

Pentecost 7; July 24, 2022
Philippians 4:10-20

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (NIV 2011) **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."** (NIV 1984) This one verse has become a motto for people pursuing great achievements in life. We've all seen it in many different places. The meaning is simple: Having faith in Jesus will empower you to achieve your dreams! With Christ strengthening you, you can climb mountains, lift heavy weights, or win championships! It is the thought that if you work at something hard enough, the sky is the limit. While it might sound as a nice motivator to work hard and have self-discipline, it is just not true. At this point in my life, no matter how much faith I have in Christ, I am never going to dunk a basketball on a 10-foot rim, much less lead a team to an NBA championship. No matter how much faith I have in Christ, I am never going to be a star quarterback on an NFL team. I am never going to play professional baseball. And even for those who are gifted athletically, for every team that wins a championship, there are dozens of teams that do not. And there are Christians on those teams too, some of whom likely have their own Philippians 4:13 tattoo. When Paul writes that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him, he is not talking about his ability to achieve all things.

We also need to be careful in thinking that in order to be content in this life, we just need to trust that everything happens as a result of fate or divine reason. Therefore, there is no point to react emotionally to hardship since they must have a purpose in the grand scheme of things. So, if you stub your toe on a rock, you do not let out a cry of pain. Why? Reason tells you that your toe hitting that rock at that time was all part of the plan of the universe. Therefore, if it's part of grand plan, reason tells you that you are able to hover above the hardships of life. Therefore, your crying out will not change what will happen to you.

Please do not take me wrong in saying that God can't take awful things that happen to us and turn them into God. God can keep the awful things in life away from us. There are many passages in the Bible that speak about that. But the danger in thinking that everything that happens to us is our fate or part of a plan, we can become rather callous, can't we? It can lead to indifference. There is danger in thinking that no matter what happens in life, we just need to better control our emotions and be happy. Get over it. If we can hover above all those things going on in my life, then we will find contentment.

But God created us as emotional people. Even the Paul was an emotional person. In his letter to the church in Rome, he expressed deep sorrow and grief and great joy at others. In his letter to the Corinthians, he expresses sorrow, anguish, fear, distress, and despair as well as joy and gladness. In his letters to the Corinthians, he expresses fierce anger, while here in this letter to the Philippians his predominant emotion is joy.

And so, if we think that we can work a little harder, we can accomplish everything and anything in this life. If we think that somehow, we can dismiss all those emotions that we go through each day, then we can just hover above everything that life throws at us. So, where, and how do we find contentment, if we cannot find it in ourselves? Paul answers that question in our text: **"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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."**

First, we need to realize that we are not in control. That doesn't mean that we are doomed to face a certain fate. But it does mean that my time is ultimately not my time but the Lord's time. The reality is that we often don't have any real control over anything. Think how many times we find ourselves turning in a complete opposite direction than we thought we were going in one day. God tells us in the book of James: **"Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."** (James 4:13-14)

Secondly, we find ourselves focusing on the outward circumstances in life. Think of Peter. When he saw Jesus in that boat in a storm, he at first focused on Jesus and did something that was impossible and walked on water. But when Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus, begins to notice the waves and starts to sink. That is so often the case for us. Instead of

looking to Jesus for our hope and peace and ability, we get distracted by the waves around us (our circumstances) and we lose contentment. Don't get distracted by the circumstances in life.

Thirdly, we often believe that we are entitled to ease and abundance in life. Real life is messy. Some days are real challenges. We go thru highs and lows. We live in a broken and sinful world.

The key to all of this is: **"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."** Strength does not come from within us because what is within us is flawed. It can only come from Jesus who had no flaws. Contentment comes from the relationship that we have in Christ. Jesus came to this world and faced everything that Satan can throw at him and never once broke, never once sinned. Through his blood shed on that cross, he covered all of our imperfections. He has forgiven us and promised us that we are heirs of heaven. We are his children. The key to contentment (as always) is depending on Jesus. The key is recognizing that we too weak, but your Savior is more than strong enough. As Paul says: **"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."** May God grant it. Amen.