

Considerations for Moving Forward

Philippians 3:12-14



Sermon preached by Rev Hamish Wishart on Sunday 24 June 2007 at Cornton Baptist Church. This is the last Sunday morning service before work begins on the extension and interior renovations of the Church.

Considerations for Moving Forward- Philippians 3:12-14

Two Buddhist monks were walking in a thunderstorm. They came to a swollen stream. A beautiful young Japanese woman in a kimono stood there wanting to cross to the other side, but afraid of the currents. One of the monks said, 'Can I help you?'

'I need to cross this stream,' replied the woman.

The monk picked her up, put her on his shoulder, carried her through the swirling waters, and put her down on the other side. He and his companion then went on to the monastery.

That night his companion said to him, 'I have a bone to pick with you. As Buddhist monks, we have taken vows not to look on a woman, much less touch her body. Back there by the river you did both.'

'My brother,' answered the other monk, 'I put that woman down on the other side of the river. You're still carrying her in your mind.'

How easy it is to be obsessed with the past at the expense of the future. Now not for one minute am I suggesting that we are a people obsessed with the past for we are clearly not. I have been so struck in the short time I have been among you that people of every age remember the past but are moving forward toward the prize. But the point is well made that at times we can get stuck in the past with all its memories and we allow them to hold us back. I want to share this morning some positive experiences of considering the past and considering the present as we consider the prize that lies ahead. There are considerations that need to be made for moving forward.

For the Apostle Paul he has just spent time explaining to the Philippian Christians where he has come from and where he is heading to. He has reminded them of his upbringing and his previous way of life. He has detailed his credentials as the best of the best, as the crème de la crème. And yet he has pointed out to them that every bit of that is as dung before God. It is worthless and gained him nothing but a hard reputation. He has met and encountered Jesus Christ and everything is worthless compared to knowing him. He knows the power of the cross in his life and he knows what price Christ had to pay to save him. And he also knows what lies in front for him. He sees the prize of heaven and he longs to be there. But he knows there is much to do in getting there. He does not want to be complacent and either should we be as we consider moving forward as well. As we consider his thoughts regarding moving forward let us ponder our own considerations for moving forward.

Consider the Past

Paul begins by considering the past. He knows where he has come from. He knows there is a whole lot in his background that has led him to the point he is at today. And he wants to encourage the Philippians to consider their past as well.

Look

He begins by suggesting that they look at the past. That they survey what has gone on before. That they review their lives and list down what they have achieved, where they have fallen down, what their hopes and dreams had been. The Philippians have been a good and faithful people. They have supported and encouraged Paul in his ministry as we thought about a few weeks back. But there are problems amongst them as well. If we skip on to 4:2 we sense a disagreement Euodia and Syntyche. There are problems as well as blessings. And that is what happens in life for us as well. We experience the good but we also experience the bad. We have those moments when we are totally on fire for God and doing great things for him and then there are the times when we fail him, when we take our eyes off of Jesus and we attempt to do things in our own strength for our own sake.

If we consider the past we can begin by looking back. And boy what memories there are. There are the memories of the first Sunday School being held in what was the community centre. That work began way back in 1959 as over 100 children came to the first Sunday School held on the afternoon of Sunday 25 November. Rev Donald McCallum officially opened the Sunday School and that work amongst the children of Cornton flourished for many years. The old community centre had its problems and by 1965 it was clear work could not continue long there. But then as we look back we see a small group of committed people planning to build their own hall for use in the area for children's work. In 3 September 1966 this building was opened and the children's work could continue in better surroundings.

We look back and see how the work continued and grew, as did the vision and soon the Church was established with the first morning service held during 1966 as well. The plan had been for a hall for children's work but the great design allowed for easy use for a worship service. The work continued with its ups and downs and then on 8 January 1978 Cornton Baptist Church was constituted in its own right and the following year its first full time pastor welcomed in.

There are many memories there for people and as we look back we want to recognise those. We want to remember the work that was done quietly and effectively by so many. We want to remember the baptistery designed and built by Willie Dudgeon. We want to recall with joy the work done by Jim Galloway as the first Sunday School Superintendent all those years ago. And there are others beside. It is great that of

those first people starting that fledgling work we still have them with us: Ruth, Ruby and Amy.

As we ourselves look back into our individual lives what do we see and consider. Do we remember when we came to know Jesus as Lord? That is the most important thing we can remember and bring to mind. That is the best thing we can look back to. Paul was able to look back and realise that his life was worthless compared to knowing Jesus. He remembered the day he was saved. Do you remember the day you were saved? Rejoice in that and in the fact that Jesus died to save you all those years ago on a cross at Calvary. Perhaps you cannot look back and see salvation in your life. Then friend today is the day to change all of that. Down through they years lives have been changed and transformed in this place through the saving power of Jesus Christ. Let today, the last in the building for us, be the day you will look back on in years to come and say that was the day I confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. All you need do to accept that offer of forgiveness is to turn from your life of sin and turn to Jesus, confess with your lips that he is Lord and seek to live for him every day for the rest of your life.

Learn

Paul looked back but as he considered the past he also showed that he had learned. Paul had always striven to be the best of the best. He wanted to be the top Pharisee. He wanted to be the main religious leader. He wanted all the praise and glory and power. But then he learned that it was all worthless. It was all a waste of time. He encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and realised that life was not about him but it was all about Jesus. He realised that he could not earn salvation; that he could not get back into that right relationship with God by himself. He learned that he had to come and depend on Jesus. That he had to glory not in himself but in Christ and the cross. He learned from his mistakes and wanted to change how he lived and acted.

As we consider the past we learn too. We learn from our predecessors what it is to have a passion for Jesus and a strong desire to serve him in this community. We learn fro our own mistakes and those of our predecessors. None of us is perfect. We have all made mistakes. The important thing is to learn from them and grow through them. I am constantly learning from my mistakes. Learning how to better serve Christ and how to better live my life. We are all the same.

As we consider the past and look and see what has gone on before and what we have done before, we learn and we grow to become more like Jesus.

Leave

And Paul had to leave the past behind. He had to leave all his successes and all his failings in the past. He had to move on and move forward. He could so easily have become stuck in his past successes as being the best of the best. He had learned so much and taught so much. And yet he learned he had so much more still to learn. He moved on.

He moved on from his failings as well. He could so easily have been destroyed by his memories of persecuting and killing Christians. He had failed God in his desire to keep the Jewish religion clean and pure. He had seen Christians as a threat and as wrong and he wanted rid of them. This could so easily have gotten him down and destroyed him. But he did not allow his past sin to keep him in the past. He was living in the present and seeking to move forward for the prize.

We have to leave the past behind us. Yes we want to keep the memories and rejoice in those but we have to leave the past behind and move forward in faith. We also have to leave behind our failings. The bible teaches us that Jesus removes our sin as far as the east is from the west. He has forgiven us and forgotten all about it. We must do the same, having learned our lesson.

Consider the Present

Having considered the past by looking, learning and leaving, Paul goes on to consider the present. He says I have forgotten what is ahead and now I am straining forward. I am in the present he says and I know where I have come from and where I am going to.

Live

As he considers the present he thinks about how he is living now. He says in verse 14 'I press on' - I am moving forward. I am seeking what is ahead. I am straining towards it. The word translated as press on is 'dioko' and this is more akin to pursuing with vigour. It is the picture of using every ounce of energy you have to try and get something. It is giving your all for what is worthwhile. For Paul this was Jesus. He had come to realise that everything should revolve around him - that he should be the centre of his life. And so as he considers the present he looks at how he lives and says I want it all to be about Jesus.

Friends I hope today that this is our desire as well. That we want to live for Jesus today and now. That every action, attitude, activity is all for him. When we wake in the morning our first thought is Christ and we pray to him and read his word. As we go to work that we want to live for him in the workplace - so we watch our speech and

actions. In the house with the family that we want to live for Jesus so we seek to show his love to our family as well and teach our kids his ways.

I hope we will keep living for him as we seek to witness for him in this area. It is all about Jesus. Let us be like others in this church from its inception in 1959 who lived for him every day.

Labour

Paul talks of his labour as well. He is working for Jesus. He is straining towards what is ahead and reaching out for the prize. In his labour he is travelling around (although as he writes this letter he is imprisoned again for preaching the gospel) sharing the good news of the gospel. Wherever he is he wants to be telling people about Jesus. That is his labour now. Once it was persecuting Christians now it is proclaiming Christ to non-believers that they may come to saving faith and preaching the word of God to the believers as well that they might be better equipped for serving Jesus.

Do we labour with all our heart for Jesus? Those first folk in the Sunday School in Cornton laboured to spread the love of Jesus in this area and this community. As we look at ourselves today do we still have that same passion – are we still labouring for Jesus? Individually? As a church? The answer I see before me is yes. I see the people giving of their time and talents serving our children in Sunday School, boys and girls clubs. I see people giving of their time and talents to serve at the coffee morning. I see people signing up to raise money for the building fund – and we need much more of this. I see people praying for the work of the church. I see people witnessing quietly and effectively to their neighbours and friends, and to those they come into contact with. We need to keep labouring for Jesus.

Love

And Paul in considering the present looked at his love. He looked at his love for Jesus and how he now realised everything was rubbish to knowing and loving Jesus. He loved him with all his heart, mind, soul and being. He wanted to know him more and love him more and serve him more. Is that our desire as well? Paul was straining forward to reach heaven and eternity with Jesus.

Paul also had a love for his fellow men. He is teaching his brothers and sisters in Christ what it is to know Jesus better and reminding them of the joy of heaven that lies in front of them. And he also has a love for the outsider as well – for he longs that all would know Jesus and know the truth of the gospel that Jesus died to save them all.

How is our love for Jesus? Do we sing and shout it? Do we experience it and show it as we spent time with him daily in prayer and in reading his word. Do we share Jesus' love with others? Is that how we live our lives?

As we consider the present we need to remind ourselves to keep living for Jesus – giving him our praise and worship – giving him all our love. And we will keep doing that as we move to the school for the next few months and worship there. We will desire to keep labouring for him as well – the work of sharing the gospel does not stop because we are out of our building. It continues all the more and we will have fresh and different opportunities. So let us keep going.

Consider the Prize

Paul considered the past and the present and now he considers the prize as well. He is looking forward; he is straining towards what is ahead.

Life Eternal

And for Paul that means life eternal. 'I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.' He is heading for heaven. He longs to be with Jesus forever there. He knows and is sure that because he has given his life to Jesus, since he has accepted the forgiveness Jesus offers and has turned around his life to live for Jesus, and since he has confessed Jesus as Lord with his lips, that he is heading to life eternal. He is going to heaven to spend eternity with him there. And he wants others to know that as well.

Friends we too are sure of life eternal so as we consider the prize we recall Jesus death, resurrection and ascension – and we look forward to his return on the clouds to take us to be with him forever. If we live with that in mind it gives us great hope and assurance for living today.

Labour of Love

As he considers the prize, Paul remembers his labour of love as well. It used to be that he laboured and strived for different things – now he lives and strives for Jesus. His labour of love is telling others all about Jesus and as he heads for the prize, straining towards it, he presses on to share the gospel.

Our labour of love is sharing the gospel as well with this community. But aligned with that at the moment is the church extension which we have planned to aid us in sharing the gospel in Cornton. God has led us thus far and we need to continue our labour of love to make sure we see the extension built. That means we need to keep our sleeves rolled up and be finding ways to raise the money required. As we share together in

that task we build fellowship with one another and we share in the joy of the work being completed.

And we must never forget in the midst of concentrating on building work and fund that there are still people outside these four walls who need to hear about Jesus. Our labour of love should be for sharing the gospel. During the summer we have the step out team with us doing kids work and hopefully some youth work as well. We will look at our other children's work after the holidays to see how that will continue. We want to explore door to door work around the area and perhaps running an Alpha or Christianity Explored course. We want to keep telling people about Jesus.

Let's Get Going

And Paul finishes as he looks to the prize by encouraging the Philippians to keep going. Let's get going. In verse 15 he says all of us who are mature should take such a view on things. We should be going forward and living for Jesus. We should be sharing the gospel.

So I want to sum it up for us today in this way. We want to consider the past by looking to see what has gone before and what we have done before. Let us learn from the mistakes we have made and learn from the successes of others. And then let us leave that all behind us. This building holds so many memories and we want to retain those and recall them often. But we have to leave the building behind in order that it can be upgraded for our future use. We want to consider the present and see how we live our lives – are we living for Jesus. We want to continue to labour for him and to share his love for people in this community. And we want to consider the prize – to think on that life eternal which is ours in Christ Jesus. And we want to continue to labour in love as we seek to win this community for Jesus. Many things will come across our path in the coming months. We want to keep raising money for the building fund but we also want to keep reaching out to this community.

May I remind us all that God has blessed us with a great church! May I also remind us that God has big plans for us here? Today, I call every individual here and every member of the church family to take these considerations very seriously and see where we are and where we are headed. Things are good and they are about to get even better! Let's get going!

And let me finish with words from Mrs McCallum from 1974 recorded in the booklet 'Retelling the Story of The Cornton – "A Church Within a Community". 'This is the story of the beginnings of a work of God, but many chapters have yet to be written. May the present be worthy of the past, and may the future eclipse them both.'