

The Rock: 06-20-2021

Philippians: The letter of joy

First reading:

Title: I can do all things

Scripture: Philippians 4:10-23

Theme:

Paul closes out his letter by emphasizing how good God is and has been, and how Paul finds contentment. He talks about the blessing of friendship and support that has come from the church in Philippi.

Introduction:

We started our journey through this short letter some months ago, and I talked about our refrigerator verses.

Those ones we memorize and stick on the front of the fridge to encourage is and remind us of God's word, His faithfulness, and as we learned last week -His promises.

This letter has more than its share. I'm not going to read them all, but a few:

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

-Philippians 1:6 ESV

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

-Philippians 2:3 ESV

"...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 4:6-7 ESV

There are more, as I said, nut these are mine. Perhaps you have others. Books we read and even the Scriptures as we grow in them always have that quote which speaks to us and sticks.

The end of Paul's letter, what we call chapter four is different. Besides verse 6-7, we run across one verse that is or has the reputation of being quite possibly the most misquoted and misapplied verse in the letter, if not the New Testament.

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

-Philippians 4:13 ESV

It's great verse, and an important one as Paul says his goodbyes to his friends in Philippi. So, keeping "all things" in context, Paul closes with a few very important things:

1-Contentment (verses 10-13)

2-Friendship (verses 14-17)

3-Finances (verses 18-20)

The Story:

So, as we close out our time in this little letter, let's look at these things and why they are important.

1-Contentment:

In the 10 years since Paul planted this now growing church, he has been everywhere. In his travels along with his friends they have encountered a few things.

As with all of life, they discovered that things seldom go just as planned, not often did they travel in a straight line, and surprise of surprises. Not everyone they met turned out to be huge fans.

Again this week, in visiting Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, those who were very much the opposite of the church in Philippi.

For all the joy and peace and help that came from them, Corinth was the problem child. Yet he loved them and fought to remind them of not just that, but took time to teach them.

Instead of honoring Paul for his selfless attitude and ministry, they ridiculed him for not taking more money (any money in fact), and doing menial work to support himself. They felt he was a poor speaker, lacked flare and showmanship. All he had the nerve to do was preach the gospel.

Paul's sarcasm comes out a bit in 1 Corinthians 4 when after trying to help them to see it's all about Jesus, he says:

"Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things."

-1 Corinthians 4:8-13 ESV

You folks are so smart! All of you. Look the part. Us, well, we're the clowns at the end of the parade. Homeless -vagabond wanderers journeying toward the Son.

They were so smart in fact, that Paul had to write to them again to remind them of the upside down and backwards way of God's Kingdom power and economy:

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 (ESV) We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor,

through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."

-2 Corinthians 6: 3-10 ESV

Why are we here again in the Corinthian letters again when Paul is saying goodbye to Philippi? Context, that's why.

Paul has found that perfect contentment in life, not because he has everything, or that his life has been one series of victories and parties. Let's read just verse 10 again:

"...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."

-2 Corinthians 6:10 ESV

Back to Philippians, where Paul says: "I rejoice!" Why? Because you have been and still are concerned for me. If not able to be present to help, at least in prayer and as we will see by way of finances.

Paul is letting them know that the joy of the Lord, their encouragement, have

helped him to learn genuine Christ centered contentment. That's the key.

I know how to be brought low -Scum of the earth, end of the parade, last in line. Been there, done that.

I also know how to be in the midst of huge blessings -Great success when churches grow, get planted, people come to Christ.

In everything, yes, everything -fat and happy, skinny and very hungry and occasionally depressed. Having every single need met, and sometimes having none met.

The even keel of a Christ centered life. My attitude never changes. Why? Because He strengthens me, sustains me and keeps me balanced.

Remember last year in our studies in 1 John? He reminded his friends then when confronted with all the challenges in this world, and the spirits of the enemy he said:

1 John 4:4 (ESV) Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

-1 John 4:4 ESV

Only when we come to realize in our lives that Jesus is all that we need for contentment, that we find our completeness in HIM. Not in our jobs, relationships, circumstances, homes, money, ETC. Only in Him.

Then we have complete contentment. But until then my friends, you will struggle with the comparison game, that next thing to make you feel better, the next relationship which will fulfill your longings, or the next job or whatever.

It is only Christ who can bring complete contentment, even in those times where you know you've come up short or you find something didn't quite work out -it's ok. Because, "I can do (endure) all things because of Jesus.

He is all I need.

Paul didn't find contentment and have joy "REJOICE" because he had lost his mind. He knew, whether in the confinement of prison or in the pulpit in Athens, he was right in the center of God's will.

I know that is a hard thing for us to grasp, that sometimes in the middle of the hardest moments in life, or the hardest things we may deal with, you are in the center of God's will.

What was it King David said?

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

-Psalm 23:4 ESV

Contentment does not mean that God will meet all your need, IE: Give you everything you want and make sure life is good. That is the perspective of the world.

In fact, Solomon discovered that it wasn't actually pain that made him discontented.

"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun."

-Ecclesiastes 2:9-11 ESV

Our problem is not that we are wearied from too much pain and suffering, but rather from too much pleasure.

Biblical contentment on the other hand is when we realize that Jesus is all we need. From that starting point we discover that our view is reframed and we begin to see things differently.

That is how Paul can do all things - that's how we can too. Most of my time has been taken up with number 1, so onward we go.

2-Friendship

"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit."

-Philippians 4:14-17 ESV

You shared in my troubles all the way from the beginning. From the moment my feet hit the ground in Macedonia, you welcomed us, you received Jesus and you grew as a community.

You understood the Great commission too. It wasn't all about you. How do we know that?

Well, Paul is clear that they joined him in sending him out AND paying his way. Their first missionary.

The encouragement by way of friendship and partnership carried him on, especially through all the hard times. They helped with their friendship and their support.

It is an encouraging thing to know, even in the very good times that you have the support of those who simply do what God has called them to.

I remember as the youth pastor, every summer the districts held camp. I had this beautiful older lady who had a strawberry patch.

Every summer she would come into my office and give me the money she had earned from the patch, to give to a student in need for camp.

I remember one of the years, a young lady really wanted to go and needed that help. That money paid her way and to this day that young lady has no idea who made the way for her and how.

I remember that when she came back from a great experience, she stood in front of the congregation one Sunday and said: "to the person who gave money to pay for my

way to camp, thank you. You changed my life."

Listen to me -You just never know what God can do through you and a few baskets of strawberries. Lives are encouraged, changed, put on different trajectories.

Work it out, stay the course, because you have no idea of the impact of your quiet faithfulness has on another person.

Those of you who are on the receiving end and don't even know about "the gifts" that just happened, remember someone, a grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, teacher, coach fried are putting you before the throne of God in prayer every day.

For your benefit and your success.

You may never know who, but thank God for them! Paul did.

Even when I didn't need anything in Thessalonica, you just kept giving. Again, even though I didn't need it, it was provided to me. It showed your heart, your friendship, and this will increase in your account in glory.

Quickly in passing: They were not earning their salvation here by doing things to make God happy. They knew God was happy with them and had blessed them by grace

In Jesus. So, out of that overflowed generous giving.

3-Finances

Finances that turned into a fragrant offering before the Lord. And here we have again, our faithful friend Epaphroditus. True to the end as a servant.

Paul remembers the hand of the man who represented the entire community of believers from Philippi.

Listen, it's not that I need the money, yes, thank you for it as it blesses and is helpful. But really, it's you I want! It's you I am happy to have. It's your obedience to God that is now put before Him like a great big temple offering:

"I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."

-Philippians 4:18-20 ESV

Really, this is how God sees our tithes as well. Not to make this about tithing,

but it is a great teaching moment. It's not our money He wants or needs, its us. Our hearts!

So, when we give of our income in a faithful and trusting way, we are showing our hearts. That we trust Him to take care of us and provide for us out of the 90% left. It's a wonderful thing actually.

Paul says you giving is a "fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable." Wow. That is how God sees you and your faithfulness when you give with a thankful and generous heart.

You see, we don't have to give in order to get. We don't sow seeds to some TV charlatan and shyster who is lining their pockets with our gullibility. Telling us that to give in that way sows seeds for a better house, boat, car or job.

That is a theology right from the pit of hell and is destroyed with a proper and good understanding of "doing all things through Christ who strengthens me."

You see, it is actually the tangible result of you and I working out our salvation, living up to what we have already attained, and honoring God because of and through Jesus.

Doing these things, we find God will supply all of our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.

Once again, we are back where we started as Paul says goodbye.

I am content in all things because of Jesus.

Because of Jesus, you have shown your deep love and friendship and support for me.

God then, will supply all of your needs - according to His glory and riches.

Contentment, friendship, finances. What a way to end -circled right back around to King Jesus! Growing in community and friendship no matter the situation.

Close in prayer.