

### **“The Secret to Contentment”**

We know what the Bible says in this text, the question is what does it mean?

Interpretation.

If we get that right then we get God’s message for us, if we don’t we go off the deep end.

Today, as we come to the close of this series of sermons from the book of Philippians, we come to two of the most misinterpreted and misunderstood verses in the entire Bible- Philippians 4:13 and Philippians 4:19.

- “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”
- “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

There many people who use these two scriptures without any awareness of the context in which they were written in. They lift them out of the wider scope of everything else Paul said in this letter and they make a mess out of it. But in order for us to understand what these two verses mean we must be interpret them in light of everything else Paul wrote in Philippians.

What I want to do now is first look at what Paul said in v. 19 and then at what he said in v.13, because v.13 provides a better springboard to launch into the main point of the message this morning.

#### **It Is Not God’s Will for Us to Be Healthy, Wealthy, and Comfortable**

First, v.19.

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

This verse has been hijacked by the hugely popular prosperity gospel movement in our nation. It is thrown around to say that God’s will for us is to be “healthy, wealthy, and comfortable,” and if we will just have enough faith then that is exactly what God will do for us. “He will meet all of our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

There are two problems with this kind of thinking.

First, it ignores the context that Paul found himself in when he wrote Philippians. He was sitting in prison in Rome awaiting trial for having caused a ruckus in Jerusalem with his preaching of Christ. Paul was the furthest thing away from being “healthy, wealthy, and comfortable.”

It is true that we know from this letter that Paul was confident that he would be vindicated, released, and set free to preach the gospel once again.

In Philippians 1:25-26, when speaking about his desire to remain in the body instead of dying and going to be with Christ, he said this:

Convinced of this of this, I know that I will remain (in the body), and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.” (Phil. 1:25-26)

But we also from this letter that Paul was well aware of the fact that God’s sovereign plan for him might also include the possibility that he would be found “guilty” by the Roman authorities.

If that happened he would remain in chains and waste away in prison, as he awaited the day of his execution. For Paul said in Philippians 2:17, “But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.”

Knowing that to be the case, it is impossible to conclude from v. 19 of our text that Paul believed that God wanted all Christians to be “healthy, wealthy, and problem free.” If a person will study the Bible in its proper context one begin to see that such blanket assertions cannot be made. A life of ease is not guaranteed in the Scriptures. In fact, oftentimes, just the opposite is true.

The other problem with saying that God desires all Christians to be prosperous and disease free, based off what Paul said in Philippians 4:19, is the fact that not only does such a statement ignore the wider context of the letter, but it also turns the word “needs” in v. 19 into “wants” and “desires.”

We do not have to be “healthy, wealthy, and comfortable” in order to have our needs met. Being “healthy, wealthy, and comfortable” is often more about our “wants and desires” than it is our “needs.”

In order to have our needs met all we “need” is Jesus Christ and his Word. “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Everything else is pale when compared to Jesus.

And then as it concerns our physical needs, if we have food, if we have clothing, and if we have work,” then we are blessed. Everything else we might get on top of that is gravy.

Yes, we ought to believe and trust that “God will meet all of our needs, both physical and spiritual, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” But that does not mean that you are guaranteed a problem free, worry free, sick free, healthy, wealthy, and comfortable lifestyle. Do not make the mistake of turning “needs” into “wants.”

### **Doing All Things or Enduring All Things?**

Now on to the second roadblock, v. 13.

“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”

No, you can't “do all things through Christ who gives you strength.” Let me tell you some of the things you can't do.

You cannot run the forty yard dash in two seconds. You cannot stand out in the middle of the highway and expect to live. You cannot win every time you walk on the field. You cannot drive drunk and expect not to get a DUI. You cannot always make 100's on all your tests, and you cannot get always get that special promotion.

I hate to burst your bubble but you “can't do all things through Christ who gives you strength,” regardless of how many times you tell yourself you can.

There are some things you can't do.

People throw this verse around and interpret it like God wants all of us to be Clark Kent, a.k.a. Superman.

Philippians 4:13 may be one of the worse English translations of the Greek NT in the entire Bible.

Literally in the Greek it translates as, “All (things) I am strong in the one empowering me.”

What Paul is really saying here is that whatever this world throws at him he can endure it because of the One who gives him strength, Jesus.

He is being empowered by Christ to remain strong regardless of his circumstances.

The Greek word that is used here is *en-duna-moun-ti* and it is based off the root word *duna-mai*, which means power. We get words like dynamo, dynamic, dynasty, and dynamite from that Greek word and all those words communicate empowerment in some way, shape, or form.

Jesus is empowering Paul not to “leap tall buildings in a single bound” but to endure, to get through whatever the situation is, whether good or bad or plenty or want.

The context of the passage supports such an interpretation because right before Philippians 4:13 Paul says that he has learned the secret to being “content,” regardless of the circumstances.

Paul says he knows what it is to be in need and to have plenty. He knows what it is to be well fed and he knows what it is to be hungry, but it does not matter. Why? Because he can “do all things,” which as I have already stated really means he can “endure all things,” through Christ who gives him strength.

Ironically, it is Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, which is a paraphrase of the Bible that best captures the essence of what Paul is saying in this text; not the NIV, NRSV, ESV, KJV, NKJV.

Peterson puts it like this: “I’ve found the recipe for being happy, whether well fed or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, *I can make it through anything* in the One who makes me who I am.

There is a big difference between saying that and saying “you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength.”

You **can’t** do all things if by saying that you mean things like I said earlier in the sermon, but you **can** make it through anything in Jesus Christ, the One who gives you the strength to endure it. If that is what you mean when you say “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength,” then you are on good grounds and you are hitting on what Paul is trying to communicate in this text.

### **What Will Make Us Happy?**

Knowing all of this about these two verses brings us close to the point of this sermon. The point of this sermon has to do with the matter what it is that will bring us contentment in this life.

Based off my comments on how one ought to properly interpret v. 19 of the text we can certainly say that being ‘healthy, wealthy, and comfortable’ is **not** the key to contentment. This is not what Paul was teaching when he said “And my God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Our contentment is not based upon us attaining a certain kind of condition in our lives.

And then based off my comments on how one ought to properly interpret v. 13 of the text we can also say that the key to being content is not based upon us being able to “reach new heights” in our work, school, athletics, or whatever other goals we might have set for ourselves. . This is not what Paul meant when he said “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” Our contentment is not based upon our human achievement.

If our contentment is based upon that then we will never be happy because those kinds of things come and go.

There are some of us here today who are not happy in life and who are not content, and the reason we are not happy and content is because we have sought contentment through health, wealth, and comfort, and we have sought it in trying to reach new heights. We have “cast our pearls before swine” and we have sought contentment in things that Jesus said will one day “rot away.”

More than that, we have sought contentment in things that are not only unfulfilling but also fleeting, and can be taken from us in a moment’s notice. No wonder we are not content.

Pascal said that in the heart of every man is a God-shaped vacuum.

That is to say there is a hole, a void in life that can only be filled by God, and if you try to fill it through money, comfort, health, food, sex, schooling, entertainment, ease, or climbing the corporate ladder you will end up starving yourself and you will die. “For the wages of sin is death.”

We usually don't think of sin in this kind of way. But what I have just set before you is the chief of all sins- idolatry.

What is idolatry?

In our culture it is not bowing down to dead statues, but rather it is man's vain efforts to fill his void, his God-shaped vacuum, with everything but God!

### **Christ is the Key to Contentment**

So then what is the secret to contentment? It is Christ.

This is what Paul has been telling us all throughout Philippians.

In the beginning of the letter Paul prays that they would grow in their knowledge of and love for Jesus Christ. (1:9) he tells them he is consumed with one task only, the preaching of Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners.

In Philippians Paul expresses his desire to die and go be with Christ. He also gives us the great Christ hymn, reminding us that one day “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

In it he encourages the church to be of “one mind in Christ” so that they may be “unified in Christ.”

He tells them to grow up in their Christian faith by “working out their salvation with fear and trembling.”

In Philippians 3 Paul tells the church that he considers everything in this world to be garbage when compared to Christ and because of that he “presses on” to obtain the prize for which he has been called to. What is the prize? The prize is Jesus.

Jesus is certainly the central focus of our text today. For in it Paul tells us that he can endure anything through Christ who gives him strength; and it is Christ alone who can meet both his needs, and the needs of the Philippians.

This letter is all about Jesus.

Jesus.

Have you learned the secret of being content in any and every situation?

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.