

KEEPING YOUR JOY - The Heartfelt Theology of an Isolated Prisoner Part twenty-twoSunday, November 29th, 2020, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #2058

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“MY GOD WILL SUPPLY EVERY NEED OF YOURS”

Philippians 4:14-23 - “Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. [15] And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. [17] Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. [18] I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. [19] And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. [20] To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. [21] Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. [22] All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. [23] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Verse 14 is the closest Paul comes to a direct **“thank you”** to the Philippian congregation - **“It was *kind of you to share in my trouble.*”** Because of the closeness of his relationship to this church he tells them something he tells no other congregation. Of all the churches Paul planted, and of all the cities he visited, the church at Philippi was the **only** church to help him out with his ministry on even close to a regular basis.

This is telling. Whenever you do anything for Jesus (let alone the great foundation laying work of the apostle Paul!) and almost no one even remembers you're doing it, it takes a fair bit of contentment in Christ and patience for reward in heaven to keep going. I guess we can all learn from that.

The fact that Paul continued joyfully, receiving so little support, shows how he had lived by his own words - **“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. [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”(4:11-12)**

The church at Philippi, however, had made a practice of remembering the kinds of needs Paul might have as he took the same gospel he had brought to **them to others**. In Paul's words, they had truly entered into a **“partnership in the gospel from the first day until now”(1:5).**

Today's text tells us that even before Paul had left the province of Macedonia (where the city of Philippi was located) they had already been sending him support for his work. They repeated this support to him when he was ministering in Thessalonica, also in Macedonia (**4:15-16**).

Their hearts were so tied to Paul's - and so tied to Christ's - that even when Paul was out of sight and voice they felt their call to be a part of his mission and ministry. Out of sight wasn't out of mind. This is the church shining at

its best.

There's a wonderful thought-process in this church. It's one of the keys to authentic discipleship. They had the ability to hold their responsibility to the Lord in a **conscious fashion** when there was no one physically present to call them to do so. The **inward pressure** of the Holy Spirit was of greater consequence to their behavior than any **external pressure** of religious duty or regulation.

Here's how we will work through our text today. First, I want to look at **three principles of Christian giving**. I see them in **verses 14 through 18**. Then, second, I want to see how God **responds** to the generosity of His people. I see that so wonderfully declared in **verse 19**. And finally, I want to examine the **hope** Paul holds out to this persecuted congregation in his benediction. This is wrapped up in **verses 20-23**.

1) THREE PRINCIPLES OF GENEROUS CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

Philippians 4:15-18 - "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. [17] Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. [18] I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."

A) THE SUPPORT OF THE GOSPEL BEYOND YOUR OWN TURF IS THE BEST INDICATOR OF YOUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Philippians 4:15-16 - "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again."

It's obvious from the text that what moved Paul so deeply about the gifts from the church at Philippi was the fact that **they** remembered him when no one **else** did. And the **reason** this catches Paul's eye, while important, is no where near as obvious. Their support for Paul **while Paul was away** proved their loyalty was to **Christ** and not just their own **interests**.

That's why I said the support of the gospel **beyond your own turf** is the best indicator of your spiritual health. It's not the **only** indicator. But it's probably the **best** indicator because it shows your love is for people because of **who they are in Christ**, and **how much Christ loves them**,

even when there is no chance they will **ever** become a part of our own **congregation**. Your giving outside your own turf shows you love **Jesus**, not just the building of your own **ministry**.

Do build your own church. Build it as **big** and as **strong** and as **vibrant** and as **well organized** as you possibly can. But don't **just** build your own church. Have the same passion to see people reached in **other regions** as you have to see them reached **at home**. That is the best proof that your motive for your ministry is **Christ's heart** rather than **personal pride**.

B) **GENEROUS CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP IS THE BEST INVESTMENT FOR YOUR MONEY**

Philippians 4:17 - "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit."

If Paul were some kind of religious shyster you wouldn't believe these words. What he says he's most joyful about **isn't** the comfort **he** received from their gift, but the fruit **they** received from their gift.

I believe the words Paul uses are very important here. "**I seek the fruit that increases to your credit**"(17). I don't think Paul is talking about piling up cash in some heavenly bank account. In fact, I think he has already tipped his hand as to what he is thinking about in these words by an earlier comment in this letter:

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (1:9-11).

He prays the same thing again, using different words, in **1:25** - "**Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith....**"

"Progress." "I want to see **growth**. I want to watch your relationship with Jesus **bloom** and **flourish**. I want you to feel the **joy** and the **life** of it unfolding more and more in your own skin."

Generous stewardship is a key way God **piles up the fruit** of your walk with Him. It's like, but so much greater than, money piling up in a bank account. Spiritual life and joy start to accumulate with compound interest.

And all through eternity you will be bumping into the fruit of your gifts in heaven - people you never

once met on this earth, but who are eternal wonders of the new birth because of your generosity. Outside of seeing Jesus face to face, there will be no greater joy encountered on the streets of glory. "I'm rejoicing to see that fruit piling up through your generous giving," says Paul.

This is Paul's constant advice to those who have some abundance of earthly wealth - **1 Timothy 6:17-19** - "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. [18] They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, [19] thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

What does Paul mean by that last sentence - "***....So that they may take hold of that which is truly life?***" Does he mean he wants all of us rich Christians to finally learn that as long as you have lots of money stashed in glory you have learned about what is most important in life?

I doubt it very much. I think he wants me to learn to use my wealth in such a way that through it I chase after what is ultimately important - fruit for Christ's kingdom. Paul's whole point is I'm to learn **not** to set my hope on the "***uncertainty of riches***" (17), but to **convert** my wealth into a foundation that is ***truly life eternal*** (19).

There's something obvious and something profound here. Of course wealth constantly has to be converted into something else to be of any value. It's only of value when you convert it into something else - houses, cars, cottages, education, another business, a nice trip - whatever. If you could **never** convert your dollars into **anything else** what good would it be? Money is worthless until it's converted into something else.

And the profound point of Paul's words is our lives will be smaller and less satisfying than they could be unless we learn the hard lesson of converting our wealth into the right kind of ***fruit*** - **1 Timothy 6:19** - "....storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

C) GIFTS GIVEN TO GOD'S WORK ARE GIFTS GIVEN TO GOD HIMSELF

Philippians 4:18 - "I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."

“That gift you sent me,” says Paul, “was not **just** given to me. It was not even **primarily** given to me. It has been offered like one of those Old Testament sacrifices. The smoke of it has wafted up like incense to God Almighty. He has received it **joyfully** and **personally**.”

This is a profound truth, worn dull by too much shallow hearing. God so attaches Himself to the spreading of the gospel that gifts given to this cause on earth pass into another realm. Somehow, it doesn't just pass between the Philippians and Paul. It ends up being given to God Himself. He receives it with great delight and pleasure. This is how God ties Himself to His work. This is how His heart is reached. The gift of the Philippians was a **“fragrant sacrifice”** offered up to God.

This leads into the second main point from our introduction: how God **responds** to the generosity of His people:

2) HOW FATHER GOD RESPONDS TO THE GENEROSITY OF HIS SAINTS

Philippians 4:19 - “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

What are we going to do with this wonderful but troubling promise? How is this **“supply”** of God connected with the generosity of the church at Philippi? Is this God, paying back his people cash for cash?

And what about other promises where God supplies the needs of **all** people - saint and sinner alike?

Matthew 5:44-45 - “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Psalm 145:16 - “You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

There you have it. God alone is the one who daily satisfies our needs. He does it for **all** of His creation. And He does it **all** the time. Breath and strength and food from the soil - children, family, and jobs to earn money - clothes and oil in the ground to keep us warm in the winter - **all** come, usually totally unrecognized, from the good, giving heart of the God who cares about our needs. So what meaning shall we attach to Paul's special promise in our text?

The answer is found in the context of Paul's whole letter to the congregation at Philippi. We have other

needs - **bigger** needs - than the ones I listed a moment ago. Trials come. Paul writes from prison. Worries nag the delicate fabric of our minds. Friends can turn into enemies. Bright futures can change overnight. We need **joy** that is unerasable. We need **peace** that can protect the inner being from the outward storm. We need the conviction that ***“to live is Christ and to die is gain.”***

There is no answer to these needs in any bank. They can't be found on any car lot. No university degree can grant them. These needs are only answered in **God**. God grants His supply to all who, in practical, costly, material ways, put His kingdom first. That's the link between the promise in verse 19 and the faithfulness demonstrated in the verses preceding. Only giving to God can so enrich a life.

On to the last point:

3) THE FINAL CONQUEST AND THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

Philippians 4:20-23 - “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. [21] Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. [22] All the saints greet you, **especially those of Caesar's household.** [23] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Of all the things Paul spills out in these verses, there is one thing he wants them to note ***“especially”***(22). Here is the part Paul would have underlined in his closing farewell. And it's here we fix our final attention.

We might quickly fly over this closing greeting hardly noticing something that would have instantly penetrated the mental processing of the **Philippians**. Paul ***“especially”*** wants to convey the love and greetings of those of ***“Caesar's household”*** (22). The significance of this would be tied to the fact that Philippi was a **Roman** colony, where devotion to Caesar had a long and bloody history.

Beside having the **gospel** in common, Paul and the Philippians also had a common source of **opposition** and **persecution**. Paul has already mentioned this several times in this letter: **1:29-30** - “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also **suffer for his sake,** [30] **engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.**”

Remember, Paul has just promised these Philippian believers God would supply all their needs in Christ Jesus (**4:19**). Would He indeed? Paul gives them proof. There are now **Christians** right in Caesar's household. Could Paul mean actual **family** members? We'll never know for sure. But the gospel was converting Paul's enemies. God was meeting Paul's needs. Even while in prison his life was bearing fruit.

Consider the impact of these words. The Philippian Christians were facing the **“same struggle” (1:30)** Paul was facing. And there were Christians who used to be their avowed enemies - right in Caesar's household - who were praying for the saints at Philippi! They were, to use Paul's words, all fellow **“citizens of heaven” (3:20)**. And they were now waiting **together** for the same Lord from heaven.

So Paul closes with the particular greeting that would prove his point. God was meeting his needs, and theirs, indeed. God's faithful promise was turning the tide. It would ultimately win the day.