

## Philippians 3 v. 4-14 Matthew 21 v 21-33-end

**T**he parable of the Gospel is based on Isaiah 5. The Jewish nation is the vineyard of God. In Isaiah God puts the question, "And now O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard". Hence, the drama when Jesus puts the question to his hearers "How do you think the owner, when he comes, will deal with those tenants?"

**P**alestine was a troubled place with little luxury and it was familiar to absentee landlords who let out their estates. They were only interested in collecting the rental at the appropriate time. The owner of the vineyard entrusted it to the cultivators. He did not stand over them to exercise supervision. He went away and left them to their task.

**H**ow patient was God. He sent messenger after messenger to all the prophets. He gave them chance after chance to respond to his appeal. The vineyard was equipped with everything they needed; the hedge, the winepress, the tower, which would make the task easy.

**I**n the end he sent his son, thinking they would respect him, but his son was murdered. Their guilt was displayed for all to see and they did not let the owner have his share of the crop. This applied to the Jewish people and was a constant theme of Jesus's preaching. They had failed to bring forth fruit or a crop. The heart break of God. The kingdom of God will be taken away from you says Jesus and given to the Gentiles and through them us.

**T**he Philippians - What were Paul's relations to the Philippians? He had visited them and set up a strong community there. Paul had probably been in prison on several occasions before the final crisis, which brought him to imprisonment in Rome. In Rome toward the end of his life he enjoyed a fairly relaxed regime, receiving visitors and corresponded freely. His letter breathes an assured and secure relationship with the Philippians based on their maturity and reliability and on their constant love and support for him.

**T**hey had helped him generously when he raised money for the church in Jerusalem. Paul considers the implications of his imprisonment. Even if it were to lead to martyrdom he believes what is happening conforms to the pattern of Christ's suffering. How many of us in those critical circumstances could say "My one desire is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings in growing conformity with his death, in the hope of somehow attaining the resurrection from the dead."

**B**ut that is the hope that lies before us in difficult circumstances. Paul is sensitive to the specific needs of the Philippians. There is a threat to the peace and strength of their community. And this matter is one to which Paul gives urgent attention. It is an external threat from Jews who are challenging their faith. From these 'Judaizers' (those following Jewish customs) Paul differs radically and comprehensively. He says earlier in the letter to Jew and Gentile converts, "We possess the true circumcision not of the flesh, but of the heart, and we also offer the true worship, the service not of external rites, but of a spiritual worship.

**T**his was very important for the Philippians to read. It explained clearly that it was not necessary to be physically circumcised in order to be accepted by God. Paul taught the new way to follow. And he said that he had not become a Christian because he was an unsuccessful Jew. He had kept the Jewish law more strictly than most Jews. He had found another sort of righteousness which is through faith in Christ.

**P**aul wrote these verses with great joy and gratitude. What he had gained was of such surpassing worth. He had never ceased to be a Jew but he was glad to have given up his old ways of living, trying to gain God's approval by keeping the law, "I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ and be found in him." Paul had this great hope that at every moment in his life and whatever happened to him he would be in Christ.

**A**s we develop as followers of Christ we have a definite goal. We become aware that we fall short and are aware of our own incompleteness, ignorance and sinfulness. But still we run the race. We all know athletes like Laura Muir. Think of all the years of preparation and all that she has given up to fulfil the goal of success. So Paul was like a runner in a long distance race who kept on running to the finishing post.

**W**e can all think of moments in our own lives when we were drawn to Him. Like a modern athlete says Paul “Forgetting what lies behind and straining to what lies ahead, I press towards the finishing line to win the heavenly prize to which God has called me in Christ Jesus.” We need to ask ourselves from time to time what am I aiming at above everything else? God is transforming our lives for his purpose.

**W**e are caught up in a consuming culture which surrounds us everywhere and whose liturgy is advertising. But Christian commitment presents us with another goal. Paul argues that the essentially Jewish story is now redrawn around Jesus. This is the new way for us all to take a deepening part in Christ’s purpose and love.

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