

I Can Do All Things

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Bible Verse: Philippians 4:10-13
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Philippians 4:10-13 is our text today, a passage that is often misused. We'll try to straighten that out a little bit in our time together here this evening. Philippians 4:10-13. The title of tonight's message if you're taking notes is simply "I Can Do All Things." And beginning in verse 10 of Philippians 4 we read this,

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

This passage is a statement about the sufficiency of Christ in the life of the believer, and you see that and the comprehensive nature of what Paul is saying there in verse 12 where he says, "in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret." In every circumstance of life he's about to lay down a principle that is true in the believing life. And what's happening in this section in the broader context of the letter of Philippians is this: Paul in the passages that we last looked at, you know, a couple of weeks ago, Paul was giving them some final exhortations. If you'll look at verse 6, for example, he said, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." So he's addressing their mindset. In verse 8, he tells them and gives them commands about how to think and how to use their mind. You see at the end of verse 8, "dwell on these things," be anxious for nothing, "dwell on these things." And in verse 9 he says, "practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

So he's been giving them pastoral exhortation in the immediately prior verses. This section here in verse 10, the tone and the purpose of what he is saying is changing and it has changed. He's no longer exhorting them, he is expressing thanks to them. He is expressing his gratitude to the Philippian church for the gift that they had sent to him. A man named Epaphroditus had brought a gift to Paul in his Roman imprisonment to help supply his needs, and Epaphroditus was the messenger, literally the apostle, the one that

the Philippian church had sent to carry that gift on their behalf. And if we jump ahead in the text just a bit to verse 18, you'll see this, you'll see what's referred to as the occasion of the epistle, what was happening in the circumstances of the apostle when he picked up the pen, so to speak, to write this letter. Well, we see it there in verse 18. He says, chapter 4, verse 18, he says, "I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

So what he's saying here is, "I have received what you sent by the hand of Epaphroditus," and in the verses in verses 10 through 13, what he is doing is he is giving a highly nuanced expression of thanks. He is telling the church, "Thank you," but he needs to do it in a particular way that does not mislead them about the nature of what he is saying, and we'll see that as we walk through. This is a passage that's filled with a wonderful sense of joy and contentment in his circumstances and the sufficiency that he has in Christ, and what I would have you understand and what I would want you to take away from this message is the very things that were available to the apostle for his joy and his contentment and his sense of sufficiency in life, are the exact same spiritual resources that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to you. That has consequences.

Look back in the middle of verse 12, then, chapter 4, verse 12, and just kind of taking the opportunity to make it personal in your own life as we anticipate what God's word has for us, what Paul said about his life is intended to be true of your life if you are in Christ as well. Look at it there, "in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret." Whatever the circumstance may be, there is joy and contentment and sufficiency that is available to the believer in Christ and we simply need to appropriate it, we need to know how to take advantage of that secret and make it our own. I'm just delighted as always to be able to open God's word for you in this way, and just to dwell on the point just a little bit more, if what he is saying is true, "in any and every circumstance I have learned this secret," then what you need to understand and recognize is this, is that the joy and the contentment and the sufficiency of which he speaks is independent of circumstances. It is separate from whatever is happening in our lives at any given time. This joy and contentment and sufficiency belongs to the believer in Christ and is there to be appropriated, and he can say that because it's all wrapped up in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. If Christ is with us, if Christ is for us, then this sufficiency is ours no matter what the circumstances may be. This is a passage of rich invitation for those of you that are walking the road of discouragement, walking through a valley of tears, walking through very challenging circumstances. This is a passage that we all want to hear and to take advantage of.

So let's just walk through it together here this evening in the time that the Lord has appointed for us. First of all, we're going to see this, we're going to see Paul's joy from his faithful friends. His joy from his faithful friends. Here's what Paul is saying at the start of this passage. Paul, in thanking them for their gift that Epaphroditus had just brought to them, he is connecting their prior generosity in the context of their past kindness to him. This was not the first time that the Philippian church had shown concern and care for Paul and you see here in verse 10 what he says. Look at it there with me, chapter 4, verse

10. He says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity." Notice right at the start of the verse there that Paul is speaking in a tone of joy. This is a delightful context. This is a positive environment in the letter at this particular point in time, and he is sharing his joy with them. And this is a church that was well-suited for Paul to express joy to because they were long-time supporters of his ministry.

Look back at chapter 1, verse 5, with me. Philippians 1:5, and actually we'll start in verse 3. You just see the gratitude and the joy throughout this entire epistle, and Paul opens in that theme of gratitude when he says in verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." "You've been a partner in my ministry for such a long period of time," he says, "and I'm grateful for you. When I remember you, I thank God for you," he says to these friends. And the idea of partnership is an indication that they had shared in the ministry with him, they had shared and supported him over a period of some 10 years or more. And so he's remembering that and he's thanking them as the letter opens, and he says a lot of things in chapters 1, 2, 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, and now in our text tonight, he's circling back to finalize that expression of thanks.

Go ahead to chapter 4, verse 15, with me as he remembers this history that he has with the Philippians. He says in verse 15, he says this, he says, "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." Do you see the sweet memories that Paul has as he's writing to them? Do you see why he's filled with gratitude toward them? They've supported him long ago in the past, they had been with him in spirit in the intervening time, and now they've sent another gift. And at this point there had been about 10 years that had passed since their last gift to them, and Paul is expressing now in chapter 4, verse 10, his sense of joy because they're able to help him again. "Thank you for your gift."

Now let's stop right there. There's a really important hinge of nuance here that we want to recognize before we see Paul explain it here. There would be a lot of different ways for an expression of thanks like that to be taken. Paul is in prison and he's getting this gift and now thanking them for it, and it would be easy for that spirit of thanksgiving to be misunderstood, to be misinterpreted. It could be such a thing as Paul saying that, "I'm glad I got your gift because I really needed it. I didn't have much here and I needed that gift to sustain me in my present course of life. And you know, without your gift I don't know what I would have done." And it would have created this sense of dependency in his expression of thanks. Well, that's not the spirit in which Paul is saying it at all and so he has to explain it to them and explain to them exactly what he is meaning, and so he spends a long period of time explaining exactly in what sense it is that he is saying thanks to them.

So that kind of orients you as we look into the passage in greater detail now, and so he says there in verse 10, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me." And so he's got this joy in the Lord. He's saying, "There is this fruit of Christian fellowship that we have. We share life in Christ together. We share in the love of Christ together," and he says, "That's the sphere in which I am speaking to you. I am joyful in the Lord. I'm not joyful because I have a pot of money in front of me now. No, that's not it. My joy is in the Lord." And having gone 10 years since their last gift, he says, look at it there in verse 10, "you've at last revived your concern for me." Well, that could be misunderstood. It could be read as if that was all that he said, he said, "Well, you know, where have you been the prior 10 years? You've finally revived your concern for me. At last you're back." But that's not the spirit of what he's saying at all. Look at it there, he affirms them, he sets their mind at ease. He has not been waiting to get a gift from them, in other words. He says, "indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity." He says, "I know that your concern for me in your heart has always been there, and the fact that you haven't been able to send a gift to me before now is not an indication of a lack of love or concern on your part, you simply didn't have the opportunity to do it." Whatever the reason for that is he's saying, "The fact that it's been 10 years, no problem. I know you care for me. I'm grateful for your gift. Thank you for that. I find joy in hearing from you again."

And look at this word "revived" there in the New American Standard. He says, "you have revived your concern for me." It has the idea, it pictures something that is blooming again. It pictures a tree that is blooming in the spring after winter. The tree had looked barren, there was nothing there, there was no fruit, there were no leaves or anything like that, but we all know intuitively, we never think in the winter that a tree is dead, we just realize that it's gone dormant. Well, this is the picture that Paul uses to express his understanding and appreciation for these faithful friends. What had been dormant through circumstances was now showing life again. He had in front of him a gift that showed that their concern had never left them, their love for him had never left. So what he is saying is, "I know that your prior lack of support over these prior years, it was not because you were indifferent, it's not because you had forgotten." And what he's expressing here, what he's showing is he's not rebuking them when he says, "Finally I've heard from you again." He's simply recognizing that they did not have opportunity to support him until now.

So what he's doing here as he says, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly, you've revived your concern for me," he wants them to know he's not disappointed in them. He understands that it was simply a matter of circumstance, not love, that had hindered them from expressing their care before now. And so you have this wonderfully sensitive apostle wanting to make very sure in his communication that he's not misunderstood. He's saying, "Thank you. Thank you for your gift and I understand why you weren't able to do it before now." Imagine yourself, put yourself in the sandals of the Philippians receiving that letter, you get the sense and you say, "Oh, he understands. He knows that we love him. He knows that we've always been with him." And so it puts their mind at ease that he is not in the least bit disappointed in them for their lack of prior support in the intervening years, rather he understands and he says, "I know you love me." And so

there's this calming settling effect that is added to his expression of joy over them that builds them up spiritually, that takes care of them in love.

Now we see his joy in his faithful friends, but there's something else that he needs to go on and express to them as well, and that brings us to our second point here this evening, is that he talks to them about his contentment in Christ. His contentment in Christ and here at this juncture in the text, Paul is showing exquisite delicacy. He is being very precise in what he says to them even as he is very affirming and grateful and thankful for them, he wants them to understand something else as well. He knows that they love him. He knows that they care for him, but he doesn't want them to misunderstand where he is at spiritually and what his heart is like. And so he goes on and he tells them something that would be very easily misunderstood. He is now going to tell them in verse 11 that his joy that he is expressing to them is not, it is not over the gift that they sent. That's not what makes him joyful at all because he had not ministered to them for the sake of financial gain. Paul was not in it for the money. He didn't care for them, he didn't come and teach them, he didn't establish the Philippian church because he thought he could get rich by doing it. Paul himself, having recognized their motive of love in sending the gift to him, Paul himself wants to clarify that, "My ministry to you was out of a spirit of love as well." It was never a financial transaction.

It is always an easy accusation, it is a despicable accusation to make against a true man of God. I'm not speaking of myself here, but my friend back in California who's undergoing this very accusation as we speak, it is a despicable accusation against a true man of God to say he's in it for the money because the true man of God, it's not about that. Maybe some prosperity comes to him, maybe it doesn't, and we'll see this in what Paul says later on. For the true man of God and certainly for the Apostle Paul, it's never a financial transaction. It's never about what the man can get from the people to whom he is ministering, and Paul here in this text is saying, "I was never ministering to you for the sake of financial gain." It could not be that. That was never possible the motive for Paul's ministry.

And he goes on and he expresses that in verse 11. Look at it with me. He says, "It's not that I speak from want." He says, "I'm grateful for your gift but not because I needed it. It's not because I needed it that I am grateful because I don't have that sense about my life. I don't speak from a sense of need." And the reason that he can say in prison that he does not speak from a sense of need is because there is a more profound spiritual reality in his heart that he goes on to say in verse 11, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." Paul is expressing here a positive constructive sense of self-sufficiency, in other words, he does not derive his satisfaction in life from what is happening around him or what he has. His joy did not come from his circumstances. His joy came from something else. And because his joy did not come from his circumstances, the gift that they sent, the gift in and of itself, the financial provision did not add to his joy, did not add to his preexisting joy at all.

How can he say that? How could a Christian live like that? You know, that's a pretty searching question, isn't it, because you and I know the truth and the reality of the matter

is that we tend to, you know, to one degree or another, we kind of rise and fall based on what's happening in life around us, right? And naturally if things are going the way we want them to go, we have a greater sense of satisfaction. I'm speaking naturally in a human way here. And if things, if we start to enter into some adversity, then we tend to feel down and we feel the clouds pressing in upon us. That's the natural way to live life even for Christians. And I suffer from that defect just like you do, but it's our opportunity and our responsibility here tonight to see what the word of God says about living life that way, and to realize that the Christian life is meant to be derived from a different source; that the Christian life is meant to draw upon something else independent of circumstances to help us have a consistent level of joy that does not rise and fall with the occasions of life. How could that be? What is it that could make a Christian say that, "I've learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am"? He's immediately excluded circumstances as being a contributing factor to the increase of his joy. It's very challenging. It's very humbling to preach on this being the kind of weak and sinful man that I am.

Here's the simplicity of it and here's an introduction to the secret of which he is speaking, and the beauty of this, let me just reemphasize this to you, my beloved friends, is this, is that what fed Paul's constant contentment is the very same things that can feed your contentment today and throughout the rest of your life. It's simple. It's a secret because it's not well drawn upon by the body of Christ, but it is not hidden in that sense. How could Paul say that? How could you say that? How can you find joy no matter your circumstances? Well, theology matters ultimately. That's one reason among many that we emphasize the teaching of the word of God here and not playing to your emotions with music or lights or fog machines or any of that other ridiculous stuff. This is where you find the secret to contentment. Let me just give it to you in three statements from the perspective of the Apostle Paul. Paul could say that, "I'm content no matter my circumstances," because he understood this, first of all. Where is his contentment in Christ? Well, let's just put it in three little statements here under this second main point that we have. First of all, God orders his circumstances. God sends the circumstances of life to us. Everything that we have in life whether it's adversity or joyful things or anything in between, everything that we have God has sent that to us. By the way, this is the same God who sent Christ for the redemption of sinners like you at the cross. The God who sent Christ is the same God who with the same wisdom and with the same love orders the circumstances of your life. In other words, he arranges the details of your life according to his wisdom and according to his love with a design to produce a good result in you in the end. "For we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose," Romans 8:28. This is the same apostle writing it about the same time in the book of Romans who's writing this in Philippians, he's saying, "I recognize that God orders my circumstances and he does so with an intention to do good to me in the end. And therefore it doesn't matter, in one sense, it doesn't matter what the circumstances are because whatever they are, I see beyond the physical reality to the fact that a loving God, a gracious God, a wise God, a good God, has sent whatever I have to me. And so he is accomplishing things for me and that's why I can be content. I understand," Paul says, any Christian can and should say, "I understand that I'm in the hand of God and that's enough for me."

That's one statement, secondly, Paul can say that he's content because he understands, secondly, that he belongs to Christ. God orders his circumstances and Paul himself belongs to Christ. Look over at Philippians 3. He says in verse 8, Philippians 3:8, and actually go back to verse 7. Chapter 3, verse 7, he says, "whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Whatever there was about my prior life that may have made me think I was a righteous man, that stuff is rubbish to me because I have Christ now. And in verse 8 he says, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Look at what Paul says here. This same apostle in chapter 4 who said, "in any and every circumstance I've learned the secret," has been talking earlier about how precious Christ is to him, and how Christ is his all and everything to him and he speaks in this absolute terms without qualification. "Any and every circumstance I've learned the secret." That's comprehensive. You go back to chapter 3 and you see that he was talking in those comprehensive unqualified terms all along. He said, "whatever things were gain to me, I dismiss them for the sake of Christ. I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I want to be found in Him. I want to know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to attain to the resurrection of the dead, and being in Christ I will."

So Paul has what he wants. Paul has what he wants. What he wants is not self-righteousness. What he wants is not earthly prosperity. What he wants is not any particulars about earthly circumstances because what he wants is not tied to earth. It's Christ. It's Christ in heaven. It's Christ in him. And for Paul to belong to Christ and to have all of the riches of wisdom and righteousness and sanctification in Christ, that's everything that mattered. Nothing else mattered by comparison to that. And so how can Paul talk about contentment in Christ? Well, God orders his circumstances and Paul belongs to Christ and therefore, thirdly, there's a natural implication of that. Since he has Christ and Christ is everything that he wants and nothing beside, if he has Christ and God is ordering his circumstances, then how could he be anything other than satisfied, content and joyful? Because his desires, the desires of his heart rest in Christ and in Christ alone, that's his aspiration. Christ is what he wants and he has him so that, thirdly, we said, first of all, God orders his circumstances, Paul belongs to Christ, and as a result, thirdly we could make this statement, that means that he is content with what God provides in every situation. He is content with what God provides in every situation.

So let's just review this one more time. There's a lot of repetition here, I know, but I also know that you and I need this repetition. We need to hear this again and again to imprint it deeply upon our souls. Why is he content in Christ? Well, God orders his circumstances and he trusts him. Paul belongs to Christ. That's all that he wants. Everything else he had considered rubbish. And as a result of the providence of God and

being in union with Christ, he's content with whatever God provides to him at any given time in his life.

Now that's a lot to take in, isn't it? That's a challenge to us earthbound Christians in the 21st century living in a prosperous country. I think it's probably fair to say that a lot of our brethren in the past election and all of this, have shown that they haven't learned this lesson yet. They're not content whatever their circumstances may be and that's why they're desperate, that's why they panic when, you know, things don't go the way that they want, it's because they haven't learned the secret of which Paul is speaking here. I'm not condemning them. I'm really not even criticizing them, I'm just making what I think is an obvious observation that if you're so tied up with what's happening in the world or in the news, that you're missing the point of what this passage is teaching us.

Now there's a word of hope and encouragement that I can give you, having said that. Go back to verse 12 now, chapter 4, verse 12. Paul says, "I know how to get along with humble means. I also know how to live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance," here's what I wanted you to see right now, "I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." Paul says, "I learned it. I have learned this. I've come to possess this knowledge." And the fact that he learned it means that there was a time where he didn't have that understanding and that perspective on life. He had to learn this lesson and that is a word of encouragement for us, for, you know, Christians like you and me to realize. Scripture tells us that this doesn't come naturally to us. We have to apply ourselves to this. We have to study truth, we have to study doctrine to get to know God and once we know God in the Lord Jesus Christ, then we have to work out the implications of that in our lives and understand that the truth that we know intellectually is enough to satisfy our hearts as we go through the remainder of our life. There's a reason why mature Christians can die in peace. There's a reason why they can say things of momentous faith as they lie on their deathbed knowing that they are about to pass from this world. And as they look in the eyes of their loved ones and they're saying good-bye to them, that they can do so with a sense of peace and joy. There's a reason for that. It's because the gospel is true, it's because Christ is with them and they find their satisfaction in him.

But we have to learn that lesson, we have to learn to be content in it, and I'm just so very grateful that you're all here tonight. I'm grateful because I know for the vast majority of you, it's an expression of the fact that you want to know the word of God better, and all I can tell you is that this is a valuable, important time for all of us. As we learn from God's word, we are learning how to cultivate this contentment in life. We have to feed our souls to live this way. We have to have intake. A runner can't run a marathon on an empty stomach and without having taken care of his body beforehand. Well, in a far greater and a far more significant way, you as a Christian need to feed your soul with the word of God and that is the way that these things come out of your life and out of your heart. And what Paul is saying is that because he's learned this lesson of contentment in Christ, that does something that has an implication for him. It frees him up, it liberates him from that soul-cancer of anxiety over the nature of present circumstances.

Look at verse 12 again with all of that explanation. He says, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity." He says, "You want to talk about circumstances, I've been on both ends of the spectrum. I've had very little. I've lived through shipwrecks. I've lived through beatings and imprisonments. I know what that's like." He says, "I've also had times of prosperity where my circumstances were more favorable to me." And he says, "I've come to learn that I'm independent of all of that." Paul is saying, "I know how to get along when I've got a little bit and I know how to get along when I've got a lot." He was content whether he had plenty or only a little. Poverty did not crush him and discourage him, and riches did not make him boastful. And here's how he can say this and this is where the reality of it is. Stay with me here. This really isn't difficult. It's not complicated what he is saying. "Whether I am in poverty or whether I am in abundance, there is a transcendent reality that applies to both." Paul says, "I am drawing on Christ either way." We've shown this from chapter 3. His goal and his primary exclusive aspiration was Christ himself and now he has Christ. That means he has Christ in poverty and he has Christ in prosperity. The poverty or prosperity is secondary to the thing that's more important to him and that is the presence of Christ in his life. So in any and every circumstance, in all of life, no matter what comes and goes, Paul had learned the secret of constant contentment. Changing circumstances did not affect his inner joy because he was content with Christ.

Now for somebody that is maybe a new Christian, that might sound like some kind of ideal that's not really attainable. For someone who is not a Christian and is living for this world, it has to sound like insanity but it's not. Paul is talking about that which he treasures the most here and because he treasures Christ the most, then nothing can take that away no matter what happens to him. And so Paul willingly accepts lowly circumstances for the sake of Christ, and when he has better circumstances, it doesn't improve on his joy because he'd already found his satisfaction in Christ.

Now, my friends, I just want to say to you that this is not some kind of advanced course on Christian living here. This is not some kind of exclusive room for only VIP Christians and everybody else lives a different way. No. No. My friends, this is what Christians do. This is the way that Christians live. We are content with Christ. We are content with him. And how could we not be content with the eternal Son of God who loved us and gave himself up for us? To be on the receiving end of that kind of love, to be on the receiving end of that selfless sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God raging against our sins and having pacified and settled that wrath of God on our behalf, how could we be seeking anything else? Christ. Christ. Christ and having him and believing in him and receiving his love and loving him in return, that's what Christians do and that's enough. That's enough. Scripture says again and again, book of Hebrews, here we have no lasting city. We're passing through. We're pilgrims on the way.

And so we can be content in him, and even if the Lord gives prosperity, well, the trust is still the same. Look over at 1 Timothy 6, just turning back to the right in your Bible, toward the back of your Bible just a couple of books. 1 Timothy 6:17. Scripture is not a Marxist book. That would surprise some people to hear, but it's not a Marxist book. There is no sin in being wealthy. There is no sin in being prosperous. It's just a matter of what

your attitude toward your wealth is. 1 Timothy 6:17 says, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed." Here in this critical passage in 1 Timothy 6, you see the same spirit of instruction that we've seen from Philippians 4. The presence of prosperity is secondary to the attitude and the hope with which you hold it. He says, "Tell them not to fix their hope on what they have but on God, on Christ, to find your satisfaction there and to handle your wealth in response to that hope rather than making your life and your aspirations around the physical circumstances of it." So poverty, that's okay, I have Christ. Riches, that's okay, they can come or go, that's not what I love. The Lord's given it to me, great, but that's not what I love. What I love is Christ and that's where my hope is.

So what you see in the totality of this section that we've looked at is he is content in Christ and that changes his whole perspective on the rest of the passage. Going back to Philippians 4, then, we've seen two things so far, we've seen the joy that he has from his faithful friends, we've seen his contentment in Christ and that leads to the climax of verse 13. Point 3 for tonight is this: his sufficiency in all circumstances. His sufficiency in all circumstances and that brings us to an often misquoted verse that for some of us we may have to change our perspective on the wall plaque that we've got or the coffee mug that you have that says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We need to understand what that verse means. So look at it there in verse 13 remembering before I read it, remembering the context that Paul has been speaking about. "I can be content in any and every circumstance. I have learned how to do that." And now it's in that context that Paul says here in verse 13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Now let me just get something out of the way. Let me clear up that misconception here. Paul is not saying that Christ will enable you to do things that you have no ability to do. He's not saying that. I could say that, you know, that I'm going to go out and I'm going to run a marathon tomorrow because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, but that would be a foolish thing for me to say because I cannot possibly run a marathon tomorrow. I cannot run around the cul-de-sac at our home. What on earth makes me think that quoting this verse is going to enable me to run a marathon when I have not trained to run for a marathon? It is not that, you know, I can become president because I can do all things through him who strengthens me. That kind of silly mindset turns this verse into something meaningless, something sentimental that has no value of truth to it whatsoever and we need to understand exactly what Paul is saying and understand how it points us in the direction that it points us. This verse is not pointing you to a proud sense of what you can do. It is not pointing you into the direction of your earthly goals and attainments. That's not what this is about, about some kind of external accomplishment that you want to achieve in your life. That's not the point of it at all. This verse is a continuation and a climax of what he has been saying about how inwardly he can be joyful no matter what his circumstances are; that he can be content; that he can be satisfied; that he can do all things without grumbling or disputing, chapter 2, verse 14.

What Paul is saying here is this when he says in verse 13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." It's intimately connected to verse 12, "any and every circumstance." All things, any and every circumstance, he's just continuing his prior line of thought and what he's saying is this, is that, "In Christ I have the indwelling power to maintain my spirit of contentment come what may. If harsher poverty comes to me, I can still be content in Christ. If Caesar sends his guards to behead me, I can be content in Christ. If they release me, I'll be content in Christ. Because Christ strengthens me to be that kind of contented man." And today, here tonight in our room, those of you that are in Christ, having understood that God orders your circumstances, that you belong to Christ, understanding that you can be content with whatever God provides in every circumstance, every situation, then you find that you can say with him, "I also can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Not about what you do with your hands or your feet but how your heart responds to life.

So this verse is not a promise of self-fulfillment in every endeavor as if, you know, you're going to succeed in everything that you do. The sad reality is that often life brings us a lot of failure, and you stumble along the way. You make mistakes and circumstances go against you and life gets hard and you find yourself without the spouse that you loved, you find yourself without the job that you thought was secure, you find yourself with children that don't love you like you thought that they would, and life gets really hard and sad and difficult and irritating, this verse is not an indication that all of those things will change, rather it's a verse that tells you that in your heart you can find contentment in Christ even if the circumstances don't change, even if you don't attain your goals in life. This verse, chapter 4, verse 13, is a spiritual statement of contentment in Christ. Paul is saying, "My sufficiency is found in Christ, not in my own ability, not in my own circumstances. My joy does not come from human effort because I find my strength in Him. I can do things through Him, through the power that He supplies, through the love that I receive from Him, through my understanding of His grace."

Stated differently, this is a statement of dependence on Christ. It is not an expression of an iron will. Do you know what? Your iron will if you have one or if you think you have one, an iron human will cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Sheer determination doesn't produce that. You know, you can't just force yourself, "I'm going to force myself to be loving and joyful and peaceful here." That's not what it's about. Paul is expressing rest in Christ, trust in him, contentment in him, that whatever his circumstances are Christ is enough. Look at verse 6, chapter 4, verse 6, "Be anxious for nothing." Do you see the absolute categorical statements that he makes? "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything," nothing, everything, it's absolute, "by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God."

So what Paul has done here in this passage and I imagine that the Philippians had to read it a time or two for it to sink in. You know, I wasn't there. It might look like I had the capacity of being there 2,000 years ago but that's not true. I imagine that they had to read it a couple of times for it all to sink in to him. Paul is saying this, "Thank you for the gift. I know that it's an expression of your love and concern for me and I'm grateful for that,

but I want you to understand that I wasn't waiting for you to send this gift because I don't minister to you for the sake of financial gain. I would minister to you the same if your gift had never arrived. And I can say that because I'm content in Christ. I don't have to have something external to provoke joy in my heart because I have Christ and that's everything that I need." And so Paul had shown them that he was not dependent on their gift, he wasn't even seeking it when it arrived, but in verse 14 you see this, he says, "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction." In one sense it looks like he's all over the map here. "I don't need your gift but I'm grateful for it. I'm appreciative of our long history but I understand why you couldn't do it." He's just covering all of the bases here and he says, "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. I wasn't looking for this gift, I did not need this gift to be content and joyful in life but, Philippian friends, you did well by sending it to me because you were sharing in my affliction and you showed the work of God in your heart by sharing in my time of affliction." And what he's saying is that, "That honors God even though it wasn't necessary to contribute to my joy." Paul does not deny that he's been in need, it's just not what his focus is.

Now having said all of that, as we read this passage, as we read verse 13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," I want to emphasize something one final time here tonight because it's very important for your own spiritual life. We would do well to recall who the Apostle Paul was. Yes, yes, yes, Paul was an apostle and he was a great example and he calls us to follow his example, but what you must understand is this, is that Paul was a man of mortal flesh just like you and I are. He was a man just like us and the strength which Christ supplied to him that enabled him to be content in every circumstance, is the exact same strength that is available to you in Christ. Paul wasn't drawing upon something that was exclusive to him that's not available to you. The resurrection power of Christ which gave new life to Paul is the same resurrection power that gave new life to you. The Christ that satisfied Paul is the same Christ that is sufficient for you as well.

And some statements that you make, the supremacy of Christ just has a way of making you at times feel very very small, and this is one of those moments. My friend, my Christian friend, Christ in you, Christ with you, Christ for you meets every situation that you could ever face in life and it meets every situation in life that you have right now. It is not that Christ enables you to do things that you have no ability for, rather his very presence, his very person is enough for you to thrive in everything that he gives to you. It could be no other way. And this is consistently the testimony of scripture, Old and New Testament alike. David said in Psalm 23, "I fear no evil." Why? "For You are with me." Paul could say in 2 Corinthians 12, repeat what the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you. Therefore I'm well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I'm weak then I am strong." And so the circumstances are not the point, it's a recognition and an appropriation by faith of the wonderful matchless sufficiency of our Lord.

Beloved, those are universal truths. This belongs to every believer in Christ. This is the gift of Christ to you and the gift is not a change in your circumstances, the highest, the

best, the most wonderful gift that Christ gives to us is Christ himself. And then he gives us a lot of other stuff besides, doesn't he? But in Christ, look at it there in verse 13 as we close, but in Christ we can look at all of life, all of its sorrow, all of its joy, the adversity, the good times, the bad times, the people that love you, the people that betray you, through it all there is this constant of our great and glorious Christ always mediating his sufficiency to us as we look to him by faith. That is your hope, beloved, and, beloved, that hope is enough.

Let's pray.

Father, I pray for each one of us that we would learn this kind of contentment in Christ, that whether You send humble means or whether You send prosperity, whether You send joy or sorrow, whether You send reconciliation or not, whether You send acceptance by our family or not, whether You send other things or not, Father, that through it all we would look to Christ and find our sufficiency and contentment in Him. And I pray, Father, two things, one for the believers here that they would indeed be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving that they would let their requests be made known to You, and that Your peace would guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Father, for the unbelievers in the room, some who are hearing willingly the word of God but struggling to understand, I pray that You'd be gracious to them and open their eyes and their hearts to Christ by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Some maybe on the live stream, some maybe in the room, hard, boastful, defiant, unwilling to listen to your word in whatever circumstance brings them in the room here tonight, Father. I pray that just as You did the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, You would stop them and that You would confront them, as it were, with Christ and that they would recognize and by Your Spirit their eyes would be opened to the glory of Christ and that they would bow before Him and say, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" And then in that moment of conviction, Father, Your Spirit would supply them with the new life that is necessary for them to truly repent and receive Christ.

Father, it's not enough, Lord, it's not enough for us to just gather together and go out unchanged. We're not interested in going through the motions. We're not interested in a mere outward conformity to some kind of form of Christianity that we happened to fall into. No, Father, we long for this reality of the true Christ, we long for this reality that we've seen expressed by the Apostle Paul here tonight, and we humbly ask You to do that which only You can do which is this, make it true in each life. Father, make it true and overcome the hardness of each heart for we have not the ability, Lord, to change our own hearts. Do that which we cannot do and do it all to the glory of Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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