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A Giving Church Philippians 4:14-23

Intro: In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he has put forward and explained plenty of important Christian doctrines and has delivered quite a few profound truths concerning the working and growing of the Christian faith and that trend continues even to his very last closing remarks. At the end of **ch4**, Paul has written 2 of the most well known and loved passages of all Scripture: **v13** and **v19**. What's odd with these 2 verses is that one seems to be given an inordinate amount of attention in modern Christian culture while the other is usually only referenced when discussing giving. It appears that many people treat **v13** as if it says "I can do all things through a verse taken out of context" while the argument could be made that **v19** is one of the greatest, if not the greatest promise in all the Bible.

Now, we discussed **v13** in our last study and we saw how it was the summary declaration of Paul's ability to be content in any and every situation. What was the secret of Paul's contentment in the face of all circumstances? First, he had an unshakable confidence in the overruling providence of God to arrange in advance the circumstances of his life in such a way that facilitated his divine calling and fulfilled his God-given purposes. He knew God's purposes would be accomplished through God's providence. Secondly, Paul also relied on the unfailing power of God to give him the strength to meet every situation in his life.

The 3rd spiritual resource in Paul's life that enabled him to be content concerns the unchanging promises of God which will be addressed in **v19** but before we get there, we cannot overlook the jewel Paul has provided for us in **v14-18**. It concerns the giving that the Philippian church engaged in on Paul's behalf, their motivation for giving and what their giving actually produced in the life of Paul and in the life of their own church. The principles laid out in this text are both instructive and beneficial for all believers today so we will concentrate our focus on them today. Last time, we noted that the Philippian church is remembered because they remembered Paul. But, they are remembered because they were a wonderful example of true Christian compassion and Christian stewardship.

14 – As was stated last time, there's a real sense here that the Philippians' giving was actually better for them than it was for Paul; even in spite of his great difficulty. In fact, he alludes to a great biblical truth here, one he would state elsewhere (**Acts 20:35**) - that godly giving is actually better for the giver than it is for the one who receives. It is likely that the gift for Philippi didn't amount to very much, if estimated in Roman currency as the church was going through a period of deep poverty (**II Cor 8:2**). But, Paul makes quite a big deal of it and sits down to write a letter of thanks in which he elaborates on the spiritual significance of their thoughtful and generous gift. Paul compares their giving to 3 very familiar things.

1st, he compares their act of giving to a budding tree (**10**). The word flourished expresses the idea of a flower or tree budding or blossoming. Having been out of contact with them for so long and then seeing Epaphroditus show up in Rome at Paul's time of need was refreshing and encouraging. Many times believers will go through a season of winter spiritually when everything seems dead and fruitless but then spring arrives with new life and blessing. The tree hasn't picked up moved itself out of the situation; the circumstances haven't changed but there is new life within. The budding tree points to fruit in the near future and that's what Paul is going to point out next.

15-17 – In **v15**, when Paul speaks of the beginning of the Gospel, he's referring to his pioneering mission works in Europe that are recorded in Acts 16 and beyond. Paul's very first excursion into Europe, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, was in Philippi. After he left that city, he says that the church there was faithful to support him as he continued to carry the gospel through Greece. In fact, Philippi wasn't just the first church to support Paul; apparently, they were the only ones supporting him during this period. He even singles out their assistance to him while he was in Thessalonica. He says they helped him time and again and he was only there 2-3 weeks!

Here, (**17**) Paul isn't so much interested in the gift he received as much as he was in the fruit that was abounding to their account. Their gift to Paul's ministry would actually increase the fruit recorded to their account by God. Clearly, the Lord has a ledger book where He records the fruit "produced" by the faithful obedience of His children and Paul states that in God's sight the gift would appear as fruit credited to their personal account. We often only think of the fruit of Christianity in terms of character, mainly like the fruit

of the Spirit listed in [Gal 5](#). But other things are said to be fruit in the Christian life. Converts are the fruit of our labors for Christ. Money given to help others is also called fruit. According to the text, our gifts to others are encouraged by God, noticed by God and much desired by God.

A good bit of proper Christian giving is hindered by the conviction in some believers that security is really dependent on having things or money. Some think security rests in finding a spouse. Others think security consists of amassing a fortune. As such, they are never satisfied with what God provides to them and they always have their eyes on even more. But, the undeniable truth is this: if the believer is not trusting God in the midst of their circumstances, they are no more secure with a million dollars than they are with just one. If they trust in God, they're secure without anything.

So, it wasn't the actual gift placed into Paul's hands that brought him joy but the giving and the meaning of the giving.

What was the motivation behind the Philippians giving? Were they "planting a seed" of faith in order to obligate God to give them more in return? That idea would have been ludicrous to both them and Paul! No, their motivation for giving was their love for Paul and a desire to see the gospel carried as far as it could go. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" ([Mt 6:21](#); [Lk 12:34](#)). Their hearts were linked to Paul and his ministry so it was just natural that their treasure would be invested in their hearts desires. This was a real joy for Paul because it was the truest indication of the abiding reality of his work among these Philippian believers.

Paul considered their gift to him as an investment that would pay them rich spiritual dividends. This reflects one of the most important principles concerning giving in the Scriptures: that we are never the poorer for having given. God will never be our debtor and we can never out-give God. We see this beautifully illustrated in [II Cor 9:6-15](#). Paul is in the middle of a multi-chapter discussion about giving when he begins to elaborate further on God's divine purposes for giving – that it becomes an abundance for every good work. Like what? Liberal giving, thankfulness; needs met, more thanksgiving; God is glorified, obedience manifested and intercessory prayer is offered. Through obedient, faithful giving, a lot of very good work is not just encouraged but engaged in fervently.

18 – Finally, Paul saw their gift as a spiritual sacrifice, laid on the altar to the

glory of God and he describes it in a way that reminds us of sacrifices in the OT. There are such things as spiritual sacrifices in the Christian life (I Pt 2:5).

We're to yield our bodies as spiritual sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2) and even the praise of our lips is considered a sacrifice to God (Heb 13:15). Good works are also a sacrifice to the Lord (Heb 13:16) and so are the lost souls won to Christ (Rom 15:16). Here, Paul sees the Philippians as priests, presenting their offering as a sacrifice to the Lord.

The Philippians' gift is also seen as a sacrifice because it was given out of their deep poverty, not of their abundance (II Cor 8:1-5). In the same way, our giving to God's work is similar to OT sacrifices in that it cost the person bringing the sacrifice a lot. Bulls and rams weren't sold cheaply in that day. How was it possible for these Philippian believers to be so faithful in giving to the Lord's work in spite of their deep poverty? Paul says they were able to give willingly out of their own need because they had first given themselves to the Lord. They didn't hesitate to take the necessary steps to meet Paul's need, despite their adverse financial circumstances, because they trusted that God would in turn, meet their needs as well, in His own good time and through His own divine means.

Let me say one more thing about giving as a sacrifice. The terminology Paul uses here is very similar, almost verbatim to what he uses in Eph 5:2 in reference to Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us. It's not difficult for us to accept that the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for us, though painful and shameful, was, in the end, both acceptable and well-pleasing to the Father. What Paul is saying here is that our spiritual sacrifices-be they giving aid, singing praise, living holy or winning souls – our spiritual sacrifices are also pleasing to God as a sweet smelling aroma and in so doing, we faithfully and obediently follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior.

19 – There are a multitude of wonderful promises in God's Word. Without going into great detail, there are promises for eternal salvation; eternal preservation, initial justification; ongoing sanctification; eventual glorification. We are promised that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us; that the Holy Spirit indwells us to equip, empower and enable us to do God's will and the Jesus will return to bring us out of this world to be with Him forever.

We've come now to what is possibly the greatest promise in the Bible. It's

great because it includes all the other promises! Do you need salvation? God will supply salvation. Do you need strength for life's trials? God will supply strength. If you're lonely, God can meet you and comfort you in your loneliness. If you're discouraged, He can lift you up. No need is left out, for Paul says that "God shall supply all your need..."

To correctly grasp the context of v19, it needs to be savored in each of its phrases and the best place to start is with the 2 most important words of the sentence – my God. Who is it that Paul knew was able to supply the needs of the Philippian Christians? It wasn't just any God; he didn't say "a god" or "the god you happen to believe in." Paul's not referring to the gods of the Greeks, Egyptians, Assyrians, or Romans. When Paul said, my God, he's being specific and personal. Paul's God was Jehovah, the God of Israel who had revealed Himself to human beings personally in the person of Jesus Christ. This God is a great God. He is a gracious and effective God.

The God of **4:19** is the God who called Abraham out of Mesopotamia, the God who called Israel out of Egypt, took her through the Red Sea, preserved her for 40 years in the wilderness, and finally enabled her to conquer the land of Canaan. He's the God of David, of Elijah, of Jeremiah, all the prophets. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who died for our salvation and triumphed over the tomb. This is the God who stands behind His promises.

The value of a promise depends entirely upon the usefulness and dependability of the thing or person believed. Having faith for the sake of having faith benefits no one. What matters is the object of your faith. The fact that you believe is not nearly as important as what you believe in. There are as many beliefs systems out there as there are people but the only ones that matter are those that are based on truth. For instance, there's not much difference between the belief of a person who leans against a papier-mâché column, thinking its marble and the belief of a person who leans on a real column. The real column will support the one while the artificial column will collapse. The God Paul speaks of a God who will support His people and who will never disappoint those who believe in Him.

Is this your God? If He's not your God, if you've never come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ, then the promises of God's care in the Bible are not for you. On the other hand, if you do believe in Him and wish to obey Him, you

will find Him strong in your need. You will find Him entirely and consistently faithful.

The next part of the verse speaks of human needs. What are our needs? Usually, when we read this verse, we may immediately think of financial need or some other physical need. But what are our most pressing needs? First, we need forgiveness from God. God provides that abundantly; He offers forgiveness of sins from our past, present, and future. This forgiveness is made possible through the death of Jesus Christ, and we receive it personally by acknowledging our sin before God and accepting Christ's sacrifice. But, forgiveness isn't our only need.

Our 2nd greatest need is for fellowship with God. Without God we're spiritually hungry, empty, and miserable. We don't need to be miserable and spiritually hungry because God desires to be known by us, to fill the spiritual vacuum of our hearts, to commune with us personally, and to meet us in our deep longings. We also need God's defense against enemies, and God is able to supply that too. Furthermore, He's able to do so abundantly "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This is a staggering measure of giving since there is no lack in His riches in glory.

Lately, the world has been witness to several new excursions into space. It's so popular now even billionaires are getting in on the act. I'll bet every time a rocket blasts off into space there are millions of people who wish they could go along for the ride. What if you could ask an astronaut to bring back a sample of space? They could take up a small canister, seal it in space, and bring it back. The canister would contain a sample. But it wouldn't even begin to capture the immensity and grandeur of space. To hold more, you'd need a larger container. But even then it could never even begin to exhaust the immensity of space. It'd be like scooping a handful of water out of the ocean..

In a similar sense God has promised to fill the need of the believer in Jesus Christ out of His infinite wealth and resources. He will expand us as time goes on, and we shall come to hold more. We shall become more and more like Jesus Christ. But even at the greatest extent of our enlarged capacity we shall only touch the surface of His resources slightly. There will always be infinitely limitless resources beyond the ones we experience.

Do you think that you can exhaust the riches of God by your needs, however great they may be? Can the finite exhaust the infinite? Can that which is corrupt exhaust that which is incorruptible? Can the part exhaust the whole? Can human beings exhaust God? It's impossible. In this life, as in the next, God shall supply all our needs, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus, and there will still be inexhaustible resources beyond that. As financially poor Christians who sacrificially supported Paul's ministry, this promise meant something to the Philippian Christians. What does it mean to you? Is it a comfort in the midst of trial or is it a challenge to grow in your faith in God?

20-23 – Paul concludes this letter, as he does most his letters, with some personal greetings and a 2-fold doxology concerning the glory of God and the grace of Jesus Christ. The glory of God that Paul references in **v20** is different than that in **v19**. The glory of **v19** is the glory of God that is expressed through the character of God. God's glory is the outward expression of what God is internally. Paul's saying that God shall continue to supply the need of the Christian out of His inexhaustible might, wisdom, love, holiness, truth, and other divine attributes. But, when Paul prays that glory might be given to God (20), he's thinking of the glory that is praise. He's really looking forward to the day when God shall be praised and honored as He should and must be forever. The Apostle John saw glimpses of this in the Book of Revelation when he was granted a vision of this yet future event around the throne of God.

Finally, the grace of God is not just the concluding theme of the letter – it's been the overriding theme throughout! Truly, the message of Christianity from beginning to end is grace, God's unmerited favor to humanity. Do we deserve anything from God? Do we deserve life or health or happiness? Do we deserve the gift of God's Holy Spirit or His keeping in our daily life? Or the fact that we are made God's heirs in the Lord Jesus Christ and will one day share in all of the riches of God's nature? Not at all! We deserve nothing. We have run from God, and still, even after we are born again, we run from Him. Yet, when we were far from Him, God came to us dying for our sin, rising for our justification, and now living to enter the lives of those who believe in Him and to guide them in holiness. God loves us and will love us forever. That is grace. It lies at the heart of this letter and in the heart of the gospel itself. 😊