

Phillippians 3:1-16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 August 2017

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It was great. I was at a church in Bath last weekend and they did a kid's song from their holiday club. Nobody was joining in. But from the back, I could see that everybody was joining in. I love that. That's great. I'm excited at the holiday club this week. I echo what Peter has said about appreciating your prayers for energy, for wisdom, for enthusiasm. As we just seek to share the gospel with the boys and girls that God brings our way. But we turn now to God's word. So can I encourage you to have Phillipians chapter 3 open in front of you, this diamond of a passage.

And it's been a real joy to study it this week. So this is Phillipians 3, verses 1 to 16. Why don't we pray as we come to God's word now. So speak to us this morning, our heavenly father, our great God, as we turn to your living word now. Would you hear our prayer? Because we make it in the name of your son, our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, by show of hands this morning, I wonder who has recently completed a CV. Put your hands in the air. If you have recently done a CV. So quite a few people here this morning. CV, curriculum vitae.

So looking up the Latin this week. I like to dig out my law books now and again. It means the course of your life. Curriculum vitae. The course of your life. Well, here's what I want to do as we get into these verses in this passage this morning. I want you to think about your field of work.

Maybe the one that you're in. Maybe the one that you used to be in. Maybe the one that you want to be in. And I want to imagine that you had the perfect CV for your field of work. So just picture that in your mind. What would that look like? What experience would you have? Where would you have been?

[2 : 06] What would you have done? Who would you have met? The perfect CV. Because what we're going to see in these verses this morning, as we get into verses 1 to 16, we're going to see Paul lay out for us his quite outstanding CV. He's not interested in landing a job. What he's interested in is getting right with God and gaining life with God. So here's Paul's CV this morning. And here's the question that we're going to look at and try and answer this morning as we look at Paul's CV. Where is true life to be found? This is a Sesame Street sermon this morning. I love Sesame Street. Or I did rather.

This sermon this morning brought to you in association with the word out. There's four outs that we need to see in these verses this morning. You ready for this? Four outs. Here's the first one. Look out. See it in those verses there? How does he start at verse 1? What does he want these Christians to do? Not be happy? Not think positively? He says rejoice. Do you see it there? Rejoice. So have joy in the Lord. The joy of seeing and of knowing and of loving and of trusting in Jesus Christ, your Savior and your King. Rejoice. Now John Piper would call joy the emotion of salvation. But here is what Paul is aware of as he thinks about joy and as he thinks about the Christians in this church. He's concerned. He's thinking about the people who are out there. And he's thinking about the people who maybe even are in this Philippine church. And what are they trying to do? They're trying to distract from Christ. And what does Paul say? He says you've got to look out for them. Do you see he uses it three times there at verse 2? Look out. Look out. Look out. As if to underscore the point. Now who are these people? Well the circumcision language there would suggest that these guys are Judaizers. So people who are insisting that in order to be a true Christian as well as having faith in Jesus Christ, you need to keep the Old Testament ceremonial laws including circumcision.

[4 : 42] So if you're into maths this morning, here is their salvation equation. That Jesus plus your work equals salvation. So they're teaching. And it's dangerous.

And if that's what Paul knows about them, then check out how he feels about them. What does he call them? Dogs. Now he's not picturing the Andrax puppy at this point. He's not thinking about Crufts and BBC One on the Sunday night. First place dog. These are not the dogs he's picturing. These are flea carrying, unclean, disease ridden, dangerous pests who are to be put down and avoided at all costs. Now have you met wild dogs? I've met some. I remember my honeymoon in Sicily. I took it on myself before trying to prove myself as a husband to book our hotels. We got to one of those hotels. What greeted us outside that hotel? A pack of roaming wild dogs. Now listen, my bride was not happy. Paul is calling these guys dogs. Don't miss the irony of what he's saying. It's the nickname that the Jews gave to the Gentiles.

It's the term in Mark 7. We see that the Syrophoenician Gentile woman using to describe herself. The dogs. But Paul says, what does he say there? Let me tell you who the true dogs are.

They are those who seek to twist the gospel. Those who seek to dilute grace and relegate Christ. Those people are the true dogs. We on the other hand, we in whom God has placed his spirit, we who glory in Christ, we are the true people of God. So what does Paul say? Look out for these false teachers. Because you see, for Paul, it's quite simple. That if you take your eye off Christ, then you take your eye off the source of true joy. Dearest Philippians, would you take it from me that the road signposted, earn your way to God, thinking that salvation is anything other than 100% Jesus Christ? Take it from me that that is a dead end. Now don't believe me, says Paul.

Verses 4 to 6, what does he say? Check out. And here's where he lays out for us his CV. The course of his life. Now do you notice in these verses there are seven things on his CV.

[7 : 18] Check them out from verse 5. We'll just walk our way through them. Firstly, circumcised on the eighth day. So he's born into a family who strictly kept the Old Testament law.

He is an eight-dayer. Secondly, do you see it there? He's of the people of Israel. So he's a pure Jew. He's a thoroughbred. Thirdly, he's of the tribe of Benjamin.

If you know your Old Testament history, Saul, Israel's first king, he comes from this tribe. You wonder even whether that was the reason that Paul's parents called him Saul in the first place, after Israel's first king.

Fourthly, he's a Hebrew of Hebrews. Do you see it? He spoke Hebrew. He's thoroughly trained in the law. He even studied under the great Rabbi Gamaliel, which I guess is the equivalent of being a young businessman or woman and having been mentored by Alan Sugar.

And as you see, as we just step back, what he is saying to these Philippians? So see, when it comes to pedigree, dear Philippians, when it comes to a CV, I've got one to die for.

[8 : 32] It's festival time. So just imagine a tourist box in here this morning. If you are a tourist here this morning, you're so welcome. But they walk in here and they say, listen, it's great to be home in Scotland.

And you say, well, great to welcome you here. What's your name? And they say, my name's Bradley. And you say, where do you live? And he says, I live in California. And you say, well, Bradley, have you ever actually stepped foot in Scotland?

No, but my great, great, great granny once stepped foot on the bonny, bonny banks of Loch Lomond. But imagine someone else walks in here and you say, what's your name?

And he says, my name's Hamish. My name is Hamish Macduff. And you say, where do you live, Hamish? And Hamish says, oh, I live in Inverness. And I was born in the shores of Loch Ness. And I've lived there my whole life. I'm fluent in Gaelic. And on a Friday night, I love nothing more than a good knees up Kayleigh, complete with iron brew and haggis. Now, here's the question.

[9 : 31] When it comes to being Scottish, who is the real deal? Paul, do you see what he's saying? He is the real deal. He is the genuine article.

He is, as we would say, he is from good stock. And he's got a pedigree to die for. And do you see how he backs that up? He's got a pedigree.

And he's got the performance to go with it. Look at him. Continue halfway through verse 5. Fifthly, what does he say? As to the law, a Pharisee. So he was a member of this Jewish sect who were deeply committed to observing the Jewish law.

And to add to that, sixthly, he was a zealous persecutor of the church. So get this, not only is he one of the good guys, but as his mission in life as one of the good guys, he's made it his mission to stamp out the bad guys.

And sixthly, righteousness based on the law, faultless. So in terms of observing the law, Paul's saying he's ticking all the boxes. Do you see what he's saying?

[10:38] There's my CV. There it is there. I'm a pure Jew. I'm a zealous Pharisee. I think you'll find that puts me untouchable at the top of my field. No one can out-pedigree me.

Nobody can out-perform me. And look at the end of verse 4. What does he say? If anybody, if anybody thinks they've got more confidence in the flesh, anybody thinks they've got reason for that, I've got more.

I've got more. Now the thing to understand is that if you were to ask Paul in his previous life, if that CV would earn him God's favor, if that CV would make him right before God, if that CV would gain him life, he would have responded, are you kidding me?

With that pedigree and with that performance? Absolutely it's got me those things. Let me just slow down for a minute. Because you may be here this morning and you're thinking to yourself, hashtag first century problems.

All this talk of circumcision and Pharisees and law, listen, that has got nothing to do with me. And that may be true to an extent.

[11:55] I mean, this stuff is a big deal in the early church. Maybe more so than it is now. But let me ask you, see when it comes to getting right with God, what's in your CV?

What are you putting in the pedigree column? The fact that the school that you went to sang hymns in assembly when you grew up? The fact that you happen to live in a country that's got a historical Christian ethos?

The fact that you went to Sunday school growing up? What's in your pedigree column? What's in your performance column? Hey, listen, I give to charity.

I love recycling. I'm into paying my taxes. Hey, I even watch songs of praise on a Sunday night. What's in your performance column? Whatever you've got on that list that equates to, as Paul would put it here, putting confidence in the flesh, trusting in your own CV, then Paul would say the same thing to us as he's saying to these Christians here.

That I've got more. I've got more. Now, where does that leave us then? Well, here's the third out.

[13:09] Paul says, verses 7 to 11, found out. Here is a man who had the resume of resumes. Here is a man who, in terms of righteousness, was head and shoulders, leagues apart from the rest.

And what does he say? Check it out. Verse 7. Whatever gain I had. Whatever gain I had. All those things that we've just looked at on his CV. Whatever gain I had. I now count as loss.

So it's a counting language. He's taken all the things that were formerly in his profit column. And he's transferred them to his loss column. His debit column. And not only that, but he regards them all as rubbish.

The Greek word there meaning something to be thrown out. Treated as dung. Rubbish. So the question is, what did he find out that caused such a drastic change?

Well, he's found something. Do you see it there? Verse 8. That's of surpassing worth. He's found Christ. But what has he found in Christ?

[14:15] That's the question. Well, two things to see. He's found a better way to life. See it there? Verse 9. He's trying to earn God's favour by doing.

Trying to have a righteousness of his own. But how could an unholy Paul stand before a holy God? See his life pursuit of trying to gain a right standing before God.

Off the back of his own CV. Incapable of bringing him life. But Jesus Christ lived a fully righteous life.

He lived a perfect life. And just follow it through his logic. By faith in him. What happened? Well, Martin Luther would call this the great exchange.

That Jesus took Paul's sin and shame as he died on the cross. And Jesus gave Paul his perfect life.

[15:21] God put the wrong on Jesus. He never did anything wrong. So that Paul could be made right with God.

So how can an unholy Paul stand before a holy God? Well, he can do it not based on his own CV. But based on Christ's CV.

And the fact that his life is now hidden with Christ in God. Paul's found a better way to life. And secondly, he's found a better purpose in life.

Verse 10. What he was previously pursuing. Giving himself to. Dead religion. A life goal. Incapable of bringing him that lasting joy and life.

Now what does he live for? Verse 10. I want to know Christ. See, he wants his fellowship with his saviour and his king to be sweeter and deeper.

[16:18] I want to know Christ. And I want to know the power of his resurrection. And I want to emulate his cross-shaped life.

Making myself nothing. As we've seen over these weeks. Having the mind of Christ. Sharing with him in his sufferings. Becoming like him in his death.

That by any means possible. I may attain the resurrection of the dead. Now here's what we need to see. That this isn't Paul turning over a new leaf.

This is the fruit of Paul, by God's grace, having been given a new heart. I don't know if you've ever heard the acronym FOMO.

It's a phrase the kids use these days just to show you that. I'm still down with the kids. F-O-M-O. Fear of missing out. So the feeling that somehow your peers are doing something.

[17:18] Your peers have something that's superior. Far superior than what you currently have. Fear of missing out. Now let me ask you as you look at Paul right here.

Does he strike you as a man who is missing out? Does he strike you as a man who is missing out? Does Paul not strike you as a man who's found everything he ever needs or wants in Jesus Christ? Saul, in his previous life, who had everything. What did he find out? It was nothing. But Paul, who has nothing but Christ.

And yet he finds out that he's got everything he ever needs. Now what a complete reversal that is. Do you see now that his CV, the course of his life, what he's all about now, doesn't read Paul. It simply reads Christ. That's why Paul lives like he does. Because in Jesus Christ, he's found something of surpassing worth.

[18:25] And if that's the why, then look how he moves on to the how. How does he live in light of this new CV? Well, fourthly and finally, verses 12 to 16, what does he say?

I'm flat out. He's pulling out all the stops in his pursuit of Jesus Christ. There is no time to waste. There is no time to lose. He's going hard after holiness.

He is longing after the things of God. Notice the wee phrase he uses here to describe it. Pressing on. Do you see how he uses it twice in these verses here?

Pressing on. Come with me and let's quickly look at these together. For they are so refreshingly important when it comes to living out the Christian life.

What motivates Paul to press on? Verse 12. See that he knows whose he is. I press on to make it my own. Why, Paul? Because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[19:29] It's funny when you're preparing for sermons. I find certain verses as you meditate on them, they just stick there. And this was one for me this week. Why does Paul press on?

Because Christ Jesus has made Paul his own. Do you understand what he's saying? Paul found Christ, but only because Jesus first found Paul.

And if you like stooped down and put his hand on Paul's life and said, Paul, you're mine. You're mine. I'm calling you out. I'm setting you apart to live differently.

You are mine. And as we think about that, it's not a wonderful description of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus, by his grace, put his hand on our life and said, you're mine.

I wonder if some of us, do we need to recapture that wonder this morning as we think about that? What does Paul do with that?

[20:28] The fact that Jesus Christ has made him his own. Is it like a game of hide and seek? A two-year-old at the minute loves hide and seek. Now that Paul's been found, I mean, is that game over? In the race, is Jesus now, is he kind of like the coach at the sidelines?

Is he cheering Paul on, saying, well, now listen, I've got you into the race. It's up to you to keep running. Come on, I'll be here cheering you on. No. Paul presses on to make it his own because Christ Jesus has made him his own.

Do you see the most fundamental reason why you and I must go hard after Christ? Is that Christ is in us by the spirit of God, moving us to go hard after him.

It's all of Paul and all of Christ. Paul presses on, do you see it, because he knows whose he is. And he presses on, verse 14, because he knows what is his.

So there's a prize to be won. There's a prize to be won. God, through Christ, do you see it? He's almost beckoning Paul home. Inviting him, calling him to come to his presence, homeward to heaven.

[21 : 40] That's what Paul's running for. And that's where his sights are set. But you see it, verse 12, he runs as one who knows that he's not yet perfect.

And he runs as one who knows that he's not there yet. In other words, he's not standing at the finishing line, shouting encouragement to these Philippine Christians, saying, come on. Paul's still on the course.

He's getting his sanctified sweat on too. And do you see what he's saying? The mature Christian, that's how they think. That there's a prize to be won. I'm not perfect yet, but I'm going there. I'm running. I was praying about this this morning. I wonder if some of us, do we need to get back in the game? Do we need to get back in the race?

Let me ask you this morning, are you sitting here with your feet up? Are you sitting here having taken your feet off the gas? Are you acting like the spiritual hair?

[22 : 43] Rather than plodding on, persevering like the spiritual tortoise? Truth is in the race that we all need to be spurring one another on.

Listen, I need others to help me. That's why we love to surround ourselves with people. Because they encourage us to keep going. I need others in this race. Did you watch Mo Far on Friday night? Incredible athlete. Incredible athlete. I watched a little thing on the BBC Sport website about how he trains. Don't know if anyone else watched this. He goes to the Pyrenees. So he goes somewhere with really high altitude so he can compete against the Kenyans and Ethiopians.

The guys are really going at it for him. He gets to a high altitude. And he gets changed. And he gets on the track. And he chases a bike. That's what he does. I mean, there must be more to it than that, presumably, to be world champion.

But it's essentially what he does. He gets on the track. And he says to somebody, If you just go a little bit faster than me, then I'll chase you. Because I need somebody who's running this ahead of me, who I can look at, and I can sprint as well.

[23 : 50] This is how Mophara trains. It's kind of what Paul is saying here, isn't it? He doesn't want these Philippians simply to admire him. He wants these Philippians to perspire with him.

Get back in the race. Verse 13, do you also see what he does? He, in pursuit of what is lying ahead, he forgets what lies behind. I take it that he actively puts out of his mind anything from his past that may hinder him in his pursuit of Jesus Christ.

He wonders, he reflects on the CVs, he reflects on his past life, whether that voice of accusation comes at him from the evil one. Do you remember what you did, Paul? Do you remember who you were? And you held people's coats to free them up so they could stone that man, that Christian martyr, Stephen.

And here you are telling people to have the mind of Christ. Who are you? What Paul is doing here is he's not adopting a positive mental attitude. This is not what Robbie Williams sang all these years ago, no regrets, they don't work, no regrets, they only hurt.

What he's doing is he's bringing his theology into play. And as we were singing earlier, that in Jesus Christ, he is a new creation. That the old has gone and the new has come and Jesus has dealt with his sin on the cross.

[25 : 19] What is it we sing? When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and I see him there who made an end to all my sin because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free for God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me, to look on him and pardon me.

Perhaps you're here this morning and you're hearing that voice of accusation in connection with perhaps your failure from yesterday, maybe even your failures from yesteryear, well, the call this morning is to come to the cross and to see that Jesus paid it all.

And if we confess, he is faithful to forgive. And as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Now I think Paul's point here is not never look back because we do look back, don't we? We do look back and it just reminds us, God, how gracious and how patient you are with us.

He's not saying don't look back. What he's saying is only look back for the purposes of looking on, pressing on. The stuff on my CV, that's the old me, says Paul.

[26 : 48] It's the old me. What I'm about now in my life, I'm about Christ and declaring him crucified. And heaven is ahead of me and I'm pressing on for that goal.

Do you see he presses on knowing whose he is and he presses on knowing what is his. Look out. The road that these false teachers are telling you to go down, Philippians, take it from me, it's the dead end.

How do I know? Well, check out. Check out my CV. Take it from a guy who was fields ahead at the top of his game. Take it from a guy who was found out.

What did I find out? That Christ is glorious. That I am his and he is mine. And so my life goal now is that I'm flat out in my pursuit of him.

Wonderful chorus that I was reflecting on this week that we'll sing later on. Knowing you, Jesus. Knowing you, there is no greater thing.

[27 : 53] You're my all. You're the best. You're my joy, my righteousness. And I love you, Lord. Dear Philippians, Christ is the chorus of my life and Christ is the chorus of my life.

Make it yours and make him yours as well because life is found in Christ alone. Just before we move on to the next part of our service, why don't we just take a moment of silence and let's just allow God by his spirit through his word to maybe just speak to some of us this morning and then I'll close in prayer.

And so, Father God, we thank you for the wonderful truths that we have seen in your word this morning. And would you help us this week by your spirit that is at work in us by your grace to keep running with you and to keep running for you because we ask in the glorious name of our Saviour and King Jesus Christ.

Amen.