Philippians - Chapter 4

Last week we covered in Chapter 3:

- We're to rejoice in the Lord at all times.
- We talked about the circumcision of the heart is the better circumcision
- There is a realization that whatever value that we had from our past prior to our faith in Jesus, that loss doesn't compare to the gain we get in Christ.
- We're fighting and running a life-long fight and race in our faith journeys for the prize of coming face-to-face with Jesus when we die.
- Our citizenship is not here but in heaven.

We are now in the final chapter of this short but blessings-packed epistle. Paul is writing this letter not so much out of a need to instruct or correct. Paul started this Philippian church with the conversion of many women who were praying when he first got to Philippi. The church had grown a lot, and he has maintained a very special and affectionate relationship with the people. They have sent him a very generous gift, so the messaging in these four chapters is one of love and gratitude. You can hear Paul's heart for these people as he singles out a couple of the women whom I speculating were among those he led to their conversions at the beginning of the church.

1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.
2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3** And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

As united as we can be in Christ, our sin natures prevent that from being the case all the time. There appears to be a beef going on between Euodia and Syntyche. Paul, invoking what he spoke about at the beginning of this epistle, encourages them to be like-minded. Being like-minded can be super hard unless there is one thing to which both parties can always agree. *Whatever differences of opinion or thought there are between two people in a relationship, having a commonality of Jesus can be a life raft in a large sea of disunity*.

Because of God's sacrificial loving, or agape, nature, He shows us to stop focusing on ourselves and think about others first. This is what drove Jesus to the cross to be the one and only way for reconciliation to His Father. He was thinking of each member of His creation *before* Himself. He was the role model of the truth that if there's going to be hope for a reconciliation between two parties, at least one of them has to die. At least one person has to surrender their stance for the sake of reconnecting and finding again the good that had been in the relationship.

Paul then speaks of the other people who are aware of this rift to step in and help settle this beef between these two women. He references in verse three something called the Book of Life. What is this? It was first referenced by Moses in the 32nd chapter of Exodus. The Book of Life is a log of every person who who will be with God for eternity. Daniel spoke in his book of this truth that those who are written in the book will be delivered. Jesus said in the 3rd chapter of Revelation, "*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his*

name before My Father and before His angels." (3:5) Praise God each of you are in this book, but when do you think your names were entered into the Book of Life?

Many people will say it was the day they confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is not correct. From chapters 13 and 17 of Revelation, the Book of Life was written from the foundation of the world. How is this possible? We're talking about God, and with Him, all things are possible. He is omniscient – meaning He knows all things. He's also eternal, so He sees all of eternity at the same time. He knows every person who is going to choose to believe in Him. Think about this truth – God had you in His mind before you were created.

The concept of the Book of Life raises the question of what about the people who are not in it? Why would God create people He knew would not end up in this Book? I do not have an answer for that – I'm not God. I have had enough therapy to get that out of my head. Now this is just me speculating here, so don't take what I'm about to say as the truth. I can envision the first edition of the Book of Life containing every single human being's name God created. However, for each one that chose or chooses not to believe in Him, their names are blotted out with His tears of grief. The Scriptures are extremely clear that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and He wants every person to repent and believe.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. **6** Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; **7** and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Paul once again commands us to rejoice in the Lord, but this time He adds the word "always." We talked about last week that this exhortation is not meant to rejoice in our circumstances – especially in the painful ones. Because we are placed into the Being of Jesus Christ upon our confession of faith in Him, we can, and should, rejoice in all the blessings that come with being a part of Him. But always? Initially, I thought this was a little Pollyannish. However, with the barrage of evil efforts from the enemy designed to distract us from Jesus and cause doubt, consistently rejoicing in the Lord is the best defense against these attacks. The goodness of God will always defeat the evil of Satan. Jesus' resurrection is the proof.

Should we elect to regularly rejoice in the Lord, we are taking steps of faith in His unfailing and perfect love for us. What does perfect love do? It casts out all fear. This is why Paul is telling, or commanding, us in verse 6 to be anxious, or fearful, for nothing. What's reality? At least for me, I do get anxious at times. How do I combat this anxiousness? Prayer. Notice the immediate juxtaposition. Paul takes us from being anxious for nothing, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

When you get sick, you have symptoms such as a sore throat, coughing, and sneezing. The pharmaceutical industry makes a lot of money selling us medicines that treat the *symptoms*. However, they rarely address the *source* of the illness. Similarly, while Satan's attacks often take place in the physical world (the symptoms), they're initiated in the spiritual world (the source). Prayer is our spiritual

portal to get to the power of the Great Physician. Remember, He who is in us is greater than He who is in the world.

Satan will attempt to use your ongoing painful circumstances to think God is not listening to your prayers. Trust me, He is. He just moves on His perfect timing. Our problem is His timing can often cause our suffering to linger longer than we want. Waiting on the Lord is one of the tougher components of faith, but waiting comes with a glorious promise, "*But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint*." (Isaiah 40:31)

Whenever someone asks or tells you to do something, it's reasonable to think about what you will benefit from doing that something. However, if it's Jesus telling us to do something for Him, then that's not what we should think about as His bondservants. We're to just do it and leave the benefits or consequences of what we've done to Him. In verse 7, Paul provides us the benefit of his instructions to pray about everything. Through the power of prayer – a dialogue, not a monologue – God give us His peace. Jesus said in John 14:27, "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*."

The peace of God surpasses not only *our* understanding but also it is a powerful witness to the unbeliever. When you're in the middle of a stressful or painful situation, but you are receiving and believing in God's peace, you are showing to an unbelieving world something different. A peaceful person in the midst of chaos will attract people. They'll ask things like, "Why aren't you flipping out?" or "How can you be so peaceful in this mess?" You can calmly look at them and say, "I've prayed out about it. God never leaves my side. He'll see me through this." I don't know about you, but as I am getting older, I'm finding God's peace something to deeply treasure. As Paul promises, His peace guards my heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. **9** The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

If we're going to obey Paul's exhortation in verse eight to meditate on all of these, that will pretty much wipe out most of what we watch on television, the computer, our phones, or at the movies. What is now allowed on television blows my mind. The boundaries of filthy language, the nudity, and the immorality are getting constantly pushed. Vickie and I actually keep a log of all the movies we watch. Because our memories are starting fade, we do this to help us remember when the last time we watched it. However, we also do this to remind us that if the movie contained things we did not want to see, we won't watch it again. It feels like this list is rapidly growing.

Again, invoking the idea of being Pollyannish, this list in verse eight can come off as a quasi-version of the power of positive thinking. I'll bring up one last time the sanctification process – God's efforts to separate us apart from the world and to make us more holy. Meditating, or simply thinking

about the virtues and praiseworthy things from verse eight's list is a tool that will move us down the sanctification path.

I would like to add to this exhortation the practice of attempting to see the good in what appears to be a bad thing. I believe God is in control of everything. From the first chapter of Job, it is clear to me Satan can do nothing to us unless God allows it. Yes, we each have the freedom to choose, but God can use the consequences of our choices to orchestrate His good purposes. When Vickie and I went through our ordeal with our old house and her health, I could see no good in it whatsoever at the time. However, we can now look back and see many good things that did happen. This is why we must remember that God is good. If we choose to truly believe He is good, we can then go from that foundation and start to see the good and praiseworthy things even in the most painful circumstances.

Paul concludes in verse nine that they can look to him as an example of what he's talking about in verse eight. Having a mentor or a role model is a good thing to have. They should never take the place of Jesus, but they can be an important example of what He would think or do. You may have heard the phrase, "What would Jesus do?" or WWJD, originated in the great book by Chris Sheldon "In His Steps". People like Paul were those who lived with this mindset. Frankly, it's not a bad way to go for us. If we don't have a mentor or role model, we can always ask ourselves, or better God in prayer, when we're not sure about a situation, 'What would Jesus do?'

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. **11** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: **12** I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Paul brings up again to his beloved Philippian friends their generous gift to him. What did he mean by they lacked opportunity? After Paul was first arrested in Caesarea, he challenged the arrest and invoked his Roman citizenship to appeal to Cesar Nero. He got on a boat to head for Rome, but the boat ran into a terrible storm. They were blown off course, the ship fell apart, and they ended up on an island. Eventually, he ended up where he is chained to a Roman soldier, but this was the lacking opportunity he was talking about. They couldn't keep up with Paul to give him their gift.

He then goes on to put some context regarding this gift and his need. He opens with an extraordinary statement, "For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." Contentment is the enemy of the advertising world. Their efforts are to convince us that our lives are not only lacking but also would be much better off if we purchased whatever their selling. If your content with what you have and who you are, then you don't need anything. At a minimum, contentment will save you a lot of money.

For many of us, that's a lot easier said than done. Let's go back a few verses and revisit the idea of having a peace that passes all understanding. For me, peace and contentment are linked. One of God's names is Jehovah Jireh. This means the Lord will provide. Hopefully, you'll remember this glorious promise to every believer from Ephesians 1:3: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*" What's the key word in

this verse? Every. That means nothing is being held back. God provides us with ***every*** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Ok, that's spiritually amazing, but I still have to physically live. What about that? Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-32, "*Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things*." God knows what we need, and He will provide it. Knowing these foundational truths of God being our Jehovah Jireh will move us into that beautiful place that Paul says he is in – being content.

He offers some context around this contentment. He knows how to be abased, or in other words, to be brought low, humbled, and reduced in status. He knows how to abound – to be abundantly provided for. He knows to be hungry and to be full. He knows how to have more than what he needs as well as what it means to suffer in need. What he's saying is his circumstances don't matter one bit to him. I would love to say I'm where Paul is, but that would make me a liar. However, this sounds like a great life objective. Where does Paul find this contentment? I bring you to one of the most important truths for every believer.

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Jesus said in one of His seven "I am" statements in John's gospel, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing*." (John 15:5) Look what happens when you combine this statement with verse 13, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, but I can do nothing without Him*." These "things" for which Jesus is so essential are spiritual things.

If we choose to lean into the truth of Jesus' sustaining Lordship and love, we will have access to great power and have the ability to do amazing things. The key word in that statement is "*if*." In responding to Jesus' command to Peter to come to Him while He was standing on the water, Peter was able to walk on water – as long as he kept his focus on Jesus. When the winds and the seas picked up causing Peter to lose focus on Jesus, he immediately sank. If Peter had kept his focus on Jesus despite his worsening circumstances, I believe he could have walked on the water all the way to Jesus. This is the perfect example of what it means that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, but I can do nothing without Him.

Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, was telling the story of a "thorn in the flesh" to which he was suffering. Many scholars believe this thorn was his bad eyesight, but we don't know for sure. Three times Paul asked the Lord to take this thorn away. What was the Lord's response to this request, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*." (12:9) What does Jesus mean by His strength is made perfect in weakness? When we choose to rely on our strength to resolve something, that choice is by definition negating God's ability to use His much greater strength to no doubt bring about a better resolution.

Therefore, if we're willing to surrender our meager strength, we are giving way to God to provide His far greater strength and be our God – our Lord. What's the problem with this scenario? Our pride kicks in. We want to prove to ourselves and to others we're independent and strong on our own. Our society promotes independence and personal strength. Should God allow success from our own strength, our pride will grow as will our sense of self-glorification. However, when we fail or make a mistake from our own efforts to be strong, it's a tough fall. Using Peter again, when he claimed he would not abandon the Lord, he was making this claim from a place of self-reliance. We know what happened, he failed miserably, as the Lord predicted.

As part of the reformation movement in the church in the 1600s, something called the Westminster Catechism was created. The structure of this document created by the reformers was that in a question-and-answer format. The *very first* question was, "*What is the chief end of man?*" The answer? "*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever*." I'm in alignment with this priority of our life – to glorify God and enjoy Him. As I said earlier, when we rely on our own strength, we glorify ourselves. However, if we should humble ourselves and surrender to God's far greater strength to be put on display, who is getting the glory? God – where it belongs.

What glorious promises we have in Jesus in just this chapter. We find contentment *and* a peace that passes all understanding regardless of our circumstances because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. If we can live like this, our lives will improve, and we will be powerful witnesses.

14 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. **15** Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. **16** For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

Once again, indicating the love Paul has for the Philippian believers, he commends them for their concern for him as demonstrated through the generous offering. He is telling them that no other church that he started has remained faithful to him in supporting him. He singles out that at one of the churches he started at Thessalonica, he received not one but two gifts from the Philippians. There is a special dynamic in giving to God. What is that? Let's read on.

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

What is Paul saying here? When giving to a missionary or missionary effort, whatever fruit that comes about from that missionary's or groups efforts – such as salvations or healings, those who contributed to the giving are given credit or a share of the rewards in God's eyes. For example, if we give money to or providing supplies to the teams that go to Juarez, whatever good that God recognizes and honors from the team's efforts, God accounts our financial support of these efforts when He chooses to reward these efforts. In what shape that takes, we may not know what this is until we get home to heaven.

This is what Paul is saying here in verse 17. He realizes that he's generating fruit in his missionary work, so out of his love and appreciation for the Philippian gift, he's hoping that fruit will abound because it will go to their account in God's eyes.

18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. **19** And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. **20** Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

He wraps up this letter with the fact that the gift Epaphroditus brought from them has left him abound – filled up. He likens their generosity to a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, and well pleasing to God. That's what genuine giving should feel like – whether it's money, time, or talent. The part of our giving that God recognizes, honors and pleases Him is that part that is a sacrifice – that it cost us something. You may remember the poor woman in the gospels that put in two mites into the offering. Two mites was not worth much at all – especially compared to the amounts of the giving some of the wealthier people likely contributed. Yet who did Jesus single out? The woman because her giving cost her everything.

Paul concludes with this benediction, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." I mentioned earlier about God's name being Jehovah Jireh – the Lord will provide. Paul is confirming this name to those who believe will be supplied all their needs. From where will God draw upon these resources? From the riches in glory by Christ Jesus. For the last time as I bring this Fall session to a conclusion, we learned about the truckload of blessings God pours out on the believer. If we're willing to believe, there's an endless resource of the richness of God's glory, so we can find that contentment and peace that passes all understanding because God loves you. If we get there, we can live with a confidence that in Christ, we can do all things. Amen?

As I mentioned last week, I told you that Vickie has written a beautiful story about something call the Bummer Lamb. I'm going to trade question time for her to come up and read it to you.