

Philippians 3:7-14 – Press on in 2021

- We are going to be in Philippians 3 today which we heard read earlier but we are also going to bring in a few other passages. This is more of a thematic new year sermon than a verse by verse explanation of Philippians 3.
- No doubt all have our own favourite Bible verse that means something special to us or has got us through a difficult time.
 - You might have it on a mug or t-shirt or wall sticker
 - Maybe its something like ‘I can do all things through Him who strengthens me’ because you went through a tough time where you could barely cope and this is what got you through.
 - Or romans 8v28
- Well, this passage is one of my favourites but it’s also one that is hard hitting and tough to live up to.
 - It puts us beyond ourselves and calls us to leave the past in the past and press on for the future.
 - That’s big
- So the greatest aim of 2021 is to know Jesus, or know Him better

Know Christ (v1-11)

- Pauls greatest desire is that we know Jesus because he knows how important it is.
 - Read v7, 8 & 10
 - He counts everything as loss or worthless compared to knowing Jesus
 - He even calls it rubbish
 - That word means dung – that’s how rubbish.
 - They aren’t just secondary but rubbish.
 - Why consider everything else as worthless?
 - So that instead he may know Jesus
 - He wants to remove all the distractions so that he can focus on knowing Jesus and life through Jesus.
- What an amazing truth and concept but wow is it hard to follow through on.
 - Count everything as loss?
 - You can’t hold on to anything!
- Paul tells us that everything in our lives is lesser value than knowing Jesus and that we should pay any price to know Jesus better.
 - Are you up for that?
 - Loose your health, you family, career, money, house, everything to know Jesus better
 - The surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Paul says, means everything else is loss.
 - See this passage is tough!

- I want to be a Philippians 3:7-14 man but its costly and I am nowhere near it yet
 - If you examined my life there are lots of things that I value above Christ.
 - On the stairs on the way down from my study I have the lyrics of v3 of 'Be thou my vision'.
 - Riches I need not or man's empty praise
 - They are two things for me I need to regularly remind myself are way below Jesus and that's why its there for me to see it every day.
 - I battle with that every day and have to remember it's not about me but Jesus.
- Paul is calling us to a high standard here
 - But before we all become disheartened let's remember we don't operate in our own strength but in the strength of God
 - David is an encouragement to us here
 - A man after Gods own heart who in so many Psalms is talking about the reasons, he loves God then in the next breath he is doom and gloom and in despair.
 - That the reality of the Christian faith.
 - We think we got it and then reality strikes again.
- Paul is open about that here too and reminds us to not trust in our flesh but in Jesus.
 - If it was about us, then Paul had it all.
 - Perfect Jew, Hebrew or Hebrews. V4-6
 - Paul had more reason than anyone to trust in his own ability, credentials and strength yet he is saying he counts it as nothing.
 - How much more should we do the same?
- Paul calls us to recognise who we are and that we have nothing without Jesus
 - He tells us to rejoice in the Lord
 - To put our confidence in the Lord.
 - To consider everything as loss compared to knowing Jesus
 - Jesus is the greatest thing.
 - If you don't know Him, I can assure you He is so much better than anything else you are running after.
- As we begin this new year in our culture there is this concept of reviewing our lives and seeing how we can be better, do more, and achieve more this year than last.
 - It feels like the perfect time to re-evaluate habits and routines.
 - A time to walk away from bad habits and hinderances and to start again with better choices.
 - Maybe with covid that wont be too hard, or maybe it will
 - People set new years resolutions to better and further themselves.
 - If gyms were open this would be the time of year that so many go and sign up
 - But most never last, 6 weeks in it is the same regulars as the previous year.

- The new year brings this idea of newness and freshness to our lives and we seek to embrace it.
 - But that desire doesn't last long
 - I always smile when you see the new year 7's go to secondary school
 - They carry every book, PE kit, the kitchen sink with them each day as they look laden down.
 - But give it a few months and they are soon like the year 10s who barely have a pen.
 - At the start of the year we have great ambitions but it never turns into long term reality.
 - Paul encourages us here as he wasn't perfect either
 - V12
 - Paul met Jesus face to face, he wrote 75% of the new testament and he says he isn't there, so its ok we aren't either.
- We are not there yet but Paul here is going to tell us how achieve the greatest aim.
 - How to strive to be a Philippians 3 follower of Jesus.
 - Paul shows us that the constant ambition of a believer is to know Jesus better and count everything else as loss.
 - He gives us two ways in which we can do that.
 - The rest of this sermon is going to unpack them.

Forget what is behind

- Here is the first step to knowing Christ better.
- There can be things in our past whether isolated events, periods of time, circumstances, situations or things we have been a part of that hinder our current pursuit of knowing Jesus.
 - Maybe we are left with guilt, shame, a sense of worthlessness that has become a block to knowing Jesus.
- Paul doesn't write this in an abstract way.
 - Paul before he came to know Jesus wasn't a nice man
 - Acts 7
 - Stephen is out preaching when things turn violent in v 54 and they stone him
 - Who is watching on and approves?
 - Saul – who becomes Paul
 - He has even offered to hold their jackets so they could throw harder.
 - Or what is Paul on his way to do when Jesus stops him on the Damascus road?
 - Round up Christians to kill them after humiliating them and dragging them to Jerusalem.

- Paul had plenty in his past to be ashamed of and to make him feel he couldn't draw close to God
 - But here he is telling himself and us to leave the past behind.
- If we have this shame and guilt in our past what we try and do is push it down and suppress it and busy ourselves but every time we get close to God, it rears its ugly head.
 - You need to know it is dealt with if we trust in Jesus, so we don't need to keep carrying it around.
 - Shame is weighty.
 - Put it down.
 - If it's stopping you coming to Jesus in the first place it's dealt with.
 - If it's stopping you growing in faith, it's dealt with.
 - The grace and mercy of God has dealt with our past if our faith is in Jesus.
- Paul certainly doesn't mean forget everything
 - We are to remember what God has done for us and how he has worked in our lives
 - Psalm 77:11.
 - Remember when he delivers or does something mighty.
- But at the same time don't live off past experience with Jesus.
 - He wants you to know and experience him in the present for the future.
 - There are too many Christians who rely on knowing God 10 years ago.
 - Know him now.
 - Nostalgia is an enemy.
- We have our past for a purpose, but it is to be left in the past
 - 1 Timothy 1v12-
 - Paul's past set him up to be used by God in the way he was
 - Your past sets you up to be used by God in the way he will for future believers.
 - Paul killed God's people, Paul was a blasphemer.
 - Yet God forgave him and used him in amazing ways
 - In 2021 will you put the past behind you and press on towards what God has in store for you.
 - The cross is powerful for all who will believe.

Press on for what is to come

- Faith is a gift from God
 - There is no doubting that.
- But the Christian life that follows requires work on our part.
 - Paul says strain (v13) – it's hard work

- Godliness doesn't happen by accident.
 - You cannot go to bed tonight and wake up tomorrow godly without having done anything.
 - It requires effort, hard work, self-control and planning.
- If we want to become more godly, to know Jesus better we need to press on and strive
 - That's not legalistic, that's living how Jesus tells us to.
- 1 Corinthians 9v25 gives us a good example here
 - By athlete he doesn't mean an amateur joe who plays 5 a-side once a week
 - He is talking about real professional athletes.
 - I have met a couple in my time, and they are crazy people
 - Their whole lives are dedicated to their sport
 - What they eat, drink, how much they sleep, how they train
 - And it gets even more serious the closer it gets to an event.
 - They have the highest level of self-discipline.
 - And they do it all for a medal here on earth
- Paul is arguing that if that's what an athlete will do for a medal that last a year how much more should we do for an eternal prize?
- Paul also tells us in 1 Corinthians an important message about how we train
 - We don't train aimlessly
 - V26
 - Like a boxer air punching.
 - Paul is telling us that to become a Philippians 3 believer we can't run aimlessly, punching the air.
- As Christians we have a goal, to win the prize to which God has called us.
 - We need a plan to get there and to defeat the enemies on the way.
 - Otherwise, the enemies derail us so easily.
 - When things go wrong in my life I so easily turn inwards and seek to solve my issues myself.
 - I turn to my hobbies and relaxations instead of coming to Jesus in prayer and pressing into him.
 - That's what Paul is wanting us to fix.
- 1 Timothy 4:7 – the Christian life is one of training.
 - It is with sweat and toil that we become godly.
 - It requires a plan and commitment.
- So often when we set goals to grow in faith it's just
 - Know the Bible better or pray more or attend home group more
 - But how are you going to do that?

- If you are like me you are naturally lazy so ideas often remain at that rather than become reality.
 - How do we turn intentions to press on into reality?
- If you think it will just take care of itself then you will be in this same position this time next year as you are today.
 - For too many of us life happens to us rather than us living life.
- So be intentional
 - Spend some time planning on where you want your faith to grow and then work out how you will get there and what enemies and distraction you will face along the way.
 - Then start the toil
 - But don't start it alone
 - Let some others know your plan so they can hold you accountable, support you and encourage you.