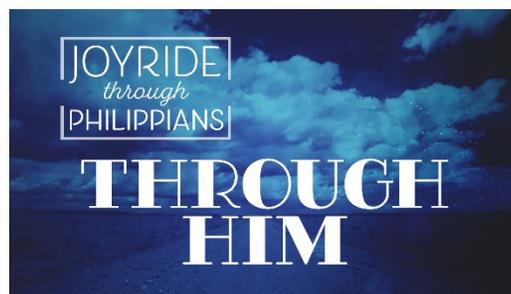


## Through Him

We have just two messages remaining in our 15-part series from the New Testament Book of Philippians that we are calling *Joyride* (because **Joy** and **Rejoicing** is a central theme of this letter to the Church in ancient Philippi, and the Church throughout the ages, and the Church today). We have today, and next Sunday.



Today we will put our focus on verses 10-13 in the final chapter (4).

This passage ends with a *favorite* verse. Let's read it aloud together:

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.<sup>1</sup>

Sound familiar? Is a favorite verse of yours?

Perhaps you even have it memorized. I have it on the screen from the New American Standard translation of the Bible. Maybe you have it committed to memory from another version; perhaps you are *old-school* and have it memorized from the King James Version:



<sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.<sup>2</sup>

I like that one, since it clearly identifies *Him* as **Christ** (and it says *strengtheneth*... which sounds pretty spiritual).

Pastor Paul is saying this of himself; he finds his strength through Christ... and by extension he is saying that of all Christians. Through Christ, believers find our strength for *everything*... all things. Christ is the source, and Christ opens up an infinite number of possibilities for the life of those who believe.

I've been at this *life of faith* for a long time, and I've heard this promise applied in a lot of different ways:

- In the face of challenge
- In the face of opposition
- When responding to God's call
- When pursuing dreams

<sup>1</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 4:13). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#). (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Php 4:13). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

I've even heard it twisted, just a bit, from time to time. It doesn't say "I can **have** all things..." especially when the emphasis is on **things**.

Nevertheless, it is a great promise... a verse that deserves to be a favorite, foundational verse for Christ followers. It is even a great verse for those who may not yet believe, since it offers hope to the hopeless, a supernatural source of strength for the weak. Do you need hope? Do you need strength, protection, power...

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.<sup>3</sup>

But in preparation for this message, from this passage, I noticed something that seemed strange. Like I said, there are all sorts of great translations of the Bible, and I have the NASB on the screen... but I typically do not speak from the NASB or put it on the screen; I typically put the New International Version (NIV) on the screen.

Here is what it says:

<sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.<sup>4</sup>

***This?*** What happened to **all** things or **everything**? That wasn't how I remembered it.

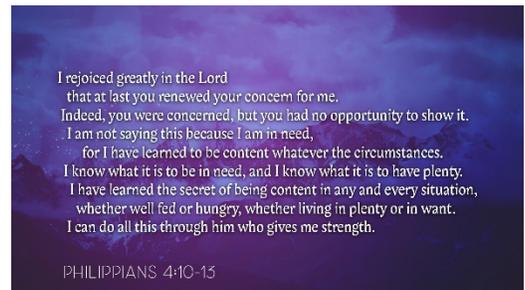
It is common for folk to stick with what is comfortable, and when it comes to Bible versions, folk often stick with the version that aligns with their formative years in the faith. For some that goes all the way back to childhood (are there one or two here that remember the original Hebrew written on the stones that Moses brought down from the mountain?); for me it was my early twenties, during my early years in the faith, and during my college years preparing for ministry. So for me it was the NIV, the version released in 1984.

I checked; that 1984 version of the NIV got it right:

<sup>13</sup> I can do everything through him who gives me strength.<sup>5</sup>

That aligns with what I remembered. But the current version (the 2011 version) messed it up, narrowing the focus, *watering it down* even, to just **this**.

Sometimes more recent translations change words like this because scholarship has gotten better. Sometimes they identify an older, more reliable text. Other times scholarship has improved, leading to a more accurate translation.



<sup>3</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 4:13). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 4:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Php 4:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I am really glad for scholars who are so devoted to help us have the best, most reliable and understandable texts.

But this change in the NIV seems to be less about *better scholarship*, and more about adhering to principles of translation. (I know I'm getting off in the *academic weeds* just a bit... but *hang in there* because I think there is an important point in all this.) The editors of the NIV prioritize more of a phrase-by-phrase meaning over a word-for-word translation (the NASB is more of a word-for-word translation). Both approaches are really good... but for my personal study and speaking, I think the phrase-by-phrase-meaning approach is usually the best.

Word-for-word, the NASB (and the KJV, and the older version of the NIV) is right. The words in the text are best translated:

I can do *all things* through Him who strengthens me.<sup>6</sup>

But when the NIV says:

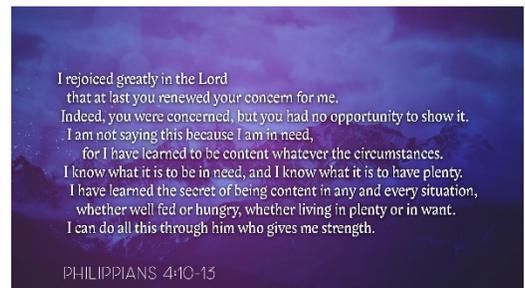
<sup>13</sup> I can do all *this* through him who gives me strength.<sup>7</sup>

I think the scholars are *on to something* important here. It does narrow the meaning by tying it to the context. The scholars serve us well here by calling our attention to the context... and we will, of course, consider the context of the entire passage.

But before we do, take this lesson to heart. When we are studying the Bible, it is good to consider what it is that we are studying. If we prefer a more academic, word-for-word translation, then it is *on us* to consider the context (the text, the culture, and all). If we prefer a more phrase-by-phrase, or even a more contemporary *paraphrase*, then it is *on us* to consider the potential biases of the translators that might color the meaning. This is the sort of stuff that good students of the Bible ought to consider (and you should be sure to demand those sorts of considerations from preachers and teachers).

So... back to the text, that starts with verse 10:

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>6</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 4:13). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>7</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 4:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>8</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 4:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

There it is again: **joy**. Paul **rejoiced** in the concern expressed to him from the Philippian Church. This reminds us of an important aspect of this letter from Pastor Paul to his friends in Philippi. The letter was a letter of **encouragement**, as Paul wanted to cheer-on the new believers. And the letter was certainly a letter of **teaching**, as Paul reminded them of the Gospel, giving them *theological bricks* to build an even stronger faith. But the letter was also a **thank you** letter. The *concern that they renewed* was tangible; the Church in Philippi was supporting Paul with **cash**. They had sent an offering, and Paul was grateful.

When we read the Book of Acts, as well as all that Paul penned in the New Testament, we understand that, for the most part, Paul supported himself during his ministry. He made it clear that he was in favor of pastors and various ministers receiving their support from the church, but for his specific circumstances he found it best to support himself.

We've derived some Christian jargon from Paul's approach: *tentmaker*. If you hear someone referred to as a *tentmaker* in a church context, that isn't because they are a maker of tents... but rather one who is in some sort of ministry leadership, but supporting themselves through some other work. That is what Paul did for most of his ministry; we know that at least some of the work that he did to make a living was to literally make tents. So those who follow that pattern these days are thus known as *tentmakers*.

We have a number of *tentmakers* serving us here at Northshore. Pastors Steve, Laurie, and Damon receive no salary from the church; Pastor Kyle only receives a small stipend. They are *tentmakers*.

But Paul was not always self-sufficient. There were moments in his ministry when he did depend on the Church for support... and the moment of his writing to the Philippians was one of those moments. We know that because he was writing from Roman imprisonment. He couldn't support himself while he was in custody, and he would not have been receiving anything to keep him alive from the government either.

It was different in ancient Rome. In our day, imprisonment comes with reasonable shelter, three meals a day, medical care, rehabilitation programs, and such. But in Paul's day, imprisonment just came with only bars and shackles. Roman jailers were not concerned with keeping prisoners alive, just confined. If others, from the outside didn't provide, that would merely result in a shorter, less-bothersome stay in prison.



Whether they be friends, family, or even benevolent strangers... someone from the outside had to provide in order for a prisoner like Paul to survive.

Roman incarceration put an end to Paul's *tentmaking*, causing him to rely on his friends in the Church for livelihood. Prison was what caused Paul to rely on Churches for support.

So, for those who might think that the ideal approach to full time ministry is to receive a nice salary from the Church, consider the pattern of Paul; it took imprisonment for him to attain this "ideal" of relying on the Church for his livelihood.

It appears that the Philippian Church had supported Paul in some way in the past, but then did not have opportunity for some reason for a season, but then renewed their support.

So, of course Paul rejoiced in renewing this aspect of their friendship. He *was* in need, and the Church in Philippi helped meet that need through their generosity. But it wasn't merely the money; it wasn't merely the material blessing.

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

It is as if Paul knew that there might be a perception that the money was what was most important to Paul in his relationship to the Church in Philippi.

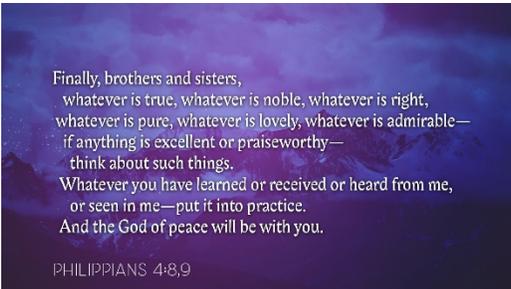
We know that there are those that are in the *religion business* for personal gain; this is not merely a contemporary phenomenon, not something we came up with in our culture (although some in our culture seem to have perfected it). Abuse in the *religion business* is as old as time... a problem confronted both by Paul and by Jesus.

Was Paul in ***need***? No question about it. But his joy was not merely about his needs being met, because he "learned to be content ***whatever*** the circumstances."

There is that word again: ***whatever***.

Perhaps you remember it from last week or simply see it in our text in the preceding verses.

***Whatever*** is: true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy.



Finally, brothers and sisters,  
whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,  
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—  
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—  
think about such things.  
Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me,  
or seen in me—put it into practice.  
And the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8,9

<sup>9</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 4:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

We noted last week that this list was a list that would resonate with the cultural mindset in that ancient Greek city of Philippi... a list of attributes that generally resonates with our culture as well. Paul was using the language of the culture to connect people with Gospel truth.

It appears that he is doing so again here. **Contentment** was among the highest virtues in that ancient Greek culture, especially among those who ascribed to Stoicism. The Stoics were cerebral and self-reliant. They would not allow their circumstances to rule their lives and mindsets; they would *rise above it all*, finding inner contentment in their self-reliance.

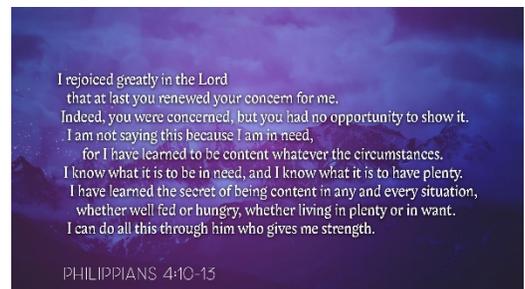
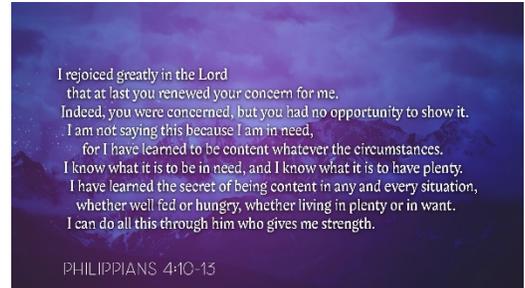
Paul was ascribing that same sort of contentment to his life, and by extension, to the lives and mindsets of all believers.

<sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.<sup>10</sup>

Paul was asserting that he had more than mere head-knowledge, more than merely ascribing to the idea of being content in whatever circumstances. Even though he said he *learned* to be content, it was not a lesson learned in a classroom. He hadn't merely read a book about being content.

Cory Booker is in the news these days because he is officially running for president. I heard him say "I always say I got my BA from Stanford but my PhD on the streets of Newark." A pretty good line. A degree from Stanford is nothing to sneeze at, but he wants people to know that he learned important lessons *the hard way* as a public servant in Newark. (I have to say I like the guy. He seems sincere. *Sincerely wrong*, from my perspective, on many policies and positions... yet sincere. That is admirable.)

Paul is making the same sort of claim. He learned the lessons of contentment across the whole spectrum, in plenty and in need.



<sup>10</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 4:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

There were times when he traveled with the wealthy and powerful, and there were times (including the moment when he penned this letter) when he was in desperate need. This wasn't merely a *philosophy* of contentment; it was a living reality.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.<sup>11</sup>

I've observed that claims like these have more weight when made from need.

Howard Schultz is in the news these days too (there are already a lot of people running for president and there will likely be a lot more). I like Howard Schultz too... mostly because he makes that delicious coffee. (Again, not crazy about some of his political positions, but a respectable guy.)



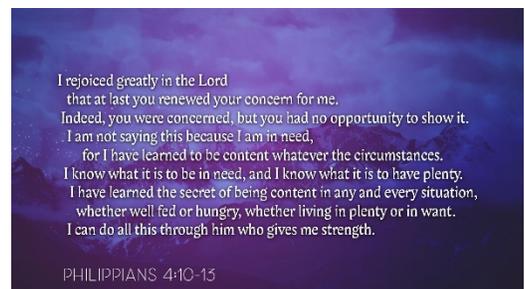
A compelling part of his story is that he has created huge wealth, for himself and many others, with great ideas and hard work. And he did it from a start in poverty. (Funny... get people to pay 4-or-5 bucks for a cup of coffee and you get rich.)

I would imagine that he is mostly content these days, at least in regard to stuff (apparently not content with his job, since he wants another one). I don't know if he would describe his childhood as content (it seems that his discontentment with his childhood poverty actually *fueled* his drive to success)... but even if he did say he was content back then, we might be suspect of such claims because it is a pretty easy thing to say from a position of wealth. We can romanticize those *good ol' days* when they are way off in our rearview mirrors.

But Paul was making these claims of contentment when he was, in many ways, at his lowest (at least in the natural). He knew plenty, and he knew need... and his present circumstances were likely *the neediest*.

Yet he *was content*. He had attained that Stoic virtue of contentment; we was not finding his joy in his circumstances.

But his contentment was not coming from self-reliance, or from some *philosophy* or *idea*. This is where he departed from this highly touted virtue of his day.



<sup>11</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 4:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Howard Schultz may be content as a self-made man, like an ancient Stoic... but Paul was not talking about being a self-made man.

That same sort of self-reliance is prominent today. Many in our culture hold the *opportunity* to be *self-made* among our highest values. For these, **equality** means, first and foremost, *equal opportunity*... everyone has equal opportunity to succeed (to be self-made). That is an interesting ideal, but it is quickly spoiled when we consider that forces beyond our control at least have some part to play (i.e. growing up in Bellevue and growing up in Marysville present different, even unequal, opportunities for success). We can and should strive for equal opportunity, but that is an ideal that is likely beyond our reach.

Of course on the other end of the spectrum there are those for whom **equality** means, first and foremost, *equal outcomes*... everyone should share resources and enjoy basically the same benefit of being part of the community. That too is merely an ideal that is quickly spoiled when we consider that each individual has different capacities for production and success.

There are those who seek **contentment** in self-reliance, and those who seek contentment in reliance on the community. (A libertarian would say leave me alone so I can find contentment; a socialist would say spread the wealth so everyone can be equally content.) It seems to me that our human condition is a mix of both.

We see both in the passage. Paul references his self-reliance, knowing plenty and need. And Paul references, with joy, his reliance on his friends.

But where does he find contentment? He does not find his contentment as a Stoic, from his self-reliance. Nor does he find his contentment from others, even though those relationships are a source of great joy.

What is the source of his content?

His contentment comes from Christ, who gives Paul strength.

This is the “secret of being content” that Paul has unlocked; this is the pattern Paul models for all who believe.

Paul said:

<sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup>

Peace and contentment is ours when we put into practice this life of faith. We see it in the pages of our Bibles in lives like Paul's... and we see it modeled all around us by faithful ones. Listen carefully to the stories of those around us, especially those who have faithfully walked with the Lord for decades, and we will learn, receive and hear.

When we find that we are not content, the “secret of being content” is really no **secret** at all, because it is right here before us.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. <sup>13</sup>

We will not find contentment in our self-reliance, or in *willing ourselves* to merely *rise above our circumstances*.

And we will not find contentment in our community either... not from others including our family, friends, or even fellow believers.

True contentment, lasting peace and satisfaction, is not a matter of our circumstances or relationships... but rather only found through faith, in Christ.

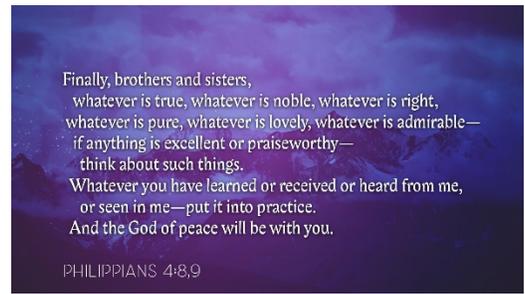
Whatever the “all things” might be, it starts here. The strength to be content, the strength to *press on* and live the Christian life, a life that honors God and gives him glory, a life that lets others see what God has for us... a life marked by peace and patience and worship... that strength for all these things is found in Christ.

Being in Christ renders wealth and poverty meaningless. Being in Christ exposes the folly of self-reliance, as well as the insufficiency of relying on others for true contentment.

So, believers, let's be content in Christ... and bring our discontent to Christ.

And for those who may not yet believe, make today your day. Peace and contentment are here before you. Turn to Jesus.

In this Book of Philippians we have the example of Paul, **and** we have the example of Jesus. Let's recall what is found in chapter 2.

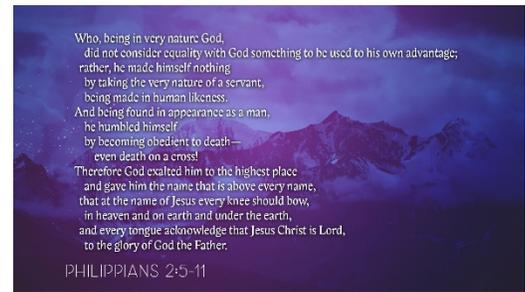


<sup>12</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 4:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>13</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 4:13). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Christ Jesus:

- <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be  
used to his own advantage;  
<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross! <sup>14</sup>



Jesus, God in human flesh, demonstrated contentment in need and in plenty, in humility as well as in triumph. We are called to walk in the same way.

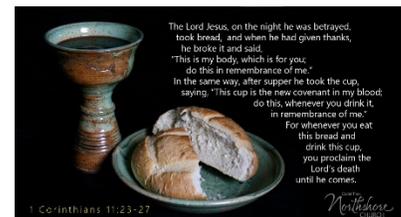
See the wonderful way that Jesus demonstrates for us, the wonderful Gospel-Way that Jesus calls us to walk. Those in humble circumstances learn patience and trust in suffering; those with plenty learn humility and dependence in prosperity, and the joy of generous giving.

On these first Sundays of the month, we come to the Lord's Table for Communion. These are moments to remember what Jesus did for us, and remember what Jesus promised. These are moments to receive; by faith, with these tangible symbols, we receive again, by faith, that which saves us. Jesus is The Way, making the way with His broken body and spilled blood.

And these are moments to **commune**; we call it Communion... these are moments to bind ourselves to *the Jesus way*, to humble ourselves, and there find peace and contentment.

Just as Jesus was content in humility and in triumph, we are called to (and promised) contentment in humility and in triumph, in need and in plenty... all through Him, all through Christ who gives us strength.

Today we have this opportunity before us to receive that strength... again, for most here as we take this familiar step of faith, or perhaps for the first time (or the first time in a long time) to those making a first step of faith.



<sup>14</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Php 2:5–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.