

Philippians 4:10-23

When we shift our eyes from ourselves to our God we can live a full life regardless of our circumstances

This text is so amazing in that it truly wraps up so many of the topics that we've talked about this summer. It's kind of a potluck of beautiful, dynamic truths that are so relevant to our lives.

As we've heard all summer, Paul wrote this letter from a jail cell and most people believe that jail cell was in Rome. And in a fly over view of this text, a few questions naturally arise.

How did Paul live such a full, satisfied, content life in the midst of such a difficult context? How did the church at Philippi get to be so generous? These questions should serve as a catalyst to drive us back to the text to see what God is saying. We don't have to conjecture answers to these questions, they are right in the Word of God.

God wants us to Live Contently (verses 10-13)

In verse 10 we see that Paul is saying, thank you so much for your gift, I am so grateful! And I don't think these are pleasantries either, he says, "rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care has flourished again." In verse 11 he says, "Not that I speak in regard to need..." (need means depression) He's saying: I'm not thankful because I was depressed and you cheered me up, my thankfulness is not predicated on my disposition, because I've learned to be content in whatever physical situation I'm in. Let me get this straight Paul, you're content in whatever physical situation you're in? This is crazy to me because I know I'm so far off this mark. I get so frustrated sitting in traffic on i-4 on the way to downtown. I get so angry when tuition goes up from year to year. I get so irritated sometimes because I still live at home and am under the direct umbrella of my parent's authority. I am so not content in every situation. But that's what God calls us to strive for. Paul knows what he's talking about when he says this. He's literally writing this line of Scripture from prison for proclaiming his faith. If anyone should be frustrated with their situation, it should be Paul!

Paul goes on to write starting in verse 12, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound... to be full and to be hungry... to abound and to suffer need." What Paul meant by abased was having extreme poverty and to abound means to have much.

At this point, I just want to know where Paul gets the strength for these assertions of his lifestyle. I believe him, that he is acquainted with how to be abased and how to abound I believe him, that he knows how to be hungry and how to be full. This is Scripture, but this philosophy is so counter-cultural and difficult to put hands and feet on, to put into practice in our lives, I just want to know where he gets the power! And if

we read one verse further, we find the very thing. The Bible says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This is such a frequently quoted verse, we hear athletes use it all the time talking about their physical strength but this verse is truly referring to the strength to be content. The power comes from God. It's God given strength to live contently. That's the only way we possibly conceive to do this. This brings up a good point, living contently has nothing to do with our situation (our context, circumstances, life stage) but it is completely predicated upon relying on the strength of God. Our culture tells us we will never be satisfied and content unless we have 6 figures, a nice house, and an expensive car. So we chase something that this world has hoisted in front of us like a carrot on a stick thinking that if we can just improve our circumstance, we'll be happy and content when all the while true joy and satisfaction has been right in front of us. We are only satisfied in Christ alone and we can only live contently by relying on the power of God in our lives. (4:16)

God wants us to Give Liberally (verses 14-18)

If we look into the Scriptures starting in verse 14 the Word of God clearly paints 3 specific pictures of what giving liberally looks like.

But I wanted us to discuss a few confusing phrases before we look into the meaning behind these verses and see how we can take ownership of needs. In verse 14, Paul says, "Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress." Nevertheless: in spite of. In spite of the fact that Paul said he was content in all things, it was still good that Philippi gave to Paul.

In verse 15, Paul says, "...that in the beginning of the gospel..." no church aided him except for Philippi. What does in the beginning of the gospel mean? It means the beginning of his ministry as an ambassador of the gospel. And we love the gospel here at the BCM that Christ died for the sins of humanity to bridge the gap between God and man through faith in His sacrifice.

Let's observe the 3 characteristics of giving liberally that Paul talks about:

-We as Christ followers must take ownership of the needs of others

If we look at verse 14, there's a phrase at the end says, "...shared in my distress..." that phrase could read to become a partaker in a burden. God wants us to immerse ourselves in, to engage with, and to become familiar with the needs of others. In the book of Acts, the story of the 1st Century church is told. One of the most beautiful facets of the early church was how the church handled giving to those in need. Acts 2:44-45 reads, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need."

The 1st Century church bought into the needs in their community. They came together, sold all they had, and gave to those who were in need. This radical example of giving shows us the importance of taking ownership in the needs of others, but before we sell all our possessions to give to the poor, I think we must equally consider the next truth from this passage.

-God doesn't always ask for extravagant giving

If we look at verse 16 Paul says that the church at Philippi "...sent aid... for my necessities..." Paul didn't get the Rolls Royce of gift baskets from Philippi! He received unto his necessity. Similarly, God doesn't give anyone an excuse not to give. You can give small and out of a good heart and it will be as verse 18 puts it, a "sweet-smelling aroma" to God in worship!

-Giving pleases God

If we look at verse 18, the Paul says the Philippians' gift was, "...a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God." Our giving brings a smile to the face of God. When we, out of a joyful heart, elect to give that which we could enjoy our self, it pleases God! It's like when you walk into a kitchen where cookies have just been baked. The smell hits you and it's heavenly! That's what our giving is like to God, in a much more theological sense. (4:15)

These three things serve as a body of proof that we ought to give liberally.

God wants us to Trust Boldly (in His provision) (verse 19)

Looking at verse 19, the Bible reads, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This verse is one of the most popular verses from this entire book! Your grandma probably has this on a pillow! This is such a beautiful promise, but what it seems like is that often we take this promise and pervert the meaning to fit our agenda. We so desire this verse to have said "want" and not "need." And it's not to say wanting is completely wrong... but take for example.... (Not empirically wrong...) Phone getting slow after 2 years because contract is up, H&M restocking daily. Not empirically wrong, but it won't satisfy

Culture says it is okay to want however much of whatever you want and you'll be happy and we hijack this philosophy and hoist it up onto God and we think he should give us whatever we want. And I can imagine He looks down on us and thinks "That's adorable. You think you have it all figured out. But because I love you, I won't always give you what you want, but I will always give you what you need." This is the place where if we lean into his sovereignty, that he knows what we need and He will supply it, that we begin to feel satisfied.

Matthew 6:30-34 lays this truth out so vividly, it says, "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

What's often quoted out of context is verse 33. We'll substitute anything into "all these things" when the Word of God clearly defines what Jesus is talking about. A few verses earlier he tells the disciples not to worry about the food they will eat, the liquid they will drink, or the clothes they wear! These are not luxury prayer requests! They are every day necessities! The promise that if we, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you," applies specifically to our necessities that our father knows we need! Because our God knows our needs and will meet them, we can trust boldly in His provision. (5:13)

God wants us to Love Prolifically (verses 20-23)

I think one of my tendencies when I read one of Paul's letters is to skim through the last few verses because they are predominately personal greetings and the customary "Grace and peace." I tend to treat it like the signature on an email... the blurb that business people put their name, number, and company and it's on every email. I treat it as extra. But God really convicted me in prepping that "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

One of the things we observe is that the Paul uses the word "greet" or some form of it 3 times within 4 verses. "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus... The brethren who are with me greet you... All the saints greet you..." This word is so beautiful; it means to embrace. Paul is saying hug everyone for me, we love you and send greetings your way! I think what is so evident is how Paul loved so many people so much! We see it leap off the page of God's word! His letters are teeming with specific greetings and shared relationships with the saints. He knew and loved so many people! In fact his was so influential that the palace guards who had been converted wanted Paul to give them a shout out to Philippi in verse 22, sending their greetings also.

There are so many examples of Paul's deep compassion for people that it makes you wonder where it came from! There's no one better to tell us than Paul himself. In Ephesians 5:2, He says, "And walk in love, (as we see. How?) as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling

savor." Paul loved dynamically according to Christ's love for Him. We ought to love prolifically. (2:15)

So, how did Paul live such a full, satisfied, content life in the midst of such a difficult context? How did the church at Philippi get to be so generous?

I think the answers are wrapped up in the point of the message. If you don't remember anything else from tonight, do everything you can to remember this sentence. One thing to remember: **"When we shift our eyes from our self to our God we can live a full life regardless of our circumstances."**

When we focus our attention on God and not on our self, we begin to see how big God is and how we can rely on His strength to live contently. When we fix our eyes on God and not on our self, we recognize how everything we have is a gift from God and our possessions become tools to give liberally. When we concentrate our gaze upon God and not on our self, we start to understand how good He is and how we can trust in His provision boldly. When we narrow our view to God and not on our self, we are reminded of the cross and how we are free to love others because He first loved us. This full life is so much better than a life lived for self. When we are focused on God, the peace that we talked about last week can be a part of our life. When we are focused on God, the same kind of joy that Paul had in any circumstance can be enjoyed in our lives. This reality has cut me to the core, because I spend so much time focused on me. My pride spoils so much of the good I do and I hog the glory that is rightfully God's. And where does this get me? I have a big ego and no satisfaction. None of it satisfies and it all leaves a bad taste in my mouth. "When we shift our eyes from our self to our God we can live a full life regardless of our circumstances." (1:46)