

## DO NOT LOOK BACK



### FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND

Life teaches us hard lessons sometimes, but usually ones that benefit us long afterwards. As a young and inexperienced middle-distance runner in the mid-seventies, I found myself leading an 800-metre race with only 100 metres to go. I could not believe it. With about 50 meters left, I panicked, looked around me, and within seconds lost the lead and ended fourth. The first place was within reach. So close, yet so far.

There are many examples of people in the Bible who looked back, or around, and paid the price. Some died. Some sank but survived. We read about Lot's wife who looked back at Sodom while they were fleeing the city as it was being destroyed. She did not survive (Genesis 19:26) because her focus was wrong. Interestingly, we are never told her name. She is always just called "Lot's wife". Peter, the impulsive one, got out of the boat, walked on the water – an absolute miracle – and then, through probably the same disbelief as I experienced in my race, looked around, and sank until Jesus saved him (Matthew 14:28). On a more positive note, Paul reminds us of the following:

<sup>13</sup>Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. –  
**Philippians 3:13-14**

To understand the context, read the third chapter of his letter to the church in Philippi. Paul gave up everything he was and had, and followed Christ to the end. In verse four he says he could have depended on the flesh, in this case referring to his background. He was after all born in the right family, tribe, and circumstances. He could have lived an easy life, but he says he counted all of this as a loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (verse 8). He continues that he wants to be **found in Him** (verse 9); that he may **know Him** (verse 10); and that he **attains the promise** of the resurrection (verse 11).

Let us now look at the verse quoted above. Paul uses three verbs: **forgetting**, **reaching**, and **press**. He firstly says that he has forgotten the things that are behind him; is reaching out to the things that are ahead of him; and he presses towards the mark, his goal, which is his calling as a missionary and a maker of disciples, as Jesus asks of us in Matthew 28:20. He uses interesting words – “press” and “mark”. He is utterly focused on the goal, the mark, so that he can attain the prize. Maybe when writing “mark” he thought of archery as a sport.

Paul mentions two even more important results of his focus: he says he wants to be **found in Him** and **know Him**. This shows the deep intimacy of Paul's relationship with Jesus Christ. He wants to be found in Him – his life is so immersed in that of Jesus that people do not see the man Paul, they see Jesus. He continues that he wants to know Him, taking the intimate connection even further. He has the desire to understand God in as much detail as he as a human being is capable of. He is not looking back at what was or could have been but instead focuses on the winning line.

The apostle must have been an avid follower of sports events as he often mentions this. In 1 Corinthians 9:24, 2 Timothy 2:5, and Hebrews 12:1 he mentions the runner. In 1 Corinthians

9:26 he mentions a boxer. He describes the preparation and attitude needed to attain the goal – running to the end, and not hitting vainly in the air but focusing on the opponent.

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Are you looking back at the life you lived in the past? Maybe you enjoyed it. Maybe you still yearn for times you think you had it better than you have it now. The problem is not thinking about the past. The problem is trying to relive the past when we know that it belongs just there – in the past. Let it go. Your focus should be on the future. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you have nothing more to look forward to than to see Him as He is:

<sup>2</sup>Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; **for we shall see him as he is.** <sup>3</sup>And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.  
– **1 John 3:2-3**

This does not mean that your physical life on Earth ceases to have meaning. Live life to the full but live it in Him. Are you scared of the things you see around you? Tension in Israel and the rest of the Middle East, social unrest in America, Europe, and most other countries, are all clear signs that point to a coming and terrifying calamity for those whose lives are not entrusted to Jesus, those who are not found in Him. These are the waves Peter saw while he was part of a miracle. Despite the world spiralling down and being sucked into a vertigo from which there is no escape, those who belong to Him will endure and triumph because Jesus is present. Jesus saved Peter because his life was already in Him and he was His!

As much as the world wants to deny it, the coming of Jesus Christ will be so terrifying, it is unimaginable. There are many films that somehow try to convey what would happen in the aftermath of the rapture of believers in Jesus Christ. Hollywood likes to blow things out of proportion. Yet what will transpire during the tribulation will make these films look mild by comparison. Paul mentions “the day” that will separate those taken from those left behind:

<sup>23</sup>Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) <sup>24</sup>And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: <sup>25</sup>Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, **as ye see the day approaching.** –  
**Hebrews 10:23-25**

## CONCLUSION

This day is approaching fast, getting closer with each sunrise and sunset. How ready are you? Are you looking around you in disbelief, as I did as a young athlete, that you are winning the race and then look behind you to see where the opposition is? Are you looking at circumstances when you should be focusing on the goal? Do not lose focus. Look to Jesus:

<sup>1</sup>Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>**Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;** who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. –  
**Hebrews 12:1-2**