

## Philippians Chapter 3

### *Philippians 3; Matthew 21:33-46*

Over four different weeks we are doing a series on Paul's letter to the Philippians and today we are looking at chapter 3. It may be really helpful if you have the Bible reading open in front of you so that I can refer to parts of it easily.

Paul begins this chapter with the word '*Finally*' – now he is not about to finish the letter – we are actually halfway through and Paul has a great deal to still say that is deeply on his heart for this beloved little church in Philippi. The Greek word used here for '*finally*' can also be translated as '*and so*'. So it seems that Paul is reiterating the command to rejoice that he has in chap 2:18, and back in chapter 1 also. He will really take us further into the power of rejoicing in chapter 4 – so wait for that instalment in two weeks time.

The opening sentence of this chapter is a command: "*Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!*" And it comes after reminding the Philippians that Epaphroditus had almost died for the work of Christ before Paul says: 'and so, you lot, rejoice!'

Paul's passion for the church to 'get' this message is evident in this chapter. After a part that is rather cynical about the Judaisers who urge physical circumcision, his message is strong and he says v 18 that he delivers it '*even with tears*'. He doesn't want them to miss the point.

So let's look at the main points of the chapter.

- V 15 first. Paul tells us that those who are mature should have this view of things.

What view?

- Verse 16 that we are to live up to what we have already attained. We will look a bit more into what we have attained towards the end of this sermon. But let's remember Paul's imperative to live up to it.
- V 14 he declares that he presses on to the goal to win the prize for which God has called him, to heaven, through Christ. And in order to do that he leaves behind old things and strains for what is ahead. What a motto - 'straining for what is ahead' – and not being held back by the past.

Bernhard Langer was a high achieving golfer. In 1985 he won the US Masters, the Heritage Classic, the Australian Masters, the Casio World Open

in Japan, the Sun City Million Dollar event and two events in Europe. He says he won seven tournaments on five different continents, and was ranked number one in the world. He had a beautiful wife and had achieved everything he could ever have dreamed of. But something was missing. I quote his words from Towards the Goal:

“My priorities were golf, golf, and more golf, then myself and finally a little time with my wife. Every now and then I prayed. I went to church. But if my golf game was not good, my whole life was miserable, and I made everyone around me miserable.

The week after I won the Masters, I was invited by my friend and fellow touring pro, Bobby Clampett, to go to the PGA tour Bible Study on Wednesday evening.

That night was the first time in my life that I heard that I needed to be “reborn”. It didn’t make sense to me. Surely, at the age of 28, I could not be born again. At the end of the study, I asked the Bible study leader, Larry Moody, what he meant by “reborn”.

He opened the Bible and showed me John 3:3 which reads: *“I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God’s Kingdom!”*

Larry went on to explain what this meant in practical terms. I was amazed to realise that the only way to have eternal life is through Jesus Christ. Jesus died for our sins and we can’t receive eternal life through our own deeds or good behaviour. We can never live up to God’s standard. We will always fall short.

After understanding that God loved me so much that he sent his only Son to die for my sins, it seemed natural for me to ask the Lord into my life.

Since then, I’ve seen tremendous changes in my life, my marriage, and my whole outlook. My priorities have changed. They’re now where they should be: God first, family second, and then my career. Every day we have to make many decisions, but the most important decision we’ll ever make is about who we believe Jesus is. We either accept him or reject him. Jesus himself said “if you are not on my side, you are against me” (at 12:30a) There is no in-between!”<sup>1</sup>

This pro golfer learnt that the real goal in life is not winning prize tournaments but rather the goal of **knowing Christ**. In Verse 8 Paul calls it the surpassing

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<sup>1</sup> In Towards the Goal. New Testament in Contemporary English. The Bible Society. 1997

greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as my Lord. Like Bernhard Langer Paul lets us know he too had been a great success in the natural in his world at his time. He has been born with top credentials as a Jew (v 5) “Hebrew of Hebrews”. He was a Pharisee (v5), an extremely hard to gain religious position of authority and prestige. He had it all and was zealous to the point of persecuting those who opposed it, especially Christians (v 6).

But he came to the same conclusion, I, Bernhard Langer, and millions upon millions of people since Jesus’ day, that he puts in v 8 *“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”*

When Jesus is our Lord, we are to live up to what we have already attained (v 16). Jesus is our blueprint for Christian behaviour, just as Paul says that his behaviour is a pattern for the Philippians. Do we make it our goal to have our behaviour a pattern that others could use as a model? When Paul makes it clear that Christ Jesus has made us His own, and that v20 our citizenship is in heaven, he is also describing a task that is both a privilege and a responsibility. St Teresa of Avila expressed this commission well when she said: “Christ has no body on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now”.

It is a privilege to belong to Christ – so let us live up to what we have attained.

It is also a responsibility. Do others look at us and think: “In that person I can see something of what it means to live like Christ”?

The life of Lord Macleod (1895-1991) of Iona illustrates what it is like when privilege and responsibility are taken seriously. He first worked in the slums of Glasgow and then built up the Christian community on Iona. Iona is still a place of encountering the presence of God and many take a pilgrimage and a retreat there to this day. When asked on one occasion “What makes you tick?” he promptly answered, “The fact that Christ Jesus made me his own.”

In this letter to the Philippians Paul is empathising that once we belong to Christ we can’t take this privilege lightly and must not rest on our laurels.

We have been given so much once we ask Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour including, as v 9 says, a righteousness that comes from faith. At our baptism all believers are marked with the sign of the Cross as a reminder of what is involved in our confession of faith, either by us or by a godparent on the

behalf of a baby or little one. To be marked with the sign of the cross implies a decision to be conformed to the likeness of the crucified Jesus – to love as he loved, to obey as he obeyed, and to be prepared to accept the consequences. The consequences are eternal! Those who share in Christ's sufferings and death will also share in his joy, his resurrection and the life that continues beyond this life – a life and place that Jesus has already gone ahead and prepared for us (John 14).

I finish by inviting us to look at verse 10-11. *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead."*

This verse is our parish verse.

This verse has been one of the most important to me for nearly three decades. I prayed it as a personal prayer about 26 years ago after hearing a missionary preach about it – and it warrants a sermon in its own right.

This is my goal to Know Christ. There is a cry in my heart in this verse that was there in Paul's heart too when he wrote this. It was his life long goal. To really know someone – we get to know their trials and sufferings as well as their achievements. If we know only of their good times we would have a warped view. So I encourage each of us to ask Jesus to reveal more and more of what he suffered for us when he died on the Cross. When he gives a revelation of his suffering to us we are changed forever. When we experience the Cross we come into a knowing that we cannot turn away from.

We all suffer – in different ways – but if we also seek Jesus in those times and seek to know him more deeply through the suffering – we develop a fellowship with Him that brings us closer and deepens our understanding of him. The Greek word used here is '*Koinonia*' (coi nonia) meaning sharing/fellowship. Those who are 'in Christ' share his faith, his righteousness, and his resurrection only if we are prepared to also share in his sufferings. However, this too becomes a privilege and certainly not a burden. I remember when I was having my third child and the pain of childbirth became too much for me and I inwardly cried out to Jesus, I experienced an encounter with Him that was unforgettable. It was worth the pain to meet with Him in the suffering that way. I have heard others say the same thing – that it has been worth the trials or difficulties to know Jesus in this deeper experiential way that happens when we seek to **Know Him** in a 'sharing or suffering way'.

The other thing that this verse reminds us is that the power of the resurrection is already ours too. The power of the resurrection is the power of God to overcome sin, eternal death, disease, pain, hurt, offence, evil and much more. We have this power in us when we have Jesus living within – the resurrected Jesus within. Once again a privilege and a responsibility! To live and act like we believe it and as verse 16 reminds us “Let us live up to what we have already attained.”

This 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Philippians encourages us to take the privilege and responsibility for how high, wide, long and deep we can go with God for whom there is no limit to love, power, and blessing.

I encourage each one of us to pray Paul’s prayer in verses 10-11 for ourselves and I will conclude with a prayer that each one here is invited to say silently in your hearts if you agree with it. For some here you may want to invite Jesus to come and live with you and for others you may want to reaffirm that Jesus does indeed live as your Lord and Saviour.

### **Let us pray:**

Dear Jesus, firstly thank you for dying for me on the cross and taking all of my sins and paying the price for them fully so that I could become righteous by faith in you.

I ask you now Jesus to forgive me for the times I have not lived according to your ways and values. Please come into my life and live in me Jesus and fill me with your Holy Spirit to help me live as you lived.

I want to know you Jesus, more and more.

I ask to know, and live out, what I have attained in having the power of your resurrection in my life. Please help me understand and have fellowship with You in your sufferings. And as you died and then rose to live may I also seek to know and receive all you have attained for me with your resurrection, and strain forward for the prize that awaits me.

Please give me the ability to live daily up to what you have already attained for me – in Jesus’ name, Amen.