

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Philippians' Gift to Paul Philippians 4:10-20 Part 3**

Christ taught His disciples that it was more blessed to give than to receive. However most Christians do not demonstrate in their giving practices that they really believe this. Though a typical Christian family might earn \$50,000 or more they usually are more concerned about how that money might serve them rather than how that money might serve others and the cause of Christ. Though a very reasonable goal for every Christian, based on the Scriptures, would be to give away as much money as possible over the course of their lives, very few professing Christians ever embrace that goal. And I don't believe that I would be wrong in thinking that there are some here this weekend who have not embraced that goal as well. And I believe the biggest reason for this is because many Christians, perhaps most Christians, do not believe the words of Christ to His disciples that it is truly more blessed to give than receive.

What is the truth? Is it really more blessed to give than receive? Certainly the apostle Paul believed this and this becomes abundantly clear to us in **Philippians 4:10-19**. Let us once again read this wonderful passage of Scripture, **“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. (14) Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. (15) And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; (16) for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. (17) Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. (18) But 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. (19) And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Christ.”**

What were the circumstances that led Paul to write these words? Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Being under house arrest provided him far greater ministry opportunities than if he was in a Roman dungeon. But unfortunately being under house arrest also meant that there were certain expenses that he was responsible to meet. The Philippians realizing Paul's situation, plus being in the best financial position that they had been for 10 years, reached out once again to Paul with a very substantial financial gift.

**Philippians 4:10-19** records for us Paul's response to this gift that he received from the Philippians. This response went far beyond a simple thank you. Paul chose rather to respond to their gracious gift with a significant amount of instruction. More specifically Paul chose to give them a significant amount of instruction about the relative blessedness of giving and receiving.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

The question that I began to address several weeks ago in light of **Philippians 4:10-19** was, “What did Paul’s thank you to the Philippians involve?” The first thing that we saw in Paul’s thank you to the Philippians was.....

Thanking the Philippians involved telling them how their gift made him feel. Let us read **verse 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.**” Paul’s response to the financial gift of the Philippians was great joy.

What is the first area of thought involved in Paul’s thank you to the Philippians? Thanking the Philippians first of all involved telling them how their gift made him feel. What else did thanking the Philippians involve?

Thanking the Philippians also involved clarifying that their expression of care was a greater benefit for them rather than for him (Philippians 4:11-17). This is spelled out for us in **Philippians 4:11-19.**

Paul began this clarification by looking at how necessary he viewed their gift in fulfilling God’s purpose for his life (Philippians 4:11-13). We found this clarification in **Philippians 4:11-13.** Let us read these verses, “**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.**” What was Paul saying in these verses? He is telling them that he in no way saw their gift effecting whether or not God’s ultimate purpose for his life would be fulfilled. In fact he didn’t see any circumstance as effecting whether or not God’s ultimate purpose for his life would be fulfilled.

Another way of saying this would be Paul was not desperate for their gift, neither did he sense a need for their gift, because he had learned contentment. Contentment has everything to do with us maintaining our focus on the ultimate goal for our lives which is being a participant in the resurrection of the dead and being perfectly conformed to Christ while at the same time understanding that there is no circumstance that can keep us from reaching that ultimate goal. How does a Christian go about learning this kind of contentment in whatever circumstances they might find themselves?

If we want to learn contentment there are two things we need to know. If we want to learn contentment we must first of all appreciate the difficulty of achieving this goal. The pursuit of contentment will not be a cakewalk. And those who successfully achieve this goal will have not achieved it by accident. There are just too many obstacles in front of them. If this were not true Paul would not have said that he had to learn contentment. What are those obstacles? What are those difficulties?

The pursuit of contentment is difficult because of the world (1 John 2:15). The world is seeking to seduce us. In **1 John 2:15** John tells us “**Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**”

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

If the world is successful in seducing us we will lose our heavenly focus. If we lose our heavenly focus we will never be able to enjoy the contentment that Paul enjoyed.

Why is the pursuit of contentment so difficult? The pursuit of contentment is difficult first of all because of the world. What else might make our pursuit of contentment difficult?

The pursuit of contentment is difficult because of our sinful flesh (Galatians 5:16-21). **Galatians 5:16-21** tells us about a battle that is raging inside us between the flesh and the Spirit. If this battle is not fought successfully, if the lust of our flesh and the lust of our eyes and the pride of life all of which is a product of our sinful flesh are allowed to rule and control us we will lose our heavenly focus. And if we lose our heavenly focus we will never be able to enjoy the contentment that Paul enjoyed.

Why is the pursuit of contentment so difficult? The pursuit of contentment is difficult first of all because of the world. And secondly the pursuit of contentment is difficult because of our sinful flesh. And finally picking up where we left off last week the .....

The pursuit of contentment is difficult because of the devil (1 Peter 5:8). Let me read for you **1 Peter 5:8** “**Be sober in spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**” Would the devil actually seek to use discontent to devour us and to distract us from our heavenly focus? Of course! It is not as if he has not done this before.

I am sure you are familiar with the story of Adam and Eve. They were perfect and living in a perfect place but this did not prevent Satan from approaching Eve and successfully filling her with a spirit of discontent. How did Satan accomplish this? It is spelled out for us in **Genesis 3:1-5**, “**Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?” (2) And the woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; (3) but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.” (4) And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely shall not die! (5) For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ (6) When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate.” ..... Satan devoured Eve by initially distracting her and then successfully tempting her to become discontent. If he had not been successful in doing this she would never have eaten the fruit.**

If our battle with Satan is not fought successfully we will lose our heavenly focus. And if we lose our heavenly focus we will never be able to enjoy the contentment that Paul enjoyed.

The pursuit of contentment is difficult. It is difficult because the world, the flesh and the devil are constantly at work to distract us from our heavenly focus. It is difficult because the world, the flesh and the devil are constantly at work to distract us from our goal of being a participant in the resurrection from the dead and being perfectly conformed to Christ.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

It is difficult because the world, the flesh and the devil are constantly seeking to elevate in our minds the importance of our circumstances and if these forces are successful contentment will be very elusive.

I hope that you appreciate what I have just shared with you. Because the pursuit of contentment is difficult we need to position ourselves for long term success as we seek to live a life pleasing to Him. We need to build into our lives the things which nurture a heavenly focus. What are those things? Time in the word, time in prayer, time in fellowship and time in outreach. If we respond in this way to the many difficulties that we are facing in maintaining our heavenly focus while at the same time minimizing the significance we assign to earthly circumstances it positions us for victory in every aspect of the Christian life including contentment.

This leads us to the second thing we need to appreciate if we are going to learn contentment. If we want to learn contentment we not only need to position ourselves for victory in light of the difficulties we are facing but we must draw upon the strength of Christ (Phil. 4:13).

Let us again look at **Philippians 4:11-13** but this time we will read through verse 13, **“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.”** What is this secret of contentment referred to by Paul? Let us now read **Philippians 4:13**, **“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”** Drawing upon the strength of Christ was Paul’s secret in maintaining contentment in every circumstance (Philippians 4:13). Now let’s get this into perspective.

Doing what we can in order to position ourselves for long term success prepares us to draw upon the strength of Christ but we still need to draw upon that strength by faith when we are being buffeted by circumstances.

Drawing on Christ’s strength allowed Paul to maintain his heavenly focus while keeping his circumstances in their proper perspective (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

We see this process being worked out in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**. Let me read this passage for you, **“And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me - to keep me from exalting myself! (8) Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. (9) And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (10) Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

Paul had been afflicted with a **“thorn in the flesh.”** This apparently was some form of physical suffering. Now let me ask you, “If you were suffering physically in some form or fashion would you want to be free of it?”

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

And the answer I believe would have to be yes. Is there anything spiritually wrong in desiring to be set free from physical suffering? Of course not! And because of this and because Paul had positioned himself for spiritual success he took his desire to be set free from this affliction and brought it before the Lord in prayer. He prayed three times that the Lord would take it from him. But his request was repeatedly denied. The thorn in the flesh was not removed. Why did the Lord choose not to remove it? Because that physical affliction was serving Paul in keeping him humble.

Could Paul's continuing affliction have turned into dissatisfaction? Could Paul's continuing affliction have turned into discontent? And the answer is of course. But rather than becoming despondent or upset about his continuing bad circumstance he drew upon the strength of Christ. What did the verse say? Look at **verse 9**, **“And he has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”** The Lord chose not to answer the prayer as Paul had prayed it. But God did answer Paul's prayer. The Lord chose to display His power not through a healing ministry but rather He chose to display His power through a sustaining ministry. And Paul was prepared to receive that sustaining power.

In fact, Paul came to see that in his situation this display of power was even preferable. Let me ask you this question, “from Paul's perspective what would display the Lord's strength the best? A healing ministry or a sustaining ministry?” A sustaining ministry. Isn't this what Paul is saying when he says, **“for power is perfected in weakness.”** He prayed for one thing and did not get it but he learned that God had given him something better.

What makes you marvel more? A Christian who has no problems and is content, or a Christian who has a boatload of problems and is content? There is absolutely no contest. I believe that we are far more impressed with Christians who through the strength of Christ are able to remain content and satisfied in the midst of difficult circumstances than we are with Christians who have no thorns or thistles in their lives. Paul believed this.

And since Paul actually believed that Christ's power was perfected in weakness it led him to say at the end of **verse 9**, **“Most gladly, therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”** I feel like Paul.

When my blood test indicated an elevated PSA level a marker for cancer I immediately went to God's throne of grace in prayer. What did I pray? I prayed that my PSA would drop to a normal level. Could God have done this? And the answer is, “Of course.” But that was not how He chose to demonstrate His power in my life. I believe He rather has chosen to provide me the opportunity to experience the power of Christ to sustain me.

I was able to quickly accept this truth very quickly because I have positioned myself to have a heavenly focus through the things I have built into my life such as I mentioned earlier which are the word, prayer, fellowship, and outreach.

Do I want cancer? No! Do I want to have surgery? No! Do I want to suffer what I know will be the effects of that surgery and beyond that what might be the results of the effects of surgery? No!

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

But I know that these circumstances give me the opportunity to experience the power of Christ to sustain me. I know that these circumstances give me the opportunity to know Christ better in this very special way. I know that these circumstances will strategically move me forward to my ultimate goal which is to be perfectly conformed to Christ at the resurrection from the dead.

### CONCLUSION

What did thanking the Philippians involve in **Philippians 4:10-19**? First of all thanking the Philippians involved telling them how their gift made him feel (Philippians 4:10). And secondly thanking the Philippians involved clarifying that their expression of care was a greater benefit for them rather than for him (Philippians 4:11-19). Paul began this clarification by looking initially at how necessary he viewed their gift in fulfilling God's purpose for his life (Philippians 4:11-13). We have now concluded this clarification. What in effect had Paul told the Philippians in these three verses. He in essence told them that their gift, in terms of the bigger picture, really had not benefited him very much. He told them that whether they gave the gift to him or did not give the gift to him he was content because he could through Christ's strength maintain his heavenly focus in any and every circumstance.

Have you learned through Christ's strength to maintain your heavenly focus to such a degree that you could be described as content in every circumstance?