

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

July 7, 2013

Philippians 4:10-20

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am 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 everything 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; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; 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 his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Have you ever used the words, “You shouldn’t have”? Would you say these words on Christmas morning when you get a hot orange and mustard yellow sweater for a gift? Would you say these words if your coworker finishes the project you were working on but does a terrible job? Perhaps you would say these words if you were a Viking fan and you received a Clay Matthews jersey for your birthday. We use these words when we get something we really don’t want, but don’t want to hurt the other person’s feelings.

But would you use the phrase, “You shouldn’t have” when someone got you something which you weren’t expecting? Something which is absolutely jaw dropping. Would it be when someone gives you an all-expenses paid trip to Hawaii? Would it be when your neighbor shovels out your driveway after an 18 inch snowfall without asking? Would it be when you came home and found a dozen roses from your husband? Would it be when you find a new PS4 waiting for you when you got home?

In our second lesson today, Paul receives a gift which fits with the second paragraph rather than the first. He is writing to the Philippians. Paul has a great relationship with the church in Philippi. He founds it on his second missionary journey. His letter to the Philippians is upbeat and happy because the Philippians bring him so much joy. He uses the word “rejoice” numerous times in this letter and he writes about the Philippians, “I thank my God every time I remember you.”

Why would Paul be so upbeat and happy? It is because the Philippian congregation loves him and makes him know they love him. He writes, “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 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 again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; 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.” Paul rejoices because the Philippians recognize it is important to support him and the gospel ministry.

How would Paul react if he were writing a letter to us today about our support for gospel ministry? Would his words be glowing? Or would he need to encourage us to do a little more? My guess is we would think Paul should speak to us in glowing terms. We have a beautiful sanctuary. We generously support our pastor. We give a good portion to missions. Why wouldn’t Paul love us? Why wouldn’t Paul speak about us with glowing terms?

Yes, these things are all true, but how often doesn’t Satan try and convince us God blushes and says, “You shouldn’t have” when we give him an offering? What do I mean? Doesn’t Satan try to reason with us like this? God is the all-powerful ruler of the universe. He speaks and it happens. He snaps his fingers and it gets done. No one can stop his will. Don’t you think some who has these means and ability is a little bit ashamed to get your gift? Don’t you think God is embarrassed because he needs your offering?

Satan’s reasoning sounds good, but he isn’t done yet. He has more ideas for us once he convinces us God doesn’t “need” our money. He wants us to look at our bills. He wants us to see how the money

going out is less than the money coming in. He wants us to feel the pressure and anxiety of wondering where the next mortgage payment is going to come from. He wants us to wonder if we'll have enough money to pay for school.

He wants us to keep those things in mind when we think about giving an offering to support gospel ministry. He wants us to reason that God is ashamed to receive our gifts. God doesn't need them, but we do. We have real needs which are pressing. We have needs which make us anxious and nervous. Who should give in this tug of war? Should it be God who doesn't need help? Or should it be me who has no money to give?

It is true that God is all-powerful and can make things happen like that. But it is an outright lie of Satan to think he is embarrassed and ashamed of our offerings we bring to him. True, God could simply speak and provide for his gospel ministry, but he doesn't. Instead, he uses people like you and me to support it. He gives us the privilege and opportunity to build his kingdom here on earth. He gives us the opportunity to give gifts to support the gospel ministry which brings people to heaven.

The Philippians understood how God used their gifts for the gospel ministry. "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 again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account."

"I have received full payment and even more; 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." Where did this understanding about gospel ministry come from? Paul assures us, "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Paul tells us God will meet all of our needs. How can Paul be so confident? He is confident because of the richness God shows us in Christ Jesus. Jesus has it all. He is ruler of the universe. He never gets hungry. He never gets thirsty. He never needs to sleep. However, he knew he needed to come into this world and become a man who would become hungry, thirsty and tired. He knew he needed to give up all of his power and might.

Why? Why would he give all this up? He did it because of you and me. He gave up all the riches and glory of heaven because our salvation depended on it. He gave them up because we owed God a debt for sin we couldn't pay. He gave them up because he knew he could pay our debt to God and the only way he could pay it was by taking our place under God's law. So Jesus willingly gave up complete control over the universe.

He willingly came into this world and was born in a barn and lived a humble life with no place to lay his head. He willingly and perfectly obeyed God's law for us. Why? So he could sacrifice himself to pay for our sins. He paid for our sins of selfishness and self-centeredness when we think God doesn't need our

gifts to him. He paid for our sins of doubt and worry about his ability to provide and take care of us. The glorious riches of Jesus' love and resurrection assure us we have the priceless treasure of eternal life.

What does the richness of Christ Jesus mean for our everyday lives? The richness of Christ brings us contentment. Paul tells us, "I am 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 everything through him who gives me strength."

Paul tells us the richness of Christ Jesus brings us contentment in this life. It makes us content in any and every situation because we have a treasure which is priceless. This contentment allows us to bring our best to support the gospel ministry. It allows us to look at our paycheck and wonder, "How much of this can I give to the Lord, my first and my best rather than what is left over, before I use it for anything else?"

We Americans don't like think this way. Why? Giving God my first and best means I need to sacrifice something I might want. It means I sacrifice getting an iPhone because I can't afford the data plan. It means I drive an older and less expensive car. It means I might not be able to afford a boat or a new fishing rod. It means I need to sacrifice even if it hurts. Why do I do this? Because I want to support gospel ministry which shares the richness of Christ Jesus and his love with others. Amen.