

Philippians 3 Pressing on... 5th October 2025

Do do do do do do, do do do do do, da da da da da da...

Who can tell me what movie that theme tune comes from?

Chariots of fire – the movie about the great Christian Olympian Eric Liddell.

He was Scottish but he was born and died in China as a missionary. In more ways than one Eric ran his race well. At the 1924 Olympics in Paris he refused to compete in his favoured 100 metre race because the heats were on a Sunday. He was the Scottish team's great chance of winning a gold medal and they were not very happy with him. Instead, he competed in the 400 metres which was not his strength at all. As Liddell went to the starting blocks for the race, an American slipped a piece of paper in his hand with a quotation from 1 Samuel 2:30, **"Those who honour me I will honour."** Liddell ran with that piece of paper in his hand and not only won the race but broke the existing world record with a time of 47.6 seconds. He may have been greatly praised after that but he gave the glory to God.

He described his race plan afterwards like this; "The secret of my success over the 400m is that I run the first 200m as fast as I can. Then, for the second 200m, with God's help I run faster." Usually in the longer races the athlete reserves some extra energy for the last push forward. Eric Liddell started off at full speed and with God's strength just kept going to the end, keeping his eye on the prize.

Eric did not stay on the running circuit rather he felt a greater purpose in returning to China as a missionary. There he also ran his race well dying in a Japanese Civilian internment camp in 1945. It was revealed after the war that Liddell had turned down an opportunity to leave the camp (as part of a prisoner exchange program), preferring instead to give his place to a pregnant woman.

Like Paul, Eric was passionate about Jesus and living his life devoted to him. I'm sure Eric felt just like Paul who writes in his 3rd Chapter to the Philippians ⁷... *whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.* ⁸*What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ* ⁹*and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in* ^[a]*Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.* 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.*

Paul wants to be known as a man whose worth and value is in Jesus Christ. Before he met Christ he was honoured as a Pharisee of high standing, he was circumcised on the 8th day, he was from the tribe of Benjamin, he was zealous for the Jewish faith and blameless in keeping the law. After meeting Christ his life was turned around and considered all those things as loss, as rubbish – once he would have boasted about who he was as a Pharisee, now he says he will only boast in Jesus Christ. Now he sees his righteousness as coming from God, through Christ's death and resurrection, not from him keeping the law.

Paul says he wants to know Christ, his power and his sufferings. Paul wasn't just wanting to know about the easy bits of being a Christian. He knew that it involved suffering as Christ had suffered. It seems he rejoiced in his sufferings as that also brought him closer to Christ. You might think that Paul knew Jesus pretty well but he wanted to know him more. He was not satisfied with an acquaintance like relationship he wants to continue to grow closer so he could grow to be more and more like him. If we are to grow in our Christlikeness then we must spend time getting to know Jesus, spending time with him...desiring him.

When like Paul we spend time in prayer, reading the bible, worshipping God together then the greater strength and grace we will have for each day. When persecution or suffering comes like Paul and the Philippians we will know the power of Christ in us. Paul was in prison as he wrote this letter, he was in chains because of his commitment to the gospel and spreading the word of Christ. And yet, he speaks of joy in the midst of suffering. We will all know difficulties from time to time, illness, grief, disappointments, maybe mocking for being Christians, yet we can know God's peace and strength through those times.

I'm currently reading this biography of a Muslim woman from Russia who became a Christian. She certainly knows what it is like to suffer for her faith, she has been rejected and under threat of death. And yet she says she wouldn't exchange the peace and joy she has found in Jesus to return to Islam and a more comfortable life. She just longs to spend more and more time with Jesus and share him with others.

Paul knows he hasn't reached the goal yet, he knows he won't know perfection fully until Jesus returns, but he presses on towards the goal, to know Christ, to become like him. Jesus had chosen us, as it says in Isaiah 43; *'fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine...you are precious and honoured in my sight, I love you'*. Paul knew God's love and wants to respond in loving him and living for him and sharing his love with others.

Do you know that personal love of God for you? Do you know he calls you by name and that he desires for you to love him passionately like Paul did?

Paul presses on and strains forward to what lies ahead, forgetting what lies behind.

A runner in a race doesn't keep looking back at who is behind him or he may trip and fall. Instead, he is intent upon the goal up ahead. How many people do you know that seem to live their life looking backward? They count their losses, their regrets, their failures and then no wonder they feel defeated.

We can thank God for his forgiveness for our failings. Paul doesn't look back, if he did he could easily have got bogged down in his past sins – remember he was a zealous persecutor of Christians before he met Christ himself, he stood by approving of those who stoned Stephen. He learns from his mistakes, he thanks God for his grace and he chooses to look forward, giving Christ his all.

In fact, he stretches all out to win the race. If you watch the athletic races, you will notice how the runner leans their whole body forward as they cross the finish line. Sometimes, it is that extension of the body to its uttermost that wins the race. Paul is talking about his flat out commitment to see this through to the end. No slacking off. No excuses. No laziness. Paul is utterly serious about this; he is stretching all out to win the race.

And what race is he running for – not his salvation – he was already assured of that – he is seeking Christ and his fullness. He disciplines himself so that he will not miss out on the greatest prize – which is knowing Christ.

I wonder if sometimes we become complacent and think we are satisfied with what we already know of Christ...Paul says there is more. Are we hungry to have a deeper relationship with Christ that effects the way we live and love?

As I read this passage I thought of the young kids in the car as we drove off on a long holiday...half hour into the trip "Are we there yet?" an hour into the trip "Are we there yet?" and so on. Paul tells us that we are on a life-long trip, and we are to keep pushing forward 'til we meet our destination. This is not a 100 metre sprint, rather it is more like a marathon, it takes endurance. Sometimes we might look back and think of a time when we did feel closer and more alive in Christ, maybe we slowed down in the race, but it is not over yet. We must hold fast to our faith and keep going, and God will give us his strength and grace along the way, sometimes through suffering, sometimes running into great joy, always running with Christ beside us.

Paul defines the prize he is running for as the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Not necessarily heaven itself but living that resurrection life now. Living in the present in the light of the future. Remember in Chapter 1 he said that 'to live is Christ'. Living a resurrected Christ life now.

Paul encourages the Philippians to imitate him, (vs 17) some may think this is arrogant, but given that Paul is seeking to imitate Christ then he is a pretty good example. We should be living in such a way that others will seek to imitate us. There are many great people of faith, like Eric Lidell, we could seek to imitate because they have sought to imitate Christ themselves. Could you encourage others to imitate you? Not because you are perfect but because it is obvious that you love Jesus and seek to honour him in how you live.

He says do not follow those who live as enemies of Christ...there are many who live to satisfy their earthly desires, Paul has tears as he warns the Philippians of those who live as Christ's enemies. His desire is that all will turn to Christ. He says rather fix your eyes on things above and live accordingly. He says to them, and I say to you "Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Philippi was a Roman colony – many of the people were Roman citizens – living a long way from Rome itself but doing their best to order their civic life so that it matched the way things were done in Rome. At that time Caesar, the Emperor was to be worshipped as their saviour and Lord.

This is the context for Paul's declaration. The Philippians as Roman citizens lived in Philippi not Rome; likewise, as citizens of Heaven, we should be living the heavenly way of life here. Paul was describing the Church as a colony of heaven. As the people of the Church we are heavenly citizens who have the responsibility for bringing the life and rule of heaven to bear on earth. We pray this in the Lord's prayer all the time...*your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven*. We are to be involved in bringing his kingdom here as we live as Jesus has called us to. At present our bodies will grow old but one day the ruler of the world, Jesus, will come down from heaven to *transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body*.

In the meantime, says Paul (4:1) in the with great affection; "*my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord*".

Let us be encouraged by Paul who though in prison stood firm, who sought to know Christ better, who wrote letters to encourage others, who had joy despite his sufferings and couldn't wait to be with Christ. Eric Liddell also stood firm in his beliefs and did not compromise his faith even though he was slandered for not running that 100 metre race. He honoured God and God honoured him. He went on to run the race of faith suffering in China but known for his love and courage and generosity of spirit. He lived as a 'citizen of heaven'. May we too seek to live as heavenly citizens, eager for Christ's return, but in the meantime pressing on and living as his true disciples.

Let us pray: Jesus, may we desire to know you more and more. For you are our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption. Our all in all, our sufficiency for every need, our refuge, our rock in times of trouble. I pray that we will stand firm in you, pressing on, running the race with perseverance.

Amen.