

ACN
November 22, 2020
Philippians 4:10-23
Gospel Call to Give

I'd like to share with you a story about my mum.

She emigrated from England with her family when she was 18, went to Wollongong, met my Dad, and that's where my brothers and I grew up. For the whole time of our married life in Queensland she and Dad used to come up each year to spend time with us. After my Dad died in 2004, mum would fly up and stay with us for about 6-8 weeks every year, to have focussed time. She really loved those weeks, and involved herself in our church, she was part of a Bible study group, and just got into normal life up here, as she did down in Wollongong.

In 2012, she was staying with us to be here for our son's wedding, and then was to fly to Canberra for another granddaughter's wedding, my niece.

So we had the wedding, and a couple of days into the next week she was getting ready to be picked up to go to bible study, when I heard a noise. A couple of minutes later I heard groaning.

She had had a massive stroke, ended up in hospital for 6 weeks, in rehab for another 6 weeks, but unfortunately neither of those rehab interventions made any difference, and she ended up a life of never walking again, and only having her left arm functioning. Her speech however, did eventually improve.

She never returned to Wollongong, so for her church, her friends and neighbours down there, Mum just effectively disappeared into thin air.

And for her, life drastically changed in that one day.

Independence gone, driving gone, her own home gone.

Eating - now her food has to be all cut up, and she uses a fork in her non-dominant hand;

for toileting, showering, dressing - all now dependant on 2 other people and a hoist each time.

And with us having moved away from Petrie 2 yrs ago, she sees me much less than she used to.

Now I'm not sharing this so you'll feel sorry for my mum. I'm sharing it because from her perspective, what I hear her say is - oh well, I'm content. I'm ok. She's certainly ready for the Lord to take her, which he's not doing yet, but she's content.

Paul says to the Philippians, I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

What an incredible thing to be able to say from a prison cell.

And I believe Paul can say it, because his attitude is directly tied to chapter 3 where he says, all things are garbage compared to knowing Jesus. And it's also tied to chapter 2, as we understand the incredible humility of Christ as he left the glory of heaven and came to be a servant on this earth.

How can you NOT be content if you've come to the point in your life where you know that Jesus is your enough? When you acknowledge that the Lord of all prioritised us when he became obedient to death even death on a cross.

And it's interesting to note that Paul isn't saying that he knows contentment from just one perspective.

He's not saying this because he's experienced poverty;
he's not saying this because he's experienced wealth.

He can truly say it, because he's experienced both, AND he knows that in either situation, there **cannot** be true contentment without Jesus Christ.

But because he has Jesus Christ as his first priority, he can be content in whatever circumstance he finds himself. You see, his contentment is not dependent on circumstances, but rather it is totally independent of circumstances.

He tells us that he has **learned** the secret.

Contentment isn't a natural thing. I reckon we're naturally discontent, aren't we? It's called sin or greed or selfishness. Contentment needs to be learned.

So what is the secret? Well it's an open secret. Paul tells us what it is.
He can do it all, through Christ who gives him strength.

Have you noticed the fact that you are not self-sufficient?
We like to think we're self-sufficient. In fact we are taught by society to be self-sufficient.

Do you remember there was an era a few decades ago where people in droves gave up their jobs in the city, sold their house, and moved to the hobby farm to be self-sufficient.

Doesn't appear to be as popular a thing these days? But being self-sufficient is a misnomer.

Paul tells us that he can do all things through Christ who gives him strength.
This does not mean that he can do whatever he feels like doing, as if he's a superhero.

And when we say that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength, it doesn't mean that we can walk on water, or win a race in the Olympic Games, or have the perfect family.

Paul's secret is not that he can do all things.
Paul's secret is that wherever he finds himself, whatever challenge he comes up against in life, whatever persecution, or hardship, or joy, or blessing, he can handle it well because Jesus Christ gives him the strength to handle it well.

His contentment is only in Jesus.
He says

'I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.'

The world we live in today is a world that oozes discontent. It encourages discontent.

We are taught to have an attitude of dissatisfaction and restlessness, even when we have plenty. Our society is driven by greed, and that has destroyed gratitude, it's destroyed contentment.

Giving has been replaced by getting. Even to the point, where I think it's become a 'right' to 'have'. I deserve it. It's my right.

Paul's words to us are words of rich encouragement.

He teaches us that it **is** possible through a deep relationship with Jesus Christ, to be content. To be able to say, that when I've had enough, Jesus is enough.

Paul can speak these words to us because of his personal experience.

The situations he faced in life meant that he knew that what this world offers is insufficient for contentment.

It is **only** through a relationship with Jesus that we can rest.

If Paul had to learn the secret of joy and contentment, let's not delude ourselves that it comes naturally.

But let's take encouragement from him. If he learnt, perhaps there's hope that we too can learn.

Now as we come to the end of this little letter, I think we're getting to the point of seeing where this beautiful relationship comes from that Paul had with this church.

I think this letter was written to say thank you. And here's where he says thank you.

The Philippians gave to Paul, fulfilling both his physical and his emotional needs.

Yes, they sent gifts, but they also sent a person, Epaphroditus.

And this relates back to the topic of our first week as we looked at chapter 1 - about partnership.

The Gospel Call to partnership was evident as Paul talked about the sharing and the affection there was between them.

Now over this past week as I've been preparing, I've had a bit of a tussle with myself, because I think I now disagree with the title I gave this sermon. Maybe disagree isn't quite the right word, but I certainly wish I'd given it a different title.

I don't think this is a Gospel Call to Give.

I think this is actually a Gospel Call to Generosity.

These Philippians were generous to Paul to a tee.

And it is obvious here, from what Paul says, that they have been generous from the beginning.

In v.10 when Paul says, "at last you renewed your concern for me", he's not saying, '....at last!!!'

He's saying how good it is that they were eventually able to show their ongoing concern.

They'd never stopped being concerned, but had been unable to show it.

Now, at last, when they could, they did!

And what joy!

The Philippians generously gave to Paul, on several occasions, in fact Paul points out that they shared with him when no other church had.

You see, the reason I want to change my thinking on this, from it being a gospel call to give, to being a gospel call to generosity, is because giving, is something that we do, or don't do.

Generosity? now that's about who we are.

That's about our character.

And what does a generous spirit do?

It gives.

Paul's relationship with the Philippians is a relationship of mutual giving and receiving. He says that in v.15.

'Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.'

They were babes in Christ at that point, he's saying, and they already had that wonderful gift of generosity. What a testimony to the sufficiency of Christ.

Paul isn't saying that he craves their gifts, he's saying that he wants them to have more and more of Christ - more credited to their account.

Their gifts, given from that beautiful and generous spirit, is a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

And ... look at v.19 ... when generosity shapes us what happens??

Paul says "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."

So friends, how is your generosity quotient at the moment?

What are the opportunities around you for your generous spirit to be at work; for this gospel call to give, to rise up and be what characterises you.

Yes, there's always opportunities to give financially, there's always opportunities to give your care and love to those around you.

But I would hazard a guess and say, that to be able to grow in generosity more and more, can only be a characteristic if we can say with conviction and joy, 'I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength', He is my enough!

So let me wrap up the series.

Wk 1 was about the gospel call to partnership, where we saw Paul extolling how much he appreciated the fellowship and partnership of the Philippian church as they worked together. Wk 1 was the week I encouraged you to be praying Gospel prayers for each other that our love might abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we can discern what is best and be filled with righteousness. Are you still praying those prayers for each other?

Wk 2 was about the gospel call to proclamation, and that Paul wasn't worried about who was preaching Jesus, as long as the word got out there. It was that week where we heard Paul say that whether he lived or died, Christ was his focus. To live is Christ and to die is gain.

Wk 3 was about humility, and we spent time in the beautiful passage in chapter 2 where we tried to grasp the concept that Jesus, God!, became human, put skin on, and took on the form of a servant. But the glory of that is that God exalted him and now every tongue should acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Week 4 was all about the call to sacrifice, obedience, and doing everything with out grumbling or arguing, and we had that magnificent image of shining like stars as we hold firmly to the word of life.

In Wk 5 we looked at what we cling to as our basis of our faith - what we regard as treasure and what we regard as rubbish, and we saw how Paul's reputation, education, and status was incredible treasure in the eyes of the Jewish world, but as he knew Christ, he found that it was all utter garbage.

In Wk 6 we noted that perseverance was key as we forget what lies behind and strain toward what is ahead, to the goal of the prize for which God is calling us heavenward.

And last week we looked at the Gospel call to Joy, that we are to be unified in vision so that we can rejoice in the Lord. And Paul encouraged us to use our minds well as we think on those things which are good, right, pure, lovely and admirable.

And today we end with gospel generosity. When we rejoice in the Lord, seeing how Jesus willingly humbled himself, the contentment that becomes ours, spills out of our generous hearts, and we become characterised by this new sacrificial way of living.

I began this series by saying to you that I didn't want this to be another series of sermons where I learnt a bit more about a book of the Bible, but that I really wanted it to bring about some transformational change in me, and that I would take some steps forward in my discipleship. And I asked if you would commit to that same goal.

I have found it very challenging, as I've refreshed myself in this familiar little book. I trust you have too, and that your self-reflective practices have grown week by week as you commit to growth.

Let's pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for opening up this letter to us over these weeks. May we open ourselves up to you more and more each day that you might build us up in partnership, proclamation, humility, sacrifice, faith, perseverance, joy and giving.

Thank you for Jesus, who did not consider equality with you something to be held on to, but emptied himself.

Thank you that at the name of Jesus every knee will one day bow, and that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would be with us all as your people. Amen.