

Pressing on towards the goal - Philippians 3 v 12 to 21 Kevin Dowle

Introduction - Pressing on towards the goal is the theme for today continuing the look at Paul's letter to the Philippians which he is writing as encouragement while he himself is in Prison.

When I started to look at this section, I initially thought, it can't be that difficult and then read it and didn't have a clue where to start! I think what makes it quite difficult is that you have to remember it's only part of the letter, a bit like if someone wrote you a letter but you only read one paragraph out of the middle page, it might be quite tricky to get the picture – so we do need a little bit of context.

12

Not that I have
already obtained all
this*

Also, at the start of verse 12 – we see the words **not that I have attained this**. Now I'm not very good at English, but I think this is not normally how you start a sentence. So, you have to look back a little at the previous verses (next slide) to see what Paul is talking about. If you were here last week, then Steve covered this, but we need to remind ourselves to make it clear what Paul is talking about.

** ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead*

Paul wants to be like Jesus, not just superficially, but deeply. He wants to participate in his suffering, know the power of his resurrection and **somehow** attain the resurrection from the dead. This really defines the goal that Paul is talking about. Now we have the context.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

In the next verses Paul talks about Jesus taking hold of him and his past. But particularly in V 13 he makes the point about forgetting what is behind and straining for what is ahead. These seem important points here, because how difficult it can be for **us**, to simply look forward in life – I know I struggle with that. But also, Paul makes the point that despite his circumstances he is not just looking forward, but **straining** toward what is ahead.

Forgetting the past

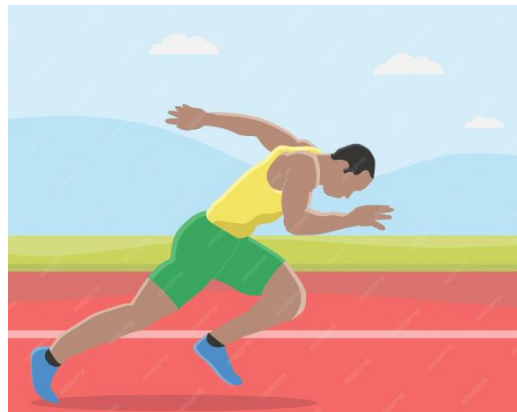


Everything else is
WORTHLESS when
compared with the
INFINITE VALUE
of knowing
Christ Jesus
my Lord.
Philippians 3:8, NLT

This is an illustration of Paul's view of his past, where he was self-righteous and zealous in his pursuit of Judaism. Following his meeting with Jesus, his past means nothing. Everything is now about Jesus and this slide illustrates what we looked at last week, where we wrote down our own

personal ambitions and then threw them in a bin to illustrate the point that everything is worthless compared to knowing Christ.

When Paul talks about straining towards what is ahead, Nicky Gumbel uses the analogy of a runner striving towards the finishing line of a race. Clearly Paul is not running as he is in Prison, but he is doing all he can – not just resting and waiting and not half-heartedly doing it but he is encouraging the church in Phillipi in writing the letter and in setting an example, even in what must have been an extremely challenging situation.



In the next verses Paul is pointing to himself as the example and encouraging others. "Join together in following my example" Paul is also warning that not everyone will do that, but showing the importance of "keeping your eyes on those who live as we do" acknowledging that Christians are different – Jane helped me out a bit here, by pointing out that worshipping as a Christian in Phillipi at that time would have marked people out as different politically, socially and in terms of religion and I think there is a question for us here in terms of what does that mean for us today? Does worshipping as a Christian mark us out as different? Who do we keep our eyes upon as an encouragement in our faith, and who is keeping an eye on me and you?

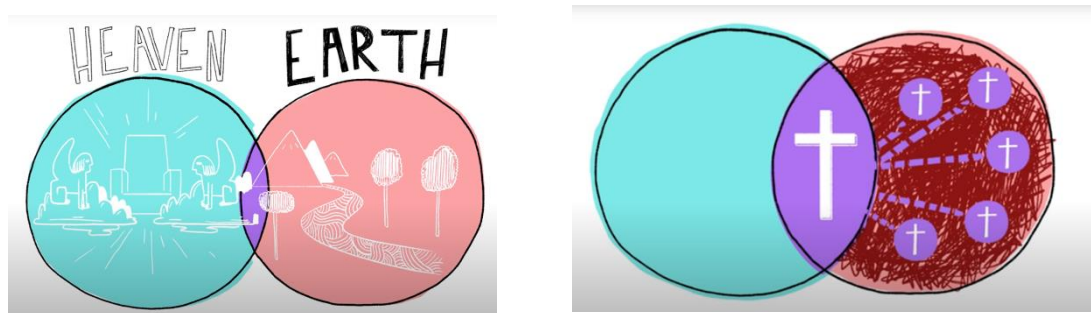


When Paul says "join together", perhaps a good illustration of this is to think of others joining the race – again not everyone will be the same, just as in the London marathon, there are the elite athletes, those in fancy dress, the wheelchair race and so on. All striving towards the finish line. In Paul's example it's not just the first over the line who gets the reward/prize but everyone. I have never really been a runner, but I did manage to get over the line in the Kenilworth Half Marathon a few years ago, only to be approached by the St Johns ambulance people

at the end, who thought I was about to pass out! I still got the t-shirt and the medal 😊

Towards the end of the passage Paul is reminding the Philippian Church that their citizenship is in heaven, and they eagerly await a saviour. Of course, Jesus has already been crucified and resurrected at this point, so Paul is now referring to the age to come, when our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like his glorious body. The idea of heaven and earth can be quite hard for us to comprehend. I quite like this illustration from the Bible project:

This illustration shows earth where we live now and heaven as another place that is being gradually merged. Through Jesus, there is already an overlap. We often hear the idea that you are in Christ and Christ is in you and I like this illustration here of the middle area, which helps to illustrate how we can sort of be in two places at once.



There is a but here though, because by being in the middle area as this slide shows, it doesn't mean that we are simply there and that's it. In this image we see that the world is a fallen world and, in a mess, but there is still a need to reach out to the world as Paul was doing by encouraging the Philippians – not to conform to the world, but still to engage in the world until Jesus comes again and everything will then be under His control – the two circles will merge if you like.

So what does this mean for us today? One of the things I find interesting is that we know a lot about Paul, as he wrote the letters, but we don't see the other side of what happened because of the letter – how was it received? What did the church in Philippi do because of the letter? Who were the people of that church and so on. What we do know now, is that Christianity grew and spread around the world, and John and Janice illustrated that very nicely a few weeks ago.

I think there are perhaps at **least** three things we can take from this. And I will finish with these three thoughts:

- 1) One is not to be held back by our past - look ahead. Personally, I find that a very helpful message and an encouragement, because often I can look back at life and see a mess, but Jesus came into the world, not to wipe

out our past, but to free us from it, to wipe away our shame and guilt our sin, so that we can be free. We can and should look ahead and not be held back by our past.

- 2) The second thing is to join in pressing on to be more like Jesus, that is what Paul was still striving to do, no matter what his circumstances and no matter what he had or hadn't already accomplished. In Chapter 2 verse 5 he talks about Jesus in terms of utterly self giving love, even to the point of death.
- 3) Thirdly Our citizenship is in heaven – so don't set your mind on earthly things. I think this is very challenging because we are often consumed with earthly things daily, but ultimately, earthy things won't last and as Paul says the power of Jesus will enable Him (Jesus) to bring everything under his control. But until that happens, we fix our eyes on Jesus, but we still have work to bring about earthly transformation, but with a heavenly goal. Possible Hymn – Turn your eyes upon Jesus