

Philippians 3:12-4:3 The marathon of the gospel CCH Sermon 23NOV25

V13-14.

PRAY

- Some of you will know that over the October half term I did some cycling in the Outer Hebrides off the West coast of Scotland.
 - The islands in the South, the Uists, are mainly flat moonscapes, so while it was a hard 50miles cycling across them it wasn't too bad.
 - But once you reach Harris and Lewis you are into serious **mountains**.
 - (here's the profile google **maps** gave us!)
 - We got to this first hill, and it was HARD work.
 - It was a steep steep hill, so **gravity** was against us bigtime
 - (don't go believing Elphaba and Glinda that you can defy gravity).
 - And then, on top of that, the **wind** which was coming right at us from the North was funnelling down the valley directly towards us.
 - My bike had 4 **panniers** on it, so at this point we just had to push our bikes uphill against the wind like pushing a heavy laden shopping trolley uphill!
 - I didn't think we were going to make it. (there's my **friends** up ahead!)
- Well the Christian life can sometimes feel like those **hills**.
 - Hard hard uphill work.
 - It was like that for **Paul** as he wrote this letter- chained up in prison.
 - It was like that for the **Philippians**, a young church in a Roman colony in what we'd call Northern Greece facing
 - pressure from unbelievers outside,
 - pressure from false teachers nearby,
 - & pressure from tensions within.
 - And maybe it feels like that uphill struggle for you today.
 - There's an impossible situation at **work**
 - Or there's **family** tension that you can't see improving
 - Or you're facing crippling **doubts** or clinical depression.
 - Perhaps it's even **church** that's difficult for you because of some relationship that has gone a bit sour.
 - To be honest, it's a bit of a miracle you are here today,
 - really you just wanted to stay under the duvet,
 - And you just don't know how you are going to go on.
- Well Paul wrote this section (which I've called "the **marathon** of the gospel") to encourage the Philippians to
 - "Press on" 3v12
 - "Eagerly await Jesus" 3v20
 - "Stand firm in the Lord" 4v1
- So let's look at the passage under three headings...
- **PRESS ON IN THE STRUGGLE**
 - **1) WITH PERSEVERANCE**
 - **2) WITH PERSPECTIVE**
 - **3) WITH PATIENCE.**

(excuse the 3 Ps, I tried to avoid them but they came out like this! I hope we'll see they are accurate to the passage). And more importantly each time there's a Jesus centred motivation to keep going.

1) PRESS ON IN THE STRUGGLE WITH PERSEVERANCE

THROUGH THE GRIP JESUS HAS ON YOU (v12-16)

- Now it's been a couple of weeks since we looked at Philippians, but do you remember Paul was talking about the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus (v8).
 - And v10 told us that knowing Christ meant
 - sharing in his transforming resurrection power (the bit we like) and
 - sharing in painful suffering (the bit we don't like).
 - However one day Paul will get to a new resurrection body (v11)
 - BUT v12
 - He hasn't arrived at his destination yet.
 - He's still on the journey.
 - Following Jesus may be wonderful
 - But following Jesus is hard.
 - He's not yet in the new body free from sin and suffering.
 - Now all this struggle language raises a question.
 - Does making it to the finish line of the race (to use Paul's metaphor) depend on me or depend on God?
 - If it's **me**, then what if I fall away, or don't measure up. I'm doomed.
 - But if it's all **God**, why doesn't Paul tell us here to "let go and to let God" why do they need to press on?
 - The answer is that salvation is all a work of God
 - It is by grace that we are saved. Eph 2:8-9
 - *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast".*
 - As we saw last time in Phil 3, all Paul's accolades and spiritual accomplishments are dung (v8).
 - Justification (getting right with God and being declared NOT GUILTY) is by faith in the work of Jesus alone.
 - Like Moses with Pharaoh's army, we need only to "be still and the Lord will fight for us".
 - You don't need to build up good deeds to get to heaven, you flee to Jesus who has done it all at the cross.
 - But when God is at work in someone they also are at work.
 - God preserves his sheep (the perseverance of the saints) but in order to do that he enables them to keep persevering.
 - Or to go back to that Eph 2 passage. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do".*
- So it's all his work, but some of his work is seen in our work!

- That's why Paul can both tell the Philippians to **press on in the race** but at the same time have full confidence that they are going to make it.

There's something similar in 2v12-13

- *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose".*
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- So persevere, but through the grip Jesus has on you.
 - You see if we look carefully at this verse though there's perseverance needed, there are 2 references to Christ's decisive work.
 - Look at v12 of chapter 3. CHRIST JESUS TOOK HOLD OF ME!
 - And v14 the Prize for which God has called me heavenwards.
 - And that's why he presses on towards the prize!
 - Because Jesus has won it for him!
 - Now don't hear me wrong, it's not a mix, 80% his work- he gets you the first 40 miles and then it's over to you for the last couple of miles.
 - It's God who works in us.
 - But when he is at work in us, we are working out our salvation which means pressing on in following Jesus, fighting sin, persevering.
- ▲ Let me give an analogy from another race.
- Bear Grylls presented "The World's toughest race"- it's still there on Amazon Prime.
 - And in it 66 teams from across the world competed in a gruelling trek running, kayaking, biking, swimming, sailing across Fiji.
 - The winning team had an amazing captain who was both strong and wise.
 - But when the team members tired, the captain of the team would use a bungy cord to attach himself to them. He is going to make sure that they make it up that hill, and he's going to take them on the perfect route to the finish line. They still have steps to take, but he's going to take them over the finish line.
 - Now we are permanently attached to Christ our captain.
 - WE are united with him by faith, so that Paul can say v14 we are "in Christ Jesus".
 - And he has taken hold of us, and he will get us to the heavenly finish line.
 - We still fight, we still press on, we still work out our salvation, but through the grip that Jesus has on us.
- Look at our verses again carefully.
 - Twice it says that the decisive factor is Jesus
 - V12 CHRIST JESUS TOOK HOLD OF ME
 - That happened for Paul at the Damascus Road (although it began in eternity)
 - And it happened to you if you are a Christian.
 - How do you know? Because your trust isn't in yourself, you are looking away from yourself to Jesus.

- A true Christian at some point as an adult or even as a very young child turned to Jesus because Jesus took hold of them.
- And he is now working in you to want to turn from sin, and now like Paul are taking hold of the goal of heaven and pressing on towards it.
- Forgetting what's behind. Yes there have been many failures in the past, but don't live there in your regrets. It's forgiven. But straining towards what is ahead.
- V14, *"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus"*.
 - And that's the second phrase that says that the decisive factor is God's heavenly call.
 - GOD HAS CALLED ME HEAVENWARDS
 - He's called me to heaven.
 - That's more than an invitation,
 - It's his summons, his call.
 - So What do we do? V13 ONE THING.
 - We press on.
 - We run the race that he has already won for us!
 - In v15-16 Paul uses his little bio here as a model .
 - As an apostle he's been given teaching for all the church
 - And any mature Christian will follow his lead in their thinking on Christian perseverance.
 - If someone thinks that either
 - There's nothing to do because we've already arrived
 - Or impossible because it all depends on us,
 - God will soon put you straight
 - Just v14 "Let us live up to what we have already attained" in other words, let's press on with living out what we know.
- Well do continue to discuss this theme of perseverance in homegroups.
 - (If it's helpful I've got a few copies of a short talk I gave at our Belgian summer camp on this, including an excellent book recommendation on this called "Run to win the prize by Tom Schreiner"¹, if anyone would like to go deeper in this or if it's a particular issue for anyone).
- But I hope it's clear, we press on towards heaven, taking hold of Christ who took hold of us! **REPEAT 1**

¹ <https://www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=run+to+win+the+prize+schreiner>

2) PRESS ON IN THE STRUGGLE WITH PERSPECTIVE

THROUGH THE HOPE JESUS GUARANTEES YOU (3v17-4v1)

- Paul now does something not very British.
 - He points to himself again as an example
 - V17
 - It's not a proud self-promotion, "ooh- I'm so brilliant".
 - Rather as an apostle he not only speaks God's words
 - But he models God's ways.
 - And he says follow great role models.
 - He's already pointed us to **Jesus** who in chapter 2 was so sacrificially selfless in growing downwards in humility that God so wonderfully promoted him in glorious majesty.
 - He's already pointed us to **Timothy** who like Jesus didn't look out for his own interests
 - He's already pointed us to **Epaphroditus** who risked his life for the gospel.
 - And in this section he's pointing to **himself** and saying keep your eyes on me as I try to humbly follow Christ, and others like me doing the same.
 - So follow my example by having the right perspective.
 - What is that perspective?
 - Well he tells us what NOT to focus on,
 - And then he tells us what to focus on.
 - Negatively don't focus on **earthly things**.
 - V18-19
 - Tragically as well as people who promote **legalism** (we saw them in v2 the circumcision group, the dogs)
 - There are also those who promote **licence** (those who say anything goes in Christianity).
 - The first say it's very important how you live- Laws.
 - The second say it doesn't matter how you live- lawlessness.
 - You can sleep around, God will forgive you.
 - You don't need to be too careful
 - But both of them avoid Jesus and his cross.
 - These people v18 may claim to be Christian but tragically they are enemies of the Cross- they don't actually have a relationship with Christ and so don't benefit from his death to save them.
 - He won't save them on the last day because there's no evidence they want him to save them from themselves now.
 - They are living for SELF.
 - It may be outrageously hedonistic and wild
 - It may just be respectable self centredness

- But rather than bringing the spending, the weekend, the eating, the drinking, the pleasures of life under Jesus' lordship, they have taken over.
- But positively Paul has a different outlook.
 - Notice that all these 3 sections are future focussed and Christ focussed.
 - V20
- Going back to my Scotland trip. Can I tell you the two secret weapons that got me up those mountains?
 - 1) Jelly Babies- thanks Alaster Gray for the top tip.
 - And 2) Roast Venison.
- Now apologies to all vegetarians, but at the end of that 44 mile ride up and over the mountains, we were invited to roast venison with Pastor Paul.
- He is an old friend who pastors a church in a small village on our route, and he had invited the 4 of us to his church prayer meeting and for an incredible roast with all the trimmings and to 4 beds for the night.
- I tell you, it was hard getting up and over the mountains, it was sometimes even hard cycling down hill the other side, but the prospect of friendship, fellowship, food and fun spurred us on like nothing, and in the last 10 miles we were motoring along, motivated by the perspective of what awaited us. DESTINATION FUELS MOTIVATION!
- Now my dear Christian friend.
 - Life may be very difficult at the moment with your mental health.
 - You may be grieving the loss of a loved one
 - You have a secret sadness that no-one really knows or understands.
- But just around the corner, is Jesus.
 - Your Saviour.
 - He loves you.
 - He's died for you.
 - He's coming back.
 - He's just there with open arms ready to receive you.
 - He's going to take your cancer ridden body and resurrect it.
 - He's going to take your broken mind and transform it.
 - He's going to take your selfish will and remove it!
- The same power that is putting all the universe under his control is going to put you under his control.

So 4:1

Repeat 2.

3) PRESS ON IN THE STRUGGLE WITH PATIENCE

THROUGH THE MINDSET JESUS GIVES YOU (4v2-3)

- The last 2 verses are very down to earth and very shocking.
 - Paul names two women who are not getting on.
 - Euodia and Syntyche
 - Wow- they aren't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, but their names go down in history as the 2 women in Philippi who were fighting!
- What's more surprising is that they probably are or had been missionaries or church workers of some sort.
- V2-3
- Let's think about the problem and let's think about the solution.
- The problem.
 - Well we don't exactly know.
 - Was it just personal
 - Or was it doctrinal as well?
 - Not much is said.
 - It's just that they need to
 - "agree in the Lord" ESV
 - "live in harmony in the Lord" NASB.
- It can so easily happen in churches.
 - Two people.
 - Quite different characters.
 - Perhaps different skills,
 - Perhaps different approaches to things
 - Have a bust up.
 - "She is so unreasonable"
 - "She is so selfish".
 - Pride flares up and words are said that should never have been said
 - There's a grain of truth on both sides
 - Both have a point
 - But it gets messy
 - It escalates
 - One goes home and tells her spouse
 - The other goes home and stew on it.
 - Both approaches fuels the fire.
 - And next time they see each other
 - They are seething.
 - And others can feel it.
 - And if it's not sorted out it will eat them from the inside and can do immense damage in a church.
- **The solution?**

- Paul uses strong language I “plead with” for both of them
- But the solution is simpler than it looks.
 - It’s got 2 parts
 - 1) Be of the same mind in the Lord.
 - That’s fascinating.
 - These 2 women are both Christians.
 - What unites them is so much bigger than what divides them.
 - They share Jesus together
 - They have been sharing the same gospel as each other.
 - They share the Spirit together
 - They share communion together (even if they queue up on different sides of the church)
 - They are going to heaven together (look at v3)
 - So see that you are on the same page.
 - Have the same **mindset** in the Lord
 - That’s a crucial word that has come up 8 times in the book translated concern, view, mindset, same mind.
 - It’s looking back to Jesus in ch2.
 - What did he do with his enemies.
 - He loved them.
 - He forgave them.
 - It was costly
 - He gave up his rights
 - He didn’t look to his own interests.
- But it’s not easy and that’s why Paul actually tells others to get involved (that’s the **second** part of the solution).
 - You can’t fix these things on your own.
 - You can when it’s low level
 - But when it gets to this stage, you need a helper.
 - My “true companion”.
 - This third party isn’t named,
 - It could be Luke who may have been in Philippi at the time
 - Go and help them.
 - Be a loving and gentle mediator
 - It’s not easy to face one another when it gets this bad
 - But it can be remedied.
 - Press on with patience through the mindset Jesus gives you.
- **Which of these do you need to remember today to help you keep going in the struggle?**
 - It’s not easy following Jesus, it’s like cycling uphill with heavy panniers when there’s a headwind.

- But 1) Jesus has got you on his bungy cord.
- 2) There's an amazing banquet up ahead and a well done good and faithful servant. Jesus himself is coming back
- 3) And meanwhile he wants to give you his thought process (his mindset)-
 - Humble gentle sacrificial service
 - That looks to remedy wrongs, to make peace and move on.

I'm going to read 1:27-30 (which contains many of these themes) and then give us a moment to pray.