

## **Philippians 3.4b - 14; Matthew 21.33 - 46**

### **What is my goal in life?**

A few years ago there was a BBC program called 'The Big Silence'. Five men and women were sent to a monastery for eight days for a retreat, to be silent. Only one was a Christian before. Over eight days, they all experienced God. Very profound for some. David, a director of two companies, had tears in his eyes. God had said to him, *'I have been with you all the time, even though you haven't known that.'*

Most of them found it very hard at first to stay silent. They reacted in all sorts of ways. One or two got very angry. Only when they stopped, they received from God.

The ideas they had of God changed. God was more loving, more personal, and more powerful.

Deep, deep in the heart of human-beings is this longing to meet and know God - and to feel known by Him. We long for a deep inner security which this life can't offer; we yearn for love from someone we can truly depend on.

Some years ago we were living in Vancouver, Canada. A very wealthy man, a man who ran a hugely successful company, he seemed to have everything. He had a beautiful wife, 3 fine children, a holiday home on a Gulf island, a ski lodge in Whistler. He said to Roger, 'I'm so empty inside, can you help me?'

Do you ever ask yourself, **What is my goal in life?**

Let's look at Paul. What he wanted in life completely changed. His goals changed.

Paul was going to persecute Christians, putting them in prison. But as he was going on the road to the city of Damascus, God grabbed hold of him.

God grabbed hold of him of a friend of ours called Jason. He was kicked out by his mother when he was 11. He lived on the streets and got into all sorts of trouble, in and out of prison. One day in prison he said he really prayed. Suddenly his cell became filled with light and he knew it was Jesus.

Paul thought he had found his purpose in life. He was very proud of all he had done. He tells us all the things he had to boast about. V5, His upbringing, his nationality, his family background, how good, how clever, how hard he'd worked, how religious, how zealous for God. We all find things to boast about.

### **Everything changed for Paul - he had a New Relationship**

When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Paul thought he was perfect. But, now, he realises that all those things are worth nothing. In fact, rubbish - compared to what? Compared to, v8, *'the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord'*. Sometimes we hear people boasting of someone they know - someone rich or famous or important, like a Government minister or even the King!

But that is nothing compared to knowing the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, our King Jesus. Being able to speak to him each day, bringing to him our concerns, our worries, our fears, our hopes.

Paul now had a NEW RELATIONSHIP - and that relationship is now the most important thing for him.

I remember when our daughter fell in love. If we were out, Mary Jane would say, 'I must hurry back because I'm speaking to Guy soon.' He became the most important person for her. Nothing else was so important. It's like that when we fall in love. We have a new relationship and that feels like the most important thing in the world...

Paul felt like that when Jesus Christ grabbed him! God completely changed his direction in life. This new relationship becomes the most important thing - knowing Jesus and living and (if need be) dying for him. Paul's goals completely changed.

### **He had a New Relationship and now he has a new goal**

For Paul, this new relationship with Jesus is Paul's new goal.

I remember years ago being at a conference and we were singing a song - '*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, Jesus, this is the greatest thing*'. I'd been a Christian for some years. As I sang I was feeling, '*but how much do I really know Jesus?*'

Do you ever ask yourself that sort of question? Lots of people can know *about* Jesus. But do they *know* him? The word Paul uses here, 'knowing', is the same word for a husband 'knowing' his wife. It's deep; it's personal; it's intimate.

I haven't got a magic formula but I will give you a couple of suggestions.

I think getting to know Jesus is like being married. Roger and I have been married now for 46 years. We have been through a lot together. We have lived in different countries, raised 5 children and now have 18 grandchildren who we are always concerned about. We don't always agree with each other. Roger thinks he gives in to me a lot - and I think I give in to him even more. After 46 years we know one another pretty well. How has that happened? By living life together, by sharing life but also sharing our hearts. By listening to each other.

It's like this with Jesus. If we walk with Jesus through life, we get to know him. We can ignore Jesus and when we're in real trouble then we come running to him. But we must walk *with Jesus all the time*.

This is what Paul is talking about when he says, v10, *he wants to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings*.

Roger and I walked together on our day off. Now his knees are bad so we cycle. We lived in a very beautiful part of England, Yorkshire. There are lots of walking paths in stunning areas - along rivers, up onto the moors with beautiful views. But, one of the problems was that I walked faster than Roger. I would get frustrated that he didn't walk faster. He got upset that I was always going ahead. I had to try hard to slow down and walk beside him. If we walked next to each other, we had companionship, fellowship. We couldn't have that if I was racing ahead.

Friends, if we are walking with Jesus through each day, if we greet him in the morning, if we walk beside Jesus in the day, gradually we are getting to know him. But if I'm racing ahead, getting on with my life, not listening to Jesus, how can I know him?

How do I listen to Jesus? One of the best ways is to read the Bible and pray. It's so good that Samuel sends a daily Bible Reading on What's App to all who are signed up on the St Marc's group. Don't just read it, meditate on Scripture. Like sucking a sweet. Last week after church there was a mum who was sucking on a lolly pop. (Not one of the kids!) We need to suck on Scripture like sucking on a sweet. Keep sucking on the sweet, don't chew it up so its all gone. Hold the Scripture in your heart like you have the sweet in your mouth.

Scripture says that God's words are sweet to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. (Ps 119.103). We're to meditate on God's word, day and night (Ps 1.2, Josh 1.8). Then God's words get inside us. They live. They give us life. They give us strength, wisdom. Jesus says that the water he gives is like '*springs of water welling up to eternal life*' (Jn 4.14) and that whoever believes in him will have '*streams of living water flowing from within him*' (Jn 7.38).

God gives us **a new power**, '*the power of the resurrection*' Paul is talking about. The Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead gives us life, puts God's life into us. So we can live lives for God's glory. We can't do it on our own.

Do you sometimes wake up feeling heavy, there's no joy?

I told you about the young man, Jason, who met Jesus in prison. Sometimes he is full of joy and hope, reading his Bible, telling people about Jesus. He's been bringing his neighbour to church and to Alpha. But, he can have really low times. He shuts himself away and just drinks, does drugs. He won't speak to anyone. He doesn't answer messages or texts. Jesus has saved him but he's no longer living for him. He's like that at the moment. The sun is still shining outside - but he's pulled the curtains and is shutting out Jesus' love. God's resurrection power is still there for Jason but he's pushing God away. God wants to flood in and fill him again with his resurrection life, a new power. Make sure you have opened your curtains wide so that God's love and power can pour into you.

Paul says his passion in life is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection - and also *the fellowship of sharing in his suffering*. What does that mean? How can we explain it? How do we experience it?

You don't really know someone until you know their struggles. We have a friend our age who has had 3 cancers removed from his gut over the past 7 years. They keep removing huge chunks of his gut. The last time they removed his bladder so he can't pee and has a bag. He no longer has a back passage either so he has a bag for that too. We visit them maybe twice a year so we understand a bit. But his wife knows what it's like for him. She lives with him!

Jesus knows what it's like for us. When we suffer or have problems, when we struggle with sin, when we see others we love suffering - we must look to Jesus. Look to Jesus hanging on the cross. Look into his face as he hangs there. See his

sorrow, his love, his compassion, his understanding as he looks at you. He knows. He understands. And you see just a bit of his suffering. Then we experience the 'fellowship of Christ's suffering'.

Let's pray.

When I survey, the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
Save in the death of Christ, my God!  
All the vain things which charm me most  
I sacrifice them through his blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small:  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

'To know Christ means that we share the way he walked; we share the cross he bore; we share the death he died; and finally we share the life he lives for evermore.'  
(William Barclay p64)

Paul has a determination to press on. 'One thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on.' He presses on. He's going flat out for what's in front of him. You can't race if you're looking backwards. Keep looking forwards. We must press on to win the prize for which God called us heavenwards.

Help me, Lord, to keep pressing on to know you.

Tell Jesus what you want your goal to be.... What's in your heart?

Lord, thank you that you reach out to me. You want to walk beside me each day. Come and be my friend, my companion, my guide, my Lord and my Saviour all the days of my life.