

Keynotes from Clive Baines am Sermon on 27/12/2020

Philippians 3 v 1-21 “What we once were but now have become causes us to strive for what lies ahead”

Philippians 3: Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, [\[c\]](#) blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ 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 that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Many of us would love to take 2020, screw it up like a piece of paper and then throw it in the fire, so that we can forget it completely, but the past always has implications

for our present and future lives. This may be because of decisions we have made, the career path we chose or the relationships we have formed. It may be because of habits we have got into or traditions we follow which lead us to have a narrow view of life that is not based on biblical truth. In this passage, there are three indications to help us see how the past works for our present and future.

1. Past - vv5-6

Paul gives us a picture of his past – his background, knowledge, learning and status. According to the life he was living then, he was faultless and had lived up to every expectation that was laid upon him. Yet all that changed when he became a child of God, receiving the gift of righteousness and the forgiveness of his sins through Jesus Christ. He had the absolute assurance of his inheritance. None of this was his own doing, but was entirely due to the miracle that took place in his heart when Christ entered his life on the road to Damascus.

Does the past hold you captive in a way that cripples your progress, or might it have been the very springboard that God intended to make you into the person you are today?

In vv7-8, Paul declares that none of his old life was worth anything in comparison to knowing Christ. Even so, God used Paul's past, with all the knowledge of the Old Testament that he had accumulated, to confront the opposition and to shine Christ's light into lives that were opposed to the truth.

Paul tells us that God's work in our lives is not yet complete and we are not yet perfect (v12). Perfection is reserved for the day we are called home, for those of us who have asked Jesus into our lives.

- Then we will have finished the race, and only then can we say we are perfect in Jesus as participants in the crown of righteousness, knowing the perfection of holiness and of true happiness.
- Though we can know something of it now, then we will know the full extent of Christ's love for us.

- Our citizenship is in heaven, and our lowly bodies will be transformed (**vv20-21**). Sin has wrecked our bodies, and made us know death, but then we shall know life everlasting, and be free from sin.

In reality, forgetting the things that are behind is something we can't do, but God chooses to remember them no more, through the shed blood of Jesus. Paul speaks of his past life to magnify the grace of God. We often long for past times, thinking we were better off then, as God's people did when they left Egypt:

Exodus 16:3 and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

However, there is no place for looking back as Jesus tells us in **Luke 9:62** "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Paul's heart was turned away from all that went with his upbringing and his legal approach to the law based on works because Christ had met with him. He constantly talks of looking forward and not turning back. His conscience must have weighed heavily on him, bearing in mind all that he did to persecute believers, yet he was determined not to be crushed by the past. We also often look back at our sinful past and reflect on our sinful attitudes, but Paul's persistence with moving on was driven by God's grace to him, and this us applies to us too.

We recognise the grace of God in giving his Son, whose blood was shed for our sin – the perfect Lamb who died for us to set us free from the curse of sin. Christ Jesus has made us his and we have become citizens of heaven.

2. Present (v1)

It is what we do today that matters. We have the awesome privilege of going forward with God, and what we do today both reflects and impacts on our longing to walk with Jesus. Paul tells the believers to rejoice in the Lord, no matter what they are going through, because Jesus is their chief joy and hope.

John Piper said 'God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him'. What I do today should be determined by:

- how God will be most glorified in me as I am most satisfied in him

We need to ask ourselves challenging questions about our study of the Scriptures, our prayer life and our fellowship with other believers. At this time, we are all suffering from the loss of fellowship and the opportunity to encourage one another by speaking God's truth into the needy areas of our lives. We have realised how important it is to meet together so that we can spur one another on as we walk with Christ at the centre of our lives.

Paul knew Christ, but longed to know him better:

- In the unsearchable riches of his grace
- In his great salvation
- In the experience of communion with him

He shows us that the prize (v14) is Christ and knowing him more.

How we live today will impact our lives going forward. Paul could say 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain' (Phil 1:21) and urged his readers to strive for a greater knowledge of the one who has saved them.

3. Future (v14)

We press on towards the finishing line. For the believer, the race began, just as it did for Paul, when Jesus entered into our hearts. Our love for Jesus keeps us running well, not looking back but keeping our eyes on him. There is no one as amazing and awesome as our God – he is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

Our faith looks to him, our hope is concerned with him and our love makes us long for him.

All these are vital for our race towards him. We are to keep him in sight at all times, looking to him as our prize, and having as our goal to be with him.

We are to press on to follow after Jesus. He is our guide and sustainer, so we lack nothing. He is our light in the darkest of times, and his is the voice that we obey as he calls us to follow him. The prize of his great calling is the crown of righteousness, of life and glory – the crown that never fades. Paul proclaims the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, as God calls his people home.

We are not saved by our works or by anything else – we have been saved and kept by his grace alone.

1 Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

- We have been raised from the scrap heap to sit among princes and to inherit the throne of glory
- We have been made kings and priests unto God
- This high calling is all of his grace.

It is an upward calling from Christ Jesus.

We are called by him and kept by him so that we may receive from him the prize of eternity with our Lord.

Phil 1:13-14: 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost
But now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

Toils and snares
We have already come
'Twas grace hath brought
Us safe thus far
And grace will lead us home

'Twas grace that taught
My heart to fear
And grace my Fears relieved
How precious did
That grace appear
The hour I first believed

When we've been there
Ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun
We'll have no less days
to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun

Through many dangers

Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost
But now I'm found

Was blind, but now I see