

**GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING YOU NEED****Philippians 4:10-23****Church of Christ / 9301 Sheldon Road****Plymouth, Michigan 48170****Royce Dickinson, Jr. / 03.14.2004**

What a wonderful Sunday today is! By the grace of God, we have been blessed with the appointment of two additional elders.<sup>1</sup> As we go forward in the strength of the Almighty, may we always rely upon the God who supplies everything we need. The God who strengthens us and who supplies us with all that we need is the focus of the Apostle Paul's concluding words to the Christians of ancient Philippi.

As you may recall, the occasion for the Letter to the Philippians is to be found primarily in Paul's friendship with the church of Philippi. In particular, Epaphroditus, who has been with Paul, is returning back to Philippi and is probably the carrier of the letter; and so, Paul wishes to report on his state of affairs and to thank the Philippians for their generous gift. It is the early A.D. 60s, and Paul is a prisoner in Rome. His letter closes with these words:

<sup>4:10</sup>I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

<sup>14</sup>Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup>Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; <sup>16</sup>for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup>Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>20</sup>To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>21</sup>Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with

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<sup>1</sup>When preached, I made personal comments about the two men who were appointed. For the sake of public distribution, I have removed these remarks from this manuscript.

me send greetings. <sup>22</sup>All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

<sup>23</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. (TNIV).

When Paul says that he has “learned to be content whatever the circumstances,” the Greek word translated “content” (αὐτάρκης– *autarkēs*) means also “self-sufficient.”<sup>2</sup> The virtue of “self-sufficiency” was a favorite one among Cynics and Stoics and—we might add—a valued virtue of many Americans. Paul claims that he has learned to be self-sufficient, but Paul's self-sufficiency is of very different kind, for—paradoxically—it comes from God. Paul's self-sufficiency arises from his decision, described in 3:7-11, to give up everything in order to gain Christ. For ancient Stoics and modern Americans, self-sufficiency means relying on one's own personal inner resources. It is found by looking *within* one's self. For Paul, self-sufficiency means relying on God in Christ to provide the necessary strength and supplies. It is found by looking *outside of* one's self.

Notice verses 13 and 19:

I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength (v. 13).

My God will supply all your needs from His glorious riches,  
which have been given to us in Christ Jesus (v. 19).

The secret to Paul's ability to do “everything” is found in Christ who gives Paul the power he needs. And when Paul speaks of “my God,” he wishes to stress that he is depending on God to do for him what he is unable to do for himself. It is only when “self-sufficiency” becomes “Christ-sufficiency” that we will find ourselves, like Paul, able to be content in whatever the circumstances. *Christ is sufficient whether we have everything or whether we have nothing.* In Christ, we can do everything and we can do without anything and still be content. Self-sufficiency comes from self-surrender, and contentment is not found in who we are but in whose we are.

Paul reminds us of something we often forget; and that is, since God's riches are immeasurable, God is able to meet every conceivable need. *The riches of God are sufficient to deal with all our needs.*

For me, there are three terms in this text that sum-up the Christian life: strength, riches, and grace. As Christians, we are promised the *power* of God's strength, the

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<sup>2</sup>The adjective is used in Phil 4:11, and the noun is used in 2 Cor 9:8.

*provision* of God's riches, and the *presence* of God's grace—all of this through Christ Jesus our Lord!

Interestingly, when Paul pens his final sentence—"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit"—he combines the plural "your" with the singular "spirit." Now this may not be the best grammar, but it is superb theology! *Although we are many, we are one.* We are many members, but one body. We are many Christians, but one church. And to tie this with the appointment of our two additional shepherds, although we are many sheep, we are one flock.

James Hudson Taylor was born in Barnsley, England, the son of a Methodist minister, in 1832. After studying medicine and theology, he went to China in 1854 as a missionary. He returned to England in 1860 and spent 5 years translating the New Testament into the Ningpo dialect. He then went back to China in 1866 with 16 other missionaries and founded the China Inland Mission. In 1870 his wife and 2 of their children died of cholera. Taylor remained in China and at his death in 1905, there were 205 stations with 849 missionaries and 125,000 Chinese Christians.

James Hudson Taylor's life and ministry depicts the declarations of Paul we have studied today:

I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength (v. 13).

My God will supply all your needs from His glorious riches,  
which have been given to us in Christ Jesus (v. 19).

To borrow from the words of Taylor himself, he said: "When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack for God's supply." Amen.

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