

PHILIPPIANS

4:10-23

Introduction

Being a Christian in a hostile world has never been easy!

=Jesus explained to His disciples, and us,

"...In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."¹

=Paul explained to his converts, and to us,

"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."²

Paul knew what he was talking about when it came to tribulation. Speaking of his difficulties as a Christian, he said in Second Corinthians 11:23-28,

2 Corinthians 11:23 ...in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

2 Corinthians 11:24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

2 Corinthians 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

2 Corinthians 11:26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

2 Corinthians 11:27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness;

2 Corinthians 11:28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

Perils and poverty were Paul's frequent companions, and they have followed Christians since then.

Perils and poverty are not the only difficulties you face as a Christian: Prosperity and plenty can also be difficult challenges! In First Timothy 6:9 & 10 Paul wrote,

1 Timothy 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

It's not just financial prosperity and plenty that challenge Christians; *spiritual* prosperity and plenty can be difficult to handle. John wrote of Diatrophes, a man in the first century church who he said loved to be preeminent among the believers - a man whose spiritual prosperity had led to pride.³

¹John 16:33

²Acts 14:22

³John 9

Perils and poverty, on the one hand; prosperity and plenty, on the other... Each poses problems for you as a believer!

Paul talked about these extremes in our text this morning. In verses 12 and 13 you read,

Philippians 4:12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

You and I will know times of poverty - times of being abased. You and I will know plenty - times of abounding. We must learn how to handle each of these.

We'll see two things this morning:

#1 You Can Learn To Appreciate
Poverty As The Lord Strengthens
You To Be Abased
(v10-13)

#2 You Can Learn To Appreciate
Plenty As The Lord Strengthens
You To Abound
(v14-23)

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#1 You Can Learn To Appreciate
Poverty As The Lord Strengthens
You To Be Abased
(v10-13)

If you're like me, you already don't like the sound of this! Who wants to learn how to appreciate poverty? Whether it's physical want, or spiritual want, we'd much rather avoid it than appreciate it.

The key is that you can *learn* to appreciate it. Paul said in verse 11 "I have **learned** in whatever state I am, to be content." From the Lord, Who strengthens you in it, you learn to appreciate your adverse circumstances.

A wonderful biography that I'd recommend to you is titled *Ordained of the Lord*. It's the biography of H.A. Ironside, author and pastor of Moody Church in Chicago. Ironside knew what it was to be

abased as he served the Lord as an itinerant preacher of the Gospel, often lacking his daily necessities of food and shelter. Time after time God had a lesson for him to learn in his poverty. One lesson in particular involved a deeper understanding of Philippians 4:19, where we read,

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

After going through a particularly difficult time, Ironside received a letter from his stepfather applying this verse in a way he'd never considered before. His father wrote,

"God spoke to me through Philippians 4:19 today. He has promised to supply all our need. Some day He may see that I need a starving. If He does, He will supply that."⁴

God knows when you need a starving, and He will supply it. He knows when you need to be abased in order to grow closer to Him, and send your roots deeper into His Word, and He is faithful to supply it.

Poverty can be God's supply for you! When it is, learn to appreciate it.

Paul had been experiencing some poverty, some want. He was under house arrest in Rome and somewhat abased until he received a financial gift from the church at Philippi. In verses ten through thirteen he describes his attitude towards being abased.

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.

He rejoiced that they cared about him, even when they lacked full opportunity to send him money. Their hearts were more important to him than their purses!

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

He wants to thank them for their gift; he knows it was heartfelt and sincere, and it was greatly comforting to him. But Paul doesn't want them to get the idea that without the gift he would be struggling. He doesn't want them to think that being abased is an excuse for spiritual depression or discouragement. Being abased was God's

⁴*Ordained of the Lord*, p. 112.

supply, and he had learned to appreciate it. They could learn from him to appreciate times of being abased God would supply them with.

"Content" is a word that, in this context, means to live independent of circumstances because of your dependence on Jesus. Sounds great! But the way to learn how to do it is to be abased.

Philippians 4:12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

When God is at work in your life it can seem that you go through extremes. Things are either great, or they're a grind. You're either abounding, or your abased. While that may indeed be true of certain seasons or episodes in your life, the result will be a life of balance. The extremes will seem less extreme and you will become more mellow in the midst of them.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

The one constant through all your ups and downs will be the presence of Jesus. By His indwelling Spirit He strengthens you to understand and endure seasons of being abased, or seasons of abounding. Like Ironside's stepfather, you can come to learn that, if God sees that you need a starving in some area, He will supply it!

It seems odd to consider poverty and peril as a 'supply,' but it is if you belong to the Lord. My ideas about what I need always involve getting more, not having less! In His infinite and compassionate wisdom, God supplies your real needs - and He does it by sometimes withholding things from you.

What is never withheld is the presence of Jesus, Who promised "I will never leave you or forsake you."⁵ His spiritual supply is always abounding through the indwelling Spirit.

+Are you going through a season or an episode of being abased? It is very likely God's supply for you!

#2 You Can Learn To Appreciate

⁵Hebrews 13:5

Plenty As The Lord Strengthens You To Abound (v14-23)

Plenty and prosperity are not always easy to handle. I've known too many couples who have been shipwrecked by success. The Jews in the Old Testament are a good example. When God prospered them in the land, they promptly forgot Him. The same still happens today.

Plenty and prosperity, times of abounding, are no less a trial than times of being abased. Let's see how to handle them.

In verses 14 through 16 you have a little background on the Philippian church and their support of Paul:

Philippians 4:14 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

Philippians 4:15 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.

Philippians 4:16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

God had put it on the hearts of this particular church to financially support Paul in his efforts to evangelize the world with the Gospel. They committed themselves to it, helping Paul "once and again," regularly.

Philippians 4:17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

Paul was thankful for their financial help, but he kept it in perspective. *He didn't need their gift as much as they needed to give it!* He had learned how to be content without it. It was to their spiritual benefit that they gave.

It's to **your** spiritual benefit that you give to the Lord's work! Apparently you have an "account" in the Bank of Heaven. You make deposits there whenever you use your resources here on earth to support the furthering of the kingdom of God on the earth. You earn "fruit" - spiritual fruit - on your deposits, both now and in eternity. Some of you are wise investors; others need to be!

Philippians 4:18 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.

The money and other items that they sent Paul to help him with his daily necessities took on the characteristics of a temple sacrifice because they were for the Lord's work. Your gifts to the ministry, while they may help with mundane and material things on earth, are seen as spiritual sacrifices in heaven.

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

This doesn't obligate God to give you back what you gave out, or to give you more. God frequently blesses you that way - providing over and above what you sacrificed. But He doesn't have to. In other words, don't give to get!

God supplied all of Paul's need. He supplied Paul by allowing him to be abased when he needed it, *and* by allowing him to abound when he needed it. God will do the same for you.

Philippians 4:20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Everything that God supplies is for your good and for His glory, with eternity in mind.

Philippians 4:21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you.
Philippians 4:22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.

In the midst of all this talk of being abased and of abounding, Paul reminds them, and us, that the work of God is abounding everywhere! Even in Caesar's household, a place seemingly impenetrable to normal evangelistic efforts, many were coming to know Christ.

How? *Through Paul's being abased!* Because of his being under house arrest, guards from Caesar's palace were assigned to him in shifts. These were getting saved and sharing with others in the palace - right under Caesar's nose! God had supplied Paul's need to be abased so that the Gospel might abound.

+One more time, let me say to you: Times of plenty and prosperity, times of abounding, present unique challenges in your Christian walk. Christians who abound are at risk just as much as Christians who are abased. You must *learn* how to abound; you must depend upon Jesus in your abounding in order not to stumble.

Conclusion

"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." In order to make that true in your life, God will bring you to and through times of being abased... And He will bring you to and through times of abounding.

As you walk with the Lord through poverty and through plenty, you will more and more learn to live independent of circumstances and dependent upon Him.

You **can** do all things through Christ Who strengthens you; you just don't know it yet!