

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Strengthened By Christ.*"

On Sunday mornings we've been in a series on covetousness and contentment, and we've reached our last message!

Last Sunday we started looking at the other main NT passage discussing contentment, and that's **Phil 4:10-13**. We're at **verse 13**, but I want to back up to **verse 11**.

Look for the repetition of Paul saying **I have learned**:

- **Phil 4:11** Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I HAVE LEARNED IN whatever situation I am to be content.
- **Phil 4:12** 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.

This brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: CONTENTMENT IS LEARNED.

Sometimes we look at people and think, "*Oh, they're so content. Must be nice to be them. I wish I was like that, but this is the way God made me...a miserable, discontent person.*"

This isn't what the Bible teaches!

Last week we talked about contentment being a choice. But Paul didn't just choose to be content, he learned to be content.

Contentment is not automatic:

- It doesn't just happen.
- We aren't born w/ this trait.

Instead:

- It's a skill.
- It can be improved upon.

Briefly look at **verse 9** **What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.**

Paul told his readers – including us – to **practice** what he did and said. We're supposed to follow his example.

- What Paul **learned**, we're supposed to learn!
- The attitude Paul possessed is one we're supposed to possess.

In a previous sermon I told you God gave Solomon a lot of credibility:

- If I said wealth doesn't produce contentment, you might not believe me, b/c I'm not wealthy.
- But if Solomon says wealth doesn't produce contentment, you believe him, b/c he was ridiculously wealthy.

Similarly:

- If I said, "You can learn to be content despite your circumstances," you might say, "How do you know? You haven't suffered that much!"
- But if Paul says, "You can learn to be content despite your circumstances," you believe him, b/c he has a lot of credibility.

Listen to what he experienced...

2 Cor 11:23b With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, countless beatings, often near death. 24 Five times I received...forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Does anyone remember from **1 Tim 6** what we're supposed to be content with?

1 Tim 6:8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

Paul said **in hunger and thirst, often without food**. Paul learned to be content w/ less than he told us to be content with!

Listen to this...

Acts 16:22 The crowd joined in attacking [Paul and Silas], and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

So Paul and Silas:

- Had their clothes ripped off
- Were beaten w/ rods
- Thrown in prison
- Had their **feet in stocks**

They were **in need, brought low, abasing**.

We would expect to read about them:

- Suffering
- Sobbing
- Crying out to God in prayer...which would've been a completely fine thing to do

Instead...

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and SINGING HYMNS TO GOD, and the prisoners were listening to them,

When you can experience all they experienced and sing to God, you know you've learned to be content in any situation.

To me – second only to Christ – Paul is the master of contentment.

So what's the question?

How did Paul learn to be this content in any situation?

Look at **verse 13** to see the answer...

Phil 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Some Bibles say **him**, but we know from the context that it's Christ.

Let me tell you two distinctions this verse has...

First, if **John 3:16** is the world's most quoted verse, this might be second.

- This verse has been printed on posters and inspirational art.
- You can buy keychains, rings, buttons, t-shirts, stickers, postcards, bracelets, handbags, and other items with this verse on it revealing how popular it is.

The reason it's so popular is it sounds really, really good!

It sounds like:

- You're going to be able to do anything you've ever wanted to do
- You're going to be able to win everything you've ever wanted to win

To some people this verse is a blank check for whatever they want in life.

But this reveals the second distinction of this verse: it's one of the most misinterpreted!

Sadly, when many people quote this verse, they hijack it from its context:

- They love to say it after something wonderful happens in their lives.

- The verse owes much of its fame to well-meaning athletes getting interviewed after winning a big game.

They're excited, they want to give God credit, so they say, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"*

But when athletes use the verse this way, it leaves some nagging questions.

For example:

- Was God really that concerned w/ who won the game?
- Did the winning team win, b/c:
 - There are more Christians on that team...but the other team is filled w/ heathens?
 - Or the winning team had more faith than the other team?

When the winning athlete quotes this verse, you also have to wonder:

- Do Christians get to win at everything?
- What happens if Christians lose?

I know I sound critical of people misusing this verse. You might be quick to say:

"They're quoting Scripture and trying to give God glory. How can you give them a hard time about that?"

The problem is...

Whenever people misinterpret Scripture – even if they mean well – it's problematic.

For example, let's say some young man is watching an athlete quote this verse on TV, so he thinks so himself...

"Wow, this is wonderful. I can also do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"

He plays in the big game...but loses.

He has to wonder:

- *Did I not have as much faith as that athlete on television?*
- *Was God pleased w/ Him, but He's not pleased w/ me?*
- *Does God not love me as much as He loves him?*
- *Or maybe the worst possibility:*
 - *Did God fail?*
 - *Was He unable to give me the strength I needed?*

The truth is, when people quote **Phil 4:13** after something wonderful, they're turning it on its head and making it mean the opposite of what it actually means.

They're turning it into:

- A slogan of personal empowerment
- A declaration of self-achievement, ambition, and accomplishment.

The verse is trivialized into a motivating motto for prosperity, advancement, and success.

Consider this...

If Paul was using the verse this way, how would you picture him at this moment?

- He's victorious
- He's conquering the world
- His life couldn't be better
- He's prospering

But what was going on in Paul's life?

He's a prisoner!

Last week I told you how bad it was for him! He's shackled to a Roman soldier, he thinks he's going to trial before Nero and probably executed...which is what he says in Chapter 1.

From an earthly perspective:

- It doesn't look like Paul's winning.
- It looks like he's losing!

So why did Paul say this?

He said this b/c the context is contentment!

- Out of context the verse means you get whatever you want and your wildest dreams come true.
- In context the verse means you can be content even when life is hard.

Phil 4:13 is about being strengthened by Christ to accept the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Paul says that whatever situation he experiences:

- Whether he's **brought low**, which is to say humiliated or demeaned...
- Whether he's **hungry** or in **need**, which is to say going without...

Then he says...

Phil 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Which is to say, *"I can handle all this because I have Christ and He gives me the strength I need!"*

And this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: CHRIST GIVES US THE STRENGTH TO BE CONTENT.

The Greek word for **strengthens** means “to put power in.”

Because we are in Christ He infuses us w/ strength. Many verses make this point:

- **Eph 3:16 According to the riches of his glory he may grant you TO BE STRENGTHENED WITH POWER through his Spirit...17 so that...you...18 may have STRENGTH to comprehend...the breadth and length and height and depth, 19b [of] the love of Christ.**
- **2 Cor 12:9 He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power (some translations, such as the NKJV, say strength) is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power (or strength) of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

It's especially difficult to be content when we're suffering, which is why the verse is very appropriate after LOSING the big game.

The fact is if you win the big game you don't need Christ to strengthen you:

- Who needs Christ's strength when things go wonderfully?
- We need Christ's strength:
 - When things go terribly
 - When we're in trials
 - When there's a thorn in our flesh

Let me contrast two athletes' use of Bible verses in interviews...

Here's the background to the first interview...

On January 12, 2013 during the NFL Divisional Playoffs, the number 4 seeded Baltimore Ravens – who were 10-6 – played on the road against the number 1 seeded Denver Broncos who were 13-3. The Broncos defeated the Ravens earlier in the season and they were heavily favored to win by 9.5 points. The game went into double overtime before the Ravens beat the Broncos in a huge upset.

The Broncos are the favorite team of someone in our church, but I don't want to tell you who it is. I'll just say that I try not to talk about this devastating Broncos loss, b/c I don't want to upset Scott Steenbarger.

Sports Illustrated said the game was “*one of the most exciting and entertaining postseason games in NFL history.*”¹ The game is known as, “The Mile High Miracle,” referring to the 70-yard touchdown pass w/ under a minute left to send the game into overtime.

After the game, they interviewed the very emotional Ray Lewis, who was the Ravens Hall-of-Fame linebacker. He said:

“No weapon formed against us shall prosper. No weapon. No weapon. No weapon. God is amazing. And when you believe in Him...Man believes in the possible but God believes in the impossible.”

Ray Lewis was loosely quoting **Isa 54:17**, which says...

Isa 54:17 No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.”

This is another verse that sounds great, particularly the words **No weapon fashioned against you shall succeed and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.**

Ray Lewis meant well, but the problem is the context is God destroying Israel’s enemies in the future. Ray Lewis made his team into the nation of Israel and the Denver Broncos into any team that plays against them.

Instead of God vindicating Israel against their enemies so that His promises to His covenant people are maintained, it sounds like God wanted to give Ray Lewis and the Baltimore Ravens victory over Peyton Manning and Scott Steenbarger’s Denver Broncos.

Here’s the background for the second interview...

The July 27, 2009 cover of Sports Illustrated is a picture of Tim Tebow in his football uniform with a determined look on his face. On the black under his eyes he wrote, “Phil 4:13.”

Tim had a tremendous college career. He was the first sophomore ever to win the most prestigious college award, the Heisman Trophy. He was part of two national championship teams. In other words, he had enough success to say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

I wondered how he interpreted this verse – correctly or incorrectly – so I did a search and I found a video of Kurt Warner interviewing him. He asked him what his favorite verse was, and Tim said it was Phil 4:13. Then he said...

“I’d say the biggest thing with Philippians 4:13 is so many people—pastors included—believe the verse means...I can do a lot of things. What I believe it really means, in context, is I can do all things, meaning I can handle all things, whatever position God’s put me in. Maybe it’s poverty, maybe it’s a sickness, my kid’s sick, God’s going to give me the strength to handle that. So I think it’s more talking about handling adversity than handling praise or accomplishing much. It’s talking about, ‘I can do all things,’ meaning all negative things: I can handle them all because of Christ.”ⁱⁱ

That’s a pretty good commentary on Phil 4:13!

Let's imagine something more serious than a football game.

Imagine a young man is lying in a hospital bed dying of some disease, and he asks to have this verse put on the wall over his bed. Someone walks in the room, sees it, but has the wrong view of the verse, and says, *"Wow, you have a lot of faith. That's great. You believe Christ is going to strengthen you to overcome this disease!"*

But the person in the hospital bed understands the verse, so he says...

"I don't know. He might...or He might not. What I do know is whether I overcome this disease or I don't, Christ will give me the strength I need for either outcome."

Kind of like Daniel's friends who said, "Our God whom we serve might deliver us from the fiery furnace...or He might not. Either way, we won't worship."

When people hear something like this, what will they say?

They'll say:

- How is he so strong?
- Why can he handle this so well?
- Where did this strength come from?

To these people, the strength is a **secret**...and this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: THERE'S A "SECRET" TO BEING CONTENT.

In **verse 12** notice Paul said **I have learned the secret of [being content]**.

I don't want to sound overly simple, but for a moment let's think about what a secret is:

- It's something only a few people know
- It's something hidden to everyone else

And the secret is lasting contentment only comes from Christ.

This means it's not w/in our ability to develop lasting contentment:

- It's not natural in that it doesn't come from us
- It's supernatural in that it comes from Christ.
- People who know Christ, know this secret
- People who don't know Christ, don't know it

The other Sunday night we watched the second half of American Gospel. Throughout the documentary, one of the major people they interviewed was Nabeel Qureshi. He was a Muslim who converted to Christianity and then became a speaker w/ Ravi Zacharias International Ministries.

Probably the most dramatic part of the documentary occurred when they revealed that on August 30, 2016 at 33 years of age Nabeel announced that he was in the advanced stages of stomach cancer.

Listen to what he shared in a Facebook video...

“My family and I have received the news that I have advanced stomach cancer, and the clinical prognosis is quite grim...This is an announcement that I never expected to make, but God in His infinite and sovereign wisdom has chosen me for this refining, and I pray He will be glorified through my body and my spirit.”

He died a little over a year later on September 16, 2017, at the age of 34.

If people watched Nabeel’s video, they wondered where he got this strength:

- They couldn’t see it.
- It was hidden from them.
- It surely wasn’t physical strength, b/c at the time he looked physically weak.
- It was spiritual strength He got from Christ.

This past week I saw a picture that illustrates what we’re discussing, and I put it in your bulletins...

It’s a picture of a tree with its roots going underground. The tree above ground is smaller than the roots below ground as they stretch down and out to gather the resources the tree needs. If you’ve ever seen a tree uprooted, it’s surprising how large and vast the root system is. We only see the part above ground, but it’s the roots we don’t see that allow the tree to be strong.

This illustrates what we’re discussing...

The most important part of Christian contentment is

- The part nobody sees...
- The part that remains a secret to everyone else

And that’s Christ strengthening us.

Contentment is worked from the inside out, or if we use the analogy w/ the tree, from the ground up.

- We draw on the deep resources Christ offers to be content.
- We must have roots that go down deep into Christ to obtain the strength we need.

And let me tell you something important...

This isn’t accomplished through some mystical or transcendental behavior. Instead, it happens very practically:

- We pray...
- We spend time w/ Christ...
- We spend time w/ the body of Christ, which is the manifestation of Christ in His physical absence. To be w/ the body of Christ is to be w/ Christ...

- We repent of sin that compromises our relationships w/ Christ...
- We read the Word...and respond obediently to it!
 - **Matt 7:24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine AND DOES THEM will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.**
 - In the parable both houses received the teachings of Christ, but only the one that obeyed was built on Christ to have roots going down into Him.

 Along these lines, in **verse 13** notice Paul said **I can DO all things**.

This is about doing:

- It's active
- It's not passive

The question is, what things can we do?

This brings us to Lesson 4...

LESSON 4: WE CAN DO “ALL THINGS” GOD WANTS US TO DO.

Christ doesn't give us the strength to do whatever we want. He doesn't:

- Let us fly...
- Lift 1,000 pounds...
- Get a perfect score on an IQ test...
- Get every promotion...
- Succeed in every relationship.

So what are the “**all things**” we can do?

- We can do **all things** Christ wants us to do.
- We can do **all things** He wants us to experience, handle, or endure in this life.

 Listen to the way it's worded in two other translations:

- The Amplified Bible: **Phil 4:13 I can do all things [WHICH HE HAS CALLED ME TO DO] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE—I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace.]**
- The Living Bible: **I can do everything GOD ASKS ME TO with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power.**

We can do all the things Christ wants us to do!

 Let me show you two examples from Paul's life. Please turn to the right to **1 Tim 1:12**. We won't turn back to Phil...Col, Thes, Tim.

1 Tim 1:12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,

He thanks Christ for giving him strength...and what for?

He gave the answer at the end of the verse: **appointing me to his service.**

Christ strengthened Paul to do what He wanted him to do, which was the work of the ministry!

Turn to **2 Tim 4** for the second example.

The context is Paul is at the end of his life. These are his last recorded words.

Notice the emphasis on people leaving Paul...

2 Tim 4:10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Luke alone is with me. Skip to verse 12 Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Skip to verse 14 Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. 15 Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. 16 At my first defense NO ONE CAME TO STAND BY ME, BUT ALL DESERTED ME. May it not be charged against them!

Things sound pretty dismal for Paul. Definitely one of those times he was **brought low, facing hunger, and [in] need.** It would be hard to be content.

Look at **verse 17...**

2 Tim 4:17 But THE LORD STOOD BY ME AND STRENGTHENED ME, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

At this low point in Paul's life, Christ strengthened him for two reasons:

1. First, b/c he was alone. He said **all deserted me.** He couldn't find strength from anyone else, but in this dark hour, Christ **stood by [him] and strengthened [him].**
2. Second, Christ strengthened Him so the Gospel could be **proclaimed** to those who needed it. Christ strengthened Paul so he could do **all things** Chris wanted him to do...and He strengthens us for the same reason.

Let me conclude w/ this...

This is our last sermon on covetousness and contentment, and I want you to appreciate Christ's beauty, but I need you to do something...

Get an elevated view of all these sermons, and tell me, "Is discontentment a sin?"

Yes, it is!

We talked about this last week. If God commands us to be content, then to be discontent is to disobey God, and to disobey God is sinful.

Christ is so good, that:

- He pays the penalty for our discontentment
- He takes the punishment we deserve

But if you think about what we just read in **Phil 4:13**, you see Christ doesn't stop there...

He also provides the strength we need to be content!

If we correctly understand **Phil 4:13** it gives us a window into the Gospel!

- Christ saves us from our sin
- AND He strengthens us to have victory over our sin

Let me close by sharing this quote with you from Spurgeon...

Self-sufficiency is Satan's net, wherein he catches men, like poor silly fish, and destroys them. Be not self-sufficient. Think yourselves nothing, for you are nothing, and live by God's help. The way to grow strong in Christ is to become weak in yourself. God pours no power into man's heart till man's power is all poured out. Live, then, daily, a life of dependence on the grace of God.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Dillon, Dennis. "Mile High Miracle: Written off as petulant underdogs, the Ravens rallied to stun the Broncos and notch one of the greatest wins in franchise history". Sports Illustrated. Retrieved 16 May 2013.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp4TNGeqn9I>