

Pressing On

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Introduction

Today, towards our communion, we will pray for one another, believing to be further enabled to put our past behind us and strengthened to reach forward to what the Lord has ahead for us. When the apostle Paul testified about putting his past behind him, he included everything - all the things in which he could place some confidence and all the things in which he could carry some shame. Paul wrote, 'But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ'. Php 3:7-8.

For the apostle Paul, what he was leaving behind was only a small part of his testimony. The major focus of his testimony was what he was reaching forward to lay hold of. He said, 'I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' Php 3:14. We have been hearing that 'upward call of God' in this season of live streaming. We have been hearing a fresh call to know Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour.

Paul wrote about another call from the Lord that would come before His return. It is more like a shout and a trumpet, and we can see by what is happening in the world that the time for this call is getting closer. Reading from Thessalonians, 'For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.' 1Th 4:16-18.

The call of the Lord is preparing us *now*, so that we can hear that final call. We are hearing now, through the presbytery, Jesus Christ knocking on the door of our hearts, homes and churches, asking if He can come in and eat with us.

As firstfruits brethren, we are giving thanks for the clarity and call of God toward us. His word is calling us to *press on*. Our lives are not on hold, waiting for the Lord's return. Nor are our lives on hold waiting for the current health crisis in the world to be finished. Rather, the Lord is very active in speaking to each of us personally about where He wants to heal us, and enable us to grow and bear more fruit.

Testimony

During a live stream service in the middle of July, the Lord challenged me to put my last thirty-one years of walking in this church behind me. The thought of testifying about this was embarrassing, because the body ministry focus that day was toward putting our unhelpful history behind us. The strong sense in the Spirit was, 'Let it go. Walk away from it, so that it doesn't hold on to you.'

I remembered, as I was responding during the live streaming, that back in 1989 the Lord spoke to me audibly in a Sunday church service. In the week before that church service, I had made up my mind to leave the church and go my own way. I thought this was the right thing to do. On that day, in 1989, during the singing, the Lord said to me, 'This is your people; this is where I have placed you.' My self-righteous reasoning and plans for leaving stopped in that moment, and I committed myself to this church community. In the Lord's

visitation last month, July 2020, there was no sense that the Lord was sending me to 'another people'. Rather, He was asking me to send away the package of fear, mind chatter and emotion that had become for me a weight of history. It was all related to the successes and failures I saw in myself, and that I had witnessed in others in this church. In front of the television screen, I said 'Yes' to the Lord, and a burden that I had not been conscious of before, rolled off me and then away from me.

The faith that I received that day was that the Lord was going to renew my mind and the language of my conversation. I knew that, as I was obedient to follow Him, He was renewing my reference points. They were no longer behind me, in my history; they were now all ahead of me. Every reference point for each new day was now in His hand. The verse that came alive to me was, 'And indeed if they had been remembering the country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.' Heb 11:15. The Scripture accounts that because Abraham and his descendants were obedient to follow the Lord, they couldn't remember, or 'call to mind', the cultures, customs, losses, hurts and failures that they had chosen to leave behind. This was the very real result of God making covenant with Abraham. All of his past was put behind him, and in obedience he walked away from it so that it no longer had a hold on him. This is what the Lord has done for me with my church history. The weight of it, which I was carrying, has been rolled away.

Paul wrote, 'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God'. Heb 12:1-3.

Today, will you join me in remembering the call of the Lord to you personally? Will you put off your weight, your burden, of church history, and let it go? All of the good and all of the bad of your church history, of your denomination, and of your experience can be rolled out of the way. The Lord is sanctifying for Himself a people, born of the Spirit, who do not reference where they came from, and do not need to control where they are going. The Lord is freeing His people to be obedient people, led by the Holy Spirit.

My testimony is that I am enabled to walk away from my history, and that it stops having a hold on me, as my language and conversation changes. The apostle James said it this way, 'If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.' Jas 1:26. The word of deliverance and healing, in this season of visitation, is enabling me to bridle, or tame, my tongue. The reflex to refer to yesterday's failures or successes is not what multiplies fellowship today. What the Lord has put on our lips is a personal confession of faith, which is a direct result of our hearing and receiving His word that is proclaimed to us.

The word of God proceeds from heaven, and goes forth from the presbytery as 'the apostles' doctrine'. We can touch it, taste it, and understand it as we confess it with our lips, in 'the apostles' fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers'. 1Jn 1:1-3. Rom 10:10. The prophet Malachi wrote of this deliverance from history, which comes through confession. 'Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name.' Mal 3:16.

As we step away from our history, even our 'remembering' is being healed, and is finding its source in what the Lord is now writing. We need to remember and dwell upon what the Lord is writing, rather than dwell on what we can recall from past events. This is part of our pressing on in the Lord to lay hold of what He has written about us. 2Co 3:3.

Attainment

While the Lord is calling and enabling us to put off the weight of our history, He is not asking us to *forget our journey*. Our journey has been with Him and He has been with us. Every son of God has stories about the lessons they have learnt as they have journeyed with the Lord. These lessons need to be carried forward as part of our testimony to the next generation. Our testimony continues to be helpful and effective as we stay current with the fellowship of the Lord's proceeding word.

Paul wrote about attainment, exhorting us, 'Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by *the same rule*'. Php 3:16. Attainment has the sense of successful discipline and training. What we learn becomes for us a 'rule', which we maintain by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord, as our Master, has been training us through discipline. He continues to call us to follow Him and to learn from Him. Mat 11:29. Although His discipline is painful, if we are trained by it, we will attain the fruit of righteousness. The apostle Paul explained, 'Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.' Heb 12:1. As those who have been trained by the discipline of the Lord, let us walk in what we have attained. What we have learnt will not get in our way as we press on in the fellowship of repentance and faith. Knowing the help of the Holy Spirit, we can continue to hear and learn.

Shaking heaven and earth

Paul said to the Hebrews, 'See to it that you did not refuse Him who in *now speaking*.' Heb 12:25. We are living in a time when the Lord is shaking the whole earth. Most importantly, though, in this time, *the Lord is speaking*. My encouragement to you today is to not be so concerned with the world news. Rather, dwell on what the Lord is saying and give yourself to your confession of faith, which is compelling you to speak because of what you are hearing. We have been exhorted recently about being lazy regarding righteousness. Each of us can know what the Lord is currently saying to us about our sonship walk with Him. If we press on to be fruitful in this season, according to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us, we do not need to be so worried about the shaking that is going on around us. Paul wrote about 'the removal of those things that can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain'. Heb 12:27. Let us speak about and focus on those things that remain.

Faith, hope and love

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, saying, 'Now abide faith, hope, love, these three *remain*; but the greatest of these is love.' 1Co 13:13. Faith, hope and love are all virtues that belong to Jesus Christ. As we press on to lay hold of our unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering, these virtues of Christ are given to us and become our most precious possessions.

During difficult relational circumstances, in which the Lord is shaking us and sifting us, He is giving us opportunity to recognise what is most important and precious to us. In the past, for many of us, being 'right' was the most important thing. It was also very important to be *seen* to be right. My confession of change is that, up to the very recent past, I would justify my anger because, to me, it was important that what was right was explained, particularly to my family. In this current season of live streaming the communion word, we have heard the call to stop eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and to make the life-changing shift to eat only from the tree of life. As we have done this in obedience to His word, the Lord has renewed our minds by the Holy Spirit. We are being enabled to remember that, in heated moments and difficult interactions, the most important thing is to remain in

His love. This means that in various relationally difficult circumstances, we do not need to argue for what we think is right. What is becoming far more important than being right is *abiding in His love*.

The love of God is *the divine nature*. It is the foremost of these three virtues because our faith works by love, and our hope is fulfilled as the love of God is poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit. Gal 5:6. Rom 5:5.

It is our personal accountability as a son of God to continually lay hold of the fellowship in which these virtues of Christ are established in our life. Jesus explained this accountability in the parable of the hidden treasure. The man who was illuminated to the message of the kingdom of heaven sold all that he had to buy the field in which he had found the treasure. Mat 13:44. An ongoing commitment to *abide in the fellowship of Christ's church*, where faith, hope and love are being established in our life, is the hallmark of a firstfruits Christian who is pressing on to maturity as a son of God.

Conclusion

The Lord made a covenant with Abraham to bless him and his descendants, and all the families of the earth. Receiving the word of the Everlasting Covenant enabled Abraham to put his past behind him; and it gave him a participation in the faith of the Son to not be afraid but, rather, to be obedient to God.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote about the New Covenant. 'But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Jer 31:33. In the fellowship of the communion meal administered by the presbytery, we are receiving the word of the New Covenant written on us. This operation of God enables us to put our past behind us, and it gives us light to focus on what the Lord is doing *now*. He is preparing us for what is ahead. We are being transformed by the working of God in our lives. We have been enabled to put off fear, and we are becoming obedient people.

Our conversations do not need to recount the failures and success of our history. Nor do we need to dwell on the current world news. Our conversations are an offering to multiply the fellowship of the present truth word. Through genuine, humble testimony and confession, we can encourage and build one another up, in love. Eph 4:16.

The uncertainties in our current health crisis have meant that many of our normal plans have been put on hold. Because we do not know what level of restrictions we might be under in the future, we can feel as though our life is on hold. Be exhorted today that, under whatever level of restricted activity you are living in your community, this is a most active time to be pressing on to lay hold of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote, 'Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, *I press on.*' Php 3:12-13.