

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Philippians 4:10-13 on June 14, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Invisible Suitcases
Today's Focus: "I Have No Power"

Christ's Strength Makes You 'Up For Whatever'

Any of you still watch commercials on TV or do you just fast forward through them on your DVR these days? I wouldn't by any means say that you'll feel your life enriched by watching commercials, but I think we can learn something about our world—where people hurt, what people want, or at least what a company has paid lots of \$\$\$ to try and make you want because they've got a product to fix that problem, to satisfy that desire, or to fulfill that longing they've created.

For example, how many of you have seen the Bud Light ads that ask if you're "up for whatever"? Like you're out hanging with friends and someone hands you a cold one and they ask, "Are you up for whatever happens next?" And if you say yes then the world around you transforms—maybe you get to play ping pong with Arnold Schwarzenegger or you get to play a giant game of human Pac-man. The idea they're selling is that if you're 'up for whatever' then you're going to have a whole lot of fun. They even set up an elaborate town they called Whatever, USA which they call "an epic town for those who are truly up for whatever." Sounds cool, huh? Who wouldn't want to be up for whatever when it's a lot of fun?!

Does that sound like your life though—all fun all the time, everything easy and handed to you? It certainly taps into something people want. I'd love to play human Pac-man. But the reality though is most of 'whatever' in life isn't all fun and games, is it? It's not easy. There are bills to pay. There are deadlines to make. There are appointments to keep. There are people to please. There is pressure to perform. Along with growing up comes the weight of more and more responsibility. And then there is a whole world out there full of people who are hurting and crying out for our help if only we would look past ourselves and see and listen to them. What are we going to do? Add on the sense of urgency you might feel if you're a Christian because now you want to share your faith in Jesus Christ with others except that not everyone wants to hear it and it can get pretty tough in a hurry. All of a sudden the path through life doesn't seem like a smooth, easy road to Whatever, USA. Instead it seems like a long and windy road with lots of twists and turns and bumps along the way.

And if we're going to be honest sometimes, it is this way because of bad choices we've made, right? Like the old saying "You've made your bed and now you have to lie in it" because you messed up and made some mistakes. You sinned and now you have to suffer the consequences. You said something. You did something. You can't undo that something. You know how much that hurts. Maybe you're stuck right now in a cycle of bad choices that you feel powerless to get out of even though every time you commit the same sin you feel worse and worse about yourself.

Although sometimes it's rough too because there are circumstances you just happen to find yourself in. As much as you and I would like to think we're in control, sometimes circumstances beyond our control cause us to just plain feel stuck, don't they? Sometimes it's hard enough to deal with our present

circumstances much less be 'up for whatever happens next.' We can feel powerless in our present circumstances. You ever feel that way?

Today as we continue this series Invisible Suitcases we're looking at another lie the devil whispers where his goal is to drive you to despair in whatever circumstances you may find yourself in. He wants to get you to ultimately throw in the towel and give up on God and your life. The lie he wants you to believe is this: I am powerless. More than that he wants you to believe that God doesn't even have the power to help you and that he's abandoned you to deal with it all on your own...until you have no hope.

Well today, friends, I have some really good news for you. God wants to turn the tables on this lie of the devil. And he can and he will. Through his powerful Word, God wants to give you peace for today and power for tomorrow. We're going to see how "I am powerless" is a lie because the truth is that **Christ's Strength Makes Us 'Up For Whatever' happens next in life.**

Now of all the apostles to be acquainted with this lie "I am powerless", the apostle Paul speaks very candidly about it. On the one hand in a couple of his letters in the New Testament he speaks honestly about his weaknesses. He's transparent about them along with his failures as a result of them. It's startling sometimes to hear this pastor person open up his heart and let us see the ugliness of his sinful nature. That's because, just like the rest of us, before Paul could find strength in God he first needed to discover how truly weak he was on his own. That's a really hard lesson for many of us to learn that in a certain sense you and I are powerless...on our own. This is why the devil doesn't just deal in obvious, outright lies but especially in half-truths with subtle twists. He's devious and he never has our good at heart. But God, because he loves us so much, in his wisdom he sometimes lets us come to our own limits so that we learn to trust his limitless love.

Also to apply what Paul's going to say to us today, we first we need to understand what he's been through the last 3 years and the circumstances he's in when he writes. You see, Paul, when he writes the words we're going to read from Philippians 4, is in a Roman prison. He finds himself here after experiencing shipwreck, a snakebite, false accusations, and attempted murder by some of his own countrymen. His former friends were mad at him because Paul gave up his position of power and prestige as a Pharisee to start preaching about Jesus even though all this brought for Paul was financial loss, hardship, and persecution at every turn. And now in prison he awaits a trial before Caesar himself where with the turn of his thumb Caesar could order his death immediately.

So the circumstances of Paul's life when he writes these words weren't all fun and games. It was tough. He didn't have the freedom to go where he wanted. And for quite some time now he was separated from his friends who cared about him. He faced the very real temptation being isolated to throw in the towel and despair. Yet here's what he says: *10 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. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 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. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Did you hear what Paul says? *“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”* Here’s a guy basically in prison who could say, “In a certain sense, yes I’m powerless here. But in a bigger sense, I’m not powerless at all. Never been stronger. I’m up for whatever happens next.”

You get it? He’s saying, “Yes, it’s tough now. It might get tougher. Yet I’m up for whatever.” Friends, how could he say that? I mean did he have any control over whatever happens next? Nope. None.

But here’s what he believed and what God wants you to believe also: *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.* Who’s the *him* here? Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior!

I’m up for whatever because of Christ who gives me strength. I don’t have this strength on my own. Ok, you’re right, Satan. In a sense I am powerless. I’m powerless to fix all my problems. I’m powerless to change all my circumstances. I don’t have all the answers. I admit it. My sinful nature is never content. Its every thought is wicked and selfish. But my life is not hopeless. I am no longer powerless. Because through faith in Christ Jesus my Savior who loved me and now lives in me, I’m not weak. I’m strong! And I can do all this through Christ. I can have peace even in my present circumstances. I can push forward into the future. I am up for whatever happens next because of Christ Jesus the Son of God who gives me strength. He became weak and emptied himself into death that I might be fully forgiven and be given spiritual strength to live a brand new life as a child of God.

Friends, any of you ever donate plasma? If you’ve ever given plasma, you know it saps you of strength. It weakens you. But only to make others strong, right? Did any of you hear the story this week about a man named James Harrison who has what’s been called “The Golden Arm”? He’s an Australian man who has donated blood plasma every week for 60 years and his plasma has literally saved over 2 million babies. Apparently there was a terrible blood disease in the 1950s which attacked unborn babies. Many women lost their babies and for a long time doctors couldn’t explain why. Then this guy James Harrison began donating his extraordinary blood. They found that his blood is able to counteract that deadly disease thereby giving life to millions of babies and incredible joy to thousands of families. Time and time again he gave of his strength to help save millions of helpless little babies. This is certainly something to thank God for.

But even more we thank God for the precious blood of his Son, Christ Jesus our Savior, for the countless lives he has saved through his sacrifice on the cross. Because as amazing as it is that a person like James Harrison can give part of himself to help literally millions of people...even more amazing is that God’s Son from eternity could so lower himself, weaken himself, allow himself to be bound to death and hell on the cross in order that all people, weak and dying people, like us might be saved—if only they receive by faith the remedy that Jesus’ blood provides for the curse of sin. And not only this but also to make us strong now in the midst of all the circumstances of life because in the glorious light of Christ’s resurrection victory...we know that all this life here on earth is temporary and that what God has in store for us because of Jesus is eternal. So we can be ‘up for whatever happens next’ because we know how our life’s story ends. It does not end hopeless and alone. It ends in eternal glory together with a great multitude of fellow believers with all the angel hosts of heaven in the very presence of God where nothing will ever diminish our joy and no products will be needed to enhance it! It’s no wonder Paul says

elsewhere, *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18).

So friends, I don't know what you're all going through right now. I don't know what your “whatever” is. But I can promise you that it won't last forever. And if right now you're in that place in life where you feel absolutely powerless, then just know that from God's perspective you are in the perfect place here today to find in Jesus your true strength just as Jesus himself once reminded the apostle Paul: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Today Jesus is once again pouring into you his almighty power by the same Holy Spirit who taught Paul the secret of contentment whom he still sends into your life through his word and sacraments.

You know anyone right now who might be carrying the invisible suitcase of feeling powerless through life? Reach out to them this week to listen to them talk about their life situation—whatever it might be. Then if you get the opportunity, remind them in person, with a handwritten note or card, or through social media how Christ emptied himself to fill them up! Encourage them by sharing the message of Philippians 4:13 or by linking them to our website and encouraging them to listen to today's sermon themselves. Christ's strength makes us 'up for whatever'!

In fact I believe this so strongly that today I've got a couple coffee shop gift cards here that I bought with my own money. Who wants one? My only stipulation is this: use it to invite someone out to see how they're doing and to help them see how Jesus helps them carry their invisible suitcases. This is my way of encouraging all of you to take some time this week to seek out someone you think might be carrying some invisible suitcases in life. Invite them to talk over a cup of coffee (or whatever they'd like) and help share with them the message that Paul shares: I'm not powerless. I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength! Amen.