

Boxing Up & Opening Out

Thomas Robinson, December 28, 2014

Philippians 3:7-16

⁷ But **whatever gain I had**, I counted as **loss** for the sake of the Messiah. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of **knowing Messiah Jesus my Lord**. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may **gain the Messiah** ⁹ and be **found in him**, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through **the Messiah's faithfulness**, the righteousness from God that based on **faith** – ¹⁰ that I may know him and the **power of his resurrection**, and may share his **sufferings**, becoming like him in **his death**, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the **resurrection from the dead**.

¹² **Not that I have already obtained this** or am already perfect/completed (*teleioun*), but I **press on to make it my own**, because **Messiah Jesus has made me his own**.

¹³ Brothers and Sisters, **I do not consider that I have made it my own**. But **one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead**, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the **upward call of God in Messiah Jesus**.

¹⁵ Let those of us who are **mature** (*teleios*) **think this way**, and if in anything you think otherwise, **God will reveal** that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter (*teleiotes*) of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

⁴⁸ You therefore shall be perfect (*teleios*), as your heavenly Father is perfect (*teleios*).

Boxing Day – Looking at the Past in the Reality of God

The day after Christmas, Boxing Day (England, Canada, US), a day for sharing the goods of the season with others, for putting away, boxing up gifts. First day of Kwanzaa. Year end near. It is a good time for reflection and evaluation. Where are we? Who are we? What's next?

We humans are complicated and difficult, even to ourselves. We live in a complicated world that's hard to make sense of. 100 years ago, World War I had sunk into trench slaughter. But on Christmas 1914, thousands of soldiers shared an informal truce in no-mans-land. 10 years ago, we were trying to comprehend the Boxing day Tsunami, 230,000 dead. 2 years ago, people here were digging out from Hurricane Sandy. This year we've been experiencing the deep pain and anger in our nation brought to the surface in the events in Ferguson, Mo and here in New York. ChristianChronicle.org: Churches in Ferguson. But also our Arthur James, 95. Time Mag. Person of the Year: Ebola Fighters: Dr. Kent Brantly.

In our text Paul is reflecting on the losses and gains of his life. These flow from specific experiences and his responses to them. He finds that the losses and gains are the same things. He experienced a new understanding of reality and a transformation of values based on reality when he discovered Jesus. This was the opening to God's faithful love, to grasp suffering, death, hope, life. The world worked the same. But everything changed.

The Importance of Imperfection

Paul challenges his readers not to admire his perfection but to share his disconcerting, wonderful journey, in which he suffered so much loss that turned out to be great gain.

Jesus reveals the goal of life in complete continuity with our lives now but beyond what any of us can reach. It depends on Jesus' faithfulness, but calls us into full participation now. Life is thus to be lived as a continual process of growth: forgetting / straining forward; or boxing up / opening out. We know our world and the common evaluation of things, what are thought of as gains and losses. The challenge is to shift that deception into real knowledge, to see everything in the light of Jesus, to know him, gain him, be in him.

The "One Thing" is the way of thinking, living, valuing life shown in Jesus. It is a call ever higher that continues through the whole journey of life. It is a realization that however far we've come, God is continually calling us to greater heights and depths, more beauty and love. It helps us see both the delights and sufferings and evils of life through a new lens.

The Community of Individual Journeys – Maturity

It's important that this way of Jesus combines both a strong sense of community and a delight in individuality. Paul was building communities that broke down barriers and brought people together "in the Messiah," united by love, into one new humanity.

But "in the Messiah" is a very big place – in the creator who delights in the diversity of his creatures. Paul knows we'll have different journeys from his own, with shared elements.

We each are taken hold of by Jesus (v 12). We each begin the process of translating that experience into the world of our life and possibilities. Paul can't do it for us, nor we for each other. We're in a rich web of relationships, but we are also individual, loved by God.

Paul says maturity is not a fixed state of holiness but living in this process of learning Jesus. It trusts in God's living interaction with us and transforming love – God's Holy Spirit. The more we open to Jesus, the more we learn, grow, mature. Each year/day is new delight.