

# NOTES FOR SPEAKING

**Meeting: Freshwaters Christian Fellowship**

**Date & Time: Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov 10.30am**

**Title: Phil 3:12-16**

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## **Introduction**

In this passage that we will be reading this morning, Paul urges the Philippians not only to start well but to finish well. Paul in a few places uses the analogy of a race to describe our Christian life, **but it is a marathon race that he describes and not a sprint.**

Many of us when we first become Christians begin with a sprint, often we will stumble and fall a few times, with God's help we get up and continue our run, maybe moderating our pace a little. Then we begin to realise that we are in a marathon and not a sprint, **then we begin to appreciate the wisdom of those who are nearing the finish line, who have recovered from the falls and kept going, who have worked through the disappointments and opposition and kept their focus. Those who have faced 'the wall' and pressed through.**

Paul in this passage gives a few hints and tips as one nearing the finish line; we could do well to take on board his wisdom in our own race.

## **Phil 3:12-16**

### **Not there yet but on the right track**

Paul begins by honestly stating an important fact, he was not yet perfect. Paul had by this time in his life experienced many things, he had **sought perfection through following the Jewish law without fault**, but now as we considered last time counts that as rubbish. **He had seen Christ and his world was turned upside down**, he became a passionate and effective minister of the gospel, facing tremendous opposition and hardship in order to plant, nurture and develop churches and individual believers. **He had amazing testimonies of God's greatness**, he was daily transformed in prayer and worship, but Paul knew that he was not yet perfect – but he was focused on attaining that perfection which will come at the finish line, when we are received by Christ into our heavenly dwelling place.

I just want to make a point here that may seem obvious to all of you, but is not obvious for everyone in the body of Christ – **we are not yet perfect**. Jesus is the only one who ever lived that was perfect, we are not, although because of the power of Christ working within us we are being changed day by day into His likeness, we have started a journey or race towards perfection, but that will not be complete until we reach the finish line – that finish line is either when we die physically and are raised to new life with Christ – or if sooner, when Christ returns and we are transformed in the twinkling of an eye.

Let read from **1 Cor 13:8-13**

In this life we will not reach perfection – our prophecy and vision will be partial, our understanding will be incomplete – I am not the same today as I was yesterday but I am not yet what I will be when I am with Christ

I remember clearly a conversation which I had with someone who was a little bit disturbed because I was talking about mistakes that we sometimes make, about our weaknesses and such like. What they said to me is that we are perfect and so we should not be talking about such things. I must admit I was a bit taken aback, as we talked they quoted from **Matt 5:48 'But you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'** – what I explained is that this is what we need to be aiming for

but is not what we are expected to achieve in this life. I then referred to this passage where Paul says I haven't yet reached it, but I continue to pursue this – that's where I'm heading.

I then went on to play my trump card as I asked them, well would you consider that you are perfect. My rationale was that they would recognise their own weakness and the mistakes they make and therefore common sense would prevail – however their answer was yes I am.

Having resisted the temptation to say well I know you and I know you are not perfect, Instead I emphasised that I am not perfect and I don't know anyone who is – but that is what I aim for. Well I think they then lost all respect for me – here I am a church leader admitting that I'm not perfect – whatever next. Unfortunately we had to end our conversation agreeing to differ.

**From the day in the Garden of Eden when sin entered the World until the day when Christ returns and makes all things new, corruption has been at work in the world.** Nothing in this world is perfect, but rather than mourning for what is lost, it can propel us forward to what will be – imagine the greatest pleasure in this life – whether that be a sublime moment of praise or worship of the Lord, or the experience of a beautiful sunset, or the beauty of sexual intimacy – whatever it may be it was not perfect – but one day we will experience and live in the good of that perfection every day – that's where I'm heading, what about you?

### **Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead**

So Paul knew he was not perfect – and would not be in this life, but then he goes on to say that he focuses on this one thing **'Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus. Is calling us'**.

Lets just try an experiment this morning – I want two volunteers (One to walk around the church looking forward. One to try & walk around the church while looking back over their shoulder.)

Let me just say to you this morning that it is very difficult, if not impossible to move forward while you are still looking back. If there are still things in your past that are holding your attention, things that you can't take your eyes off of – then you will at best be hindered in your attempts to move forward – and at worst it can lead you to stumble and fall into a ditch, or off the edge of a cliff and find that you leave the race for good.

There are a number of things that can hold our attention in the past which I want to mention this morning.

#### **1. Sin**

The first thing that can keep us looking to the past is sin. There are two main reasons why we keep looking back at sin, the first is that we continue to feel ashamed and dirty because of the sin we have committed. We say to ourselves I could never be clean, I can never be like a or b, surely God cannot fully love me after I have done all of these things.

If that is how you are thinking about yourself let me say that you are listening to a lie. **The lie is not fundamentally about you but about God.** It is a lie from the enemy that says Jesus blood was not enough – a lie that says God is a liar and He could never forgive you – a lie that you need to silence and if you can't silence the lie yourself then you need to get prayer so that others can stand with you to break the power of that lie in your life.

Psm 103:9-14

1 Peter 1:2

The other reason that we look back to sin is because **we haven't made a 'clean break'**. We can be like the children of Israel, although they had been set free from Egypt by the mighty power of a loving God they looked back to Egypt with 'rose tinted spectacles' emphasising the good things and forgetting the slavery and harshness of their captors.

**Sometimes we can look back on our sin with a smile**, we can long for the worldly pleasure we derived from that sin. If we look back on sin like this then we will find ourselves constantly returning to that sin. We will find ourselves in a cycle of sinning, realising that what we have done is wrong, feeling guilty, trying to walk away but with a focus on what we are leaving rather than on what we are heading towards and then finding that we are back to where we started.

If we are in that position then we need to break the cycle and again if you can't do this by yourself than you need to ask for others to stand with you and pray with you.

Repentance needs to be genuine – Lord I am sorry for this sin, please forgive me. Help me to hate this sin as much as you do. I am choosing to walk away from it towards you and I'm not going to look back.

Remember what I talked about earlier and you can be reassured that I am not talking about achieving perfection in this life – **but there is a difference between occasionally stumbling on our way forward, and never actually moving forward because we are too busy walking in a circle away from and then back to a recurring sin.**

## **2. Failure**

The second thing that can hold our attention in the past is a sense of failure. Some of us have a tendency to view our lives through a simplistic template of success and failure. When things have gone well, when we have made right choices, when we have responded in a right way then we have succeeded. When things go badly, when we make poor choices, when we respond in a wrong way, then we have failed.

In fact life is much more complex than success and failure. Sometimes you can do the right things but appear to get the wrong results. God is not so interested in success and failure as He is in developing our character, our relationship with Him and our trust in Him.

If you look back on Jesus life, if you don't take into account His resurrection, it could look pretty much like failure. Yes He did all the right things, His teaching was brilliant, the power of God was clearly manifest through signs, wonders and miracles – but at the end even His closest followers deserted Him, He died a painful humiliating death and even His Father turned away.

But when He died Jesus said '**it is finished**' – He had completed the purpose for which He was sent. From death came life, from having no followers Jesus has tens of millions of followers today, 2,000 years after He died. God honoured and exalted Jesus, seating Him in heavenly places.

God wasn't one bit interested in what people saw as success or failure. Jesus, who was perfect, appeared to be a failure – we are not perfect – we can & do make mistakes – but God has already accounted for those mistakes in Jesus blood that was shed for us.

God is more interested in your heart towards Him than He is in what the world would call success and He isn't half as upset about our so called failures as we are.

Rather than dwelling on past failures and allowing them to distract us from looking forward, lets hand them all over to the Lord and allow Him to deal with them and look to the future with a clean slate – being more concerned about love and relationship with the Lord than success of failure.

### **3. Disappointment**

The third thing that can keep us looking back when we are attempting to move forward is disappointment. When things didn't turn out the way we planned, when prayers don't appear to be answered, when we have thought we were doing the right things but appeared to get the wrong results. When we thought revival would come but it still carries.

**The root of disappointment is lack of faith in God.** It is our impatience with God's timing and/ or His wisdom. Do we really believe He works all things together for good for those that love Him? – do we believe His timing is perfect? Do we trust in His plans?

We need to understand that God's ways are not our ways – but they are better. We need to give to God our disappointments and not allow them to develop into cynicism.

### **4. Success/Great experiences**

The final thing that can keep us looking back when we are trying to move forward is what we consider to be our successes – or our best experiences. We want to camp around that experience rather than moving on. Like the Israelites who wept because the new temple didn't match up with their remembrance of the old – or like Peter's response to seeing Jesus glorified with Elijah & Moses – lets build a tent – lets stay here forever.

We are not called to camp at these places – we must move on – and that might mean leaving the comfort & shelter of our tent. It might mean moving away from the oasis into the desert. It may well mean making more mistakes, tripping up, falling over, and working hard. However, like Paul we must press on.

### **Have a vision of where you are heading and the prize you will receive**

The final thing I want to leave you with from our passage this morning is that **Paul was not running from something but to something.** He had a vision of the finish line and what lay beyond. He knew that a prize awaited him on the other side.

We do have a tendency, even as Christians, to expect a quick return on our investment. We're not good at looking at the long term. If we pray today we want answers tomorrow, if we sow this week we want a harvest next week. If we experience difficulty or hardship we want to be reassured that it will quickly pass and that we will begin to see the results of our patient endurance quickly – before our patience runs out.

When we think about our prize or reward we rarely look beyond a few years – let alone beyond this life. However although we receive a down payment in this life our real reward is after this life in heaven.

### **Heb 11 35b to 38**

Many, who have faced atrocities in this life and even martyrdom, have done so because of the hope of a better life after the resurrection.

**John 14:1-3** says, Jesus has gone ahead of us to prepare a room for us. **Revelation 21 1-4** gives us a description of the new heavens and earth that will be our inheritance.

We need to develop as Christians the long view. We need to bear in mind that this life is but a blink of the eye in the context of eternity. We need to recognise that the shaping of our character is not just to do with this life but of the life to come. This makes sense of those believers who appear to have been cut off in their prime – who appear to have died before they have fulfilled their potential. We need to develop a long view and trust God for its fulfilment.