

Talk – Phil 3:12-4:1 – Running with the Prize

Bible Reading

Philippians 3:12-4:1

Central Truth

Press on in Christ – running, walking and standing firm.

Purpose

I want to listener to recognise that for the Christian, standing firm in the Lord is not about standing still – it is about pressing on until they see Jesus.

Outline

Some Friends

Press on to take hold (3:12-14)

Running with the prize (3:15-16)

Walking for Christ or without him (3:17-19)

Standing in the Lord (3:20-4:1)

What does that look like for you?

Rejoice in the Lord (3:1)

Stand Firm in the Lord (4:1)

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Talk

Prayer

Dear Lord and Father,

We speak to you as your citizens and with your word before us.

Help us to open our ears and hear words you want to say.

Help us to have the humility to recognize that it is wise to listen to you and foolish not too.

Help us also to change where you want us to change.

We ask this in Jesus name. Amen

Some Friends

- I want to tell you about some of my friends. I know some of you may be surprised to hear that I friends!
- First there is Ralph, he owns and runs a small business. He works incredibly hard, like many small business owners. There are not many holidays, there are long hours, there are financial strains.
- He runs - hard. And his hope is that in the years to come, his hard work will pay off and he and his wife will be able to sit back and relax a bit in retirement.
- Second there is Lucy, she is a student. I can't remember which discipline – accountancy, dentistry, medical, law, architecture – one of those professions that will demand a lot.
- She is focused. She can study long hours, she gets good marks, she keeps her folks happy.
- She runs – diligently. And her hope is that one day she will graduate with top honours and be employed in the best job and will be able to the rest a little and enjoy life.
- Third there is Barnie, he is a mad keen Crows supporter. He could be the poster boy for club support. He is at the games, rain, hail or shine (mostly rain). He organizes his life around the club, he will always have the right gear and will make sure that he is painted in the right colours.
- He runs - with the highs and lows of the club. And his hope is that one day, one year the Crows will win a premiership and the world will all be right.
- Fourth there is Susan. She is a teacher and she is approaching retirement. She has taught hundreds of kids over the years, the next generation who have gone out from her classes ready to shine.
- Like most teachers she has managed the balancing act of lesson plans, marking, school reports, extracurricular events and parents.

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- She runs - with grace and distinction. And her hope is that one day she will not ever have to teach year 9 boys again.
- And finally, there is Fredrick. He works for a big multi-national company, one of those places where only the best get an opportunity to work. He counts himself fortunate to have been selected and he now does whatever he can to show his skill and merit. He aims to climb the corporate ladder. One day 'CEO' or 'CFO' will be printed on his office door.
- He runs - with ambition. And one day his hope is that he will be financially secure and own several homes.

[Note: KDN – may be helpful to have a school age person example]

Each one of these friends are contributing much to society and one day there should be honour and reward – the prize for a race run well.

- I wonder if you can resonate in any way with these people?
- I would be surprised if you couldn't.
- We are all running a race and our hope is often set on what is to come.

Press on to take hold (3:12-14)

- The Apostle Paul understands the importance of this race – because he calls upon the Christians in Philippi to run a good race – to press on – to strain so that they might take hold of the prize that is to come.
- The difference is that he shows how Christians should run the race.
- Look with me at Phil 3:12 *[PAUSE - READ Phil 3:12-14]*
- Paul - using himself as an example - speaks of his drive.
- Twice he says that he 'presses on' – and he does that because he knows that what he really wants is before him.
- And three times he says that he wants to 'take hold' – and the prize he wants in *his* grasp is that which Christ Jesus is holding for *him* – it is his ticket to heaven. It is his future.
- Surely, we can relate to this. So much of what we do is given shape by what we hope and dream about.
- Paul helps us to see that it is totally appropriate to hope and dream not just about what we might achieve in the years that we walk on this planet, but also in the eternity that follows in heaven.
- His actions are governed by his hope. He says 'one thing I do' in order to achieve this dream, is to do that mutually consistent action of *forgetting* what is behind and *straining towards* what is before.
- His thoughts, emotions, decisions are all about this one thing – and it shapes the way he lives his life. For him there is more to do. He has a race to run, and

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to finish means he cannot afford to dwell on the past, to rest on his laurels, to sit on the sidelines and watch others run the race around him.

- Yet notice – this race is dependent on a call, in fact the call of God. It is God who calls him heavenward (verse 14), and the call has come at the start of the race not at the end of the race.
- This is what makes this race so different to the worldwide race that we know so well – and that my friends whom I told you about at the start, know so well.
- The idea of a ‘calling’ it is not God’s *invitation* to be saved, to come to heaven if we so desire,
it is God’s *determination* to save.
- The prize is what God has determined to award.
- It is not awarded because we have earned it, or achieved it, or deserve it – it is awarded because God has chosen to give it.

Now this changes the nature of the race entirely.

Illustration

- Imagine an Olympic games when the Gold medalists are announced before the race is run!
- Or imagine the difference it would make to the US Open if the organizers announced at the start of the tournament that the trophy would be given to Novak Djokovic.
- Immediately it changes the nature of the way people compete.
 - The gold medalists would ease off – they are a sure thing,
 - Novak Djokovic would loosen off some of his intensity – he already has the trophy in his locker and the pay cheque in his bank account.
- Running the race holding the prize changes the nature of the way you compete.
- The Christian race is one which is run with the prize already guaranteed.
- Yet - Paul doesn’t want the Christians in Philippi to ease off at all.

Running with the prize (3:15-16)

- Look at verses 15-16 [*Read 3:15-16*]
- If you are mature in your Christian race, then live up to what has already been attained.
- Paul cuts away at the idea of *self-fulfillment* – that those who think that it is within their grasp, or within their ability to live such good lives that they might be able to secure their place in heaven.

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- Such a view ignores the fact that the person giving out the prize has already attained it and is holding it for you.
- Some might disagree, Paul says, that's fine, but one day God will make that clear to you. Standing before him and listing off all your achievements and works – will not contribute anything further to what he has already done for you in Jesus.
- Paul cuts away at the idea of *self-fulfillment*.

- Paul also cuts away at the idea of *Spiritual idleness*.
- Jesus attaining the prize in no way entitles the person to sit back and do nothing or little – effectively dropping out of the race because their future is secure.
- There is work to do, there is *his* work to do.
- If you are mature in your Christian race, then live in such a way that gives due respect to that which has already been attained.
- Paul cuts away at the idea of *Spiritual idleness*.

So how does the Christian run with the prize?

- They Walk, and they Stand!
- Let me show you.

Walking for Christ or without him (3:17-19)

- Verse 17 – notice the contrast that is drawn here. [READ 3:17-18]

- Paul is quite free in saying that there are two ways to run this race. You can '*live as we do*' or you can '*live as enemies of the cross*'
- The word behind that idea of '*live*' is actually the word '*walk*'.
- He is saying as you *walk* through life – you make choices – good ones and bad ones.
- When one looks at the walk, then they can see whether that is a life walked *for Christ* or *without* him.

- Over the last couple of chapters, Paul has given the Philippians plenty to consider when it comes to walking like him – that walk has primarily been shaped by the humility that Jesus showed by being willing to die on a cross.
- That is a walk that ends well for those Jesus died for.

- And so now Paul can describe the opposite walk – the walk as one who is an enemy of the cross of Christ.
- This walk does not end well.
 - a. Verse 19 – their *destiny is destruction*.
 - turn your back on the cross, and there is no benefit to be gained from the cross - their end will be destruction.

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- Paul looks beyond this world to the next and finds only eternal loss.

- They are spiritually dead.

b. Next, he says *their god is their stomach*.

- I doubt this is talking about gluttons, but more about those who seems more concerned with the food regulations and laws of the day. Paul had a go at them at the beginning of Chapter 3.

- or perhaps he is speaking about those who are guided most by their own fulfillment and desire – which they feed in order to remain satisfied.

- Either way, it is clearly not a positive description.

- They are spiritually ignorant.

c. Third he says they *glory in their shame*.

- they embrace and take hold of that which they should be ashamed by.

- If there are matters which go against the will of God, then these people don't just engage in that activity, but they celebrate it.

- Any public sin would fall into this category – greed, corruption, sexually immorality.

- They are spiritually corrupt.

d. and then finally he says their *mind is set on earthy things*.

- those who are so lost in the world that they are no longer able or willing to see what it is that God would ask of them.

- they walk according to the values of the world.

- They are spiritual lost.

- Enemies of the cross are those who seek to avoid suffering that may come as a result of any convictions about Christ.
- Yet without him, they are left only to be shaped by the world - and as such they walk by the values and whims of the world - spiritual dead, the spiritually ignorant, spiritually corrupt and spiritually lost.

Application

- Friends, I wonder if we as a church are at risk for falling into the trap that Paul warns the Philippians about here.
- We live in lovely Adelaide – which offers so much. We work and study and play hard as we enjoy many of the blessings that are offered all around.
- But I wonder if our walk is tailored more around our comforts and conveniences then they are around the challenge to participate in the sufferings of Christ.

So how does the Christian run with the prize?

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- They Walk – they walk with Christ.

Standing in the Lord (3:20-4:1)

And they Stand!

- Paul closes off this section of this letter by talking about our citizenship.
- Verse 20 – ‘Our citizenship is in heaven’ and it is from there where Jesus will return – and why, because he has one last job to do – it is to transform our lowly bodies (now captivated and influenced and attacked by the world) and change them to be like his glorious body.
- Just as he came through the world, suffered, died and was glorified – so will those who stand with him come through the world, suffer, die and yet be glorified in heaven.
- The citizenship language used here may come as a result of the political climate of the day – Paul may have been directing attention away from the Roman Saviour - Caesar Augustus whom the citizens of Philippi may have looked to for protection and provision.
- And instead directs their attention toward the heavenly Saviour Jesus Christ who is Lord – and who is far more able to provide protection and provision not just in this world but for eternity.
- Paul’s hope is for a *spiritual transformation*, but more – his hope is for *physical transformation*. A changed and new and glorious body.
- One of the benefits of citizenship is that you are given all the benefits of what it means to stand and belong alongside those who are also citizens.
- Ask any of those among us who are in the process of applying for Australian Citizenship – there are benefits that come with citizenship – you are accepted and belong and as such you are included in the benefits and blessings which other citizens enjoy.
- Look at how he finishes the section Chapter 4 verse 1 – ‘Therefore my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, *stand firm in the Lord* in this way, dear friends’
- He started chapter 3 by calling on his friends to *rejoice in the Lord* – he has told them why, offered himself as an example, warned them of those who won’t, and then called them to run, walk and now *stand – firm in the Lord*.
- I think Paul would want us as listeners to recognise that for the Christian, *standing firm in the Lord* is not about standing still – it is about pressing on until we see Jesus.

PAUSE

What does that look like for you?

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- What does that look like for you? You tell me. Each of us runs a race that looks different from the next person.

- But the challenge for any Christian is to be *distinctively Christian* in the way that you walk – a challenge that applies to ...
 - The successful *Christian* small Business owner
 - The diligent *Christian* Student
 - The avid *Christian* Sports supporter
 - The retired *Christian* teacher
 - The respected *Christian* CEO or CFO

- We need good and capable and successful people in the secular workforce who are distinctively Christian.
- And I think that Paul would say if we can't be both...
 - a Christian and a Small Business Owner
 - a Christian and a Student
 - a Christian and a Sports supporter
 - a Christian and a teacher
 - a Christian and a Corporate executive
 - or whatever it is that we are trying to be in the world

– then it would be better if we were just Christian.

Pray