

Philippians 4: 10-23

Contentment Through Jesus Alone

Welcome and prayer

Before getting into the closing part of Philippians, I'd like to review where we've been by focusing key verses from each section. Hopefully these verses tie together our journey through this amazing book.

1:6--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—The Apostle Paul knows, and writes, that he has certainty about Jesus' work in his life. He acknowledges that Jesus calls us and works in us, and it's a good work, and that He will see it through at the chosen time. This should give us hope, which so many people desperately need these days.

1:18--What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. --We learned further that Paul does not really care if we share the gospel with perfect motivation, or pretense—all of the time. Even if we have “wax in the cracks” of our vessel (a method used to deceive customers) God can use our feeble efforts to produce a genuine faith. One of the first times that Tanya and I heard the gospel was from a “health and prosperity” preacher, and despite his insincere intentions, God used that experience to draw us to the truth of Himself. And for that we praise Him, and rejoice, just like Paul.

1:21-- For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain....²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.--In this day and age, we have been convinced that we should have a trouble free life that is long and prosperous. These verses tell us that living for Jesus is our greatest gain, here, and that dying, to be with Him is even greater. We also heard that Paul was content despite his circumstances, including lots of suffering. Christians have been in conflict with their own flesh, and the world for 2000 years. We should not be surprised, disappointed, fearful or frustrated when things are not going our way. We should not be afraid of sickness or even death, because whether this life is good, or not, Jesus has already won the victory.

2:8--And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross....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.--It is stunningly incredible that God Himself took on human form, and in his humanity, was obedient, allowing himself to be killed in the most cruel fashion on that Roman cross. That same person is also the one that is so exclusive in his claims about his divinity, and being the only way to right relationship with God, that it is offensive to millions of people. Yet at also the same time, God's word tells us that every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that He is God. No other religious figure or person has ever made such a claim—it is either reassuring, or terrifying, or both.

2:14--Do all things without grumbling or disputing,¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,--We live in a crooked and twisted time of moral relativism that seems to conspire against us at every turn—Paul commands us not to grumble or complain, so as to be a good example. This is certainly a challenge right now.

2:27--Indeed he [Epaphroditus] was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow—Christians need close and supportive friends, and Paul was no different. Mercy is one of the main hallmarks of God, and our walk with him—I don't know if we'll ever meet someone like Epaphroditus, or even Paul, but if we do we'll all likely just sit and marvel that God saved any of us.

3:2--Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.--Here we received a warning in the strongest of ways, to avoid those that would corrupt and distort God's message. We must not be like the Judaizers that created rules and laws about God where there were none needed. He is enough. His word is enough. We do not need to add or modify anything.

3:7--But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ 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 Christ—Paul had many attributes, characteristics and accomplishments that he could brag about and rely upon. He compared all of them to rubbish, but the word he used was synonymous with dog feces. Everything—that means everything—that we have in this life is dung compared to Jesus.

3:14--I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.--Our walk with, and striving for Him never ceases. To be a mature Christian means that there is never any rest or retirement along the way. God will reveal how we should serve and grow as we proceed along the narrow path that never stops until we finally go home to Him.

3:18--For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.--To live and grow in Him means to be an enemy of the world around us. We are to decrease, while Jesus increases, and this is completely counter-cultural. It is getting harder and harder to be a Christian in our society, and for that we should rejoice. If the apostle Paul had the life that he did, why should we be any different?

4:4--Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.... ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.--In the Bible, words like “always” mean exactly that—despite any circumstances, we should rely on the peace of God to allow of our hearts and minds to remain reasonable so that others may see Him in us. We must show our confidence in Him, and hope from Him in all situations. All of these verses bring us right back to 1:6--**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**

So now, before we get to the text itself a couple of goodbye stories to connect to Paul before he “departs” from his friends.

In 2011, when my mom was on her death bed, and only days away from going home with Jesus, I asked her on the phone how she was doing. She has been bed ridden for about 3 weeks, and was past the point of no return after a 10 year cancer battle. Her reply to my question of how she was doing was “just dandy”, which was typical of her sarcastic nature, but also reassuring to herself, and me, knowing that her life was in His hands at that moment. Paul’s letter and closing had a similar tone of hopeful reassurance for his friends at Philippi.

Secondly, and famously, Gandalf the White from J.R.R. Tolkien's Return of the King said, --
“Well, here at last, dear friends, on the shores of the Sea comes the end of our fellowship in Middle-earth. Go in peace! I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil.”--As Gandalf assured his companions to be peaceful, and not weep tears of sadness about his departure, so did Paul tell us the same things. As we’ve heard, Paul connected with and encouraged his friends.

Now into Today’s text....

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.--

Christianity is truly relational which is obviously more difficult these days, but we must continue to rejoice in Him, and care for each other as best as we can. Paul’s friends in Philippi showed great care for him, and as we approach the dark days of winter and a potentially lonely Christmas season, we too should seize every chance to share his hope and love.

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. -- Paul was of course, imprisoned at he wrote this. Paul lacked for no material things before his miraculous conversion, and now in prison he says he lacks for nothing, since Jesus is with him. The word "content" here comes from the Greek philosophy of Stoicism and means "independent or self-sufficient". In other words, we should not seek our contentment from any place outside of ourselves, once Jesus and the HS abide in us. 1 Timothy 6 also says: But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and³ we cannot take anything out of the world. As you may have heard there is no trailer hitch on a hearse.

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. --As we've heard, Paul endured a great many trials in his life. As a prominent Jew, he also had bountiful advantages, and he lost all of them. His example of the extremes of life, without, and then with Jesus should assure us, that Jesus truly is our all.

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.--This has to be one of the most misinterpreted and misconstrued verses in all of Scripture. Paul is not saying that God will give us whatever we want. It is not saying that if we pray hard enough, things will turn out the way we want. When I was 7 and my parents were separated and heading for divorce, someone told me that if I prayed enough that my parents would stay together. Well of course that was horrible advice, and sent me down a long dark path of being hostile to God and his people for about 20 years. The Apostle is telling us that no matter what our situation, whether good or bad we can get through them through Him. He strengthens us to proceed with Him, regardless of the situation. This goes directly against so much of what we hear today. Our society chases idols of all kinds, and expects that God, if He's loving, will provide our desires. That is simply false. It's Him we need.

¹⁴ **Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.** --All of us need Earthly encouragement, too, so Paul acknowledges the efforts of his friends to help him out, by sharing in his troubles. They share practical and spiritual support.

¹⁵ **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.** --It is also incredible to know that there are people that were there with Paul at the beginning of the gospel, and more incredible that a small group of them directly aided Paul, which in turn, through the centuries led to us being here today. It has been a long process to get God's people to this point right here, yet here we are. Never take for granted that we are God's hands, feet and mouth, so to speak. That should be humbling, yet frightening, too.

¹⁶ **Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.** --There are many famous stories of God's people needing help—George Mueller, Brother Andrew, Dietrich Bonnhoffer, Corrie Ten Boom, and even our friends at the House of Omeed. Paul received assistance in terms of material goods, and we should not forget the importance of that, even when it's difficult as it is recently.

¹⁷ **Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.** --We must seek God Himself, as Paul did, and we must also seek the proper fruit which results from our efforts in Him, and for Him. 2 Corinthians 9:8 states that {God} is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all time, you may abound in every good work. His grace abounds for those of His children that are intent on His works. Matthew 6:21 also states that {for} where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. By helping Paul, they receive credit in God's account, so to speak, since he sees their sacrifices.

¹⁸ **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.** --Paul is simply and directly grateful for what he's received from his friends, too. To be content in Jesus means to be content with where we're at, also. Our offering is no longer fragrant things, but our very selves.

¹⁹ **And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.** --The supremacy of Christ demands that we are obedient, which leads to joy. Everyone is always wondering how to have more joy. It starts, and ends with obedience to Him. We should be captivated by God, rather than the 1000 other things that demand our attention.

²⁰ **To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.**-- Or "O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!" Psalm 84:12. Or Proverbs 14:27 says "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death".

Final Greetings

²¹ **Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you.** --
What if we greeted people or thought of people in the way that Paul does?

²² **All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.**--Even those people that are Romans, and usually opposed to Christ are compelled to greet the Philippians, likely because of Paul's example and influence.

²³ **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.**--What an amazing closing sentiment. What better thing to hope and pray for people?! Paul, who experienced a history altering conversion on the road to Damascus prays for the same grace to abound for his friends and fellow believers. Wow.

To close, from Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, the protagonist Raskolnikov, who had undergone a tremendous transformation like Paul, and every Christian, stated **that** "that is the beginning of a new story - the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life. That might be the subject of a new story, but our present story is ended."

Paul changed, as Jesus saw him through, and entered a new life. Even as this one ends, a much better one begins.

Prayer