

2025 TALK, 27.7.25, PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11, 12-21

WHAT'S IT WORTH?... WHAT WILL IT COST...?

Do you ever get those days when you wonder: 'What if...?' There are so many turning points in each of our lives. Sometimes significant decisions we have had to take about our direction in life. Sometimes apparently small moments which have had un-seen & far-reaching consequences. In the words of David Bareham: 'These are not coincidences, rather "God-incidencies" ...

Some days you might find yourself wondering, 'What if I had taken that path instead of this...?' Wondering how things might have turned out different for you, either for better or for worse... I am glad to say that I don't spend much time thinking along these lines. There's too much going on to waste any time with that kind of pointless exercise. As Paul reminds us here in Philippians, what matters most is not what is behind us, but what is immediately in front of us. There's a saying which goes: 'God is much more interested in your future than your past' ... Or, from the story of Jacob, when he is 'leaning on his staff' and reflecting on his life, he doesn't dwell on all he has been through, but instead simply says (to paraphrase Genesis 48: 'God has guided me to this point & God will lead us on' ... Jacob's attention is not so much on the blessings of the past, but on the blessings God has for future generations.

Having said all that, I have to be honest with you. There have been times in my life when I have wondered about a particular question: Had Chris & I been fully aware of the cost of local church ministry, before I started as a Christian leader – would we have still decided to go ahead?... There is, of course, that wise parable of Jesus, about first calculating the cost of building a tower, or any project, before you make a start. But often you can't see or anticipate that far ahead. So, it becomes a matter of trust. 'LORD, I don't know what lies ahead, but I will trust you that you will be with me when the road gets tough'... That's been our experience. There have been many mountains to climb. At times it has seemed that the LORD wasn't paying attention, that Jesus was asleep in the boat. But our Good Shepherd has always been there with us. The Light of Life has always lit the way in the dark paths we have sometimes had to tread...

Talking of 'dark paths' & 'tough roads' reminds me of Scottish cyclist, Oscar Onley. Most of you won't have heard of him, because this year was first Tour de France. Every stage, when he is interviewed on TV, after the racing is finished,

he is very honest about how tough that day was. And yet he would never have wanted to have pass up this chance to ride with the best – and to compete to finish in the top three of the Tour de France. Remarkable achievement! (.....)

Let's turn our attention now to the remarkable Apostle Paul as he pens Philippians 3. Another 'purple passage' from the pen of the church's leading 1st century good news preacher. Paul here reflects on what it means to 'share in Christ's sufferings', as well as to share in Jesus' resurrection power. But, unlike the one exception at the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul spends no time here listing his past hardships for the sake of the gospel. NO, not at all. What's more remarkable is this: ***in no way is Paul at all sorry*** for all that he has lost for the sake of the good news of Jesus. What has Paul 'lost'? What has he put in his personal 'debit column', rather than his 'asset or income column'...?

What does Paul ***now*** 'consider loss'... ? Nothing less than his Jewish identity & ancestry... We need to take a moment to pause. To take in the full weight & significance of this extraordinary personal confession... Paul is the most Jewish of any Jew. The most righteous. The most zealous. In terms of observing God's Law & preserving the Jewish scriptures, he was the absolute tops. Paul prized his Jewishness & his observance of the Law of Moses most highly. And then he met Jesus. A dramatic encounter on the road to Damascus... And his system of valuing things in his life was completely re-calibrated...

It's not just that Paul no longer considers these things so important. No - he rejoices that he is able to: 'count these things as garbage' - compared with the priceless nature of knowing Jesus as his Saviour...

How do we value aspects of ***our*** lives ? What do we consider more valuable than other things?... What do we value most highly ? And how does that compare with the value we place on knowing & following Jesus ? I'm always brought up short by that very startling saying of Jesus. It's only found in Luke's gospel & I've yet to hear a sermon preached on it. Jesus said: 'Whatever human beings consider valuable is an abomination to God'... I don't think Jesus is referring to the value we place on other people. (Although there may be times when God ***does*** ask us to be willing to sacrifice a particular relationship for the sake of God's Kingdom... Think of Abraham & Isaac, for example...).

On what do ***we*** place most value? ***One*** way to figure that out is to ask ourselves, what do we spend most money on? Is it our homes? Our cars? Our

holidays? Christmas probably comes quite high on that list too... There are many 'big ticket' items which mean big expenditure...

Please do not misunderstand me. This is not just about our spending money. It's a much bigger question about our hearts & minds... How much are our hearts & minds 'set on earthly things'...? Paul uses this description about the people of this world who are 'enemies of the cross of Jesus'. But I'm sure it can be also applied to believers too... There are things in life we can put 2 much value on, compared to the 'surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as LORD'...

I heard a recent radio interview by Chris Evans recently. He was talking with the explorer & TV personality, Head Scout - Bear Grylls. You probably know that Bear Grylls is a Christian. He features on the latest Alpha videos. You may have also heard that he has just published a book entitled: 'The Greatest Story Ever Told'. It's a dramatic re-telling of the life of Jesus, through the eyes of five different believers. Worth a read. Not so much because of who wrote it, but the subject matter. I made a point of asking our local library to buy a copy. So, at least one copy of 'The Greatest Story Ever Told' should be in there very soon. But I mention this book because of the comment Bear Grylls made about it. He said: "I would give up everything else to have written this book"... Remarkable thing to say. All his exciting adventures. All his achievements. All his fame & fortune. He said he would give up all this, in preference for just writing this book about Jesus. And that's because his own life has been blessed by writing it. And more than that, he has already heard of many people, not previously believers, who have already come to faith in Jesus through reading this book. As Chris Evans commented: 'Lots of people think they know the story of Jesus, but they don't really'... People today, people you know, still need to really 'hear' the good news of Jesus.

Which brings me to one other reflection before I finish with a final challenge... Paul finishes this chapter in agony. He is crying tears of anguish. Why? Because he is all too aware of the people who are living just for earthly things. People who think that what is to their benefit is actually their un-doing. Who is going to share with these people the good news of Jesus? If not us, then who? Alpha is one of the best opportunity believers have for introducing people to Jesus. If you don't believe me, why not just sign up to come along yourself, to find out how the Alpha course works? If asking someone to come with you is a step too

far right now, then just come along yourself. What's the cost? Nine Tuesday nights from your life, and a Saturday of seeking God. Isn't that time commitment worth it? To find out if you might want to invite your friend, work colleague or a family member along in the future?

There are two dates in Cary's calendar which might to help focus our minds at the end of this talk. Firstly, our emergency meeting on **Tuesday 5th August**, for everyone who has any link with C.B.C... This meeting is really about 'what does it cost to follow Jesus'?... What are we prepared to sacrifice for the sake of Jesus? And the other date is **Tuesday 16th September**, when we launch the Alpha course here – both for those who already believe & those who have questions about believing...

So, my final challenge for us all, myself included, is this:

- How much value do we put on knowing & following Jesus?
- And, what are we willing, like Paul, to put in our debit column for the sake of Jesus? What are we willing to lose? What will we sacrifice at the foot of the cross today, for the sake of the gospel & the Kingdom of God ? I wonder?...

STORY OF SACRIFICE & BLESSING ?

The life of Jesus & the story of Paul make this clear: It is only by being ready to put our lives on the line will we find life in all its fullness.... If the people of God don't embrace the cost of going the way of Jesus in these dark days, what hope is there for our world...?

What's it worth ?

What will it cost ?

(TIME OF QUIET)...