

I've said this before, but I **am** going to say it again:

In the church, when it comes to teaching on money and giving, there's generally 2 types of preachers: For some preachers: Well, that's one of their main topics – in fact, in many churches, every single Sunday, a message will be given, just before the offering is taken up...

But the 2nd type of preacher (and I've told you this before too – that "I fall into this category"), we get a little bit embarrassed about talking about giving, because we don't want to be seen as one of those money-grubbin' charlatans, who have the Bible in one hand, and with their other hand, they're trying to prise the money out of your wallet... And so when it comes to giving a message on giving, we become somewhat reluctant bible teachers...

Anyway, I wasn't even going to mention that this time, because I've learned "I just got to get over it"...., because when we preach our way through whole books of the bible, it's going to come up, and it's going to come up again and again,, And if God brings it up, we're going to talk about it, because it's important for our spiritual development... (Michael, get over it).

So I wasn't going to mention my embarrassment to speak on this, but I **did** mention it, and here's the reason why:

The more I studied the Bible reading for today, the more I realised, the way that Paul falls into the 2nd category... You see, when I give teaching on finances and giving, I am **very** aware, that what I say, can easily be taken the wrong way, or it

can be deliberately mis-construed, to make me look bad, or to be used against me...

And the more I read today's reading, the more I realised that Paul is trying really hard to guard against this. He doesn't want people to take what he says, the wrong way. He doesn't want his words to be mis-construed... And so, he makes a statement, and then he qualifies what he's just said, by making another statement, and he does it a few times...

And so e.g.

- V10 He's rejoicing because of the gift
- V11 I wasn't really in need – I've learned how to be content
- V14 But it was kind of you, and you've been good like that
- V17 But my heart wasn't set on the gift
- But it's been good for you
- V18 But you've looked after me well

And it just seems obvious to me (as a preacher/bible teacher), that he's constantly qualifying what he says (which is a very un-Paul-like way of writing)...

Righto, I've given today's message the title: The blessing of generous, sacrificial giving. It's a blessing for the one who receives, but it's also a blessing for the one who gives ... And in fact, what Paul is demonstrating here, is (from his perspective) the blessing is more for the **giver**, than it is for the receiver.

Which shouldn't be a surprise, because didn't Jesus say "Acts 20:35 **It's more blessed to give than to receive**"ⁱ ...

And so, he starts out (V10), he rejoiced in the Lord. Now, did you notice that he didn't actually give the Philippians thanks – he rejoiced in the Lord... Did you notice that???

Christian giving, is very different to the world's version of philanthropy... *There are some very big, well-known humanist philanthropists – Billionaires, who have given \$Billions away to various charities... And we know about it, because their names are often attached to their donations... And they receive thanks; accolades; recognition... ; tax deductions...*

But when **Christians** give (to support ministry);

- We give out of love for God;
- We give as a personal sacrifice to God;
- we give to advance the Gospel;
- And we share in ministry, by giving...

We **don't** do it for:

- Thanks;
- Accolades;
- recognition

I became aware of this, when I was very young...

Way before I was old enough to be an official member of the church, I remember sitting in on a congregational AGM...

And at that meeting, it was noted that a family (nominal church members – members who never came to church/bible study/prayer meetings), held a bull sale, and the church catering committee catered for it... Anyway, they gave a ‘donation’ to the church for their trouble...

And in that meeting, it was decided that we should write a letter of thanks to them for their ‘generous donation’... And even as a kid, I thought “Why?” There’s active members of this church who put that much money in the plate every month, and we don’t write them letters of thanks...”

And to me, it all seemed a little bit ‘off’.

And today, I’m aware that I’m speaking to people who generously support the ministry of Bush Disciples (some of you are local; many of you are from away, and connect through the online ministry)... And like Paul, **I rejoice...** I want to thank you as well, because without the combined support from you all, we couldn’t be doing what we are doing...

But more than give you thanks (to you personally), **I rejoice in the Lord**, because I realise that we’re not in this alone. You are partnering with us, in this ministry.... But now I’m getting ahead of myself. We’ll be up to that bit shortly.

So Paul rejoiced greatly, that they’d “**revived their concern for him**”...

Let me fill in some gaps here:...

In the past, the Philippian church have been a tremendous support for Paul... When Paul went on his missionary journeys from country to country and region to region, he didn't want to take money from those he was preaching to... He didn't want anyone to think that he was in it for the money, or that he was some shonky travelling philosopher or cult leader who wants to relieve them of their cash. He wanted to be able to preach the Gospel (free of charge), and for nothing to get in the way of that...

But when he planted a church in a town, that church then had an opportunity, to bless another town, by helping to fund Paul, to go and preach in another area. That way, they could be partners with Paul in his ministry...

But you know what: Such is the selfishness of the human heart, that very few of them did. The opportunity was there, but the thing is, most churches that he planted, didn't have a generous, missional heart... But the church in Philippi did. And so they'd financially supported Paul in his mission trips (more than once), while the other churches, who had also benefited from his ministry, gave nothing (or relatively little)...

There was something special about the Christians in Philippi. They had a generous, missional heart... And it's interesting to me, that this is a rare letter that Paul wrote here... Usually when he wrote to a church, he was writing to correct some terrible problems in the church... But not to the church in Philippi... And this is something that I'm learning from this: When a church/individual Christian are going good with God,

they will be generous to other Christians, and especially in support of Christian mission...

Anyway, it seems that they hadn't been able to support him for a while, probably because they couldn't get the money to Paul – he was in jail (probably in Rome)... And it seems that it was only when they sent Epaphroditus to Paul, that he was able to take a monetary gift to help Paul to survive in prison... You see, it wasn't like our prisons of today, where everything's provided... A fair bit of his tucker, he would have had to provide for himself. Even the papyrus he's writing this letter on, wasn't cheap, and needed to be purchased...

Isn't that lovely. In all probability, we may only have this letter to the Philippian church, because there was a church in Philippi, who so loved the Lord, and who so loved Paul, that they sent one of their members (Probably all the way to Rome), to deliver this monetary gift...

Alright so, they used to support Paul; But he hasn't received anything for a while; but now he says, "**You've revived your concern for me**, [now that you have the opportunity]."... But when we talk about opportunities, do you realise, that they **made** the opportunity... They sent one of their own members (all the way to Rome, Probably), to make it possible for them to give a financial gift to Paul...

And what a lesson we can learn from that... We might hear of a need, and think "Oh, that's so far away... I'd like to help,

but I just don't have the opportunity... Well, let's be like the church in Philippi, and make the opportunity....

(even if we have to send one of our members half way across the world, to deliver a gift in person, to make sure it's getting to where it's needed, and to make sure that the ministry we're supporting is legit'.... If we feel we don't have an opportunity to give, we can **make** an opportunity)...

But even though Paul was **definitely** 'in need', he says, "I'm not really saying that I was in need"... You see, he'd learned, in whatever situation he was in, to be content... And then he says something really interesting in V12

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Ow, there's a verse we know:

V13, would have to be one of the most loved; learned; quoted bible verses... ¹³ I can do all things through him who **strengthens me**. And yet it's one of the most misunderstood and **misquoted** bible verses...

I'd be surprised if there wasn't at least one person listening to this today, who has it up on the wall somewhere (or on the fridge door) as a picture/plaque or something... ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

And **often**, when we quote this, it's in the context of, when a particular challenge arises, and we give ourselves a little reminder, "**I can do this**, through Christ who strengthens me...".... And many of us have found comfort and strength and encouragement in those words...

But have we ever realised what Paul is talking about here... He's "**learned the secret**" – in the original Greek, there's one single word here for "**I have learned the secret of**" and the word (which I think only appears here, in the whole of the Bible) is about a secret initiationⁱⁱ – In the Ancient Greek language, it would be used to describe an initiation into some secret mystery cult or something... **I have learned the secret of** – I've been initiated into the secret.

What secret? What's the initiation? What's he discovered???

- That whether he has plenty; or
 - whether he's hungry;
 - Whether he has an abundance; or
 - whether he is in dire need,,,
- he's content...

And when he says "¹³ **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**", The "all things" of V13, are the same root word of "**any**" and "**every**" circumstance of V12, which are connected to facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need... And so, in the context of where Paul says this, it's not open slather... He's **not** saying "I can achieve whatever I

set my mind to, because Christ is strengthening me.”. It’s not an exercise in positive thinking...

V13 is **specifically** talking about being strengthened (by Christ) to deal with having plenty, or to deal with having little... And he’s certainly **not** saying that when he finds himself in poverty, that Christ will strengthen him to accumulate plenty...

The NIV translates V12 **Philippians 4:12 (NIV84)** ¹² **I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. ...**

(it talks about it in terms of experience – I’ve experienced having plenty/being in need)

But a better translation says so much more than that... It’s not only that he’s experienced it... He says “¹² **I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.**

He hasn’t only experienced it – he knows how to **live it appropriately** (as a disciple of Jesus)...

You know, the message we get in many churches today, is “poverty is a curse God wants to set you free from”... Do you know what Paul would say to that??? “That’s the view of the **uninitiated**”. – if that’s my view, then I haven’t caught-on yet, to the things of God – my eyes are blinded by worldliness and the temporary pleasures that this world has to offer...

Because the initiated, know the secret, of how to live with Godly contentment, in poverty...

In other churches, you might find that the message is exactly opposite – that your wealth is a curse, and you need to be rid of it... And once again, I reckon Paul would say, “That’s the perspective of the uninitiated”...

The initiated, have learned the secret ¹² **I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.**

*Somebody gave me a series of messages to listen to once “How to be rich” ... And I don’t even know who the preacher was, but it was an excellent series. It wasn’t about how to **get** rich – it was about how to **be** rich...*

Let’s face it: Most of us (by world standards), **are** rich. And so most of us are rich, but we don’t know how to be rich... You see, with wealth comes responsibility –

- to feed the poor
- fund the spread of the Gospel
- to give generously
- To use what we have, for the Kingdom of God...

And this is what Paul’s talking about here – knowing how to be rich, **and** knowing how to be poor... It’s about depending on God, and depending on the strength of Jesus, **in** our poverty, and **in** our wealth.. It’s about living a God-honouring life, in our poverty, or in our wealth... It’s about serving Jesus in our poverty/wealth...

It's not just about experience – it's about living a Godly life, in whatever circumstances we're in... And the initiated know the secret – Christ gives us strength to be content, and to live as faithful disciples of Jesus, no matter what our financial circumstances...

And you might be listening to this today, and I'm going to be challenging you, "Do you find your worth in:

- what you have; or
- in your success; or
- in your earning capacity
- business; or

do you find your worth in

- accumulating enough farms to pass on to your kids;
- getting your own enterprise up to a sustainable concern???

If that's what you find your worth in, such that **if** it was taken away, or if it all crumbled away before your eyes, you would be heartbroken/bereft,, Paul would probably say, "You're the uninitiated"...

Contentment... Being and Purpose... in all circumstances, whether we have little/much... That's the secret... Have you learned that secret? Are you living that secret?

And of course, it doesn't come down to our own strength/coping mechanisms. This is the strength that we have in Christ Jesus....

I'd better move on...

It **seems** that the Philippian church had **also** learned the secret well, of how to **be** in the financial situation they were in... They'd learned the secret of generosity... Out of all of the churches, they were the only ones who had a vision bigger than themselves, and they supported Paul on his missionary trips... And now they're supporting him in prison...

Righto: Even though (in the strength of Christ) Paul could be content with having nothing,, he says: ¹⁴ **Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.**

And this wasn't new for them. They'd supported him in the past...

And this is where we get to the crux of Paul's message... Paul himself, didn't have his heart set on the gift. His concern, was for the **giver (and the fact that they were giving)**, more than the gift...

You see, a generous giving heart, is evidence of a heart that's surrendered to God...

Right back, at the beginning of this letter, he was giving thanks to God for the church in Philippi. And he was thinking

God for their **partnership**; and that they were partakers with him of grace; And his prayer

⁹ your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Alright, Paul's joy, is because of their partnership with Him in the Gospel... And his joy, was because they were being filled with the fruit of righteousness... How were they partners with Paul???

Well, I think we can assume they were praying for him and his ministry, but there's 2 very practical ways that they partnered with Paul:

1. They sent Epaphroditus to help him (in his time of need);
2. The very practical giving of financial support...

They were filled with the fruit of righteousness - they had this compulsion of the Holy Spirit, moving them to express their faith in Jesus, in ways that cost them... *You know, there's an old saying, that "For many, the last part of us to be saved, is our hip pocket"...* And for some folk, that's true...

But when we **give**,,,, this is an expression of the fruit of righteousness... So much so, I would also say, that if I am not a generous giver (and a sacrificial giver), then there's something drastically deficient, in my relationship with God...

And so Paul's joy (**his greatest joy**), wasn't so much that what he received from them, would relieve his present suffering somewhat (although it would) – **His greatest joy**, was what it revealed about the disciples of Jesus in Philippi...

When we first started out Bush Disciples, finances were really tight. And there were times where we'd get to the point, Hmm, Not sure how we're going to pay this bill – oh well, I guess we can always redraw the home-loan... And I still remember the first time it happened – a couple of days before the bill was due, I went to the mail box, and there was a hand-written letter, which also contained a cheque... And it was from a couple in another country town, And they thanked us for the teaching we provide, and they told us how they regularly listen to the teaching, and that they've been really growing in the Lord...

*And I rejoiced... It was so humbling... I don't believe this couple were any more financial than Robyn and I were,,,, But what moved me, was that they cared,,, And we could see the spiritual fruit **they** were bearing... They were moved to generosity, and to give (sacrificially), to support the mission of the church... They not only valued the teaching they were receiving – they **partnered** with us...*

You see, there's 2 ways of looking at things: Some people think in terms of “fee-for-service” – Alright, so “If I'm benefitting from this ministry, than I should support it, to keep it going”...

But a better way, is to see it in terms of “partnership”... “This ministry is touching lives with the Gospel... I’m not giving, to pay you back what I’m getting out of it – I’m giving because I’m partnering in getting the Gospel, and getting biblical teaching, to a world who need to hear it...”

It delights me, to see the Spirit of God at work (in anybody), but especially in those to whom we minister...

And now, there’s people all over the state, and maybe other places. Money just turns up in the BD bank account.....

And I rejoice – not because of the money – yeah, it’s a great help, but I rejoice, because you partner with us, and I rejoice because, to give: is good for you spiritually, just like when I give, it’s good for me spiritually...

He says: ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

In the original Greek, apparently “the fruit that increases to your credit” was a common expression used to describe “compounding interest”... Alright, so if you put money in the bank, it earns interest, and if you leave it in the bank, it earns more interest... At least it used to, back in the days when interest rates had a “natural number” (a whole non-negative number) before the decimal point...

Here's a spiritual truth: Our personal financial support of the church's mission, is an important part of our spiritual development...

So, Paul says: V¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent,

And then he describes their gift as: a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

That's like saying, "When we give, it's really pleasing to God..."

I mentioned 'sacrificial giving' earlier. What is 'sacrificial giving'? Well, we're not saved by any sacrifice we make – we're saved by the sacrifice that God made – His own son on the cross...

And in Romans 12, we're told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice – that's the sort of worship God wants – spiritual worship, which is a life transformed to the will of God...

And this is the sacrifice that Paul's recognising, in the church in Philippi... They've been transformed, and they want to give – they want to honour God with what they have...

Now, here's the thing with sacrificial giving – it costs us... I think it was King David who said, "*I won't give a sacrifice that costs me nothingⁱⁱⁱ*"

But even though it costs us, God will always make sure that we have enough... ¹⁹ *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

When we are obedient to God, He will always give us what we need... And the key concept here, is “need” and “riches”... Our need – His riches...

The prosperity preachers will claim, “You give your money to this church, and God will give you back more.”... “You put \$100 in the plate, and He’ll give you back \$1000... What an **obscene** distortion of God’s word, when sacrificial giving gets turned into a get-rich-quick scheme...

God hasn’t promised us earthly riches. He’s promised us what we need, and we know that we look forward to true wealth – being in glory with Christ...

Well, we’ve come to the end of the letter to the Philippians. Let me finish how Paul finished:

²⁰ *To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

²¹ *Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.*

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

ⁱ Acts 20:35

ⁱⁱ O'Brien, P.T., 1991. *The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Chronicles 21:24