

Sunday, 30th September, 2018

SRCF

Living from joy

The Goal of life

Philippians 3: 1-21 (4:1)

We are well into Philippians and rightly, Oli has called this series 'Living for joy'. Joy is a key word in the letter. So today's reading is a sandwich of rejoice and joy with the meat of the letter in the middle.

So let us Read Philippians 3:1-4:1 page 1180

It is written in a common format of the day:

1. **Introductory Section** (1:1–11)
2. **News and Instructions** (1:12–2:30)
3. **Warning against False Teachings with Paul's Experience and Life as a Model to Follow** (3:1–21)
4. **Exhortations** (4:1–9)
5. **Gratitude Expressed for the Philippians' Generosity** (4:10–20)
6. **Conclusion** (4:21–23)

In a sense, today we look at the meat of the letter but as I hope you have picked up, joy effuses the introduction:

4 I always pray with joy,

and the news:

18-19 Yes, and I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

In the instructions bit:

2:2 Then make my joy complete by being like-minded

2:17-18 17 Perhaps my life's blood is to be poured out like an offering on the sacrifice that your faith offers to God. If that is so, I am glad and share my joy with you all. 18 In the same way, you too must be glad and share your joy with me.

and we begin today with: *Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!*

It does not end there. Read on and find the other references to joy! We have 2 more weeks of learning about 'living for joy.'

So today we have 5 key points.

1. reject performance-based goals
2. embrace the eternal goal based on Jesus
3. Press on!
4. live up to what you have! Get your eyes on the glory to come.
5. Stand firm!

Structure:

1-6 Performance based goals

7-11 eternal goals based on Jesus

12-14 press on to the ultimate goal! Grace does not lead us to sit back and relax.

15-21 live up to what we obtained in Christ. Get your eyes fixed on the glory to come!

4:1 stand firm!

So we begin with a challenge. Are you one of the dogs? It's a bit brutal, I know but it is vital to understand the passion we have for God's grace. Paul is facing up to people in his day who were setting performance based goals for salvation and Christian living. Its not good enough to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you must be circumcised, follow the law, eat Kosher food, say the prayers, attend Passover, make your pilgrimages to Jerusalem and so on. It seems obvious to us now that the Old Covenant demands were superseded by Jesus. But here is a warning, do we set up new performance based goals which we expect in our Christian Life. Perhaps one way of illustrating the problem is to re-write Paul's verses 5-6 in our fellowship. I was born into a Christian family, attended Sunday School from 3 months, church from 11 years, made a profession of faith when 8, was baptised when I was 14, as a teenager I answered questions on every chapter of the Bible, started Bible teaching when I was 18, led a CSSM Beach Mission, run a youth club, been an elder of this church, an employed pastor for 10 years. read my Bible and prayed every day, tithed consistently. You could add teetotal, non-smoker, good citizen, correct pre-millennial view, Biblical creationist, right view on abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality if you wish,

All these, I count but as loss for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.

The point I am making is that setting human based goals for spirituality doesn't just make you out of order, it makes you an enemy of the gospel.

You began by receiving salvation as a free gift, why do we try to live by looking for goals we can measure our faith by. What matters is knowing Jesus! Living a righteousness that he has given us, trusting in God's promises rather than your scorecard.

This is not new stuff, go back to Jeremiah 31: 31

³¹ *“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,*

*“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.*

³² *It will not be like the covenant*

*I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,”
declares the LORD.*

³³ *“This is the covenant I will make with the people of
Israel*

after that time,” declares the LORD.

*“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.*

*I will be their God,
and they will be my people.*

³⁴ *No longer will they teach their neighbour,*

*or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the LORD.*

*“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”*

The great revelation of Jesus Christ is just that, you can know him! This is the glory of the new Covenant, you can have joy in knowing your sins are forgiven and you have a new living relationship with Jesus.

Paul puts his response this way:

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.

Most of us probably balk at bits if this. We are Ok with *knowing the power of his resurrection* but are a little shocked by the idea of *and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*, but we are happy with , *attaining to the resurrection from the dead*.

Paul expects persecution. He is writing from prison. He was imprisoned in Philippi and beaten. The early church spent 300 years under constant persecution. The church today in many parts of the world is under constant threat of or actual persecution. We know of persecution in the Middle East; China, Myanmar, North Nigeria, and many other places which do not catch the headlines. Our freedom is rare, to be valued but maybe be a little embarrassed by. We have it easy! The expectation of Christians is that we share in the sufferings of Christ, many ending up killed for their faith. It is not that we

choose to be persecuted, that will come from living with joy. If our lives are Christ-like we will have the same reaction as he did. People around will either accept him as they see him in us or reject him and reject us. But if you want joy, the persecutors will follow you.

The final phrase needs a little explanation. If, somehow might sound like a vague hope. It is not. Paul does not know how God does resurrecting the dead. Somehow could be better translated “in some way”. He does not know whether he will be executed this time or later, and we do not know the day of our death, he does not know how God raises people from death but we do know God does. That is made clear in verses 20-21.

So knowing Jesus is living his life. This is the key to our understanding of this passage. What is it ‘to know Christ’?

As I walk down my road, people greet me by name who I only vaguely ‘know’. They know me a bit more because I put leaflets thought their door. They know I come here and that I am the neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator for our Crest Gardens.

Some years ago I greeted an gentlemen while walking to church on Sunday Morning. After a few weeks of passing and greeting we stopped to talk. As the months passed I got to know about his wife and children and grandchildren, that he went to St. Marys and so on. Then he stopped going for his Sunday morning paper and the contact was lost.

So how well do we know each other? It is always a surprise to discover how little we know about each other. But we know each other quite well in the sense of how we react to different circumstances.

How well do you know members of your family?

So the question I want to ask is quite simple. Where on this scale is your knowing Jesus.

Do you know his name and something about him, like my neighbours do?

Do you know his story and details of his life?

Do you know how he reacts to different circumstances?

Do you know him more than your own family members?

Do you know him more than your wife?

In Jeremiah 31:34 we read:

³⁴ *No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"*

But just for the sake of expressing our communion I want you to turn to those around you and say “ Know the Lord, know Jesus”

What we mean when we say it to each other is know him more!

If you do not know who he is, read the book, watch the 'Jesus' film, find out who he is!

If you never trusted him for salvation, then open your heart to him, admit you are a sinner in need of forgiveness and receive the salvation he offers.

If you are way off the walking with Jesus bit, you know doing life the Jesus way, then repent and turn to him for restoration and power to get back in step with him. If you are struggling with spirituality, hang in there, win the battle of prayer and prioritize knowing him.

It became a very negative thing but St. Ignatius of Loyola taught his monks to experience as much as they could of the Jesus life. To use their senses to know what being Jesus was like. Paul is calling us to live our lives as like his, expecting persecution, anticipating death by execution and looking forward to the resurrection life.

In verse 12-14 we are told to press on! The gospel is all about what Jesus gives, but it does not lead us to wallow in the blessing we have. The call this morning, to press on to the goal! Lets reread those verses.

¹² 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 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The language is that of seeking a trophy. Like Arsenal beating Brentford and now looking to win the next match so they can advance to the goal of the League Cup.

Past failures have been laid at the cross, today is the first day of the rest of your life. So live for Jesus, with Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. If God has removed your sins from his memory, then be released from them yourself and live in the Spirit. Paul is straining forward to what is ahead. He has forgotten the struggles, even his current imprisonment. He is looking for lies ahead, further service here on earth or the call of God to join him in heaven.

Are you looking heavenward? If you have put your faith and trust in Jesus, you will reach the goal! That is a certainty based on the word of Jesus. You can rely on him. So assess the current situation in the light of the future glory. Value your relationship with Jesus and develop it more.

Forget Brexit, your citizenship is in heaven. And citizens value their home country. They talk about it and watch anxiously for news of it. Your citizenship is in heaven. You are on your way home. Value it, talk about it, watch for news of it. Over coffee, why not discuss what you are

looking forward to in heaven and what living with Jesus means for today.

And stop going on about your mortal body as if it all that you have, listen to the word of God today:

We eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Finally, slipping over to next week's message,

Life may not be making sense for you. There are all sorts of difficulties in day to day living, but stand firm on the promises of God. Know Christ and the transforming power of his death and resurrection.

4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

You are on the right road, don't turn off the way or stop altogether. Press on to the goal with joy in your hearts.

Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.