

VIP Treatment

[Philippians 3: 4b-14](#), [Matthew 21: 33-46](#)

What does it mean to be a VIP? A Very Important Person, that is, rather than a Very Impatient one, or a Very Important Pet. Even the fact that the initial letters are capitalised suggests someone grand, so important that humble lower-case letters simply aren't enough to contain them.

Very Important: is that Very Rich? Very Famous? Or Infamous, even? Very entitled? And if it's that last one, to what are such VIPs entitled? We hear of "VIP Treatment." The term suggests another world of luxury: being kept separate from the rest of us, with access to special areas such as airport lounges and guides to sweep them away from the crowds. It's a world in First Class, receiving seats at the best tables at restaurants, audiences with other Very Important People or applause from onlookers. There is an expectation that others will in some way bow to their very importance.



Our celebrity culture, embracing figures from sport, entertainment and social media amongst others catapults people into the public gaze. Some may be intensely hungry for public recognition, the status of being Very Important.

And if not recognised, there might be an outraged response: "Do you know who I am?"

What could be more humiliating in such a situation than not being recognised? Recognition by someone tells us that we matter, that we're noticed.

The catch is that our culture uses a strange system to decide what, and who matters. Garnering wealth, possessions, appearance, influence, high academic or social status are taken as measures of importance.

This is nothing new, however. Saint Paul in his letter to the Philippians is able to demonstrate that he has plenty of attributes to qualify him as a VIP: "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless." Furthermore, he is a Roman citizen.

Such an impressive CV gives him access to the top table in Jewish culture. Paul is culturally and intellectually supreme. In addition, when he is being beaten by Roman guards, he can quite rightly say to them, "Do you know who I am?" and they have to stop, acknowledge his citizenship and set him free. This is a huge privilege; indeed, in Acts 22:28, the commander says to Paul ruefully, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."

Yet for Paul, being recognised for these things is absolute rubbish; all those accolades and securities mere garbage to be thrown out on the ash-heap. For him, the fact that he has recognised Jesus as his Lord turns everything upside down.

Paul was writing his letter to the Philippians from a prison cell, in very difficult conditions, yet he is full of joy and gratitude. Recognising Jesus as the Very Important Person who loves him transforms his sufferings and indignity into a hymn of praise. We too are called to set aside all those things which might hold us back from following Christ and recognise him as our Very Important Person.



How can we take that question of: “Do you know who I am?” and turn it into “Do I know who he is?” looking at Jesus, who knows everything about us and loves us. And, having found ourselves focusing on Jesus and who he is, how does this transform how we see others? What does “VIP treatment” really look like today?

What space can we make – in the time we have this week, in our prayers and conversations, to consider those who we might otherwise not recognise, or those we find it difficult to love, and make them our Very Important People as the One Very Important Person has shown us?

Revd Vicky Barrett