

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ENOUGH AND TO SPARE - Philippians 4:10-20

SUCH was part of the description of the prodigal of his father's home, when he had come to see what a fool he had been, and was reduced to such a state as to "**perish with hunger**". Even the slaves back home were in better case than he. They had "**bread enough and to spare**", Luke 15:17. It is a like impression that we get from our passage concerning our Heavenly Father's resources; and after all that we have learned as to what He expects of His children, it is good to have the assurance that sufficient supplies are available for our strengthening, that we may be, and say, and do all that is required of us. Come, then, to these verses, and see the message they have for us. Consider, first -

THE VARIETY OF NEED

"**All your need**", says verse 19 - "every kind of need, material and spiritual", is Plummer's comment. A good deal is said about the Material needs. Since the time when he became a Christian, Paul had often been in want, but he didn't talk about it - "**not that I speak in respect of want**" (11).

He had learned a great lesson in life - to take everything that happens to him as coming from the hand of GOD. That made him "**content**", whatever his circumstances - poverty or plenty; up, or down; "**all things**" came alike to him (12).

Still, he did greatly appreciate all that these Philippian brethren had done for him (14), in his periods of physical distress. It was not only what it meant to him, in the satisfying of his need; but, even more, what it meant to them, in the reward of kindness that will thereby accrue to them (17).

He knew that the grace of generosity was great gain to the giver as well as to the getter - indeed, that "**it is more blessed to give than to receive**". I wonder whether this saying of the Lord JESUS, unrecorded in the Gospels, was the theme of Paul's teaching "**concerning giving and receiving**" (15).

If we are the Lord's, all we have is His, including our money - personal consecration is a purse-and-all consecration; we are not just owners of it, but stewards of it; and **"it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful"**, I Corinthians 4:2.

Moreover, let it ever be remembered that we are to give **"not grudgingly** [though we don't want to], **or of necessity** [because we must]: **for God loveth a cheerful** [Gk. hilarious] **giver"**, II Corinthians 9:7.

But how clearly this Epistle brings home to us the extent of the Spiritual needs. For it puts before us a picture of the Christian life at the highest level, filling our hearts with a great desire to come up to that standard, yet filling our minds with a great despair of ever reaching it.

We know so well how far short we come, and how easily we fail; and so we recognise our need of guidance and of grace to enable us to fulfil the purposes and plans that GOD has for us.

Let us go back over the Epistle, and pick out at random some of His expectations of His children, in order that the sense of our need may become all the more definite, that it may turn us away from our inadequate selves, and that it may throw us all the more upon GOD.

"That your love may abound yet more and more", 1:9 - what a need is mirrored in that requirement: we need so much from Him, if this is to be fulfilled, **"Christ shall be magnified in my body"**, 1:20 - if it be a fit body, or a frail body, it must needs be fortified, if its members are to be used in His happy service, endowed with physical strength, mental vigour, and spiritual power.

"Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ", 1:27 - what need is evoked by this demand for a worthy demeanour and behaviour: complete consistency between creed and conduct, between lip and life, between profession and progression, is a vital necessity for a healthy Christian; yet how great is his need if he is going to attain it.

"To suffer for His sake", 1:29 - Paul knew all about that; and all that are called to it will need all the courage, all the endurance, to take it, whether it be suffering of body, even torture for their testimony; or suffering of mind, for all the shame and obloquy heaped upon a Christian; or suffering of heart, from the desertion of friends who have left them since they joined up with the Master.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus", 2:5 - a mind of uttermost humility, sinking the seeming welfare of self for the weal of others; thinking of those others as CHRIST once did, and always does; we shall need a strong intincture of unearthly power if we are ever to achieve such a heavenly frame of mind.

The sons of God, without rebuke", 2:15 - how often we have to be rebuked by others; yet here is a condition to which GOD's children are summoned, a character in which GOD sees nothing, knows nothing, that calls for His serious, yet loving, remonstrance; how great their need if they are ever to attain this high stage of spiritual behaviour.

"This one thing I do", 3:13 - so many other voices are calling, so many other interests are clamant, that it is not always easy to give such undivided allegiance to the cause of CHRIST; and, besides, the strength of temptation, and the weakness of self will combine to turn him from the path, if he cannot obtain what he needs to keep straight on.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway", 4:4 - we have just been considering it, and have reminded ourselves of all the forces of the world we live in that make such rejoicing difficult; a man who stands face to face with such a demand knows full well how desperately he will need some great off-setting influence if he is to accede to it.

"Be careful for nothing", 4:6 - where is the man, or the woman, without anxiety? The number of such non-worriers should be equivalent to the number of Christians. For them, but only for them, there is no need to worry; but there is great need to if they are not.

"Those things . . . do", 4:9 - you'll need much if you are to heed such; for Paul is offering himself to his Philippian friends as an example of Christian life for them to follow, as he, on his part, sought to follow CHRIST. Need, need, need - all the day, all the way.

In the spiritual sense, the Christian is a bundle of needs; still more so, if he is a bundle of nerves. From this stroll through the whole Epistle, stopping by the wayside to view some of the landmarks, let us retrace our footsteps back to the portion of the landscape, from which we wandered off. Here, then, we think of -

THE OPPORTUNITY OF SERVICE

"Ye lacked opportunity", says verse 10. It is now something like ten years since the church at Philippi had the chance to do their friend service - they had the will, they had the wherewithal, but they hadn't the way. From verse 15 we get the impression that they had been among the prime contributors to the fund that Paul collected for the poor saints in Jerusalem, I Corinthians 16:1-5.

But they had not forgotten his own needs either; for, as he says, **"ye sent once and again unto my necessity"** (16). Then, from various circumstances, had come the long period wherein their gifts had perforce to cease. Now, however, **"at the last your care of me hath flourished again"** (10) - "budded forth again", is Dean Alford's suggestion.

Epaphroditus had been able to bring from Philippi a whole lot of **"things"** (18) to relieve his destitution in the Roman prison.

Paul was deeply moved by this token of their abiding love and care for him. One recalls that incident in the life of the fugitive David when he was overheard to wish he could get a drink of water from the well of his native Bethlehem, and three of his men, at grave risk of their lives, ventured through the enemy lines, and brought back the water. David was completely overwhelmed by such devotion, and felt that he could not drink, but poured out the water, in sacrifice of thanksgiving before the Lord. Paul did not hesitate to partake of the victuals that his friends had sent; but I imagine that his feelings were akin to David's. To the apostle, the gifts were **"an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God"** (18).

The late Professor Deissmann, to whom the world is indebted for his discovery, through his archaeological study of the unearthed papyri and ostraca of the Ancient East, that the New Testament is written, not in classical Greek, but in a vernacular, almost colloquial, form of Greek as used by the common people of the day, has an interesting suggestion concerning the phrase, "I have all" (18).

He remarks that the word translated "**have**" was frequently used in a commercial sense, and was employed for describing the giving of a receipt. If his idea be adopted, the phrase would read, "I give a receipt in full". In any case, that is the significance of the verse, as it stands.

It is Paul's acknowledgment that the Gift Parcel has arrived safely, and fully, to Paul's delight, and, we may say, verse 18, to GOD's delight.

Let it be taken to heart that these Philippians took their opportunity when it came. In the last case, they had waited for it all those years, on the look out for it; and then, perhaps all of a sudden, the chance came, and they seized it with both hands. That is the New Testament advice. We have already quoted Galatians 6:10, "**As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith**" - that is, our fellow-believers. And Hebrews 13:16 tells us, "**to do good and to communicate [distribute] forget not: for with such sacrifices GOD is well pleased**".

Opportunities for service often suddenly present themselves, and as suddenly pass: oh, to be quick to see and seize them. Unnoticed opportunities are like Browning's "angels", that

" . . . sit all day
Beside you, and lie down at night by you,
Who care not for their presence - muse - or sleep,
And all at once they leave you - and you know them."

In the Christian sphere this is so often fraught with eternal significance. An opportunity of testimony presents itself you are brought into touch with some person quite unarranged, and in your heart you feel the meeting is of GOD: say the introductory word at once, ere the chance quickly is out of reach.

What would have happened, I wonder, if Philip had lost the opportunity of hailing the Ethiopian chariot, that GOD had arranged to meet with the evangelist at that desert spot, Acts 8:29.

By some turn in the conversation among fellows, a chance occurs to put in a word for the Saviour - with love, with humility, and with tact grasp that chance. Eternal issues may hang on it. GOD does thus provide opportunities of service for His children, unless we habitually neglect them.

I think it is not our responsibility to make them, but to take them. In trying to make opportunities, we so often only make blunders. If, at the opening of each day, we place ourselves at His disposal, He will so delightfully, as in Philip's case, make the Place, the Time, the Person to coincide - and will then give the Word to preach unto him JESUS.

With what joy will you thus watch GOD working out His purposes through you. And so now, with evident appropriateness, we come to -

THE SUFFICIENCY OF POWER

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (13).

There is no **"do"** in the Greek, so that from the broken sentence we almost get an impression of a man stirred, even excited, by the sudden realisation afresh that there is absolutely nothing required of him by GOD that he cannot do: he is complete master of every situation, he is equal to anything and everything.

When things are glad, or sad; when things are prosperous, or calamitous; when things are gracious, or anxious - **"I can"**, says Paul; I can stand up to life, whatever it brings, even if that means the imprisonment with all its deprivations and restrictions, and the daily, even hourly, irksomeness of the chain and soldier.

He **"can"**; and we can - for his secret is available to us. **"Through Christ which strengtheneth me"**.

It seems to me that, if **"joy"** is the characteristic of the Epistle, **"through"** is its secret - so often does it occur: and we haven't finished with it yet. In CHRIST, then, there is all the strength that I can possibly need - enough and to spare.

Paul has the same thought in Romans 8:37, **"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us"** - conquerors (enough); more than (and to spare).

But in what sense can we be more than conquerors? Surely, in not only overcoming, but in getting something out of what is overcome. Some trouble comes, and **"through Him"** we are enabled to bear it, and not to be bitter about it - that is to be a conqueror; but out of our attitude towards the trouble there comes a deeper knowledge of GOD, and a new sympathy to help others "in the same boat" - that is something **"more than"** mere victory. What wonderful sufficiency is ours!

"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by [in] Christ Jesus" (19). You have supplied all my need, he seems to say, now GOD will supply all your need. And across the years he seems to say it to you and me also.

"Your need" - may be very big: so little to Him, but so large to you, therefore He will not belittle it, make light of it. Yes, vast and varied may be our need. **"My God"** - in all His majestic mightiness; Paul is allowed to reckon Him as **"my"** GOD: you and I are allowed the same privilege; up alongside of Him, our need does not seem so insuperably big, after all.

"His riches" - the other day, for a certain purpose, I had a cheque from a man drawn on his "NO.2 AIC". It would appear that GOD has at least four accounts

- (1) "**The riches of His goodness**", Romans 2:4.
- (2) **The riches of His wisdom**, Romans 11:33.
- (3) "**The riches of His grace**", Ephesians 1:7.
- (4) **The riches of His glory**, Ephesians 1:18.

Out of one or other of His accounts there is abundance to meet all our need. "**In glory**" - the Royal Bank of Heaven; and what a bank: "**where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal**", Matthew 6:20. "**According to**" - not just "**out of**."

A millionaire might give a tramp a shilling "**out of**" his riches; but how greater would be help "**according to**", that is, after the measure of His riches - the first, a parsimonious gift; the other, a princely gift. This latter is the Divine manner.

So closes the passage, on the note, not of any praise to us, for anything we may be, or may have done, but of acknowledgment that it is all of Him. The "**glory**", then, is His, and shall be His "**for ever and ever**"!

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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