

Christ - my goal

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[0 : 00] I would like us to turn now to Philippians chapter 3 and we look this evening at the verses 13 and 14. Philippians chapter 3 and verses 13 and 14.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended that this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

There's an old, old song which the younger people certainly won't know that says, I know where I'm going. I know who's going with me. Do you know where you're going?

Do you know where your life is going? Do you know tonight what's going to be the destination of your life?

You see, that really is the most vital of questions. Because you've got to think, if you don't know where you're going, if you don't know where your life is leading to, then what purpose does it have?

[1 : 39] What purpose is your life tonight? What use is your life? If you don't know where you're going.

That, you see, that you see is one of the great blessings of being a Christian. Because a Christian knows where he or she is going.

And a Christian therefore knows what his life or her life is for, what to do with that life. So that when we reach the destination, life will have been worthwhile.

And the Christian's destination is Jesus Christ.

That's what every Christian is making for. For Jesus. The Christian can say, Christ is my goal.

[2 : 44] Because Jesus said to his followers when he was here in this world, before he died and went back to heaven, he said, I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also. That's the destination of the Christian believer.

And it's sure and certain because Jesus has said it. And so the Christian is able to order everything else about his life with a view to reaching that great and good destination.

And that's exactly what Paul is saying here about his life. He's saying his life has purpose. It has meaning.

He says he can look to each day of his life with confidence, with assurance. He can get on with the task of living confidently, no matter what he has to experience in each day.

[3 : 57] And we know from what we've learned about Paul, even in this letter to the Philippians already, that he had many difficult things to deal with. Some days when he got up in the morning, he knew very well that it wasn't going to be an easy day.

But every day for Paul, because he was a Christian, was a day worth living. Because it was a day of purpose. It was a day for getting on with the great work of living, of reaching the great destination at the end.

I press toward the mark. He says, I've got a goal in you. And I can keep going. Come with me.

I can have hope. I can have confidence. I can even have joy when there may be very many sad things going on round about me. When there may be real sadness in my own heart.

I can still at the same time have this joyful attitude to life. Because I know where I'm going. Christ is my goal.

[5 : 07] And because Christ is my goal, the Christian says, as Paul says, and because I know where I'm going, then it shows. It shows now. In the way I live.

And it shows in a number of ways. It shows, first of all, in my assessment of the present. The way I think about the way I presently am.

The way I think about my condition before God now, the Christian can say, is a clue to the fact that I know where I'm going.

I hope you'll agree with me that that's to be expected. If a person really knows where they're going when they're on a journey, they have to know where they are on the route.

Now. They have to know what point they are on the journey now. They have to know that they're on the right road if they're going to be sure of the destination.

[6 : 19] Otherwise, they are lost. And of course, that's the very way that Jesus himself described people before they come on to the Christian way. Before they have this assurance that they know where they're going.

They're lost. They haven't really come to a proper assessment of where they are now. So how can they be sure of the destination at the end of the journey?

But that's not the way with Paul here in these two verses. He relates where he's going to and how sure he is of the mark that he's making for.

He relates to it to his condition now. There's a connection. The way is linked from the present to the goal at the end. And so that's the way he begins in these two verses.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended. But this one thing I do. What does he mean when he says perhaps these strange sounding words? Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.

[7 : 27] Brethren, I haven't reached the goal yet. There's something still not right in my life. That's part of the process of knowing that you're on the right way.

You see, we can't get away from the fact that Paul begins this very assured testimony here with words that are actually in negative terms.

I count not myself. I don't reckon that I've yet got hold of it all. But I press toward it.

I know I'm going to get it. But my assessment of the present must be in negative terms. There's something not yet right. And it's at that very point that speaking to the other Christians that he's writing to, he says, brethren, in other words, this is not something that's unique to me, the Apostle Paul, as a Christian.

This is something that I share with all true Christians. If you're confident about the future, you do have something negative, surprising as it may seem, to say about your present position and your present condition.

[8 : 53] There's something I haven't yet grasped. Policy. Well, what is it that Paul hasn't yet grasped?

When he thinks about his present position as a Christian, what is that thing? Not as though I had already grasped it or I had already made it my own.

Well, we have to go back to what he says in verse 12. There he says, Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, that I follow after, if that I may make it my own.

The same words that he uses in verse 13. I have not yet made it my own. But in verse 12, he's saying, I follow after, if I may make it my own.

What is it? It's being perfect. The thing that he's conscious of as a Christian, that keeps him pressing on towards the mark, towards the destination, is that he's not yet perfect.

[10 : 07] And he puts that even in another way, a way back at verse 10, where he talks about that condition as being conformed to Jesus Christ.

Or being like Jesus. That's the mark that he's making for. That's what heaven is going to be.

It's going to be the place where finally God's people will be like Jesus in every respect. And Paul is sure of that.

that the thing that actually helps him on the journey, that gives him confidence to keep on, is to remember that presently, now, he is not yet like Jesus.

There's something that he lacks. And that's to go hand in hand with something that we found out last week or was it the week before, something that he definitely has.

[11 : 15] You see, if we go back to verses 8 and 9, what is he saying? Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him.

not having mine own righteousness which is of the law but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. And so difficult and all as it may seem we've got to try and grapple with this.

Paul is saying that as a Christian there's something he definitely does have. He's got Christ. and he's got the righteousness that Christ worked out for sinners when he lived in this world and when he died on the cross, when he took the place of sinners.

Paul has now got that through faith and through faith alone. He hasn't been able to earn it. he hasn't been able to work up to it.

He had to come to the place where he was willing humbly to receive it with empty hands. And Christ came and he now possesses Jesus as his saviour.

[12 : 46] And he possesses the righteousness of Jesus like some inward gift that means that he'll be accepted with God at the last.

He has that. But righteousness is a way of life. Righteousness that would mean that he is now living perfectly.

he doesn't have that yet. But he's making for it when he reaches the mark.

Yes, he has Christ and Christ's righteousness for him. He has Christ and all that Christ has done for him.

He has received that right from the moment he became a Christian. that the righteous living that will honour Christ and please Christ that's still in the making.

[13 : 53] That's still going on. And in order to reach that mark he has to realise that there is still so much of that likeness of Jesus that is still to be produced within him.

Paul has started the Christian way. That's what all the positives were for that he's got Christ. He started it and having started he's sure of finishing but he hasn't finished and he's aware of that.

now maybe you don't find these concepts easy but we do have to grapple with them because they cause so much difficulty to people.

They cause so much difficulty to people who have become aware that they need to be Christians that they need to have Jesus as their own saviour and yet they have difficulty in being sure that they have found Jesus.

And the most common reason it seems to me is that the evil one comes to seekers like that and points out all sorts of sins that are still in their lives and all sorts of things that they still haven't got sorted out and says to them you can't be a Christian.

[15 : 32] if there's this still wrong in your life and that still wrong in your life. But you see Paul is saying here that the true Christian who is making for the mark is a person who is most aware that there is still much to be sorted out.

No the true Christian is aware of many faults still within much that falls short of the glory of God.

God but what separates the Christian from other sinners is not that the Christian is not a sinner at all but that the Christian is a sinner who trusts in Jesus to deal with that sin and to go on dealing with that sin.

The Christian is the sinner who is clinging to Jesus because he or she is a sinner and wants to be can like Jesus.

So there needs to be that assessment of the present if we really are to be a Christian who is sure of the destination.

[17 : 17] But that's just the start of it. There's another evidence of the Christian who knows where he or she is going. Not only in their assessment of the present but of their approach to progress.

realizing that Jesus has begun the work. Realizing that Jesus is the saviour who can bring us to heaven.

There is this new desire to please and to honour that Jesus who has done so much for us. There is need to make daily progress that we may honour Christ.

who gave his life for us. And what we notice from Paul's example, from Paul's testimony in his approach to this progress is the effort that he puts into it.

Oh, I don't count myself to have grasped at all, Paul sees, but I follow after this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press towards the mark.

[18 : 42] That talks about effort that Paul is putting into his Christian living. The sort of effort that you might expect in an athlete, and we'll come to that in a minute. There are really two things about this effort to make progress day by day in the life of Paul that ought to be typical of the true Christian.

There is concentration. There is a concentrated approach to the Christian life. This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind.

Yes, here like an athlete. I wonder if the young folks here this evening have ever noticed, when they've perhaps been watching athletics on television, have you ever noticed the eyes of athletes?

Maybe not so easy to see them when you're watching athletics on television, but I think it's worth looking at the next time you see athletics on television.

Even before the race begins, and very often you do get quite a good close-up of them limbering up once they've got undressed and just before they're ready to get down on the blocks, you often go along the line, the camera goes along one by one.

[20 : 07] I'm sure some of you will have noticed the way that they're obviously psyching themselves out. They're getting focused, they're blotting out all that's around them and they're focusing on the journey they've got to make and the finishing line that they've got to reach and to reach first if they can.

Focused, concentrated on the job in hand. Well, that's the way with a true Christian.

Or that's the way we are to be can when we know where we're going. I'm not saying that you'll always see it in a Christian's eyes.

But if you get to know them a little, and if you know anything about your own life, if you're seeking to live that life for Christ and to reach the great goal of heaven and being with Jesus, then there's need to be focused.

There's need to be concentrated. Paul puts it in this way. This one thing I do, and there's an emphasis in the original language here, I'm told. One thing Paul says. Sometimes we do that in our own conversation.

[21 : 28] Sometimes we do it, I think, when we're perhaps having an argument with somebody and it's gone hither and thither and we want to get back to the point in hand. One thing we say.

Well, that's sort of the way that Paul is talking here. One thing focused, concentrated, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward, always dealing with the task in hand of making progress as a Christian.

And so in order to deal with that one thing day by day, there's so much that behind us that we have to forget. it. Now, we have to be fair here again, we have to get the balance of Scripture.

Paul is obviously not saying that to be a focused Christian making progress, you forget everything of the past. Paul himself has just been telling the Philippians quite a number of things from his own past.

There are lessons that we learn from the past. there will be not one of us here this evening, I am confident, but has learnt lessons that we would do well not to forget.

[22 : 49] Mistakes we have made and they have been corrected. Perhaps sometimes it's been a painful experience to admit that we were wrong and to turn to the right way. This may have been part of our Christian life.

This may be true of any of us here this evening who are not Christians. We are not to forget that. we are certainly not to forget the mercy of God.

Paul has been talking about that. How although he had determinedly for much of his early life turned away from God's way, God in his great mercy drew him back to see that he needed Jesus Christ and Jesus only.

We are not to forget that for Christian progress. But we need to recognise sometimes things in our lives that are keeping us from being focused on the job in hand of making progress in the Christian life.

Maybe there's a hankering sometimes with some of us for past experiences. Perhaps especially some of you who are older, even older than I am after a recent birthday.

[24 : 06] You, you see, even more than I did, knew the church of Christ in our land and the free church certainly in a better day.

And you've got to consider if it's keeping you from making progress today because you're so taken up with hankering for the past.

past. And you've got to consider is it hindering you? Is it hindering you from recognising that your God is in the present?

And that whatever are the particular issues of today, he can help us to deal with them in the way that is appropriate for today. What was appropriate a generation ago may not be quite appropriate in the same way for today.

So in that way maybe we are needing to be more focused on today's tasks for moving forward and not living in the past in a way that's hindering us from getting on with the present.

[25 : 16] Maybe some of us, and this will be true of us whatever our age, maybe we're harbouring some bitterness over past wrongs.

And wherever we go, whatever we want to do for Christ, perhaps especially when we meet one person or another, we're especially reminded of it.

Some problem we went through in the past, maybe it was never properly resolved, certainly not resolved to your liking or my liking perhaps, and it's nagging.

And if we just stop before the Lord for a moment, I mean I don't know what experience you may be thinking about, you won't know what experience I might be thinking about.

This situation may not be true of each one of us, but it may be true of some of us. And if we stop to think, it's hindering us. It's hindering us from making progress.

[26 : 19] We're going back to something that needs to be left in the past. We weren't able to sort it out, but God will certainly sort it out. Even if it takes till the great day of judgment, he will sort it out.

And we need to be focused and think about the present needs we have, the present issues that need to be dealt with for Christ and for his glory and for his salvation seed.

God or maybe there is someone who thinks of past sins in their life and they come back and you can't forget them and you feel, I cannot really be of any use to the Lord today because of what I did in the past.

past sin and you need to forget. You need to put that past sin and you need to lay it at the throne of God's grace and you need to trust in the promises of Christ that the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin and the righteousness of Christ covers and forgives all sin.

when we go and when we confess and when we trust in what Christ has promised to do for those who will confess their sin and seek his forgiveness.

[27 : 57] We need to forget those things that are behind and reach forth to the needs and the opportunities and the tasks that are important for our progress in the work of Christ.

There has to be concentration in this approach to progress and there has to be determination. Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press or strain toward the mark.

Now the young folks I think might find this understandable. Again we want to get back to athletics. I'm not thinking so much now of what you may see on the television because there's constant movement but do any of you ever look at glossy magazine pictures of athletes?

Yes it could be footballers but I think especially athletes, male or female, and you see these still pictures that are taken of them. Perhaps pictures of a hurdler just at the point of crossing the hurdle or perhaps be it a sprinter or a long distance runner just at the point of reaching the tip or it can also be just at the point just before they move off the blocks.

And you can sometimes get these wonderful pictures that show you every muscle and every sinew and it's strained and it's looking forward and it's all working.

[29 : 45] You can tell just by the body form in the photograph you can tell that every muscle, every sinew is working to impel and compel the athlete forward forward to the mark to the goal.

Everything is determined to that end. That's the picture that we have here. By this word I press or I strain toward the mark.

it's a very challenging word. It's challenging us to effort.

And we really need to ask ourselves as Christians tonight what do we put the most effort into in our lives?

Do we put the most effort into making progress in the Christian life? Think of the effort these athletes put in.

[31 : 03] What's it for? Well at the best it's for glory that will pass.

Again the young folks I'm sure saw the pathetic pictures of Muhammad Ali lighting the Olympic flame in Atlanta last year. You may not remember but I remember his days of glory.

That they're past. What real benefit are these glories? to that poor man today.

But the glory that the Christian is making for, is straining for, is an eternal glory that will never be taken away, that will bring blessing and peace and joy for all eternity.

And it deserves effort. Don't let's leave it at it requires effort. It deserves effort. That's really what Paul is saying here.

[32 : 24] I press toward the mark. are we so busy putting effort into other things that when it comes to the means of grace perhaps for instance that are so essential to our progress in the Christian life we're just too tired.

when the Christian life itself is worthy of more effort than anything else in this world that yes does demand effort and is worthy of effort but not as much as becoming a better Christian is worthy of effort.

And you see Paul is convinced of how worth it it is because he doesn't finish without showing what his anticipation of perfection is about.

He says I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He keeps his eye on the goal and he's confident there.

yes he can talk of it as a prize that is waiting. It's not going to be gained without effort. It's not going to be gained without diligence.

[34 : 04] That's the way that the Lord has prepared. But it's not just that that keeps him going. You see it's the prize of the high calling or of the upward calling of God.

now when the Bible talks about the call of God to the Christian it's talking about the power of God that's in the call.

You see whenever anyone becomes a Christian it's because God has called and God has given the power as he has called.

And what Paul is saying here is that the power of God's call is still working and will work up to the end always drawing on and upward towards the great prize that God has prepared.

So that at the end of the day the glory that will be received although we've put all effort into it it will really be all of God's doing. We have to make the effort and we will make the effort and we must make the effort because we see how worthy Christ is of going on of being diligent and serving him more and more better and better but we only have assurance that we can make progress because the upward call is at work because God in his life is so determined and he keeps drawing and he keeps pulling us on with his love and with the power of his mercy and he does it in Christ Jesus he constantly makes us aware of all that we have in

[35 : 59] Jesus he constantly makes us aware of how Jesus will never leave us how Jesus is always there for us at every state and so we see I haven't reached I'm conscious of much sin that my trust is in Christ who died for me and he's committed to me in his love and for his sake I press toward the mark I know where I'm going I know who's going with me to you oh if you don't tonight will you not bring your life to

Jesus he's the way bring your life with all its needs with all its sin to him and then you also will be able to say I know where I'm going and I know who's going with me Amen