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Philippians 4:10-13:

“Can We?”

- I. Not Just Nice Words.
- II. But Words of Contentment.
- III. The Answer to the Question.

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Philippians 4:10-13

Dear Friends in Christ,

Please listen once again to the fourth stanza of our Sermon hymn: "What God ordains is always good:/ He is my friend and Father;/ He suffers naught to do me harm/ Though many storms may gather./ Now I may know both joy and woe;/ Someday I shall see clearly/ That he has loved me dearly." "Though many storms may gather." Well, they do, don't they? Some are quite nasty, aren't they? "Now I may know both joy and woe." We do, don't we? Some seem to know mostly woe, right?

Keeping that fourth stanza in mind, listen to this insight (author unknown): "None of us ought to presume the circumstance. Whether good or bad, comfortable or awkward, opulent or Spartan, we may be certain we live as we were decreed to live by a caring God. Therefore all is well." And Luther put it this way: "How rich a God our God is! He gives enough, but we don't notice it. He gave the whole world to Adam, but this was nothing in Adam's eyes; he was concerned about one tree and had to ask why God had forbidden him to eat of it."

And that's the way it usually works. We want everything to fit our thinking, a certain path, but the path we travel is unknown to us. And then, there's our text for this morning, especially those words, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." And some might wonder. . .

CAN WE?

I. Not Just Nice Words.

Our text begins, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity (v.10)." I would guess that some see these words as nice words from a nice man to some nice people. The fact is that part of Paul's second missionary journey took him to Philippi. In the Book of Acts we're told that while at Philippi Paul and others "went outside the gate to the riverside...sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard...was a woman named Lydia...The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul (Acts 16:13,14)." Lydia and her household were baptized, and then Lydia invited Paul and the others to stay at her home. Thus, the beginning of the church at Philippi.

So far, everything sounds sweet and wonderful, doesn't it? That's the way we like it. However, reading a little further into the Book of Acts we're told that Paul and Silas met fierce opposition, were severely beaten and imprisoned at Philippi. But Lydia and the others did not avoid associating with them for fear that they would fall into conflict with the authorities. We're told, "So they (Paul and Silas) went out of prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed (Acts 16:40)." Quite comforting under such negative circumstances.

Now, here's the point: In light of the prison experience at Philippi it is comforting to read The Letter to the Philippians; its encouraging words. But get this: when Paul wrote this letter he was once again in prison for preaching the Gospel; this time in Rome. He wrote, "...what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known...that my imprisonment is for Christ (Phil. 1:12,13)."

You see, these are more than just some nice words. There was a special relationship with these brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul's words from our text, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity (v.10)." We could use the term "family." These words flow from the bond of Christian love through faith in Christ. It's what Jesus teaches: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn.13:34,35)." This is to the church - us - for the hard times.

Sure, we have our moments and differences. Sometimes a bit odd from one another - so we think. And, sometimes, maybe, a bit hard to take. But the love of Christ draws us to see beyond these things. The world doesn't see it that way. It loves those who agree with its thinking - and that differs from one world lover to another.

II. But Words of Contentment.

Our text goes on to say:

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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 (vv.11,12).

Astounding, isn't it? Paul is in prison, yet he comforts the Philippians by assuring them, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation to be content." And maybe you're thinking, "Now we're going to talk about being content, no matter what!" Well, why shouldn't we? This world really isn't our home and what it offers isn't our goal. I mean, we should remember these words of Paul to the Philippians - to the church: "But one thing I do (please listen): forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3:13b,14)." Heaven!

We labor and sacrifice so much for this world. Everything we gain at every stage of life - everything - goes away. At the closing stage of life a person can reminisce and get sentimental about the past, goals that were set for life; get sentimental about family, high and low moments. Without Christ, the reminiscing will be meaningless. With Christ, this world and its sentimental effects will be replaced by the most indescribable and incomprehensible, unending joy, love, and peace. That's why Paul could say, "I have learned in whatever situation to be content." This is brought home in Jesus' High Priestly prayer when He prayed for the first disciples and for those to come, us:

"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word... I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours... I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of this world, just as I am not of this world (Jn. 17:6,8,14)."

References to the world are made five times in these selected verses from St. John 17. Not one reference presents the world in a positive light but impresses upon us that this moment in time and the world are very temporary - the world hates Christ's people because of the Word - that we are no more of this world than Jesus!

So, let's put it in a simple and clear way: We belong to Jesus and He will provide our daily bread; what we need for each day. His will, will be done in our lives, in spite of this world. We want to be able to say with Paul, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." And the only way we can say that is if we can say with Paul . . .

III. The Answer to the Question.

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me (v. 12)." The question is, "With what and how does He strengthen us?" Here's the answer, in three parts: **First**,

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...(Eph. 2:4-6).

That's the goal: "the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." - eternal life through Christ. Dear friends, we do not want to spend our lives swimming in sentimentalism, or sacrificing everything in search for a slice of heaven on earth. We want to spend our lives in thankfulness for the blood of Christ that has cleansed us from all sin and gives eternal life to those who believe.

The second part that must be very clear and in front of us each day: We must maintain our journey here through growth in and application of the Word of God. It's simple, from Psalms 119: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you (119:11)." Then this: "My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your Word (v.28)." Then this: "You have dealt with your servant, O Lord, according to your word (v.65)." Then this: "My soul longs for salvation; I hope in your word (v.81)." Then this: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (v.105)." It directs us. And this: "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple (v.130)."

And **the third part** from the writer of Hebrews: "...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...(Heb. 12:1b)." We must endure. Of course, this endurance comes through the Word of God. This is not an easy race. We can listen to a lot of voices. They're always there, all the positive thoughts we want, but they won't take away the times of dire conflict, or the tragedies of life, or the last breath. We can listen to a lot of voices, or we can listen to Jesus: "I am with you always, to the end of the age (Mt.28:20)."

You see, **you can, I can** - we can "do all things through Him who strengthens" us.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott