

Joy in Christ's Strength  
Philippians 4:10-23

August 21, 2011

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<sup>A</sup> Acts 18:1-5, 2 Corinthians 11:9, 1 Thessalonians 2:9

<sup>B</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

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<sup>C</sup> Philippians 3:8

<sup>D</sup> John 15:5, 2 Corinthians 12:9

A. Introduction

1. how big is our frying pan?
  - a. Two men went fishing. One man was an experienced fisherman, the other wasn't.
  - b. Every time the experienced fisherman caught a big fish, he put it in his ice-chest to keep it fresh. Whenever the inexperienced fisherman caught a big fish, he threw it back.
  - c. The experienced fisherman watched this go on all day and finally got tired of seeing this man waste good fish. 'Why do you keep throwing back all the big fish you catch?' he asked.
  - d. The inexperienced fisherman replied, 'I only have a small frying pan.'—{2}.
  - e. how often do we fail to carry out the task God would have us to do because our frying pan of faith is too small?
  
2. the title of this message
  - a. 'Joy in Christ's Strength'
  - b. may be slightly misleading
  - c. our focus is not on the strength that Jesus Christ possesses although that is in every sense true
  - d. perhaps it is better expressed as the
  - e. 'Joy in the Strength of Christ'
  - f. that is, that the joy that is to be found in the strength that Christ imparts to the believer
  - g. we shall consider this truth this morning in the context of Christian giving to the support of God's work

B. Context: Christian Liberality

1. How did Paul carry out his ministry?
  - a. in both the book of Acts and in his own letters we find that Paul had a unique way of carrying out his ministry
  - b. his second missionary journey took him first to Macedonia, the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea
  - c. then he went to Athens, and, in Acts 18:1-4 we read, 'After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his

wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.'

- d. so Paul worked at his trade while he preached the gospel
- e. but then, Acts 18:5, 'But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.' – Paul went 'full-time'
- f. as support came from Macedonia, 2 Corinthians 11:9, 'and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.' – the support mentioned here in verse 15,
  - (A) 'You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone'
- g. he makes a similar statement in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 'For you recall, brethren, our labour and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.' as in here verse 16,
  - (A) 'for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.'
- h. when you read the context of these and other passages, you discover Paul's motivation in so doing was that no one be able to accuse him of preaching out of greed for money

2. but, now in Rome, imprisoned

- a. Paul thanks the Philippians who had provided for his needs
- b. some have suggested that the court costs of his defence would have been great – but aside from that, the cost of his upkeep: housing and food, was not supplied by the state but by himself although he could not work as usual
- c. this is why Epaphroditus had come to Rome to see Paul, to bring a gift from Philippi – as here in verse 18
  - (A) 'having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent'

- d. so Paul walks a delicate balance in expressing thanks,
- (A) on the one hand, of expressing how grateful he is for their gift, as here in verse 14 – **Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.**
    - (1) recounting the ways and time they had helped him
    - (2) recognizing that the break in their support had been unavoidable – here in verse 10, **'... indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity'** – either lacking the funds to send or the way to send it
  - (B) and, on the other hand, that he might not seem to be asking them to send even more, pointing out
    - (1) verse 11, **'not that I speak from want...'**
    - (2) verse 17, **'not that I seek the gift itself'** – or, as it may be said, 'not that I am chasing after money'
    - (3) and, verse 18, **'but I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied'**

3. Paul was especially thankful, knowing the sacrifice they made

- a. he describes the situation in 2 Corinthians 8:1-2 – **Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.**
- b. so with that attitude it is no small wonder that their gift is described in terms of worship, here in verse 18, **'... having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.'**
- c. that phrase, **'a fragrant aroma'** or **'an odour of sweet smell'** is one that is used in the OT to describe a burnt-offering, that is an offering that was made and wholly devoted to God, none of it being shared with the priest or presenter.
- d. how appropriate, then, that Paul describes these people with these words in 2 Corinthians 8:3-5, **'For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.'**
- e. Frequently I receive literature, e-mails, and telephone calls from people or organizations that have

methods, programs and tools for fund-raising. These are always expressed in terms that assume we are short of funds. When I respond that we do not use any fund raising but depend upon the free-will offerings of God's people they express great surprise and even disbelief. For this I thank you all

### C. Message: Christian Contentment

1. Paul told Timothy 'But godliness with contentment is great gain' (1 Timothy 6:6, AV) and this contentment he shows here
  - a. in verse 11, 'for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am' – or, perhaps even, 'in the present circumstances I am in.'
    - (A) Paul was not born with this contentment
    - (B) Paul was not endowed with it
    - (C) it was a lesson learned in the school of Christ
  - b. Paul continues in verse 12, 'I know how to be ...' (AV) – not 'I know what it is to be ...' as in a number of modern translations; the Philippians did not have to be told that Paul had experienced these things; he had done so in their presence – 'I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.'
  - c. the apostle who had counted '... all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ...' (Philippians 3:8) had long quit caring for mere things
  - d. the Greek for that word, 'contentment,' was used by the Stoic philosophers to describe a power within a person that would allow them to suffer any setback without complaining; to keep, as the British say, a stiff upper lip
  - e. that is not how Paul uses the term 'contentment' – let us see what is the ...

### D. Secret: Christ's Empowerment

1. what was Paul's secret?
  - a. how could Paul be content in his dire circumstances?
  - b. it was because they had joy in Christ's strength, verse 13: 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' (AV)

- c. this verse can be more literally rendered, 'in everything I am strong in the One empowering me'
- d. while the Greek word can be translated 'by means of' or 'through' Christ, Paul especially uses the word when it is associated with Christ as 'in' – in vital union with Christ
- e. and this is more consistent with other Scripture: consider
  - (A) John 15:5, Jesus said, 'I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.'
  - (B) 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul's testimony, 'And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.'
- f. that was how Paul could learn to be content, even while he was in a dungeon in Rome

## 2. what was the Philippian church's secret?

- a. how could these impoverished Philippians be so generous?
- b. they had experienced already the empowering of Christ giving them strength to give, to offer themselves to God
- c. they had in fact already learned by doing what Paul again reminded them of here in verse 19, 'And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.' – there it is again – 'in Christ Jesus'
- d. they found the strength for their service – to Paul and to God – in their vital union with Jesus Christ
- e. a union that provided a conduit of power whereby

## E. Conclusion: Closing Greetings and Prayer

### 1. on these thoughts Paul can conclude this letter

- a. giving praise to such a gracious God – verse 20, 'Now to our God and Father [be] the glory forever and ever. Amen.'
- b. and sharing greetings among the children of God who had so enriched his life
- c. so, how big is your frying pan? ... big enough to cook and to serve the fish God gives you? ... don't be content with the little fish!

2. Our closing hymn is #446, 'I'd Rather Have Jesus'
  - a. it is our relationship to Jesus that matters above all else
  - b. the words of this hymn were written by Rhea F. Miller, the music by George Beverly Shea
  - c. George was born in Winchester, eastern Ontario, the son of a Methodist minister, and was taught to play the violin by his father, and the piano and organ by his mother. In 1921 his father moved to a church in Ottawa and George often sang at services in the Ottawa valley. In about 1922 Rhea had written this poem and given a copy to her friend, George's mother. It was now 1932 and George was 23 years old. He had received an offer to sing with a secular band in New York City; the bright lights beckoned, the salary appealed and the fame enticed him. So his mother was very concerned about him and she placed this poem on the family piano.
  - d. George sat down to practise and read the words, and began right away to put them to music. The next Sunday morning he offered this song to the congregation. Shea made the decision that day to continue singing for the Lord.
  - e. George Beverly Shea is now 102. In the intervening years as part of the Billy Graham evangelistic team he has sung to more people in person than any other singer. God's plan for him dwarfed the small frying pan of New York City!<sup>{3}</sup>.
  - f. what can you not do when Christ empowers you?

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my favourite commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan  
Volume 11, including Philippians, by Homer A. Kent, Jr
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, Philippians by H. A. A. Kennedy, Hodder & Stoughton, 1903
- Kerux – The sermon and illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick to be found at the web-site, [www.holwick.com](http://www.holwick.com).
- Moule – The Epistle to the Philippians, by H. C. G. Moule, 1873 (and his commentaries on other epistles)
- Motyer – Philippians Studies, The Richness of Christ, by J. A. Motyer; Inter-Varsity Press, 1966
- Wuest – Philippians in the Greek New Testament by Kenneth S. Wuest, © 1942 Wm B Eerdmans

2. Adapted from Kerux illustration #24249
3. Adapted, amended and edited from material on Wikipedia, and various web-sites and [www.songofdeborah.com](http://www.songofdeborah.com) (Deb Spaulding)