

[come and get it]

:: philippians 4.11-13 ::

This morning we're looking at 3 verses: Philippians 4, verses 11 through 13.

Here they are:

Philippians 4.11-13 - Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 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. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I saw on Twitter the other day that someone referenced this passage, specifically verse 13, and pointed out that sometimes we focus on the 'I can do' and sort of neglect to focus on the 'through Christ.'

And coming to this text, which is so familiar and so famous, quoted on every Christian sweatshirt and graduation program ever printed, I realized that there really are a lot of different ideas here with a number of different teachings. That's just how the Bible is and that's a wonderful thing.

What really stuck out to me from these verses was Paul's use of the word 'learned.' He knew how and could confidently proclaim his sufficiency in Christ because he had **learned**. And that's what we're called to do as well.

All of these studies have been based upon the idea that God's desire is a dynamic fullness for His people and we want to know how to get there. So, essentially, verses 11 through 13 is the summation of the entire book and our entire study of it - how we get to verse 13, where we've discovered the fullness that God wants for us.

The answer to our quest is given by Paul, where he says, 'I **learned** this. It didn't just happen. I didn't just go to sleep a spiritual caterpillar and wake up a butterfly. God has brought me and taught me through His power and His timing for what He wants me to be.' It's an active participation.

Paul indicates here that the situations he found himself in, be they positive or negative, were a school used by God to draw him into a greater intimacy with Himself. And because Paul was *willing* to learn, he was *able* to be filled and able to be used and able to take hold of that contentment we all want.

So, for me, two immediate questions came to mind. First: Am I learning anything in my present circumstances? And, second: Am I *willing* to learn from the circumstances that God brings into my life?

Sometimes our faith can become habitual and when that happens, our communion with God tends to become crisis-oriented. We call out to God in the shipwrecks of life, but sometimes neglect to draw near to Him while resting on the beach.

And here, we see that God intends to permeate every situation of ours. It's not *just* in the storms of life that the Lord is speaking to us. We see Jesus and the Apostles and many other examples being filled and used in normal, everyday situations.

Look at Jesus' ministry. A woman drawing water from a well. A wedding reception. Dinner with friends. Going to church. Taking a walk.

If we're disconnecting with God because 'nothing's really happening,' then we miss out on the fact that God desires to speak to us at all times and in all circumstances. The God of the Garden wants the same thing as the God of the shipwreck and that is *communion with* and *transformation in* His people.

Today, maybe we're experiencing abounding or maybe we're abasing. Maybe we're hungry, maybe we're full. It doesn't really matter. Because the lesson for us is that God's contentment and God's wisdom are available to us no matter what the backdrop of our circumstances are. So, what I am to do is to stop and evaluate what's going on in my life and see how God might speak to me there. Because, right now, I'm in the spiritual classroom. Right where God has placed me is where He desires to teach and transform me. Nehemiah was on the job. Abraham was moving his family. Nathanael was on his lunch break. Ezekiel was hanging out by the river. Paul was on his way to kill some Christians. That's where God encountered them.

If we miss the understanding that God speaks to us in every situation of life, that there are spiritual truths to be learned no matter where we are, then we become the kid who's sleeping in the back of the class. And we can't learn if we're asleep to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

What am I learning right now concerning God and His plan for my life? If the answer is *nothing* then there's something wrong, because God has much for us to discover in the places He has put us. That's what we see on the pages of Scripture.

But the second part of this is different. It's one thing to *realize* that we are currently in the school of faith, but it's another to humble ourselves and willingly learn. Because, quite frankly, there are some topics covered by Paul here that, in my flesh, I'm not all that interested in learning. Abasement. Suffering. Hunger. Need. Persecution. Those are areas of study that aren't very comfortable. And my flesh is obsessed with comfort.

But the Christian life isn't about *comfort*. In today's text we see the great discovery Paul reveals here is *contentment*. That's what we're called to. And if we're willing to focus on Christ instead of focusing on the backdrop of our circumstances, if we're willing to make *Him* our sufficiency instead of trying to be self-sufficient or possession-sufficient or pleasure-sufficient, **then** God is able to fill us up with the wonderful blessings we see in the Apostles and so many others throughout the Bible. We'll find how lucky and enriched we are.

Paul could do all things through Christ, which is something we want to characterize our own lives, because he was willing to follow Christ and trust Christ and abide in Christ, no matter

what the backdrop of his physical circumstances might be. He was willing to be taught and instructed in the wisdom of God.

Proverbs 4.7 - Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

The instruction and contentment and intimacy with God that we all want is readily available to those who are willing to learn and be transformed. That is the avenue to Philippians 4.13. To the life, more abundantly Jesus invited us to.

When my hunger is for the filling of Christ, then physical hunger doesn't matter. When my heart understands the forgiveness of my sin and seeks to glorify my Savior, then being offended or defrauded or passed over becomes unimportant in comparison.

Now, here's the thing: difficult situations and circumstances are headed our way. We're promised that in God's Word. Our flesh might want to avoid them, but it's an unavoidable fact of the Christian life.

The devil seeks to sift us. The world will hate us. Our own flesh wants to sabotage us. So we have these adversaries and then we have a God who allows trials in our lives because trials produce a refined holiness, which is beneficial for us. They produce understanding that can be used to encourage and minister to others. But if we're unwilling to be enrolled in those classes, then we're going to miss out on what God presents to us in them and through them.

Think Job. Job was willing to talk to God through his suffering. His circumstances were awful. Maybe the worst of anything we read in God's word. But because he was willing to commune with God and wait on the Lord, he was able to learn incredible things and know the Lord in a way that we marvel at. His suffering has been a source of revelation and help for us for untold centuries, because he was willing to trust in the Lord and not reject him, as others encouraged him to do.

Or think Joseph. Joseph was willing to trust God, despite being falsely accused and unfairly treated to a criminal level. This boy, who spent a huge amount of his life imprisoned and hated by those around him, trusted God and learned that what others meant for evil, God meant for good. Because of that willingness, Joseph was able to save his family and countless thousands in Egypt.

Or think Paul. Paul was willing to trail Jesus no matter where the road went. You want me to go to Jerusalem, I'll go to Jerusalem. You want me to go to Rome and talk to Nero? I'll do it. You want me to go talk to these people who stoned me? Great. Macedonia? Athens? Prison? Basket? Fine. He followed after Jesus willingly and was able to gain more ground for the Kingdom than maybe any other mortal human in history.

But then flip it over. What about the people who were unwilling? Jonah. He was too full of hate to follow God to Ninevah. He turned the other way because he was unwilling to learn about mercy. Or Lot. There was no particular malice in his heart, but he, being a child of God, chose earthly materialism and pleasures over intimacy with the Lord. Think John-Mark, who decided to call it quits when things got hard. His unwillingness led to a bitter division between the dynamic duo of the book of Acts.

Now, all those guys ended up being used by God in one way or another. But what we see is that when we're unwilling to be transformed, disaster is always close on our heels. For those that are willing to submit to God and understand that each situation is a chance to draw nearer to Him, for them incredible things happen within and throughout.

And so, as we live out our lives here, we need to consciously understand that God desires to interact with us. We need to stop focusing on the backdrop, whether it's a Garden or a shipwreck, and we need to focus on the Person of Christ. We need to let go of our obsession with comfort and grab hold of the fact that what we *really* want is contentment, which God is ready to supply.

The Christian life, as described on the pages of Scripture, is incredible. But it requires that we put on Christ.

Romans 13.14 - But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

This Christ was willing to humble Himself, even to death, and He was willing to do the Father's work in any situation and any place. As we put on Christ, He is able then to work in us, work through and do more than we could imagine.

Outside of that willingness, we cannot find the kind of dynamic spiritual intimacy we see proclaimed in this book. We can't. We are equipped. We are empowered. We simply need to enroll ourselves into God's program.

Be a man of God today. Allow His transformation to take hold of your heart and discover the contentment of a life sufficient in Jesus.