

[pay it upward]

:: philippians 4.10, 14-18 ::

Our text this morning is Philippians 4, verses 10 and 14 through 18. We're going to take verses 11, 12 and 13 separately next week, because they're a sort of parenthetical teaching within what we're covering today.

So, here's our text:

Philippians 4.10, 14-18 - But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity... Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

Here at Calvary, we have some very strong feelings about how the Church is to discuss the subject of money. The way we do things isn't the only way to do them, but we feel passionately that the Church is not to burden God's people and beg them for money. This happens a lot throughout the world, and it is sad to us. We think of it as fleecing God's sheep when you see Churches constantly guilting people into giving more and more and more, creating the idea that God is *dependent* on our money. That is not the case.

So, in the pulpit, we try hard to talk about money and giving only when it comes up in the text we're studying. This morning it does. Paul gives some very interesting insight into what God thinks of our financial giving to the work of the Kingdom.

I say *financial* giving, because we tend to try to substitute other things for money. Sometimes Christians try to talk about not giving money, but tithing our time or our prayers or something else. In the Bible, God clearly commands His people that they are to give **money** to the work of the Gospel, and this text gives us some details of how that works and what it means for us spiritually. Spoiler alert: God gives that command for our benefit.

So let's get into it, verse 10 again:

Philippians 4.10 - But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

The first thing we notice is that Paul gets excited about the fact that the church in Philippi was giving financially to the work of the Lord. But he wasn't excited because it meant he was getting a paycheck, in fact he plainly says that in verse 17, which we'll see. We also know that,

when he wasn't imprisoned, Paul worked a job as a tentmaker so that he could help support himself. So, it wasn't that he was going to go out and buy some new stuff with their money. No, he was rejoicing because of the benefits **they** would receive as a result of their giving.

The next part of the verse can seem a little bit confusing as he's talking about them caring or not caring. The church certainly *did* care about Paul's wellbeing and the work that God had set before him to do.

The problem was that they lacked opportunity. Because, back then, communicating with someone out of town was no small task. The letter and the gift Paul had received from them and this letter that he was writing back had to be sent by hand, through a messenger, who had to risk the dangers of lengthy travel. It was months and months just to get a letter to someone. So, obviously, as Paul traveled around the Mediterranean and Asia, it would've been essentially impossible to get a letter and funds to him. Now that he was a prisoner of Rome, he was stationary and the believers in Philippi were able to get him some support for his needs and his ministry.

Philippians 4.14 - Nevertheless, you have done well that you shared in my distress.

It's clear to us that all around the world there are people in distress. God has revealed to us in His word that when we reach out with love and compassion and truth to the poor and distressed in this world, He is pleased.

Specifically regarding this text, Paul is teaching that when we extend care and our resources to our fellow Christians who are suffering or are persecuted or afflicted, we have done well.

This is no small subject in the Scriptures. After all, that phrase which we seek to hear at the end of our lives on earth is what? "Well done, good and faithful servant." Paul, throughout this letter, has detailed how we embrace the Christian life to the fullest, so that we can hasten the wonderful transformation that Christ wants to do in us. And, in this verse, we're given almost a shortcut: give to the work of God and you have **done well!**

We all want to know the will of God for our lives and not all of the steps are clearly laid out before us. But, in God's word, there are a number of things that are plain and simple: Do you want to do well? One way you can do God's will is by giving financially to the work of the Kingdom. That's the deal.

When we give financially to the ministry and to those who are afflicted and distressed, the Bible says we are doing something good and beautiful. Something that pleases God.

Philippians 4.15-16 - Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

So, again, in case it wasn't clear, Paul is definitely talking about Christians giving *money* to God's work. It's a calling we've all received and an opportunity we all have.

If we look in the Bible for principles of how to give to God, we find clear directives that we are to give regularly, sacrificially and joyfully. We see here that the Philippians hadn't just sent Paul on his way with a few dollars out of guilt. He had come to their city, having been directed by the Holy Spirit, they had preached the Gospel, started a church, been imprisoned, miraculously set free and then arranged for the local government to keep from persecuting the believers they were leaving behind.

Now, as he left, the Philippians gave to him for the ministry. But as we can see in verse 16, it wasn't just cab fare. They continued sending aid to him, not because they were motivated by guilt, but because they were motivated by a desire that others might find that which Paul had brought to them. I can imagine that as they pressed their coins into his hand that they said, "We want others to know what you have made known to us. That there is freedom from sin. There is victory over death. There is heaven for us. And if this money can get that information to others, then we will by any means deliver it."

After Paul had departed and went to Thessalonica, the Philippians took the initiative to send aid to him a second time. They had a heart to spread the Gospel through the ministry of Paul and to partner with him in the work God had given him.

Philippians 4.17-18 - Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed, I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

So, as we already saw, Paul wasn't excited about the money for himself. He had what he needed. No, he was excited because he knew that their giving meant that spiritual fruit was going to be deposited into their account.

And, to me, this is a remarkable thing. As we search for God's purpose in our lives and as we desire a greater faith and a greater intimacy with God, as we hunger for the kind of fullness that we see men like Paul having, the Bible is on record as saying that when we give to the Lord, not out of guilt but out of love, spiritual fruit is automatically born in our lives.

Because the Philippians gave to the work of Christ through Paul's ministry, as one commentator puts it: His converts were their converts. Those Roman soldiers who had given their lives to Christ, those he had evangelized in Thessalonica and beyond were spiritual dividends that the Philippians would be rewarded for in eternity, simply by investing funds in the Kingdom.

A penny to God's service is the greatest and most lucrative investment we can make. Will God return a physical dollar for our physical penny? No. That's not what the Bible teaches. No, God plans something much better for us than a few fleeting riches. He guarantees a dramatic return on our heavenly investment. And, as Bible teachers are fond of pointing out, it is the only time in the Scriptures that God invites us to test Him.

Malachi 3:10 - Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the

windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

God desires that we give and commands us to give to His work because of the benefits which it brings. He says very plainly in His word that it is a good and beautiful thing for us to do. That we're automatically *guaranteed* a deposit of spiritual fruit **and** that it greatly pleases Him. It **pleases** Him! Paul calls it an acceptable, sweet sacrifice to God. It is an act of worship and submission and love when we give financially to the King who seeks to save.

Now, money is a very sensitive and touch subject, especially in the Church. Our teaching on the topic is that what you give is between you and your God. A man cannot tell you how much to give. Neither should a man guilt you into giving. God isn't in the business of sacrifices of guilt. He doesn't want them because He is not dependent on us.

Instead, God shows us in His word that He has instituted giving in the Christian life so that we can benefit spiritually and eternally and so that we can partner with Him in His quest to save those who are lost.

For the Philippians and for us there are 2 prerequisites for giving in this text. There is opportunity and desire.

For a time the Philippians lacked opportunity. They were disconnected with Paul and unable to reach him with the financial gift they wanted to give.

At this point in time, in the place that we live, this is never the case for us. Plain and simple. In the click of a mouse we can send money to those in need on the other side of the world if we want to. Think Gospel For Asia. We have a local church which is established and able to do ministry all over this community and beyond using the funds that people bring in. There are para-church organizations locally and nationally that are doing a good work of evangelism and compassion that we can support. Organizations like the CPC here in town who are working to save lives spiritually and physically.

We lack no opportunity. Literally, at any moment we can give 1 dollar or 10 thousand dollars to the legitimate work of God's Kingdom. So that's not a problem for us.

But the other part is desire. And this is where many people in the American Church fall short. 97% of us, by some estimations.

Jesus had a great number of warnings for the rich. After all, He said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. That's a scary thing to think about when we realize that we are richer than almost anyone else in all of human history. Yes, wealth is relative, however when you look at the world and history, the figures are staggering.

According to research, right now, if you make 25,000 dollars a year, you are richer than 90% of the current world population. If you make 50,000 dollars a year, you are richer than 99% of everyone else in the world.

I don't say that to guilt us. Guilted giving is not Biblical nor beneficial. I say that because we need to understand the opportunity we have and the resources we have if we are willing.

1 John 3.17 - If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?

The Philippian believers joined in Paul's distress and sent aid to him. In the same way, we have seen those around us, both near and far, who need help and compassion.

James 2.15-16 - [If] you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

And so the question is not one of opportunity, but it is one of *desire*. Do we *desire* to please God in this way? Do we desire to receive the incredible offers He's made to us, or are we content to forego this part of the Christian life and rationalize or procrastinate our way out of it? Paul talks about giving being a sweet-smelling sacrifice to the Lord, which blesses Him and pleases Him and benefits us and helps others who are in such need, in no uncertain terms.

If we put ourselves in his analogy, the question to ask is: Am I content to be in the Temple, but not bring my God a sacrifice? We desire intimacy with God, He desires intimacy with us. When we were dating our wives, did we say, "Honey, I really love you, but you're not worth spending my hard-earned money on. Why don't you pay for dinner and I'll pay for mine."

If we search our hearts and that is the attitude we discover toward God, then there is clearly a disconnect between what God wants for our Christianity and what we're allowing Him to do within us.

Or, looking at the Philippian example. When we search our hearts and understand the salvation and forgiveness of God, do we have a desire that those around us receive it as well? Do we want to fill heaven with those who are currently traveling towards Hell?

God is clear about giving. It's not complicated. On top of that, God is faithful to personally guide us in our giving by His Holy Spirit. The question is not 'should we', the question is 'how should we?' Which Thessalonian can I reach out to today through my finances? How can I invest in the good work of Jesus Christ that has saved me and transformed me?

We need to ask ourselves these questions and we need to be willing to live biblically when it comes to our finances. And if we're not willing to do that, then we need to see what that means for our progress in the Lord and the fullness He desires for us. It's not about guilt. It's not about God or the Church being dependent on your wallet. That is the opposite of what the Bible says. It's about the Lord transforming us on a very important level, so that we can take on the life of Christ, who is all about giving to us richly and sacrificially that we might receive abundant life.