
UNBROKEN JOY
A DIFFERENT KIND OF ENGAGEMENT
Philippians 4:14-23

Our text today is verses 14 through 23. I would like to pray, and then we will go right to God's word. Father, open the scripture to us today. By your Holy Spirit, give us understanding, we pray. I ask you, Lord, to remove distractions, those within and those without, that we might be able to focus our minds upon you, surrender our hearts to you, to respond with understanding, in faith, to you and your truth, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last week we were in verses 10 through 13, and Paul is saying thank you to the Philippian church for a gift. He has received a financial gift from them. He is in prison in Rome, closing out the book of Philippians, and he wants to say thank you. As he says thank you, he enters into the topic of contentment and his own testimony of contentment in Christ. I would like to read those three or four verses, beginning in verse 10, and then we will go to today's text, which is a continuation of that theme. My title for today is "A Different Kind of Engagement." "A Different Kind of Engagement."

Philippians 4:10-13: I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Verses 14-23, our text for today: Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied; having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

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Last week we began looking at the subject of “Contentment.” I probably disappointed a few of you when I told you that your favorite verse – Philippians 4:13 – doesn’t mean exactly what we often think it means. It doesn’t really, primarily say what we use it to say. Verse 13: “I can do all things through him (through Christ) who strengthens me” is not primarily a message that tells us that no matter how hard the circumstances, I will win, I will overcome, I will always have an abundance. No, that’s not the primary message of Philippians 4:13. The primary message is: Regardless of the circumstances, win or lose, in abundance or in need, I will overcome; I will know contentment in Christ Jesus.

The first promise, if that were the primary meaning, is good. And I’m not sure you are convinced of this, but the second promise is actually better, much better -- that regardless of the circumstances, I know contentment. It’s a better promise, and it’s actually the promise that our world really needs, because our world is enslaved to itself, enslaved to its own circumstances and materialism. We have an opportunity to bring a message to say, “Listen, there is a contentment that is not under your environment, not under the circumstances of your life. There is a place of security and joy and peace in Christ Jesus that is greater than what’s going on around you.”

If you go over to the beach and walk out on a pier and look down in the water, you might see a bottle floating there in the waves. Just imagine there a sea wall, and the pier, and that bottle bobbing around. When we say that happiness is found in circumstances, we are like that bottle. We are just pushed around by this circumstance, by that wave, by this happening. We try to control those events, but we are just really at the mercy of all that’s happening around us. When we say, “Okay, through Jesus I can control my circumstances,” what we are really saying is: “I am still at the mercy of my circumstances.”

The first thing that we looked at was saying, “Well, we don’t live underneath, under the control of what’s going on, but very importantly, that doesn’t mean that we are detached from our circumstances.” We are not indifferent. We are not passive to what’s going on. In fact, we are engaged. We are engaged deeply.

As we talk about this particular part for a moment, I want to quote some great 21st century poetry. Are you ready? See if you know who this is by: “I can’t feel my face when I’m with you, but I love it, but I love it.” The Weeknd performs this particular song. It’s not about a woman, it’s about drugs. It’s about cocaine, specifically, which is the face-numbing drug. “I can’t feel my face when I’m with you, but I love it, but I love it.” “I know she’ll be the death of me, at least we’ll both be numb” is speaking of a kind of euphoria that comes by escape through numbness, through a certain kind of detachment from your world, from your circumstances.

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That is not what Christianity is offering. Following Christ is not so much about “Now that I have Christ, I don’t care about anything else.” It is a different kind of engagement. It is engaging in our environment, in our circumstances, in our world, in Christ, and knowing contentment because we don’t live under those circumstances, but we are engaged in them in a phenomenal way.

The whole book of Philippians is about a joy that we know -- a joy. Do you remember what we said about joy, quoting the Yale theologian? It’s thicker than happiness? It’s this idea that life is actually so much better than I ever thought possible, and this kind of a recurring, deep within satisfaction, contentment, happiness. It’s this, “Wow - it just gets better and better and better in exceeding my expectations in phenomenal ways.”

Paul is saying life with Christ is a life of abounding, unending, unbroken joy – that Jesus descended, became a man in humble circumstances, gave his life, and died on a cross to pay the penalty, to free us from our sin and pride and selfishness, so that we could then follow him in this life of the cross. To live is to know Christ and to follow him, and to live this life knowing joy, knowing contentment, so I don’t live under my circumstances.

I’m not detached from my circumstances. I’m not primarily about changing my circumstances. That’s there. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” is not “through Christ, I can always win and I can always change what’s going on.” It’s first of all primarily about “God does something in me so that no matter what is going on outside of me, I am content and at peace.” Are you with me? Are you with me? Are you confused? Would you tell me if you were? Some of you just lied.

Okay, this is very important. I’m not just trying to dissect this down to its smallest part. These nuances are very important. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” is not primarily about “I always win. I change life so that I like what’s going on.” But secondarily it does have a meaning that “my circumstances are changed because I am in Christ.”

Let me try to illustrate it this way. Tim Keller, in his book on marriage, an excellent resource -- [The Meaning of Marriage](#) -- says that when couples get married, an individual in marriage soon discovers three things.

- Discovery #1: This person (I will speak as the male in the marriage) this person I married, this woman, is much more selfish than I thought she was. That’s discovery #1.
- Discovery #2 is: I’m pretty sure she is thinking the same thing: that I am much more selfish than she thought I was.
- Discovery #3: I’m pretty sure that her selfishness is worse than my selfishness.

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There is this revelation that comes in marriage, and typically a couple will do one of two things at this critical juncture. They will either fall apart and not make it, or they kind of go to their corners, make peace with it, live their own lives, and stop engaging in the same way - a little bit disillusioned, a little detached, a little disinterested.

Paul is calling us to the life of the cross so that the Christian in that moment doesn't disengage, but goes to a whole new level of engagement, a different kind of engagement -- the cross life, the life of Christ in me. So though I'm pretty sure that her selfishness is worse than mine, I'm going to declare war on my selfishness and live to serve, cherish, and nourish her. Instead of going to our separate corners, I'm going to go to her corner in a kind of a scene where I am going to be there serving, caring, cherishing, nourishing, and dying to self, and then a new kind of engagement is open to me.

Now, this is all introduction. I hope you are with me. It's important at this point to understand that Paul is teaching in the book of Philippians that it's more than a method or formula. Using that marriage analogy, I am dying to self. It's the life of the cross. I'm pursuing my mate. But it's not just a formula. Christ is in me. Christ is working. I am experiencing him. And because of that, he is changing me. He is changing her. He is in the atmosphere. He is changing everything.

Paul is saying: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" - Philippians 1:21. This is so amazing! I never imagined that life could be like this! If my marriage is good, I'm content. If my marriage is bad, I'm content. I am embracing the life of following Jesus in the walk of the cross, dying to self, crucifying my flesh, living to serve, but it's not just a formula. He is actually in me and he is changing me and he is changing everything else. It's not in predictable ways. It's in wonderfully unpredictable ways. This is so great! And when I die, it's better! Because then I am with Christ!

Some of you have two images right now about marriage. Brian just said it's a cross to bear, and it's like an MMA fight. You go to your corners. You have Ronda Rousey or... That's not the message here. The message is that there is a contentment in Christ that leads us into a place of engagement that's on a whole different level than what we typically know.

Last week I promised you two things in today's message. I want there to be truth in advertising, so here are the two things:

1. This passage teaches a surprising benefit, a surprising benefit, a super bonus, a benefit that comes from true contentment in Christ.
2. Secondly, it gives us a promise that becomes our focus, a promise that pushes out contentment and the fruit of it -- that supports it, a powerful promise from God that is

behind it all.

The bonus first -- the unexpected blessing. What you find in this passage is a look into Paul and his relationship with the Philippians. The bonus is this: We have a new kind, a new level of intimacy in relationship when we are content in Christ. Let me say that again: When we find contentment in Christ, we experience new, deeper, more intimate relationship. Do you find yourself ever wanting friendships and intimacy in relationship that are more transparent, authentic, honest? You love the other person not for what you get from that person. You can really be yourself around that person, and there is a deep, intimate, appropriate knowledge of one another.

Paul models that here. In fact, it's really fascinating what he does. He goes to say thank you. This is my summary of the passage. He says, "Listen, you sent this extravagant gift from Epaphroditus. He delivered it. I am here in jail. I need it desperately. I am in prison for preaching the gospel. This is wonderful. Thank you. But, listen, don't misunderstand: I am content whether I get the gift or not. In fact, I am fine whether you send the gift or not. The gift was great, but really I am okay. In fact, I think it was a good thing for you to give the gift, because there will be an eternal reward for you, and there will be blessing and you will grow from it, and you will grow closer to God. So, thanks but no thanks. I didn't really need it. It's better for you that you gave, so I'm glad that you gave because it's really good for you, but I was fine without it."

I don't know about you, but if I had written a thank you note like that, my mom would have sent me to my room. It doesn't seem all that thankful. In fact, it's been called the thankless thank you. The reason is that Paul is opening a window into relationship where it's just not about money. It's not about materialism. It's not about a return on your investment. Paul is modeling: I care for you. I care for you and I am ready to risk failure, rejection, offense, not getting another gift from you when I might physically need it because I love you. He is modeling the cross life in friendship.

I have told this story about the refrigerator magnet a number of times and I apologize, but it really illustrates the point I want to make here. My wife and I were having a very difficult time early in our marriage. That was an understatement, by the way. It was a very difficult time. She's got this look like, "Where is he going?" I promise you, Babe, it won't be that bad. I had been praying a certain bible verse for her and for us. I went to the Christian bookstore one day and saw a magnet that had that bible verse. I said, "Oh, this is perfect. This is God." I bought the magnet. I went home and I didn't just give her the magnet, but I prayed for her. I got down on my knees and I prayed this incredibly moving, inspirational, anointed prayer. The heavens opened and angels filled the room and sang as I prayed. I mean, this is the kind of spiritual leadership that every woman would be happy to have and long for.

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When I finished, I got a little pat on the head, “that was nice,” and something to the effect that the magnet got tossed on the counter. Little did I know -- this is how I did not know my wife -- she doesn’t like anything on the refrigerator door. To this day we have a clean refrigerator door, which really isn’t the point. The point is this: I remember her being underwhelmed. The reality is, her response was probably very appropriate, very loving, very appreciative, but in that moment, I was blind to the fact that it was so much about me. Even the act of giving was just loaded with expectation in terms of what would be returned to me. What’s insidious, what’s so helpful for me about that experience and the illustration is that it had every appearance of being selfless and spiritual, but in reality, when I didn’t get the response I wanted, I was disillusioned and disappointed.

Paul is modeling for us here a security and a contentment in Christ that isn’t trying to suck out of everything around it meaning and purpose and happiness. It is finding it in Jesus and then freeing the person to give without all the hooks. That, friends, is supernatural. That is available only in Jesus Christ. And yet, it is the promise that God offers for us.

The unexpected bonus is this: It’s friendship, it’s relationship on a new level. The promise that pushes it out is in verse 19, and hopefully you already have discovered that. Paul writes this: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

So, you have who, what, and how.

Who? -- my God. God is doing the supplying.

He is what? – supplying every need, every need, emotional and physical. There is a place of release where we say, “God, you are calling me to live a life of serving, a life of dying to self, and I have this fear of being taken advantage of. I have this fear of not having enough. I have this fear of ‘if I really live a generous life, I will run out.’ I am seeing my exhaustible supplies emotionally, relationally, materially. You are telling me to live a life where I am generous, opening my life relationally, physically, materially.” Here is the promise that makes that possible: God has got it. God has got it. God will take care of it. God will provide for you, every need.

How? -- according to his riches in Christ Jesus, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. There is an unlimited supply, where God gives us what we need in relationship, in life, to allow us to walk with him, and live with him, and live for him, so that we find ourselves saying relationally, “Wow, this really is better than I thought possible.” “When I entered into this friendship, or when I have thought about my need for friends, when I entered into marriage or into this relationship, I had

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these expectations and these hopes. There is an aspect of that where it is natural, but in Christ I am finding an inner transformation is taking place that helps me to find contentment in him and joy in all these circumstances, which is so preferable." Every need met in God, according to the riches that are in Christ Jesus. We find ourselves continually surprised in Christ.

So, let's respond. Let's respond to the message this morning and start with this: Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you know contentment in Jesus Christ? I don't mean, "Do you come from a certain Christian tradition, or you have a certain head knowledge?" but "Do you relationally know him and the forgiveness of sin that comes by faith in Christ?" That is a critical response.

If you don't, my encouragement to you today is to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. I want to ask us to bow our heads and give you an opportunity to respond. That would be the first and most appropriate response - trusting in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If that's you, if that is the response you want to make today, would you lift your hand? I would like to pray for you. Say, "Listen, I want to trust in Christ. I want to come to him as my Lord, as my Savior. I want to repent of my sin and put my faith in him." I am going to give you a moment to respond.