

**Paul - his past, present and future!**

Isaiah 51-7 Psalm 80<sup>9-17</sup>; Philippians 3<sup>3b-14</sup>; Matthew 21<sup>33-end</sup>

*I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (Philippians 3<sup>12</sup>)*

If we were doing what we were supposed to this morning, we would be talking about vines: they are in the Gospel, the Psalm and the Old Testament readings. We are going to leave that for another year.

This morning we are going to focus on Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Paul, who is no stranger to being miserable and is often guilty of being tortuous in his arguments, excels himself in this clear and inspirational passage. In it he talks about his past, his present and his future.

In Paul's past he was, without a doubt, a terrorist amongst the Pharisees. His blood line is impeccable; his education the best a Jew could hope for; his religion faultless; his willingness to kill and torture Christians - because he thought they were wrong - a role-model for any terrorist group. His summary: **if anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more.** Paul had a great future - he would make the Sanhedrin one day, yet Paul deliberately made his future his past.

Things changed when he met Jesus. Paul was going about his task of terrorising Christians when Jesus spoke to him and turned his life around.

- ✦ **Whatever gains I had, these I come to regard as a loss because of Christ.**
- ✦ **For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.**

We all have a past - some more interesting than others: but what matters more than anything is the day we met Jesus!

Paul's present is summed up in the simple verse - **I want to know Christ!**

- ✦ He has discovered that in Christ he doesn't have to try to be good or to get it right any more: **not having a righteousness of my own that**

**comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.**

- ✦ His present is shaped by his hope: **I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.** Here we have the great change - a life motivated by love rather than hate; a life of giving rather than controlling; a life lived sacrificially because Jesus gave himself for us.
- ✦ He is prepared to work at faith: **Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.** I confess that I prefer the NIV translation, ***I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*** Our life has a God-given purpose!

Every Christian's present should be the same: **I want to know Christ.** A life motivated by love rather than hate; a life of giving rather than controlling; a life lived sacrificially because Jesus gave himself for us.

Paul's future is summed up in words we have already heard: **if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.** This is the opposite of the confident Pharisee. This language hints at him being glad just to get his big toe into heaven.

- ✦ **This one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.** Everyone is a winner in this race - we live with God.

This is a confident celebration of faith - Paul's faith and ours too. The past dealt with; with Christ in the present and struggling to become like him and then with Christ in the future.