

## ***Christ is Everything***

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Philippians series final sermon

## **Philippians 4:10-23**

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Dear friends in Christ,

Our Bible reading reminds me of when we moved to our previous church in Aylmer, Ontario. Aylmer is a small town of about 7000 people. The Aylmer CRC had about 700 members at the time, so it was about 10% of the size of the town and easily the largest congregation in town. So when the CRC gets a new pastor, the local newspaper comes out for an interview. That had never happened to me before. I was a little nervous and I really wanted to make sure that my answers gave a sense that I was depending on the Lord to fulfill my role at the church.

Somewhere in the interview, the reporter asked, “Do you think you can handle all the work and challenges you’ll face at this church?” I thought for a moment and responded with the words of Paul here in Philippians 4. I said, “I’m trusting that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” When the paper came out the following Wednesday, the article said something like, “Pastor Rich believes he’ll be able to do everything that’s asked of him.” I was more than a little miffed by how he reported my words. But as I reflected on it later, I realized that I couldn’t really fault the guy. All he heard me say was, “I can do all things” because he didn’t know the power of Christ that I was alluding to as the most important part of my answer.

The Apostle Paul knew the power of Christ to change people. He knew the power of Christ to help us be content and grateful for all we have. Throughout this COVID-19 time, we’ve had to choose every day how we will respond to the restrictions and safety precautions being asked of us. Paul had to respond every day to the fact that he was being isolated unjustly in his Roman prison. During COVID, we’ve all seen people who respond with selfishness and anger. They don’t want to live by the restrictions. They only care about their personal freedom. To say that Paul didn’t care about freedom would be false. But Paul had a freedom in Christ that superseded any freedom this world can offer. That’s what kept him going. That’s what gave him hope. That’s what made him strong. That’s where he got his power to live in less than ideal conditions. It was all from Jesus. He could do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

### **The Hidden Secret**

People looking from the outside might wonder about Paul and the Philippians. But for both Paul and the Philippians, there’s a hidden secret for us to uncover. Their contentment comes from a deep sense and confidence that ***Christ is everything***.

I don’t know exactly why Paul speaks in vv.10-13 about his contentment but the following verses show—I believe—that his words are a sort of reminder and encouragement to the Philippians. We do this too sometimes. You start from your own experience to share how you’ve learned something about the Lord’s goodness so that your testimony reinforces or strengthens the faith of others. Paul is perhaps using his own experience to encourage or connect with the Philippian Church. When

he starts out by talking about how he's learned the secret of contentment, I hear him saying, "In my experience I've faced hard times, but I learned that the Lord will get me through every time. I can do all things through him. I've realized that having nothing is fine as long as I have Christ. He's with me. He's my everything. That's why I can be content." Then he goes on to say what amounts to, "It seems to me that you Philippian Christians have had a similar experience because you give so generously. I mean, you don't have a lot of money yourself but you're still willing to part with it. I see the contentment in you that we receive through Christ. So hold on to him and don't settle for anything less."

As Paul finishes writing his letter to the Philippian Church, you can see him gushing with thankfulness for the love and support of the Christians in Philippi. He feels it even from over a thousand kilometers away. The church gladly went out of their way, willingly stretched and sacrificed a lot of personal comforts in order to encourage Paul on different occasions. Now again, they were eager to share gifts for the struggling church in Jerusalem even though they themselves would be considered needy by many standards.

Pardon the pun but Paul felt that the Philippian Christians were "poor as a church mouse." Do you know the origin of that saying? The expression has been popular in English since the 17th century, but was probably taken from French and German expressions which are much older. It makes sense if you think about it. In centuries past, a mouse that chose to live in a church building would have slim pickings, if any pickings at all. Churches had no recreational facilities, no daycares with little ones dropping food on the ground, and no well-stocked kitchens like we do today. They were used mainly for worship services and a mouse living in such a place would be hard pressed to find a crumb.

Seriously, the Philippian Church was poor as a church mouse. So Paul is starting off this section by encouraging them through what he's learned and also affirming them in their confidence in Christ which has moved them to be such generous givers. Paul is stuck in a Roman jail or confined to a rented home. Either way, he's waiting and could have been extremely depressed and filled with doubts and regrets. But Paul is living what he preached just a few verses earlier about rejoicing in the Lord always! He's excited to share that this joy in the Lord has given him contentment. He also sees that joy in the Lord producing generosity among the Christians of Philippi. They are not hanging on to things of this world because they have found the secret to life in Christ, as Paul has. Christ is everything.

Have we found that secret to life too?

### **The Challenges of Wealth**

The fact is, when you live in a land of wealth, like we do, we must recognize the challenges of wealth. We can easily think that as long as we have money, we'll be okay. That money is the secret to life in that sense. We live in a society that seeks wealth and measures people's worth by their bank account. Clearly that is not the mindset of the Philippian Church. They have little and yet they gladly give it away.

I remember an elderly man telling me about the early days of the Dutch immigrants to Canada in the 1950s. As a Christian community, they worked hard to establish a Church and a Christian School. Those were two priorities. Well, one evening this man heard a knock on the door. Members of the Christian School board requested a donation. Without hardly thinking, the man said to his wife, "How much money do we have?" And he wasn't talking only about the money in the house. He meant in the bank. She said, "We have \$75 total." He said, "Write them a cheque for \$75." That sticks with me as such a powerful example of commitment to the Lord's cause but also of complete dependence on the Lord. This man wasn't worried about tomorrow in terms of whether he could pay his bills. He joyfully gave to the Lord's kingdom and then trusted that the Lord would bless the giving and provide for his needs and those of his family.

That's a supernatural gift. Like Paul said to the Philippians about their sacrificial giving, he could say to this man and all today who joyfully give and trust the Lord to provide for them:

*(Your gifts) ...are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

In the Bible we see examples of God blessing his people with wealth. That's sometimes taken by certain Bible teachers to mean that it is God's will for every Christian to be wealthy. Clearly, that is not the message of the Bible; it's not Paul's message to the Philippians. More times than God gives wealth, Jesus warns us against the love of money or the dangers of wealth. He doesn't say that money or wealth is wrong in itself. It's just that most people are apt to become greedy and hoard rather than to be generous givers and sharers.

I can safely say from experience that I've seen wealthy people who are also very generous. So these are not hard and fast principles or rules about wealth being good or bad. Everything is a matter of how we view it. Do we see it as OUR money? Or is it God's gift to us to use for his purposes in this world? Do we OWN our money or is it entrusted to us by God to use as STEWARDS for God's purposes in this world? The former Back to God Hour radio minister, Joel Nederhood, once wrote that the Bible says "we should not set our heart on riches when they increase."

Today we are all concerned about the COVID virus. But we should be even more concerned about what Nederhood called "Affluenza"—the sickness that comes to us when we have lots of money, when we are affluent. If "affluent people are looking for a vaccination to protect them from affluenza, they can do no better than" meditate on the words of Psalm 49 which says, "A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish." In other words, "Understanding' is the key to immunity when it comes to affluenza." We need understanding from God to stay clear of the dangers of wealth.

We need to understand things about wealth that God teaches. For example, affluence or wealth in this life **is temporary**. Jesus repeatedly tells us to store up heavenly treasures that do not fade, rust, break down and can't be stolen. The things we long for and sometimes boast about are passing away. \$100,000 might

get you a fancy car but it's still going to pass away eventually. You can drive it only in the summer so that it never sees snow or salt on the roads but it still won't last forever. Your highly desired set of wheels is still slowly fading away, to use Jesus' words. So enjoy it if you wish, but don't set your heart of such things. Take Jesus' words and challenges to heart. Listen to him to gain understanding.

Wealth comes with big challenges for everyone, including the Christian. Paul's encouragement is to get and keep our heart focused on Jesus as our everything so that we don't succumb to hoarding everything for ourselves. Nothing in this life lasts forever. But our relationship with Jesus can never be taken away. And our investments into the kingdom of God—things as small as supporting Paul while in prison—pay eternal dividends. Don't get sidetracked from the kingdom of God by focusing on the kingdom of self. That's Paul's warning about the dangers of wealth.

### **The Wealth We Really Need**

The wealth of this world comes with challenges to steward it well, for the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom. Whether we have a lot or a little, Paul reminds us of the wealth that we really need, which is found through Christ. Money can buy us a lot of worldly comforts, but it can't buy us peace with God; it can't buy us joy in Christ, it can't buy us the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. No, it can't buy us anything that we truly need as human beings who need to be reconciled to God. Only Jesus can do that for us. So focusing our life on him is what we really need in order to enjoy life as God intends. Paul teaches us that money can't redeem us. Only Jesus can. And he does! He can heal us, even from influenza (cf. Nederhood, *The Forever People*, ch 55 & 56). Paul says confidently to the Philippian Church in v.19,

*Php 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Do we believe that?

You see, friends, in the redemption that Jesus gives, he brings us into a new life, like what was described in the video we watched earlier. We can spend so much time chasing after worldly things—pictured as a treasure chest. But we need to realize that, through Christ alone, we are delivered from that slavery to things that decay. Christ gives us new eyes to see the world and our place in it. We are not here to store up things on earth. We're here—we're saved by Christ—to let his glory shine in us and through us. We're saved to truly enjoy life, which is living with God's agenda in mind instead of our own self-serving and self-preserving agenda.

Maybe think of Jesus' work in us after saving us like the work many of you have been doing in your homes since you've been self-isolating. With all sorts of extra time at home, people are cleaning out their closets, basements and garages and purging. They've been giving stuff away, realizing that we've got lots of things we really don't need, don't use or don't even want anymore. We can hardly even remember why we wanted some things in the first place. Something we once thought was so great, we now consider junk. So we are purging our "stuff."

Stepping further into life with Jesus means stepping away from our dependence on wealth. Purging our “stuff” can help refocus our priorities. Purging could mean giving lots of stuff away. It could mean downsizing. You can figure out what has the biggest grip on you and decide how to free yourself from that. Give it away? Sell it? Donate it to someone who needs it much more than you? Purging could mean simply deciding to give away more of your money every month to a cause that honours the Lord. In this way, you’ll be purging your dependence on yourself and your money and learning to step more fully into the life Christ has for us, a life where we experience him clearly providing for us.

We reap blessing that come from giving: more joy in Christ as we learn to rely on him. As Paul said to the Philippians, the Lord says to us still today as we set him first:

*Php 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

You can trust that promise. Jesus is everything you need.