

October 11, 2020

Philippians 4:12-13

“Can We?”

- I. Paul Before And After the Epistle.
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Philippians 4:12-13

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thomas Guthrie was a noted Scottish preacher of the nineteenth century. He made this observation:

Oh, the lying that is practiced beside many deathbeds! All (family and friends) are engaged in a conspiracy to deceive the victim. Truly, the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Every hint of death is forbidden; everything that could excite alarm is forbidden; a dying-chamber is turned into a stage for players who wipe away their tears before they enter and wear a lying mask of ease and smiles and hopes when hope itself is dead. The whole scene is like that old pageant of heathen worship in which they crowned lambs with garlands and then led them away to the slaughter with dances and music.

When I first read that I thought isn't that the game we play in other areas of life? Thinking, maybe, that trouble is something that should happen to somebody else? Pretending that everything is going to be okay when, deep down inside our tummies, we know it isn't? Painting pretty pictures to hide the realities of life? And here's Paul giving us the most positive truth that the world's positive thinkers cannot stomach: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." And so, the question . . .

CAN WE?

I. Paul Before And After the Epistle.

In the Book of Acts Luke reports that while in Philippi, during Paul's second missionary journey, 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.

However, reading a little further into the Book of Acts we're told that Paul and Silas met fierce opposition, were severely beaten and put in prison at Philippi. But Lydia and others did not hide from their guests' crossbearing. We're told, "So they (Paul and Silas) went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed." (Acts 16:40) Very positive under very negative circumstances.

Now, here's the point: In light of the prison experience at Philippi some might be shocked by The Letter to the Philippians for its strong and encouraging words. But, get this: When Paul wrote this letter he was once again in prison for preaching the Gospel. He was in prison in Rome, and in his letter to the Philippians 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." (1:12-13)

With all this in front of him, Paul wrote these words of our text:

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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
(vv. 12-13)

II. Where We Are.

Well, at this point we're not in prison. At this point we haven't experienced the sufferings "Paul and the others" endured. But we are living in a world that has grown far more antagonistic toward the Christ and His people, and many are being severely persecuted for Christ.

As stated in the past, for me the 1960's comprised a pivotal point in this nation's thinking and direction. That was underscored for me when, quite a number of years later, I came across Clark Pinnock's little book, "Set Forth Your Case," which was published in 1967. The front cover described its purpose: "An Examination of Christianity's Credentials." This has been quoted before but many things quoted in the past have a way of catching up with you and then glare at your soul. Pinnock uses the term "monolithic culture," which is defined as "constituting a massive undifferentiated and often rigid whole." (Merriam-Webster) This is to say, everybody has to be on the same page in beliefs, words and actions. Sort of like what you read about in George Orwell's fiction, "1984.": Pinnock wrote:

"The faith of our monolithic culture which is emerging is the religion of humanity. The happiness of man is the single tenet, and whatever is human is sacred. The way of salvation is through restructuring of the social environment and results in the satisfaction of the desires of all men...Man is holy...Whatever is, is right...

"The religion of human forbids any absolutes. Doctrinal convictions discriminate against unbelievers." (pp. 56 and 57)

The statement, "the religion of human forbids any absolutes" is, of course, a contradiction. "The religion of human" is loaded with absolutes and leaves little or no room for God. Mostly none! Monolithic culture and "the religion of human" comprise a global movement. How about a "One World Order"?

This is what the Apostle Paul, Silas and the early church were confronting throughout the Roman Empire as they witnessed to Christ. You see? There really is nothing new under the sun!

III. Can We?

So, here we are living at a time which may very well be the *brief* moment before the *final* moment. And here we are praying the Holy Spirit give us every strength to hold to the Word: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." And the basis for that truth rests on the miracle we have been given:

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 with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus... (Eph. 2:4-6)

You see, God made us His. Our cry here, in this church, is the miracle that Christ won our forgiveness and eternal life - "made us alive" - "seated us with him in the heavenly places" though we must walk this earth for awhile. We will never hear Him say to us, "I never knew you; depart from me...". (Mt. 7:23) In His *High Priestly Prayer* Jesus prayed for the first disciples and us . . .

"I have manifested your name to the people you gave me out of the world (the first disciples and us). Yours they were, and you gave them to me... 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 the world, just as I am not of the world." (Jn. 17:6, 9, and 14)

I'm sure you remember what Jesus said about the world: "... (it) hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." (Jn. 7:7) "The religion of human" cannot tolerate what Jesus says it is, in spite of the piercing evidence of every century's non-stop corruption and violence. Just as we are seeing today! Thus, Jesus would say:

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (Jn. 15:18-19)

It has been stated:

Those who are the chosen in Christ are the special objects of God's providence and loving care. They have the promise that he will never leave them or forsake them. He will supply their needs (what we need in the midst of upheaval), not simply out of his glorious riches, as a millionaire throws coins to a beggar, but richly and daily in accord with the all-surpassing riches of the one to whom the whole universe belongs. (Harlyn J. Kuschel, "Philippians, Colossians, Philemon," Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Northwestern Publishing House, 2000, p. 100)

Dear friends, we can listen to this world's voices or we can listen to God from Hebrews 12:

"...let us run with endurance (we must endure) the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

"Consider him (look to Him) who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (Heb. 12:1b-3)

We pray the Holy Spirit gives us wisdom, strength and courage to say with Paul, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." We can! We can.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott