

October 26, 2014

Text: Philippians 4:10-20

Theme: Sharing...Something We Can All Do?

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I wonder what the people in the Gospel lesson were thinking. What was going through their heads? Where did all this food come from? 5,000 men, plus their wives and children—all eating as much as they wanted! They hadn't seen all of this food while Jesus was speaking to them! Surely...no...he couldn't have...what a miracle! Think of how those people must have been in utter shock when they realized the miracle Jesus had done. Turning 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish into food for thousands of people—impossible. And it goes without saying that they were thankful as well. Thankful that Jesus shared his power with them by giving them food.

Fast forward about 30 years to the city of Rome. What was Paul thinking—sitting in “prison” on house arrest, and in comes his friend Epaphroditus with gifts from the Philippian Christians! Gifts from the people in a congregation about 600 miles away! At first Paul probably couldn't believe it—he would've never expected gifts from a group of Christians so far away. And then thankfulness would've flowed over him—thankful love for the Philippian Christians who shared their possessions with Paul and deeply cared for him.

Now, maybe you don't have a former pastor who is trapped in a prison somewhere like the Philippians had in Paul. And so you can't send him a care package to brighten his day. And I know for a fact that you don't have the ability to take the Victory Café food and multiply it so that you can feed all 35,000 people in Franklin. Maybe you think—I could never give anyone anything as meaningful or amazing as what Jesus and the Philippians did. I can't share like that. As we conclude our 7-week series on Paul's letter to the Philippians, our subject is: **Sharing...is it something we can all do?** And as we consider that question, we're going to look at three aspects of the issue of sharing. **The Struggle, The Secret, and The Sacrifice.**

First, the struggle. Paul had an incredible amount of struggle in his life. Over the past 7 weeks, you've come to know that at the time he wrote his letter, Paul was in captivity in Rome. He lived in a house and he could have visitors, but he was chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day. He could go about daily activities, but he knew that any day the Caesar could order him to be executed. But even in his struggle, he wrote to different churches, and his letter to the Philippians was filled with love for them and joy because they were faithful Christians. In the final portion of his letter, Paul thanked them for the concern they showed for him. Verse 10 says, **“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.”** In verses 14-16 Paul tells us how they had shown concern to Paul—by supporting him and his ministry—even when he was in a different town—Thessalonica. The Philippians had the wonderful idea to take their congregation's offerings and not only support their own church, but support other mission work! **“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 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; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.**

Paul thanked them for sending him aid, but he also said they were the only church to send him help at all. He had been at a bunch of churches—why didn't more help him? There are a couple possible reasons. Maybe they thought they didn't have enough money to send some to Paul. Maybe they simply forgot about Paul. Maybe they didn't think they had any way to get Paul help—travel in that day was not what it is today, and electronic banking didn't exist either. Could've been any of those reasons, or maybe there was a completely different reason no other church helped Paul. The bottom line is—the human heart (yes, even the hearts of Christians, because we all still have the sinful nature that only ever wants to do evil) will come up with any possible excuse *not* to help someone in need—any possible excuse *not* to share.

Why is that? Why is it that we struggle with sharing with others? Maybe it's money you struggle to share—money and possessions. Is it because you don't think you have enough to share? That you need all you have to support yourself or your family? Maybe you struggle to share emotionally—when someone's in need of an encouraging word, you shy away—you can't do it. Maybe it's because you think you're not capable of comforting people with words and actions—maybe you think you don't have that ability. Or maybe you struggle with sharing the talents

you do have. The skills you have—you don't use them to help others. Maybe it's simply just not high on your priority list to share all you have with others.

Whatever the outward ways are that we don't share—whether it's our possessions, emotions, or abilities—we don't share because our heart by its nature wants to look after itself before helping others. We are selfish. We want to make sure we're okay before we look to see if others are okay. And even when we are okay and we clearly have an opportunity to help others—well, our sinful natures aren't content with just being "okay"—they'll always find an excuse to be selfish.

But selfishness isn't the root of our problem—it goes even deeper yet. The root cause of our selfishness is a lack of trust in God. Because if we totally trusted in God to take care of us—we wouldn't ever have any need to be selfish! But the devil whispers in our ear, "How can you trust 'God' to take care of you—he allows so much evil in the world! There are so many problems in the world! So many people who have nothing! If God lets terrible problems happen to some people, who's to say the next person with terrible things happening to them won't be *you!*" The devil hangs the carrot of self-won riches—of trusting in ourselves instead of God—in front of us to lead us away from our heavenly Father. And because our sinful nature is still active within us, we too often succumb to the temptation not to trust in God, but instead to selfishly look after ourselves. We struggle to trust. And therefore we struggle with selfishness. And therefore we struggle with sharing. *You might think, "How can I ever do what I'm supposed to—how can get unstuck from this pit of distrust and selfishness? It seems hopeless!"*

There is hope—because there is a secret. A secret that Paul talks about in our lesson. A secret that gives us the solution to the struggle of distrust and selfishness. Let's look at verses 11-13. **"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."**

Paul said in verses 11-12 that he had **learned the secret of being content whatever the circumstance—in any and every situation**. Paul had gone through the entire scope of circumstances in his life. Growing up he was the member of the prominent religious order of that day—the Pharisees. Paul grew up a rich religious leader. Then, in the early portions of his ministry, Paul had a tent-ministry. He supported himself through a regular job and carried out his pastoral ministry on the side. Imagine Pastor Ben not getting paid by Victory of the Lamb—imagine he did all the different things he does, all the different duties of being a pastor *and* he had to support himself and his family by working another full-time job on the side. That'd be crazy! He'd just be scraping by, and he would be exhausted. But that's what Paul did. And Paul had been run of numerous different towns for preaching the gospel, he had been brutally beaten, shipwrecked, and he had been imprisoned more than once in a few different cities. So when Paul says he's learned to be content whatever the circumstances...that means something. If this were an 8 yr-old child who grew up receiving everything he asked for from his parents and then some, this wouldn't be such a big deal. But Paul—he had experience in any and every situation. Paul had learned the secret of being content—in all situations. What was it—what was that secret?

Philippians 4:13. I probably don't even have to read that passage—most of you probably know it. And even if you can't think of it right now, as soon as you hear it the lightbulb will go on in your head. It's a common phrase athletes sometimes use to build themselves up. A couple years ago I remember seeing it on Tim Tebow's eye black. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Sounds fantastic, doesn't it?! But, this passage isn't promising us that we can do whatever we set our minds to. "If you try hard enough, you can get whatever job you want! You can get an A+ on the test because Christ strengthens you! You can go to the Olympics, become a professional singer, have an impressive looking house, have the means to drive a very nice car..." –you get the picture. That's *not* the promise here.

Look carefully at the translation in your worship folder. **"I can do all *this* through him who gives me strength."** All this...Paul is saying he can be content in any situation, and at all times—because the power of Christ is with him! The promise isn't that we will have everything we want or be able to do anything we set our minds to—the promise is that whatever God puts before us in life—whether that is being married, single, a parent, child, student, athlete, employee, employer, or anything else, Christ is with us, continually strengthening us.

How does Christ strengthen us? Well, Christ is the ultimate “Sharer.” Think again back to the Gospel lesson—a prime example of Christ sharing his emotions and abilities. Verse 14 said Jesus had compassion on the crowd and healed their sick. Jesus saw the pain, the hurt in the eyes of people with diseases and he healed them. He saw the need for food for all these people, and he provided as only he could—with a great miracle.

And he’s still sharing with us today. Everything in the world belongs to Christ, and yet think about how much he has given to you—how many individual “things” you own—100s, 1000s! Each article of clothing, each piece of food, each tool or kitchen utensil, each object that is simply for your enjoyment—a book, a movie. But Jesus’ goal wasn’t simply to share physical healing with them and fill their stomachs, nor is his goal simply to give us all the *stuff* we need. He has a much greater purpose—he wants to feed us eternally. And so he shared something greater than physical health, something greater than earthly necessities, something greater than anything could get in this world. He shared himself.

Jesus Christ, the God over all creation, shared himself with us by coming to earth and doing what we never could—Sharing perfectly. He was never selfish with his time, he never looked out for himself before looking after others, and he always showed perfect compassion. He was perfect in absolutely everything he did, but he didn’t even keep that to himself! Jesus’ perfect record, his 100% score in keeping God’s law—he shared *that* with us! His perfection is our perfection. His eternal glory in heaven is our eternal glory in heaven. Jesus shared with us in the greatest possible way by sharing himself.

And how does that change us? It makes us want to do nothing other than share with others! The reason Paul could be content in every situation is because he knew he had the only thing that mattered—Christ’s perfection. Christ’s love. And when you have the only thing that really matters—you’re free to share absolutely everything with others! Now that we know the secret of the solution to our struggle against selfishness and not trusting in God, we come to **The Sacrifice**. Let’s read the final verses of our lesson, starting with verse 17. Paul says, **“Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 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. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”**

Paul once again acknowledges his thankfulness for the Philippians’ gifts that Epaphroditus had brought him and he also calls the gifts a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. What does that mean? Did the gifts smell nice? Maybe, but that’s not the point. Paul is alluding to all the OT sacrifices that the Israelites offered to God. The phrase “fragrant offering” is used over and over in the OT to say that the offering was acceptable and pleasing to God. The OT believers offered sacrifices for the same reason that the Philippians gave gifts to Paul—because God taught them to show love to others as he had shown love to them. And just as God delighted in the OT sacrifices and offerings, he also delights in your generous sharing!

And joyfully sharing our possessions, emotional support and talents is the only logical result of Christ’s sharing with us. Because Christ has shared himself with us and given us his perfection, which is the greatest gift in the world and the only one that really matters, we can be content in any and every situation. We can be free from selfish desires. We aren’t consumed by a desire to look after ourselves—we are overcome with generosity and a desire to share with others! Brothers and sisters in Christ, you have been “unstuck” from selfishness and the sin of not fully trusting in God. Christ unstuck you by sharing himself with you. He is with you in every situation, lovingly strengthening you for every task set before you. Is sharing “something we can all do?” By God’s grace—yes! Christ shared himself with you, which strengthens you to share as well. Amen.