered the risen Jesus one day on a road to the city of Damascus.

And since that moment, Paul has undergone radical transformation. Listen again to what he says in verse 7.

But whatever gain I had counted, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything, all that stuff I've just told you about, as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

[6 : 37] For his sake, I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, trash, garbage. In order that I may gain Christ. And be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.

But that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God. All of my credentials, all my CV, all my record of achievement, rubbish, he says.

My former life in Judaism, it encouraged me to pursue a life of righteousness of my own. But Paul says, in the Lord Jesus Christ, I found all that I was looking for.

I found a righteousness that is given to me by God. And he considers what he's found in Jesus to far surpass what he had as a Jew.

And of course, when somebody speaks from personal experience, it carries a lot of weight. If somebody else were to give such a withering critique of Judaism, it would be considered not very politically correct.

[7 : 46] It might be considered kind of anti-Semitic. But when you learn that Paul himself was an esteemed, the esteemed religious leader, he establishes a credibility that should make you sit up and pay attention.

This is his personal experience. So what is the point that he's asking as he reflect on this? It's simply that those who read his letter, the Philippians, are now us.

That we would not put our confidence in our flesh. That they wouldn't put any confidence in their Jewish heritage or any self-made righteousness.

Instead, what he's arguing is that you and I should put our confidence in Jesus Christ. And that we should watch out for anyone who tries to tell us otherwise.

So you see, how does the chapter begin? It begins with Paul encouraging the church. He says, rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord. Relish Jesus Christ.

[8 : 52] Enjoy him. But he quickly moves on, doesn't he, to tell you what gets in the way of that. He's concerned about false teaching. And he says, false teaching undermines Christian joy.

So he says in verse 2, watch out for the dog. Beware of the dogs. Watch out for people who are trying to tell you that you need to get circumcised.

That you need to follow the Jewish ways. And verse 2, he uses that word dogs. And he does something ironically. Because do you remember, what did the Jews call Gentiles?

The Jews often called Gentiles Gentile dogs, didn't they? And Paul flips that. And he says, no, you Jewish people, you're behaving like that. And he calls these false teachers, flesh mutilators.

Because that is all circumcision was. And advocating that would amount to. And so Paul suggests, doesn't it, for Christians, that circumcision has no spiritual value.

[9 : 59] It would have just been an act of mutilation for the Philippian Christians to come and get that done. And by contrast, can you see in verse 3, he says, you who put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who are resting and relying on him alone, you are the true circumcision.

Spiritually, not physically. It's Christians who are the true people of God. And you might say, well, that's really arrogant to say that.

But it's not, because we put no confidence in ourselves, in the flesh. Our confidence is in Jesus Christ. And what Paul is underlining and putting in bold font for the Philippians and for you and I, is that we already have the blessing of God.

And they should be really aware of people saying, no, no, no, actually you need something else. Like circumcision. In order to be really sure of yourselves before God.

You need to have a kind of 100% attendance record. You need to be trying your absolute best to be sure. And Paul says, no, no, no. You don't need that. It's foolishness to think that.

[11 : 08] And so what are the implications for you and I, and for people like us? I think there's three things to mention at this point. It ought to raise the question for you and for me, where is our confidence before God?

You think about having to give God an answer one day, don't you? Like everyone does. Every single human being thinks about that. They think about that day when they will stand before God and they will have to give an account for how they've lived their life.

What do you imagine you will say on that day? When you think about now where you stand before God and how he sees you, where does your confidence rest?

It's possible, isn't it? Maybe you're here and you think it rests on your heritage. That's where Paul thought. You might think, well, I've been brought up in a Christian family.

I've gone to church for years. So you'll be fine. And Paul wants us not to put our confidence in our heritage.

[12 : 27] You could rest confidently in what you've done. Again, like Paul did before he was a Christian.

You could say to yourself, well, I've tried to live a really good life. I've tried to be as charitable, to try to be as kind as I can. You might even say, I've tried to do what God wants.

Perhaps you can think of the way that you've served your community or even the church. And that's where you're seeking confidence. And again, Paul would warn you this morning against confidence there.

And he would urge you and I to be confident in Christ only. And Paul is making a distinction that's really central and absolutely crucial to the teaching of the Bible.

But many people misunderstand. His distinction is between a self-made righteousness and the righteousness that God gives as a gift by faith.

[13 : 33] His distinction is between confidence in the flesh and confidence in Jesus. And Paul says the former is a self-path.

It's a self-made path and it ends in destruction. And Paul says to you, it's the wrong road, even though intuitively we often think it's the right one. And you are kidding yourself this morning if you think that you can have a righteousness which you somehow create yourself that can get you right with God.

No, the righteousness that we have as Christians comes from God and we trust Him by faith. And that is the only basis for our confidence.

I'm visiting an old lady who's in the hospital at the moment. She's the mum of a friend of mine. She's great fun, West Londoner, brought up in Shepherd's Bush. Speaks very straight. And I said to her, would you call yourself a Christian?

And she grabbed my arm and she said, I've got all the certificates. I've got all my certificates. Would you like me to show you them? She's misunderstood, isn't she?

[14 : 51] Pray for her. She's misunderstood that she thinks she has a righteousness of her own. That she could be good enough for God. And what she needs is the righteousness that Jesus offers by His death and His resurrection.

And what God seeks from her and what God seeks from you is not a good life of trying your best. It is faith in Jesus Christ. And that, I think, leads to the second implication for us and these Philippians.

I think we need to guard against false claims. We need to watch out for people or preachers or institutions that tell us something different to what Paul is saying here. And Paul says, you need to be wary of those who promote a kind of self-made righteousness.

and so I think you look at the different world religions and this is the path that they offer you. The path of doing certain things or living in a certain way in order for you to have a future with God. There are churches out there that teach you, well actually you need to go and confess to a priest or you need to do acts of penance and you need to do good deeds in order to win the favor of God.

[16:09] And there are plenty of people around us living in London who think that they can effectively ignore God all of the time and as long as they look after their family and they try to be charitable to others in times of need then God will surely accept them in the end.

And Paul says, lies. They are false claims. Sometimes I think we tend to view people who believe those sort of things as closer to God than some others at least.

Maybe atheists or something like that. I wonder whether Paul would actually say that those people who think that you can do something that they are as far away from God as you can get.

And that's why we need to guard against claims that cause us or others that would lead us to put our confidence in the wrong things. The third implication of these verses I want to draw your attention to is about what we most value in life.

Because I don't think Paul is dealing here just simply with the categories of true and false. He's also talking isn't he in these verses about greater and lesser value. And he's saying what I once thought was in the credit column of my life I now regard it as a liability.

[17:34] Listen again to the language of verse 7. Just note the language of verse 7. But whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

He's saying once I thought that certain things were worth a lot. But now I regard them as of little worth. Look at verse 8.

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the sparse and worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. You know the car boot sale?

Quite like car boot sales. You load up your car don't you need a car boot sale with your old junk.

There's stuff you think I don't want it it's of no value to me and you take it to the car boot sale.

And if you arrive there at the right time you open up you put your stuff on the car boot sale maybe on a table and then other people come particularly children come and they pick it up and they think this is amazing isn't it?

[18:37] The old cars that are battered and you think oh they're not worth a thing but the child picks them up and they think oh this is treasure. one man's rubbish is another man's treasure.

We all find value don't we in different things. Paul is saying while he valued all sorts of things very very highly in the past now I found the Lord Jesus.

They're rubbish to me. And what he says provokes you and I doesn't it to ask the question do I value the Lord Jesus as highly as he does?

Are there other things in my life that I value more than Jesus? They might not well be they might not be the things that you're placing confidence in before God.

They may just be things that you love. A particular relationship may be a particular habit or a pastime certain aspects of our lifetime maybe it's our job our occupation maybe it's our reputation maybe it's our comfort could be many many things but whatever our hearts cherish Paul's words ought to provoke in us this question do we cherish Christ more?

[20:09] so look at verse eight again with me such a great verse the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and that leads me to say this if you love something or love someone more than Jesus I don't think the apostle Paul is asking you to make a resentful sacrifice of that this morning maybe but ordinarily not I don't think he would ask you to summon up some kind of inner resolve Lord please help me to love that thing less instead what we've seen in a number of different passages in a number of different ways over the last few months is I think the apostle Paul does what the whole of the Bible teaches and it tells you this take a closer look at Jesus take a closer look at who Jesus is he who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped and take a look at what Jesus done but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant being found in likeness of man and this morning if you love something or someone more than Jesus the issue isn't that you love that thing too much but actually that you've missed something about

Jesus and so look again and keep looking at the Lord Jesus till you see what Paul saw look closely at Jesus until you see what it is that makes him worth more than anything that the world has got to offer and so let me turn briefly to the second half of the chapter Paul has been talking in verses 1 to 9 about Jesus taking hold of him but in the rest of the chapter he speaks about what he is taking hold of he spoke in the first half of the chapter about the now but the focus changes in the second half of the chapter to the not yet and again Paul's primary communication is his own experience he talks about what he wants to know and what he wants to find in life so look at verses 10 and 11 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death and that by any means possible

I may attain to the resurrection of the dead now you and I we know don't we that Paul knew Christ but he doesn't know Christ in all the ways that he wants to know him that's the Christian we know Jesus don't we but we don't know Jesus in all the ways that we want to know him that's the Christian life that Paul wants to know Jesus more deeply to be united with him in his death and his resurrection sharing in both his suffering and in his glory and he goes on to make it very clearly that he hasn't got there look at verse 12 it's 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 Paul's experience in the present is knowing so many blessings of the Christian life and yet longing for more he's a work in progress and that's how he experiences life as a follower of the

Lord Jesus he's a work in progress and Paul's point is here this every Christian should have a similar experience in fact verse 17 explicitly calls on the Philippians to follow in his footsteps and to look for further examples of this and he contrasts those positive models with those he describes in verses 18 and 19 he says don't be like those people who have just got their minds set on earthly things people who just think about eating and drinking who take pride in what is actually shameful and he calls them shockingly enemies of the cross of Christ and Christians are not to be people that live in that way instead he says Christians have their minds set on the heavenly way and we look forward to that day when Christ will return and establish his kingdom them perfectly and permanently so again what are the implications and at 12 midday I'm giving you five points of application I'm sorry alright which should have been on the screen but they're not so the first application is this we are not there yet we are not there yet it's wonderfully encouraging is that we're works in progress and that is how we experience life as followers of the Lord

Jesus it means that we do not kid ourselves thinking we've already arrived and we've already been made perfect but actually more applicable to you and I is we do not give in to the feeling of being defeated it's so easy isn't it to be discouraged by our failures and sometimes part of our discouragement is false expectations that the Christian life is always kind of moving onward and upward and we'll never take any backward steps but the Christian life is full of spiritual ups and downs that is the normal part of being a Christian should I say that to you again spiritual ups and downs are a normal part of the Christian life and that is something we ought to accept if you've got children like my family you're going on a long car journey and one of the kids asks from the back what what do they ask are we there yet and the answer is usually no we're not same here are we there yet

[26 : 26] God's work is not finished in us I think that's helpful in parenting as we bring our children up in the faith in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus our children are not there yet and neither are you we're not there yet and so instead of being defeated by our failures and our slow progress we ought to take heart aren't we keep pressing on second point of application here is this I think this will involve a kind of learnt forgetfulness I couldn't think of a better way of putting it a learnt forgetfulness in relation to the past that's the second implication a learnt forgetfulness look at verse 13 brothers I do not consider that I've made it on my own but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind straining forward to the prize that lies ahead so for Paul who put himself in his shoes at the moment for the moment I suspect for the apostle Paul there were many regrets

I suspect for the apostle Paul it meant trying not to focus on all the years that he would have considered wasted his investment in training as a Jewish Pharisee I presume that he tried not to think about all those Christians that he persecuted and murdered and harmed perhaps he also had to try hard not to think about his ongoing failures in seeking to please God and I reckon that we as a church family could do with learning from this Christian discouragement and Christian lack of motivation often come from dwelling on the past some of us are caught up with things that happened in the past and what happens is they create a pattern of thinking that stops us from

moving forward I think the question if you had your time again would you do it differently is not a question for

Christians would you do it differently it's irrelevant and Paul is saying he's not saying that there's no value on reflecting on the past he's not saying that there aren't lessons that God wants to teach us from the past but he is saying that dwelling on the past will generally not help you in the present and so he advocates a kind of forgetfulness a forgettery a forgettery of the past that welcomes God's forgiveness now which is focused on striving towards what is to come and what lies ahead the third implication is this this striving to what lies ahead is not all up to us it's not all up to us and there's another great encouragement here is that Paul is unembarrassed here in these verses in asking you and I to strain and to exert ourselves to push ourselves to go for it in being more like Jesus he thinks that the Christian life is one of effort one of going for it being all out for the Lord Jesus but he also reminds us wonderfully doesn't he he balances that by saying we are waiting for Jesus to usher in the future and Jesus is coming back irrespective of whether we do or don't do anything and when he comes he will demonstrate his supreme control over all things including us and he will give us a new and a glorious body that will smash park run times and we can trust him to do it because he is the Lord of the future and we can rest in his power to accomplish the future that he's promised let me read you the last two verses of the chapter which show you this look at these promises but our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself it's a similar point that I want to make fourthly we shouldn't trust Jesus for the future but we trust him for the present because just as

Jesus power will help us get to the goal in the end you notice the power of Jesus is mentioned in verse 21 and in verse 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his suffering as becoming like him in his death and Paul is saying that his power is at work in our lives now that he hasn't left you on your own that he gives you his Holy Spirit to accompany us and help us at every turn and that same divine power which brought Jesus back from the dead is with us by his Spirit as we seek to press forward to our heavenly goal persevering persevering keeping going as a Christian is hard isn't it you've probably noticed that that God's power is with us and in us one final thing as we finish and the fifth implication of these verses is we ought to care for the earth bound that's strange doesn't it we ought to care for the earth bound that is we ought to care for the people around us who don't have an eye for heavenly things at all but they're focused solely on the things of this earth this city this world these are people who the apostle

[32 : 09] Paul calls here the enemies of the cross people who made a God of their appetites and find delight in things that grieve God and these are people that are not waiting for a saviour from heaven because they don't know him and they don't love him like we do and I'm really struck by how the apostle Paul speaks of such people do you notice there's not a hint of dismissiveness or condemnation there's no judgment or derision there's just a heavy heart look at verse 18 he says to you that he can only speak of these people and now tell you even with tears I can only speak of these people with tears he cares for them very deeply and in this too Paul sets a great example to you and I not to speak of those who do not know Christ in harsh judgmental tones and so let's pray that God would put it into our hearts those tears of love which the apostle Paul speaks of in these verses it's a really wonderful chapter isn't it I could have spent four or five weeks in it and I hope that you'll reflect on it this week there's one key thing to remember the one key thing to remember is that in

Christ we are already now this lunchtime deeply blessed but there's more yet to come like Paul we might say it's not that I've already attained all this or arrived at my goal but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray