

Pressing on towards the goal

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Preacher: John Murdo Davidson

[0 : 00] Let us pray. Eternal God of glory, you are gathering us here once again in your presence and in your house.

The place of prayer, the place of worship, the place where God ordained it for us to gather one with another. To sing your praises, O Lord, and to sing with joy and thanksgiving within our hearts, O Lord, for who you are.

Now art the Holy One of Israel. You are the God of all glory. And Lord, there is none set beside you. You are the one, O Lord, who is clothed in holiness and beauty and majesty and power. You are the one, O Lord, who has formed us and has created us in your image.

You are the one we have come, O Lord, this evening to worship on your day, the Lord's day, the Sabbath day. And Father, from the outset of our worship here this evening, Lord, may you still our hearts.

[1 : 30] May you still our minds. May we come before you in spirit and in truth. You are the God who has sent a Redeemer into this world.

Lord, because, Lord, we have fallen so far short of your glory. And, Lord, we thank you and we bless you for that act of reconciliation that you have planned from eternity past, that covenant of grace and that covenant of peace, where a people who have fallen into dire sin, Lord, that you would come and rescue.

And, Lord, we thank you and we bless you, O Lord, that your glorious Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was willing to come and to seek and to save that which was lost.

He came for the unrighteous. Father, he came to trade places with us. And he bore all our sin, O Lord, on that cross of Calvary.

And he bore all our shame. And, Father, we thank you that your word teaches us that if our faith and if our trust is truly in him, that, Lord, we are clothed in his righteousness.

[2 : 59] We are adopted. Lord, for our sake you made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We thank you for the gospel of free grace. And we thank you, O Lord, for the power. And we marvel at the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work as we gather here this evening.

The Spirit of Christ himself. And, Lord, as we are still for these moments in prayer, we just pray that we would sense your nearness and your love and your grace.

We confess our iniquity. We confess our weakness and our fragility. But your word tells us that, dear friends, now that we are children of God, what we shall be has not yet been made known, but we know that when Christ returns, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Glorious God, we thank you for this gospel. Lord, none of us deserve even the least of your mercies, but yet, O Lord, you call us by our names, and you pour out your love into our hearts, you transform our lives, and you put a new song in our mouths.

[4 : 34] And we thank you that this hope is open to all. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved. Grant us hearts that are repentant, Lord.

Grant us hearts, O Lord, that take sin in our lives seriously. There is no soundness in this, according to Isaiah the prophet.

But, Father, you are working a work of sanctification in the hearts and in the lives of your people. So would you have your way with us this evening? And may you get all the honour and all the glory, the time, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And may we as your people get a blessing, Lord. And may we say, one with another as we lead, it is good for us to have been here. We have met with the living God.

O Lord, and have met the places of your people. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. If you would turn with me, and open your Bibles, please, to the book of Philippians again this evening.

[5 : 40] And we're going to have a look at Philippians 3. Philippians 3. I think we'll read the whole chapter. Not that long, once again.

And then we'll focus in on a few verses of Philippians 3. Philippians 3 and a chapter 1. Philippians 3 and a chapter 1.

And this is the word of God. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord, to write the same things to you, is no trouble to me, and is safe for you.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, Israel of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law.

[6 : 57] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on, to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

[8 : 30] Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have been told, often told you, I now tell you, even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly sins. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from that we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body, to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him, even to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, my brother, who my love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm, thus in the Lord, my beloved. Amen, and may the Lord bless that reading, of his own holy, and the narrowed word.

Amen, Amen, and may the Lord bless you. Amen, and may the Lord bless you. Come back with me, to that portion of scripture, that we read in Paul's letter, to the Philippians, Philippians chapter 3, and we'll take as our verse, we'll take as our verse, verse 12, Philippians 3, and verse 12.

We'll read from 12 to 16. So that's the verses we're looking at. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[10 : 21] For others, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

There was a man, and what this man used to do was, he used to go out onto the beach at low tide and the beach went on for miles and washed up on the beach where millions upon millions of starfish washed up and with no way of getting back to the sea and the sun would be scorching. And the man used to walk along the beach and he used to pick them up and he used to throw them back into the sea one at a time. Throw them back into the sea. Throw them back into the sea.

Another man came along the beach one day and he asked him, he says, why are you doing this? What is the point?

[11:48] And the man who was throwing the starfish back into the sea says to him, the point is, it makes a difference to this one.

And he held up a starfish and he threw it. And he says, that is the difference. It makes a difference for this one. And then it makes a difference for that one.

There are times in the Christian life, there are times in our walk with Christ, there are times in this walk of sanctification when we struggle and we're weak and it feels as though we are getting nowhere in this walk.

There are times where our old besetting sins seem to come back and haunt us. And it feels like we're walking along the beach and we're just throwing the starfish into the sea.

But that is not the way it is. In walking with Christ. That is not the way it is. Every day we walk in this life, God is working in us and through us as we have heard already this morning.

[13:18] There are times in our experience where we do not see any maturity or growth in our own lives. But you can beg your bottom dollar, your wife or your husband to see engrossed in your spiritual life or your mother or your friends or your children.

You see, Paul here, he is giving a bit of personal testimony. He is talking about his past life as a Pharisee leading up to our text here.

And he's talking about what life is like now for him. He is talking about the race that he is running.

He is talking about his life with Jesus. He is talking about his old life as nothing but rubbish.

He talks about in his old life how he thought he was perfect. Paul was not perfect. He talks in verse 9 about being clothed in Christ's righteousness.

[14:49] He is telling us about his faith in Jesus. He is telling us about how he is resting in Jesus.

He is telling us in a nutshell that the Christian life is not an easy life. Remember, he's in prison.

He does not know if he's going to live or if he is going to die. But he knows that his salvation is assured.

He knows he belongs to Jesus. And as we heard this morning, he rests in that. I ask you a question here this evening.

Are you resting in that? Is your faith and your trust and your confidence in the God of all mercy? Or is it in yourself?

[15:59] Or is it in your job? Or is it in your loved ones? Or is it in where you've come from? Or is it in your life?

Charles Spurgeon as he finished preaching. And he had just listened to Spurgeon preaching at the door. This man was shaking hands with Spurgeon at the door.

And this man was telling Spurgeon where he had come from. You know, this man was of good stock. And he was telling Spurgeon all about his ancestry and all about his family history and how good they were.

And Spurgeon turns around and he stops him in his tracks and he says, Spur, I don't care where you've come from. I only care about where you're going.

Do you believe in Jesus? And this is what Paul is talking about here. We can look to our past and that past, each of us has a past and that past, it kind of molds us and it shapes us and it makes us who we are.

[17:11] But ultimately, it's gone. That's yesterday. What about tonight? What about tomorrow?

Paul tells us here that he says, I am not perfect.

And we say, Paul, the great apostle Paul is telling us in verse 12, not that I have already obtained this or I'm already perfect, but I press on.

I'm not perfect. I press on. You see, sinless perfection is not the experience of the apostle.

No. You see, when Paul is converted on the Damascus road, he sees himself with new and fresh eyes. Isn't that what happens when the Lord comes into your life?

[18:18] You get a new set of eyes and you finally see who you really are. He sees who he really is.

He tells us, I press on. It's the same Paul in verse 9 who reminds us that we cannot be saved by our own righteousness because we have none.

sin. Because we are riddled from head to feet with sin. Sin. Now, Paul, as a Pharisee, pretty much thought he was sinless.

And then the Lord shows him with fresh eyes exactly what sin is and what sin has done to him. And the Lord sets him on this new road that started on the Damascus road, this new road. life of holiness.

[19 : 32] Holiness. Not the life of perfection. You see, the life of perfection we will never know in this life.

But you, if your faith and trust is in Jesus, you will experience that in the next life. But in the meantime, we press on.

We move on. Yesterday is yesterday. Tomorrow is tomorrow. God willing, if it comes. I press on, he says, I pursue. Because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

He is united to Christ. in a spiritual way. He belongs to Jesus.

And Paul is telling the world that he belongs to Jesus. I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[20 : 43] He's not independent, even as an apostle. No, he's not. He's united to Christ. You see, the Christian life is not an aimless life.

The Christian life is one of direction. It is the one of function. It is the one of pressing on. When times are difficult, when times are tough, we do as Paul did, we press on.

Because remember what we learned this morning, because it is God who works in you. You have the Holy Spirit within you.

you see, you see, Paul here, throughout the whole of Philippians, and it's actually quite amazing to think that he does not see his own life as anything extraordinary.

The great apostle, Paul, sees his own life as the ordinary Christian life and what should be the ordinary, normal Christian life.

[22 : 04] His longings, his goals, his ambitions, are all for Christ, Peter, and my vision. Paul could have sang these words. But you say, this is the great apostle, Paul, his life was extraordinary.

Yes, he was apostle, yes, he was that. But he does not see his life as anything extraordinary. If he did, he wouldn't bother writing letters to the churches, saying, imitate me as I imitate you, Christ. to the states elsewhere in Philippians, imitate me as I imitate Christ. You see, he has a correct self-estimate of himself.

Verse 13, I do not consider that I have made it my own. You know, he says, brother. And as I said this morning, I think this little Philippian church was his favorite.

He loved this church. He loved this church. And he says, brethren, brothers, and sisters. He puts himself on a level playing field with them.

[23 : 20] Yes, the great apostle Paul. And he says, brothers, and sisters, you are no different to me.

Yes, I may be an apostle. But ultimately, imitate me as I imitate Christ. He was a leader, yet he was a brother among brothers.

You know, it's very easy to be a leader. But it's very difficult to remain a brother amongst others. Leaders have to be very careful. Leaders have to lead by example, especially in the church. And that is what Paul is doing here. He says, brothers and sisters.

And Paul is saying to us and to the Philippians, way back then, he's saying, listen, we're never going to reach perfection. But that does not discourage the fact that we aim for it.

[24 : 30] We strive after it. we seek after holiness in our lives. Without reaching perfection in this life, the obligation still stands.

Do you remember the difference between indicatives and imperatives? Anyone want to put up their hand and answer the question? Indicatives state a matter of fact.

The gospel is all in the indicative. It is a matter of fact. It is set in stone in time and infinity. Christ died for the ungodly. It's in the indicative.

No one can ever change that. The gospel can never be changed. And then we have the imperatives, the commands. God's people follow after commands.

It's not legalism. It's not legalism. It's seeking after holiness. It's wanting to please the one who died for us.

[25 : 34] That is what Paul is wanting to do. He's wanting to please Christ because his focus is on Christ. He has this humility, this God-given humility within his very soul is following after the ultimate one who has ultimate humility and that is Christ himself.

The one who came to be a servant. The one who came to serve, the one who came to die and the one ultimately who would rise again.

that's the one he's wanting to please. Paul knows that only Christ is perfect but he knows that in God's word it says be holy for I am holy.

But you might say oh that's Old Testament stuff. no, it's repeated in the new. Be holy for I am holy. Show the world who you belong to.

Show the world who you want to please. Strive after that holiness and that perfection. perfection.

He tells the Romans in chapter 12 and verse 3 he talks to us again and he says do not think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

[27 : 16] That's what he says. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. We are to be grounded. We are to be level headed. That is what we're called to be.

we are to be sober. A sober understanding. So that is what Paul is doing.

He's realistic. He has this sobering self evaluation of himself. He does not think of himself more highly than he ought. And this is the springboard to Christian progress for each and every one of us. Sometimes I worry when a minister or a preacher preaches about holiness. We don't like it. Preach to me about the gospel.

Preach to me about all the indicatives. Yes. But we have a life to live in this world. And yes, we'll fail every day, but the obligation still stands.

[28 : 25] Paul had this single-minded zeal. He talks about zeal when he was a Pharisee. He talks about zeal as being under the law, and he talks about all his life as a Pharisee, and this zeal of rules and regulations, and all the rest of it, and he had a zeal.

Now he has a real zeal. A single-minded zeal. You see, the whole point of him writing this letter to this little Philippian church is that they would continue to function as lights in the world, grounded together, united together, that there would be no division among them.

And then those outside of the church would go, wow, they've got something. Look at their lives, the way they love one another, the way they help one another.

In fact, the way they help people out with the church, look how they love their enemies. It's the kind of life we're called to.

A single-minded zeal. Dual citizens. Citizens of glory and citizens of tarbert. With Christ actively working in your heart and in my mind.

[29 : 55] Progress. Progress. That's what we want. And throughout the letter, he talks about standing firm.

He talks about being in the one spirit. He talks about be of the same mind, be of full accord, be of one mind, have the mind of Christ.

Are you serious, Paul? To have the mind of Christ? Are you seriously telling us and commanding us that we are to have the mind of Christ?

That that's there for us? Yes. Yes. Because each and every day that you live in this world, and I live in this world, Christ is molding us and he's changing us and he's transforming his people and he's getting us ready for another place.

I think it was C.S. Lewis who said, I think I belong to another place. Your citizenship is in heaven. A single-minded zeal.

[31 : 13] You see, Paul is taking his sanctification seriously. It's a big word, but it basically means that God is cleaning us up and he's taking away all these nukes and cans of sin out of our lives.

He takes the sanctification seriously. He sees it as a responsibility that he owns. See, you have this face that God has given you.

You own it. It's you are. But you've got to look after it. You've got to take care of it. Same with the life of sanctification.

You've got to do it. Somebody once said, a personal holder, I can't remember who said it, you've got to look after your own veneer before you can look after someone else's.

It's so true. It is so true. Yes, this single-minded love and the single-binded zeal to be obedient to Christ and his life.

[32 : 18] And you see, verse 13, what does he say? Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do. And you think, Paul, one thing you do.

Okay, let's pause here for a wee minute, but the one thing I do for getting what lies behind and straying forward to what lies ahead, Paul, the one thing you do, you're not the busiest apostle I

know.

You're planting churches all over the known world, and you're taking these people, and you're teaching them the gospel, and you're doing this, and then you're getting imprisoned, and you're setting up elders, and you're setting up deacons in this church, and then he's moving to the next church, and then he's moving to the next church, and he's setting up all these churches, the Lord is using them and behind them because the Lord wants them, as he said this morning.

And Paul talks about the one thing I do. The one thing I do. You see, this he is saying is top of his priority list.

Who writes to-do lists? Anyone write to-do lists? I love to-do lists. I really do. I rarely get through them, but I write them. It kind of clears the mind, you know, and you empty out your mind all the things that I have to do today, and then you reach number two, and it's five o'clock, and you've got to go home.

[33 : 42] But Paul here, it's like he has a to-do list, and top of the list is striving after holiness and obedience. It's top of the list. Planting a church over there, and over there, and there, that's not top of the list.

That will happen, and it did happen, but his number one aim was pleasing Christ, and this walk of sanctification. The one thing I do, one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, the one thing I do, is that the one thing we do, we have to challenge ourselves, each and every one of us, and we have to make this the one thing I do, every day, every day, because he's looking forward.

What's been has been. You cannot change yesterday. We repent of our sin. We repent of our sin. The Lord catches us in sin, we repent of it, and we move forward.

Move forward. Straining forward, and the metaphor he uses here is one of running a race. Running a race.

he's straining forward with sheer determination. He's extending, he's pushing, and for those who may run, any runners in the house, you know what it feels like when you're on mile six or something and you're straining forward.

[35 : 15] That's what he's doing, and he has a gaze, and he's looking forward, and he's looking, and he's seeing, and he's gazing, and he's at one with Christ, and he moves forward like a runner, seeing the stripe, seeing the finish.

And we ask ourselves, what's the one thing that holds his gaze? What is it? What is the prize he is after?

Well, he doesn't really tell us, does he, in the text? We have to kind of read between the lines. He says in verse 14, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. What's the prize? Perhaps it is the Lord's well done when he breathes his last and he is face to face with Christ.

It's Christ who is holding his gaze, and the Lord says, well done. Is that the prize? Perhaps.

Perhaps it is the crown of righteousness that awaits him when he reaches glory.

[36 : 25] that crown that all of God's people are going to enjoy and see, touch and hold. Is it the crown of righteousness? Is that what's holding his gaze?

Perhaps. Perhaps it is to see the Lord's face, face to face. Perhaps. Perhaps.

It's the blood claims rose. rose. Perhaps. Perhaps it's the unending presence of God and of Christ forever and ever in eternity.

Perhaps that is what is holding his gaze. Perhaps. And perhaps it is all of these things and so much more.

You see, he tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2 9. All this and so much more. What no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.

[37 : 34] Will I repeat that verse? That is a beautiful verse. What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.

the Lord has prepared a place for his people. Is that what's holding his gaze? Straining forward, he talks about in verse 14 the sure foundation.

Christ is his foundation. You see, with this issue of sanctification there are the old theologians, they talk about active sanctification, and they talk about passive sanctification.

It all sounds very grand, but it's quite simple, really. You see, when the Lord works in our lives and transforms us and we become Christians, we enjoy passive sanctification.

We've been set apart there and then. We are his possession. We are holy unto the Lord. We are his treasured possession, as I said this morning, a holy nation, a treasured possession, a royal priesthood.

[38 : 55] So when someone is saved, they are automatically set apart for a work of faith and a work of obedience and they're set apart as Christ. They are holy.

If you're in Christ, you are holy. Anything that belongs to God is holy. It cannot be anything else. And then we have active sanctification.

That's what Paul is talking about here. Where we're actively seeking after that life of holiness. Passive and active sanctification.

salvation. That's where the commands come into play. You see, Paul is wanting this little Philippian church and those who are in it to be mature.

To be mature. It's maturity. It's just like when you see a child grow up. And you see them grow.

[40 : 01] and they grow and they grow. And then they suddenly start to mature and mature and mature. And you watch it and you see.

You see the process. It's near. But you see it. It's the same for us as well. It's the same for us. It's not a sprint. It's a marathon. time. And we must strain forward and strive. We are called to maturity.

Press on. Press on. Keep going. Keep going. Strive.

Save. Save. Love. Save. Be after one another. Praise all.

[41 : 07] Praise all. Eternal God, we thank you indeed for your work. And we thank you, Father, that you have indeed saved your people on our road of holiness.

But Lord, each and every one of us is conscious of our own sin in our lives. Father, we pray that you would mold us and that you would transform us and that you would recreate us into the image of Christ.

Lord, we fail you every day. But Lord, we know that ultimately we are safe for time and for eternity.

For the Lord Jesus said, none shall be plucked out of the Father's hand.

So Lord, would you work that act of grace in our lives from day to day. And Lord, would you continue to bind this congregation together in the bonds of Christian love and unity as they continue to serve you here in North Harris.

Lord, I thank you for them. We pray for David, the minister, and his wife, Mary, and the children, and Lord, the rest of the congregation that may be away on holiday. Would you bless them and take them back safely.

[42 : 20] And Lord, we pray for any who are here on holiday, this day that you would grant traveling mercies. Lord, we thank you for Christ. We thank you for each other.

And we thank you for the life that you have given to us. And we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. Holy Spirit, rest on and be with you for now and evermore.

Amen. Amen.