

Calum Cameron - Philippians 1:6 - A day that changes everything

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 May 2017

Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Well over the six weeks I'm here the plan is hopefully over the Sunday evenings to be working through a short series through the Book of Philippians and that seemed like a really good idea at the time but when I sat down and looked through the Book of Philippians I realised you could spend six months and barely scratch the surface but we'll see how things go. Now before we jump into chapter one of the Book of Philippians I just want to paint a wee picture in your mind. I wonder if you know the kind of person who when they're given a book a novel a book of fiction they begin reading it and they jump straight to the end and they read the last page. Now my own mother does this and it's infuriating.

I recommend a novel to her and the first thing she does is read the ending she says oh that's nice and it really grinds my gears but it does add a certain a different perspective to the way you experience the story if you know how things end. I just want to have that in our minds as we approach the beginning of chapter one of Philippians. See God's word tells us what's on the last page. God reveals to us how the story of life of our experience will end. We know that a day is coming in the future. Paul mentions it twice in the few verses we're going to look at in verse six and verse eleven he refers to the day of Jesus Christ and this evening we're going to consider this as a day that changes everything. It changes your priorities it changes your desires it gives you a totally new perspective on life and I want to break it down into two points. First is that the day of Jesus Christ gives

Christians an unshakable confidence for the future and then secondly the day of Jesus Christ means radical transformation now in the present. So really we're just looking at the day of Jesus Christ from those two perspectives from the future and from the present. Now as we look at this unshakable confidence I think it's good to remember that the context in which this letter was written Paul is a guy here writing from prison so at a human level he should be full of uncertainty. He's awaiting news which could mean either his death or his release and later on in the book we will see him battling with that tension.

But Paul is also writing to a church that's facing uncertainty. It's a church that seems to be suffering from some kind of disunity. There seem to be problems going on here. It's a church that's facing persecution. It's a church that's facing the general struggles of being Christians in a hostile world and there are so many themes in these opening verses that we could pick out. I think the clear focus throughout Philippians is on the person of Jesus Christ. See in less than four pages in our Bibles Christ is mentioned 93 times. The letter begins with the grace of Jesus Christ. It ends with the grace of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the reason verse 13 for Paul's imprisonment. Paul goes on later on to say his goal is to see Jesus proclaimed. Paul's Christ centredness, this focus of his on Jesus Christ is just epitomized in verse 21. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. So Jesus Christ is absolutely central to Paul's message. And now just as we focus in on these opening verses after his opening greetings and his thanksgiving for these Philippian believers, we see that Paul just launches into this reason for his confidence. In verse 6 we have on the screens, I am sure of this. I am certain of this one thing that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. That is an incredible assurance for these believers. Right at the beginning of his letter, Paul does not jump straight into sorting out their problems. He does not jump straight in with admonishment and rebuke. He reminds them of their confidence. We are reminded right at the beginning that God is involved in their salvation from beginning to end. Just think about how important that pronoun is. Who began the good work in these people? Who began the good work in us? Not Paul. Not the persuasive ability of any human preacher. Not even the

Philippians themselves, but he who began. God who began this good work. Paul is making it explicitly clear that God is the initiator in their salvation. But not only that, the point also is that God finishes what he starts. God sees the job through to completion. Now Paul is not saying that our lifestyles don't matter. He is not saying that it is not important how we live. He is not saying that our actions and our faith are unimportant. But it is clear that the initiator, the author and the perfecter of our faith is God. It is someone external from ourselves. Later on in chapter two, Paul goes on to say, it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. You see, as Paul looks ahead to this day when Christ returns, he has every confidence that God will finish what he has started. And that has to be the foundation of our confidence. If we think that Christianity is all about getting ourselves into the right spiritual shape before God accepts us, we've totally missed the point. The beautiful thing about the gospel is that our confidence is not placed in ourselves. Our confidence is placed in God. The gospel, if we grasp it, means that we have to recognize that we cannot get ourselves to that level. As we look to the future and as we think about the reality of Jesus Christ returning in judgment on the day of the Lord, we have to recognize there's no chance we can stand on our own two feet.

[7:07] We sang earlier in Psalm 130. If God were to mark our sins against us, none of us could stand. Now this day of Jesus Christ that we're thinking about in Paul's letter, it comes from the Old Testament background of the day of the Lord. Now one scholar called Ralph Martin says that that is the act of God bringing judgment on his enemies and salvation for his people. It is the climactic day that will be a culmination of God's purposes at the end of history. We read that in Zechariah. You can also read it in Joel chapter 2 and we can learn more about it from Jesus own words in Luke chapter 12. He says there, be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet so that when he comes and when he knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you he will dress himself to serve, he will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak. But Jesus says this, understand this, if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. And the reality of that is that that could happen even as we leave this place tonight. That could be a joyful thought for a Christian. It should be a joyful thought for a Christian. But I just wanted to take a moment and think about the reality of that situation. The day of Jesus Christ is written in history. It is as sure as the sunsetting this evening. And the question we have to ask ourselves is are we ready for our master's return? John Stott wrote that the day of Jesus Christ is fixed in the Father's diary. He says our salvation is as assured as the coming of that day. For the believers, the objects of this good work, we must be made ready for his coming. Stott goes on to say that our salvation can no more be forfeited than the Father can break his pledged word to glorify his Son. That's why we can say with such confidence with Paul in verse 6 that I'm sure of this, that he who begins a good work will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. But maybe you aren't sure whether God has begun that good work. It's often people feel like we haven't done enough. We haven't got ourselves to a certain level of morality. There was a man in Philippi where Paul's writing this letter to a jailer and he asked a simple question. He said,

Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And Paul simply told him, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It is as simple as that. And Paul makes it even clearer in his letter to the Romans. He says, if you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and if you believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

As Thomas said this morning, there's not a single person in here who is beyond that promise. And it's interesting, I think, that we find if we turn to the letter of 1 Peter, we find a similar confidence right at the beginning. Before anything else, chapter 1 verse 4, Peter says that if you're a Christian, your inheritance is being kept for you in heaven. And he says that you are being shielded by God's power through faith. I think again, it's another reminder that we are not trying to earn a certain reward. We're not trying to achieve salvation through our own effort. It's something that's kept secure for us even now. And we, Peter says, are being kept for then. See, both Peter and Paul and the other apostles lived their lives with their eyes fixed on the day of Christ. It filled them with this unshakable confidence. He who begins the good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of

Christ. Now, if that's the case, and if verse 6 tells us that salvation is God's work from start to finish, from beginning to end, the question for us is, does it really matter how we live? If we are safe for that day through faith, is there any reason to worry about sin, about our lifestyles, about obedience? One author put it like this. He said that human logic at this point might reason, if God has begun and will complete his work in us, then surely we are relieved of any responsibility. It would be easy to be lulled into spiritual indifference by that kind of reasoning. See, our tendency is to say, you know, if God does the work, we have nothing to do. We have nothing to contribute. But Paul's logic as he goes on here is the reverse of that. Because God is at work in you, we have a responsibility to respond to that work. See, God's good work in us is not just forgiveness from sin. It's not just adoption into a new family. It's also a gift of new life. And it's a new life that changes everything. It's transformational. It means that we should want to please God. We should desire to obey him, to change our sinful patterns and habits. So the second point I want to focus on this evening, the day of Christ means radical and powerful motivation for change now. So we've looked at confidence in the future. We're moving to consider how that affects us in the present in our daily lives. Jonathan Edwards, the American preacher during the Great Revivals a few centuries ago, he said that a Christian is much like a butterfly. See, like a Christian, a butterfly goes through a radical transformation in its cocoon. He goes through something called metamorphosis. It changes from a caterpillar into a butterfly.

[14:22] Now imagine that butterfly was to come out of its cocoon and continue to crawl along a branch all day like it was still a caterpillar. It's an absurd thought. But Jonathan Edwards point is this, a Christian is much the same. A Christian is given new life. A Christian is a new creature. So for us to continue living exactly the same way we did before is absurd.

We should want to make use of our new life to display to others the transformation that has happened. See, as we look to the day of Christ, we have a responsibility not only to grow but to display signs of that growth. And as we look on into the chapter, we see that just so clearly through Paul's prayer. What does he want for these believers? It is my prayer, verse nine, that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. So what does that mean? I think it means that the reality of the day of Christ should totally direct how we live now. See, knowledge of what might or might not happen in the future, it radically changes the way anyone lives. An example of this, imagine you give two people the same exact job to do for a year. Say it's something mundane and repetitive like polishing shoes or sealing envelopes or something. So these people have to do the same job for 10 hours a day for a whole year. And you tell the first person that at the end of the year they might receive some money. You tell the second person at the end of the year that they'll get £10 million. Will these two people go about the job in the same way, with the same energy, with the same enthusiasm, with the same integrity?

Of course they won't. The second person has an awareness that there's something incredible waiting for them. The first person doesn't know, maybe. The point is our view of the future has a huge impact on how you live in the present. And as we look to the day of Christ's return, as we reflect on it, as we think about it, our desire should be like that of Paul's prayer. And I think that is a constant challenge for Christians. We know that we should be like the person who knows they're receiving this incredible fortune.

That should be shining through in us. We have this knowledge that something incredible is waiting for us. And I think we have to constantly be asking ourselves, would other people see that? Would the people in our communities see something different in us? Would they recognise that we are different? Of course none of us are perfect. We are all still flawed. We are all still prone to inconsistencies. But we are called in verse 27, Paul says, to live a life worthy of this gospel. I think it's also helpful to read what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. He says there, now brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly as labour pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape. But you brothers and sisters, you are not in darkness so that this day should not surprise you like a thief.

You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For

those who sleep sleep at night and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing. Let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. With an awareness of the imminent day of Christ, with an eager anticipation for His return, our lives should be characterised by that hope, by that confidence. So the day of Jesus Christ is a future reality that shapes how we live in the present. It is often said that Christians live within this tension between what is called the now and the not yet of our redemption. Often that tension can be difficult.

[19:55] Sometimes we look into our own hearts and we find that we are so far from where we want to be. Maybe some of you are sitting here today and you are thinking that your love is not abounding more and more. You do not feel particularly pure or blameless. But remember that Paul speaks about this work that has begun in you. And I think that is a hugely important word. It reminds you that you are not the finished article. I am not the finished article. See, people who trust in Christ and who repent of sin do not instantly get made perfect. And we know from experience that so many of the problems that Paul addresses in these New Testament letters come from within the church. They are internal problems. And that is so true in our own experience today. Of course there are external challenges. There are pressures from our culture, from our world, from our society. But some of the greatest challenges the church faces come from within. The church is a community of imperfect and flawed people who are brought together and dependent on God's grace. One writer said this. He said that God sees us as we are. He accepts us as we are. He even loves us as we are. But by His grace He does not leave us as we are. You see, God has already begun a work in us to transform and to renew. We thought about how Peter in his letter speaks about the same kind of confidence as Paul. But Peter also goes on to say that in the context of that confidence, it's so important how we live. He says in verse 16 of chapter 1, be holy because the God who called you is holy. But we were first reminded there that true Christian confidence is not dependent on ourselves. Peter writes about this living hope that is rooted firmly and deeply in the action of God. Often the New Testament writers will use something people refer to as an indicative imperative. And it sounds big but really it just means a statement and then a command. And the way they do this is they say here is something God has done. It's descriptive. And then the instruction of the command is this is how you should live in light of that. And getting that context right is so important.

And we have it here in Philippians. Paul makes it clear that what we know is true should shape and affect what we do. Our action should be totally influenced by our belief. And the two cannot be separated. The Thomas was getting at this this morning. What we think and what we do are inseparably linked. And thinking about the day of Jesus Christ has real implications for how we live. And I think that includes all of our everyday experience. Alec Motier said that the assurance that God gives us here in Philippians chapter one not only guarantees the outcome it guarantees to that every experience of every day for in all things God is putting the finishing touches. Good news he says bad news difficulty blessing unexpected happiness unexpected trouble. All of it has a purpose. You see knowing the ending of the story transforms how we view the present. As we continue to study Philippians I hope we'll see that the world that they lived in it brought them great suffering. It brought them immense challenges.

But we share in so many of those in many ways our world has not changed. I think you see this over the last few years the situation in the Middle East has just been at the center of our world's attention. The news is just increasingly full of stories about terrorist attacks. Islamic State. We see political corruption hate crimes poverty all sorts of horrific stories on a daily basis. See despite the great advancements humanity has made since this letter was written in so many areas in science and medicine and education in our general living conditions. People are still in desperate need of hope and confidence.

That's been further highlighted by the recent tragedy in Manchester. It leaves people with a sense of injustice a sense of hopelessness. How can we react to horrendous events like this? How do we make sense of this? I think it's helpful in the face of times like this to remind ourselves of the big story of God's redemption and what he's doing through the whole Bible to remind ourselves that God created a good world a world without the evil and the chaos that we see. God created human

beings to enjoy a relationship with him. And human beings mess things up we disobey God. That special relationship was broken. Our world became imperfect. It became corrupted by evil and sin. This is why we see such terrible things. Then what we read throughout the Bible is God's plan to put things right. To redeem the world to bring justice to the nations. The hope of the Gospel of course is that

Jesus died to pay for sin. To give us forgiveness. Of course it's that and it can never be less than that. But it's not only that. The hope of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. That he is alive today which means he is coming back. And when he comes back he will bring ultimate justice to this broken world. On the day of Jesus Christ he will right every wrong. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. See our confidence and our certain hope is that Jesus Christ will come back here. On the day of Christ he will come back and put this world the right way up. He will judge with true justice. He will make all things new. And I think we have to be constantly mindful of that in the face of present suffering. In the face of present difficulties. And this becomes clearer and clearer the further we go into Philippians. Verse 29 says, For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake. See we can't always make sense of things now. But we know, we trust, we have confidence that God is sovereignly at work every step of the way. St. Clair Ferguson put it like this. He said that God has a long term plan. He says God is getting us ready to see and to share in the glory of his son. See the verb that Paul uses to bring to completion it suggests the idea of putting the finishing touches to. That is what God is doing in our lives. It reminds me of a show on television when I was younger called Art Attack. I have no idea if it is still on TV now. But at a certain point in the show an artist would go out into a big open area like a field or a car park or something. And he started laying down all these random household objects like old clothes, like bed linen, broken household appliances, all these totally random things. And while he is doing this the camera is down at ground level so you can't really make sense of what he is making. And after a while when the artist finishes the camera zooms out to a view from the sky. So you are looking down on the whole project. And from there you can see that all these random things that have been randomly laid out have actually been forming a beautiful piece of art. Something that you could only see from the right perspective. I think we as believers have to be mindful that until the day of Christ we might not always be able to make sense of what God is doing. We might not always be able to understand the suffering that comes our way. But we know the ending. We know it's on the last page of God's story of salvation that Jesus Christ will return. Now in the present we are still called to live out that story. So the day of Jesus Christ gives Christians unshakable confidence for the future. But it also radically transforms life in the present. If you are a Christian today you know that from the beginning of your salvation right to the end God is at work in you. And I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ. Amen.