

A God That Calls us to Himself

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[0 : 00] This evening's reading is from the letter of Philippians chapter 4 and we're reading from verse 10 to the end of the chapter and it can be found on page 1181 of the church Bibles.

Philippians chapter 4 verse 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.

I'm not saying this because I am in need for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

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.

[1 : 16] For even when I was in Thessalonica you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. 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 forever and ever.

Amen. Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Great.

[2 : 18] Good evening. Lovely to see you. My name's James. I'm on the staff team here at St. Silas. What a glorious Glasgow evening it is. Slightly chilly. No clouds tonight.

That makes it slightly cooler. Right. I don't know why I'm talking about weather. That's so random. Right. Let's pray. Be sensible. Father, we pray that our love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

So that we might be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ.

To the glory and praise of God. Amen. And that prayer comes from the prayer that Paul plays for the Philippians at the very start of his letter.

And it's really been an absolutely cracking letter. I hope you guys have enjoyed it. I've certainly enjoyed the bits that I've been around for. And what we've seen throughout it is that great theme of partnership.

[3 : 32] And we might perhaps think of partnership as the word friendship. And one of the reasons that we use the word partnership instead of friendship is that, in understanding Philippians, is that our ideas of friendship aren't as formulated and as defined as those would have been to Paul's first readers in those days.

And so instead we use the word partner to try and give the strength of the idea that Paul means in this friendship of knitting together. And so we've got different kinds of friends, don't we?

We've got those friends that we stick around, keep around, because they're useful. That's kind of like the boffin in the class, because you know you might have to borrow their notes at some point.

And then you've got those friends who you add on Facebook, because you want to get your friends' numbers up. You want to increase your public profile. But you won't have much to do with them.

And then you have those friends who you hang out quite regularly on a social occasion. And you know them really well. You know them face-to-face, name-to-name.

[4 : 42] But you don't really interact with them on a super deep level. And then you have those friends, those besties, who know everything about you, ins and outs. You rather wish they didn't, but they do.

And they regularly bring those things up on awkward occasions. And the term of friendship that Paul is talking about, he's looking at that end-of-the-spectrum stuff, that deep friendship that Paul wants us to have in the Gospel.

So I wonder if we might turn to our neighbor and just talk quickly about what makes a good friendship. I'll give you a moment there. Yes?

Yeah, love, trust, yeah. Something from the side, what makes a good friendship. Yeah, something in common. Yeah. And friendship's got a lot to do with generosity of giving and taking.

And we see that in our reading this evening. So we read about giving and receiving. And then we also read about how friendship is sticking beside someone, even though it really hurts.

[6 : 13] And we read about that in our reading this evening, of sharing in troubles. And in the letter of Philippians, Paul speaks about three main friendships, doesn't he? So we read of Philippians' friendship with Paul.

And then we read of Paul's friendship with God as God's appointed spokesperson. And then we read about the Philippians' relationship with God through...

All right, hang on. All right, where was I? Right. And then finally, we saw the pattern of Christian living that Paul gives in the Philippians is that of suffering to glory.

So suffering now and glory later. And we saw that in Philippians 2, those wonderful verses of how Jesus suffered for us but was exalted later.

And so as we turn to our passage tonight, we just look at it. I want us to consider what it's going to look like for us to be friends with God.

[7 : 22] To have a friendship with God. And there's three things about God and what God calls us to that I want us to notice from this passage. And the first thing there is that God is the happy God who calls us to contentment.

Verses 11 to 13. And our key verses there are really the end of verse 12 and 13. I'll just read those again for us. Maybe if you've closed your Bible, you can open it up again.

And that is where he says, I've learned the secret of being in content in every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

And what does he say? I can do all of this through him who gives me strength. So let me ask you, are you contented? Are you happy?

And the contentment that Paul is speaking here is not about being fatalistic about life. So I was in Jordan and the Jordanians are forever saying, inshallah. And they mean it in a really fatalistic way.

[8 : 24] What will be? What will be? God will do his thing and I'm simply the pawn that has stuff done to you. And when he talks about contentment, he doesn't also mean simply grinning and bearing it and smiling when stuff is really, really hard in life.

And some of us here have had some really tough experiences in life. But when he talks about contentment, he means having a rock under our life now and looking forward to a sure and certain hope.

And I want to suggest that for us as we sit here in Glasgow this evening and in the West, that the idea of happiness and contentment is really something that we struggle to, struggle with.

So we might look for our contentment in independence, in expressing ourselves, in being free from constraints, being able to live without reference to any other person around us.

So I wonder if you read a couple of weeks all the Scottish papers, what did they have on the front cover? They had a massive ad campaign on dying with dignity, campaigning for euthanasia.

[9 : 38] And then we think about the Northern Irish campaigns, the vote going through recently, allowing abortion there. And what's happening there is they're putting the right of the individual over those of the community in those situations.

Or we might look for contentment and happiness in our possessions and achievements. So we think, if only if I had that new gadget, or if I had enough to retire on, or if I get a good degree and a good job, then I will be happy.

And because we are Christians who are living in the world, we very often use Bible verses simply to say the things that the world around us is saying.

And so we take a verse like verse 13 there, I can do all this through him who gives me strength, as a self-improvement mantra. So we substitute there all this with whatever our latest desire is.

So I can be totally independent through him who gives me strength. I can have financial security, or the body I want, or the ideal relationship through him who gives me strength.

[10:58] And what we're doing there is we use it, that verse, to make us less dependent on Jesus and on his coming for our hope and happiness.

And to make our life here more comfortable. But that is exactly the opposite of how Paul uses this in this section here.

So when he says that he can do all things through Jesus, through him who gives him strength, he means that whatever circumstance he's faced with in life, whatever struggle he goes through, whether we suffer or are humbled, or when things go really, really well, we can be content if we are dependent on Jesus.

And the more dependent we are on him, the more contented we will be in this life. Why? Because we remember how Jesus suffered and died and was humbled for us.

And the reason that we can find this contentment is because Jesus is happy. He is happy and contented. He's the happiest person in the universe.

[12:11] He is the happy God who delights in you. And he loves to share his contentment with you. So when we think about Jesus' sufferings for us, his humiliation and death on the cross, and then we think about him being exalted to the right hand of God in Philippians 2, in all of this, Jesus is happy.

And he still is because he knows that it has all been for you. The second thing that we learn about God and what he calls us to from this passage is that God is the humble God who calls us to partnership.

Just look down at verses 14 to 16 there. And you see, gratefully, the Philippians have understood this idea of Christian contentment. And we see that in verse 14.

Yet it was good for you to share in my troubles. And the yet there indicates that this is the point that Paul has been trying to make in this section, that he wants to thank them for being a friend and partnering with him in all his troubles.

And I wonder if you've ever gone through a really tough time in life with someone, and someone's helped you through that. Then you will know the deep friendship that has been formed through that.

[13:39] And so before the church, before working for the church, I served with the Royal Marines for a bit. And often I get asked, what do you miss most from the Marines? And my answer is simply, well, the banter.

And what I mean is the deep friendship that going through the suffering together produces. You see, most of the things that happened in the Marines were absolutely horrendous.

I would rather eat broken glass than go through a lot of a game. But the friendships that were produced were amazing. And how did the Philippians share in Paul's troubles?

Well, let me just read for you a section from 2 Corinthians 8, where Paul holds up the Philippians as an example to the Corinthian church. And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

He's talking about the Philippians there. In the midst of severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up to rich generosity.

[14:43] For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability, entirely on their own. And what is he saying there?

That even though the Philippians had nothing, even though they were suffering horrendously, they gave generously to Paul. Why did they give?

Because they cared about the gospel. They were gospel friends and partners. So let's try to think this through. When we think about being a good Christian in Scotland, or generally, we often express this in terms of being kind to the poor, having a heart for social justice and for charity, which is a good thing to be rarely commended.

But if that is the only thing that we ever speak of, and we never speak about Jesus and what he has done for us on the cross, then we are not friends of the gospel.

We are not gospel partners. So if we think about churches that are like the Philippian church, we think of African churches. We think of the extreme hardships they face.

[15:57] We're Boko Haram-Burnsdown churches. And we think of the extreme poverty. And we think of the overwhelming joy and generosity in the gospel as they partner with Jesus and Paul, sharing in their sufferings.

If all we do is offer them charity and don't preach Jesus here, and we don't defend Jesus in Scotland, then we are not their gospel partners or friends.

See, churches like the Philippian church, and like those in Africa, care more about having gospel partnership, about being friends in the gospel, than they do about charity and about material goods. Because they care about the gospel. Otherwise, they wouldn't be suffering. They wouldn't suffer for the gospel. It would be very easy to abandon the gospel and live happy lives there.

But because they care about the gospel, they persevere through suffering. And when those churches that are suffering like that see churches in Britain and the West abandoning Paul, abandoning the Bible, abandoning the gospel, while at the same time being very charitable, they weep.

[17:17] And they pity us. And we should weep. And pity ourselves as well. You see, those churches would rather go through a lot more hardship than see us abandon the gospel.

And the reason that the Philippians are happy to share or partner in Paul's troubles and deep humiliations, and the reason that churches in tough places are happy to endure hardship, and it's not perhaps obvious from this passage, but thinking back to chapter 2, is that Jesus was humbled and went through troubles for them as their friend.

You see, Jesus was so troubled that he went to the cross for the Philippians. And he went to the cross and died in our place for our sins, for us tonight.

And so, if we call ourselves friends of Jesus, this will probably mean partnership or friendship with him in his sufferings and troubles. And for us in the UK, this might mean being arrested or imprisoned.

Maybe you've seen those clips on video on Christian concern about street pastors being arrested for preaching the gospel. Or it might mean job loss.

[18:33] Just this week, I heard a story about a chaplain in a school who was looking forward to being sacked for having written an article that defended the Christian view of marriage.

And you'll never read about that on the BBC. It might be being shunned and slandered by those around you simply for believing the Bible and for holding to Paul in Christian partnership and friendship.

But notice here, Paul writes to them to thank them for sharing in his sufferings. And it's not because he wants anything from there. See the start of verse 17 there.

Not that I desire your gifts, but he wants to encourage them in keeping at it. That their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

Why? Ahead of the day of Christ and for God's glory, to God's praise and glory. And the third thing that we learn about God and what he calls us to here is that he is the honoring God who calls us to glory.

[19:45] And this is verse 17 to the end of the chapter there. Our key verse there is really the second half of verse 17. What I desire is that more be credited to your account.

And the question then is how will Paul accredit them with more? If Paul has needed to be supported by them. I wonder if you noticed that. And the answer comes in verse 19.

And my God will meet your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. And when will they be accredited? When? On that final day.

The day of the Lord that Paul has prayed for them at the very start of the letter. And notice here also how Paul suggests that gospel partnership or friendship with himself is really partnership and worship of God.

So what does he say at the start of verse 19? My God will meet your needs. That is the God that Paul has been teaching about. Not some other God. That's different.

[20:53] And notice then how Paul stresses in verse 18 how generous the Philippians have been towards him. I am amply supplied. And he interprets this gospel generosity as a sign of friendship in terms of what?

Of worship to God. That they that is the gifts they are given. What are they? They are a fragrant offering. An acceptable sacrifice.

Pleasing to God. So as the Philippians have supported Paul in gospel ministry they have really been worshipping God. And as we stick closer to Paul and his teaching we worship God and we draw near to God.

And so the point here for us is not that we gee ourselves up as it were to take out our checkbook and give more to the church but it's really to challenge us and trust that God will honor us and care for us and meet all our needs.

and the point is to encourage us in gospel friendship and partnership. Abundant, happy, self-sacrificing, love-motivated, Bible-saturated, generous friendship with the Lord Jesus.

[22 : 08] And the reason for this is that if as we are glorified and honored so Jesus is glorified and honored. And the purpose of it is that God might be glorified and honored more and more and more.

Just look down at how he ends in verse 20. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. So, just in summary there, three, how can we be friends with God?

We learnt about the happy God who calls us to contentment, the humble God who calls us to partnership, the honoring God who calls us to glory. In conclusion, I wonder if you might take a moment to consider what it might look like for us here this evening to be friends with God.

Just look at verses 21 to the end there. And perhaps we might think about what that might look like compared to the start of the letter, verses 1 and 2. So, let me ask you, what might it look like for you this evening to be friends with God?

How do you need to change how do you need to grow in love and knowledge and depth of insight more and more? Well, it might mean being a better friend to Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus from verse 1.

[23 : 34] That is, it might mean reading our Bibles more, trusting what we're reading more, taking them seriously as written by a loving Heavenly Father to us, to be wise and how to live ahead of that great and glorious day.

It might mean being in friendship with God, all God's people, coming together regularly on Sundays as God's church. It might not mean that we're all identical.

I would never want to hang out with people that are exactly like me. That would be incredibly boring. So, I'm grateful for the diversity that we see at church that there are so many opportunities for me to be challenged and grow in knowing Jesus and loving Jesus better through my friendship with you guys at church and through our friendship and unity with one another.

It might also mean taking up a new citizenship and a new way of thinking here. What if you notice there that the only individual mentioned at the end of the letter is Caesar and who is Caesar?

Well, he's the head of the Roman Empire and it's no coincidence there. Paul wants us to think about our citizenship, where we belong and where we are going.

[24 : 52] That is, we are citizens who are headed to heaven. It might mean being in Christ Jesus, being united to Jesus in his sufferings and in his triumph, trusting him, obeying him in life.

even when it hurts. It might mean trusting Jesus for the very first time as your heavenly father and if that is you tonight, please do come speak to myself or Martin or someone else, maybe someone that you trust afterwards.

I thought we might close with those words of that wonderful hymn, my really favorite hymn, What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.

what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Let's close in prayer. So Father, we thank you that we can have gospel partnership, that we can know the Lord Jesus.

We pray that we might be united. We pray that we might abound more and more in depth of knowledge and insight and love of the Lord Jesus.

[26 : 08] In Jesus' name, Amen. The band's now going to play our last song for us. Should we wrap?

Let's go for muttas!