

## **Joy When Life is Tough - Philippians**

### **Part 8**

#### **‘For This I Have Jesus’**

#### **Philippians 4:10-13**

**Pastor Charles Price**

I want to look at these verses because they represent something which I think we in our present society desperately need to know. If you were to ask somebody sometime, ‘how are you doing?’ They often give you the answer, ‘Well, under the circumstances, I’m doing OK.’

And, you know, fine well, that they are under the circumstances. They’re tired, they are a little discouraged maybe; they have this sense of being swamped. And they’re certainly living under the weight of their circumstances. Somebody else comes along who’s maybe a bit more spiritual and says, hey, you shouldn’t live under your circumstances, you should live above your circumstances, which sounds great.

But how are we to live above them if they are part of our lives? I want to suggest a better alternative that Paul talks about in these verses here in Philippians 4. Not about living under the circumstances nor living above them, because we shouldn’t live under them, we actually cannot live above them, but rather we may learn to celebrate in our circumstances. And this is going to be our theme this morning. Let me read again the latter part of Philippians 4:11-12. The middle of Philippians 4:11, ‘I have learned to be content,’ says Paul, ‘whatever the circumstances. Now I know what it is to be in need. And I know what it is to have plenty. But I’ve 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, that is Christ who gives me strength.’

And let me remind you for the last time that when Paul wrote these letters, he was not writing in an ivory tower somewhere. He wrote this letter from prison, almost certainly in Rome. Having been deprived of some of the best years of his life, five years in round figures in total. Two years in Caesarea, two years in Rome. The best part of a year getting from one, from Caesarea to the other. And yet, despite this, despite the hardship, the frustration, he was a man in his early fifties. He probably felt he was in the peak of life and yet he was spending it locked behind a prison door, chained to his circumstances, but he says, I’ve learned something, I’m not going to live under my circumstances, that would depress me and discourage me. I can’t live above them, but what I’m going to do is learn a secret. He describes it as the secret of being content in every circumstance.

That’s why he could write earlier in this chapter and say to the Philippians, rejoice. And again, I say, in case you think that sounds like the wrong word, that I should have said react. I’ll say it

again. Rejoice! Why, because I've learned how to live no matter what my circumstances are with a sense of joy and purpose. And last week, we talked about how this works out in our own inner world, how we survive within ourselves. He talks about the peace of God, which passes understanding as we present our situation to him with thanksgiving. But this morning, I want to talk about how to survive externally. That is not in the inner world of our own hearts now, but how do you actually cope with the circumstances that are tough and are difficult?

Because that's what Paul is writing about. And it's important that, as he says, I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. This is not a result of some buoyant personality that Paul may have had that you perhaps don't have, and I don't have. But rather, this is something I have learned and if Paul learned it, it's something which you and I are able to learn. How to be content and he says in Philippians 4:12 that the context of learning this, is that "I know what it's like to be in need and to have plenty. I've been on both sides of that fence. I know what it's like to be well-fed and to be hungry. I've been on both sides of that fence. But whatever my circumstances, I've learned the secret of being content."

Now we've talked a bit about Paul's circumstances in the prison where he is in Rome. But you may know that the whole of Paul's life was characterized by hardship and difficulties. In 2 Corinthians 11, he was writing to the Corinthian Church, and there'd been an infiltration of what he describes as some pseudo apostles; people claiming an authority that I didn't have. And Paul is writing about this, and they had said that Paul was not a real apostle, and so he defends his apostleship and the way he does so is intriguing. Let me read for 2 Corinthians 11:23 he says, 'are they servants of Christ,' that's these pseudo apostles, 'I am out of my mind to talk like this, but I am more.' And here's his evidence. 'I have worked much harder than they have, by implication. I've been in prison more frequently than they have. I have been flogged more severely than they have, and I've been exposed to death again and again.'

Remarkably, Paul says the evidence that I'm God's man, chosen and commissioned by God is I've worked harder, I've had more time in prison than they have. I've been flogged more severely than they have, and I've been exposed to death again and again. Now we live in a rather soft age, because life is made to be pretty easy, relatively. And when these kinds of things happen to us, we start to assume I must be out of the will of God. Paul says, this is the evidence I'm in the will of God.

Then he gives some specific detail and in the next verse. Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. For those whose arithmetic isn't very good, that's 39 lashes. Five times I received those, and the lashing was with a whip which had several chords to it and pieces of bone were tied into the cord and every time the whips would hit the back of the victim, they would break the skin and often tear out pieces of flesh. At the end of 39 whippings like that, the person would look like a ploughed field, every part of their skin broken in their flesh exposed.

And Paul says, I didn't just experience that once, I experienced it five times as an apostle. And by the way, he wrote this letter long before his ministry ever finished. So, there are many more times these kinds of things may have taken place. So, five times I received the 40 lashes minus one, three times I was beaten with rods. That's just big sticks, just beating me with sticks. Once I was stoned, I had nothing to do with marijuana, that was stoned and left for dead.

We know about that occasion, because it's recorded in Acts 14 when Paul was on his first missionary journey, he went to the town of Lystra, and they dragged him out of the city. They stoned him and they left him for dead, presumably concussed, unconscious, his body suitably broken. They assumed he was dead. They went back into the city, but it says that Paul, when he revived, got up and went back into the city. I would have run the other way if I could run at all under those circumstances.

Paul went right back into the city, probably stood up in the town square and said, ladies and gentlemen, I was telling you something very important when I was rudely interrupted; let me finish. Incredible, once I was stoned, he says, and three times I was shipwrecked. That doesn't include the times we know about in the Book of Acts, which happened after this. So, we know that most times that Paul went on a missionary journey, his boat sank at some stage. Why didn't God keep them afloat? You would have thought God would look after him a little better than that, wouldn't you? But his ship sank; I spent a night and a day in the open sea. On one occasion, just probably hanging on to a piece of wood floating in the sea.

Being constantly on the move. I've been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from gentiles, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, in danger from false brothers. I think he was in danger. A whole catalogue of dangerous situations in which he found himself. I've laboured and toiled and often gone without sleep. I've known hunger and thirst. I have been cold and naked, says Paul, there are times I'm just utterly, utterly exhausted and I get no sleep. There are times there has been no food on my table. And this, by the way, is the man who wrote, my God will supply all your needs. But you can live without food for a few days. Paul did, and there have even been times, he says, when there have been no clothes on my back, I have been cold and naked. He doesn't tell us in what circumstances that came about. Maybe he was in the bathtub on the boat one day when the boat sank, and he swam away with nothing.

We know he arrived in Malta on a plank when his boat sank. That was a later boat. You can imagine a few local Christians who might have been there saying, we understand the Apostle Paul is in the vicinity. I wonder where he is these days? What's that piece of seaweed on that plank that's floating out there? Oh, it's not seaweed, it's somebody's head. Oh, goodness me, he's naked. This must be a nudist beach. It's the Apostle Paul. I mean, what an entry. It raises the

question, doesn't it, why didn't God look after him a little better? Because there's an assumption we make about that. If you're going to serve God, give your life to God, then everything's going to work well and smoothly. That was never true in scripture, it was never true. Certainly not for the apostle Paul. It's not true in the life of Jesus, it's not true right through scripture, it's not true in history. And Paul says besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

In other words, I carry the burden of my ministry. It's not something I do casually. I face this pressure of concern all the time. He says, who is weak? Don't I feel weak? You think I'm some tough nut? I'm not, I am weak. Who is led into sin, don't I inwardly burn? If you think that because I'm an apostle God keeps the devil away from me, he's not on my back. I tell you that's not true. I face sin, I inwardly burn. And earlier, when he wrote to the Corinthians, he's talking about burning as sexual temptation, whether he's equating the two, but he's saying, I am tempted and I battle with temptation. I battle with sin.

I don't know what kind of circumstances you're in this morning. Those circumstances can drive you from God, or they can drive you to God. The way they drive you from God is when you begin to become bitter and angry. That's the instinctive response. But I have to learn something, says Paul, I have to learn it, you've got to learn it, I've got to learn it.

And not only was Paul's circumstances tough in terms of his persecution, but simply the sheer difficulty of life in those days. I mean, Paul, as an apostle, had none of the advantages that we take for granted. We send missionaries off to different parts of the world, and they're not going to face the kind of limitations that Paul had to face. You see, Paul never had any amplification when he preached. If he came here today, he would laugh at the fact I needed a microphone to speak to you. The only folks who ever heard Paul speak were the people who listened to him closely enough to hear his actual voice.

He didn't have a cassette ministry, if you didn't get it the first time, you could buy it and listen to it again. He didn't have a radio program; he didn't have a video library. When Paul went on his missionary journeys, he didn't send an advance team to train the local Christians, book the local coliseum, and then when everything was ready, Paul would come flying in with George Beverly Barnabas and have a great 2, 3, 4 weeks of evangelistic meetings. And then he would leave behind the follow up team and move on, and the follow up team would come in and look after the new converts while Paul went to the next city.

Paul only went on three missionary journeys in his life. He often arrived as a total stranger and would begin from the very, very bottom and then in most places he went to, eventually the only reason he left was because they drove him out, either because they put him in prison and then they sent him away from the area. Paul enjoyed the hospitality of prisons right throughout the

Mediterranean world. When he was in Ephesus, where he stayed for three years; that was his longest place where he ever stayed. For two of those years, it tells us he preached every day in the lecture hall of the temple.

That is, he had an evangelistic crusade that ran every day for two years. And he said when he wrote about that, he wrote about that to the Corinthians, he said, and while I was there, I also made sure I wasn't dependent on any of you for my financial resources. I worked hard making tents. Paul was trained, not as a tent maker, he was trained as a Pharisee. He was an intellectual, but he learned to get his hands dirty and make tents and sell tents, so he would depend on nobody else to supply his needs.

I mean, this is hard work. You see, we live in a day when it's easy, relatively speaking. But one of the problems is this, that the more comfortable we are, the more we've lost the capacity to be content. There's probably never been such discontent in people's normal lives, such greed for more, such appetite for something bigger and better and faster, further and higher as there is in our world today. You see, we've learned to place our dependency on technology instead of God, learned to place our dependency on technology and knowledge instead of God. Learned to place our dependency on physical resources instead of God. In fact, we've learned to live in dependency on almost anything except God.

One of the things Paul knew as he was stripped of everything but God. That's why God again and again takes his choicest servants and makes life difficult for them to strip them of every other object of dependency. That's why they become the men that Paul became; and others who in similar circumstances in scripture had to go through that same thing. Yet he says, I've learned the secret he calls it in Philippians 4:12, I've learned the secret of being content.

What is the secret? What is it that most people miss? And Paul says I've learned it's a secret, but it's become an open secret. Well, he says in Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything through him that is through Christ who gives me strength." Now, don't take that verse out of its context. When Paul says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, that doesn't mean I can, I can jump over the moon, I can do everything through Christ.

When I was principal of Capernwray Bible School in England, I remember one Monday a student came to talk to me. She said to me, last night I was part of a team of four students who went to a church that we had been invited to go to. The church had written to us and said, could you send us a team of students to take a Sunday evening service. It was a country church. She said, when we arrived there, the person meeting us said, which of you is the singer? And we haven't got a singer. And he said, that's such a disappointment. We've announced you're going to bring some special music with you, there was going to be a singer. And she said, I could see how disappointed he was. And I used to sing when I was younger, so I claimed this verse. I can do all

things through Christ who strengthens me, and I said to him, I will sing. She said it was a disaster. Why didn't God fulfill the promise? I said that verse has nothing to do with you singing. When Paul says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, he's not saying that means, I can do anything.

Put me in a ring with what's his name, Tyson? and I can beat him. Of course, he's not saying that. We have different gifts. We have different abilities. We have different strengths, different weaknesses, we know that. But the context in which Paul says, is that I can live in any circumstances. That's the context. That if I'm well-fed or hungry, living in plenty or in want, I can live in any circumstances. When the sky is blue and everything's fine, the sun is shining, I can enjoy it with a clear conscience. But when the clouds have formed and the rain is falling and everything's going wrong, I can still live because Christ is my strengths. I love the way the amplified Bible translates this. It says I have strength for all things in Christ who empowers me. I am ready for anything, I am equal to anything through Christ who infuses inner strengths into me. That is, I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency. I love that, that's the amplified version. That's why it takes longer to say, but I love it. Ready for anything.

Many of you remember Dr. Alan Redpath who is now in heaven, but he used to come and preach here I know in years past, from time to time. And Alan Redpath used to talk about RFA, Ready For Anything taken from this verse. But that doesn't mean I'm ready to do things I'm not gifted or equipped to do. It means I can live. I'm ready for any circumstance. I am ready if my house begins to fail. I'm ready with all the consequences of growing older and all the limitations that it puts on me. I am ready when suddenly everything works well for me. I am ready when I lose my job. I'm ready for when I get promoted in my job. I'm ready for anything, why? Because my reference point has become not my circumstances, but Christ, as I said last week.

What happens to us is not nearly as important as what is happening in us. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. That's why he could say to the Corinthians also in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 He says 'we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not abandoned. Struck down, but not destroyed.' Paul says what is true is that I'm hard pressed.

That's true. I am perplexed. That's true. I'm persecuted. That's true. I'm struck down. That is true. But I am never crushed. Never in despair. Never abandoned, never destroyed. As the J.B. Phillips paraphrases the New Testament puts it, 'I am knocked down but never knocked out.'

And he goes on to say why? Because we carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our bodies. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal bodies. For what seems to

push me down and strike me down gives, says Paul, the opportunity for the life of Jesus in me to be exhibited. That is the source of my contentedness and my ability to live and survive.

When Paul was returning to Jerusalem before he was arrested there and then imprisoned in Caesarea, and then later taken to Rome, the beginning of this five-year period of imprisonment. On his way back to Jerusalem, he reached Caesarea, which is the coastal town, just a matter of 50 miles or so from Jerusalem. And it says that a man named Agabus, a prophet came down from Judea. This is in Acts 21:11 and coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, the Holy Spirit says in this way the Jews of Jerusalem bind the owners of this belt and will hand them over to the gentiles. With this vivid enacted message, taking Paul's belt, tying his hands and his feet with it, he says, this is going to happen to the owner of this belt. Paul, the Holy Spirit is telling you when you go to Jerusalem, you are going to face imprisonment and captivity.

And Luke, who writes this record of Acts, says when we heard this, we and the people pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem, 'Paul, God is giving you a way out of what's coming. Don't go to Jerusalem. And Paul answered, 'why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, the Lord's will be done.' Under their breath they probably said, Paul's will be done by the sound of it. But Paul was saying, no, no, the Lord has forewarned me and given me the option. That's why the Holy Spirit sent this message. Paul, if you really can't handle this, there's another way you can take.

Paul says, not at all. I'm ready. RFA ready for anything, I am ready to be bound, I'm ready even to die, because I know what happens to me will never, ever be bigger than the presence of Jesus Christ in me, who will be my sufficiency and my strength, because no matter what happens, I'm ready. He didn't say that because of stoicism, but because of his awareness of the adequacy and the sufficiency of Christ within him. Nothing faces me that is bigger than Christ, that's my strength, says Paul.

My wife and I know a very godly man who is now 92 years of age. A man who's been a great encouragement to us, prays for us every day, prays for this church every day since we came here, a very godly man. And he had a little saying. Five words long. 'For this, I have Jesus.' He would often say this. He was a wonderful preacher, very simple preacher, but very wonderful preacher. And he'd often say that, and he printed a bookmark, a little yellow velvet bookmark and he had written on it. For this, I have Jesus and he would give it away to folks.

Several years ago now, he suffered a stroke, he had two strokes in quick succession. He was in hospital and we would call his wife and find out how he was, and one day I called his wife and she answered the phone, she said, 'he's just come out of hospital today. He's right here in the

room.' She said, 'if he stands up and walks across the room, it's like a ship without a rudder, he doesn't know where he's going to end up. His speech is slurred,' she said. 'I'll pass him the telephone, he'd like to hear your voice, though if he speaks to you, you probably won't hear what he's saying.' And she passed him the phone, and I said, 'I'm so sorry to know you're having to go through this difficult time.' And he spoke, and yes, his speech was slurred, but I knew exactly what he was saying. He said, 'for this, I have Jesus.' I've enjoyed him in the good times, that is what he said to me later on when we were in his home. I enjoyed Jesus in the good times when he gave me the health and strength I've enjoyed all my life. And I'm enjoying him in the bad times. For this, I have Jesus.

Just after that incident, I was speaking at a conference in England known as Spring Harvest, held every Easter. It draws about 60 or 70,000 people to two different locations for five days. And I was speaking at the evening celebrations, as they call them, in the big tent, seating thousands of people, and I told this story. For this, I have Jesus. A little while later, back at home, a week or two later, I got a letter in the post from a lady who said to me, 'you don't know me, but I was at Spring Harvest the night you talked about, for this, I have Jesus. So, I came to try and find you at the end of that meeting, but I couldn't find you. Too many people, so I got your address from the Spring Harvest office and I want to tell you my story.'

She said, 'I think it was two years ago, my husband was killed in a road accident.' She said 'it was the worst thing that could have happened to our family, we have two young children. The day before he died, a friend of mine had written to me, and in her letter, she'd enclosed a little yellow velvet bookmark that said, 'For this, I have Jesus.' And when I opened it and saw it, I said, how nice, how sweet. It's lovely, and I put it down and forgot about it.'

The next morning, she said, 'midway through the morning, a policeman came to my door asking her to accompany him to the hospital - my husband had been in a road accident. When we got to the hospital, he had already died. So, we went to the school my children were at, and we picked them up and brought them home.' She said, 'It was the most terrible day of our lives.' 'When I came into our home there on the table was this bookmark. For this, I have Jesus.' She said to me, 'in that letter, I cannot tell you what that has meant to me and to my family, so much so,' she said, 'we have put it onto his tombstone. For this, we have Jesus.'

Let me ask you this morning, is this the Jesus that you have? You know, you can have a Jesus who is little more than the patron of your theology, but he's distant and remote. You can have a Jesus who's simply your instructor, your teacher, but again, he's remote. Or you can have a Jesus who's of the very heart of everything that takes place in your life. He's your life.

Before we left to come here to Canada. My wife, Hillary, went to visit a friend of ours, a lady only in her middle years, but who had been diagnosed with cancer and was dying, in fact, she



died a couple of weeks after we arrived here. We went to see her and sat on the end of the bed and asked her, 'how are you?' She said, 'I'm just lying here under this blanket, and I'm just swamped, I'm so weak. I can't reach out at all, I'm just here under this blanket.' And Hillary said, 'why don't you invite Jesus to come under the blanket. You don't have to get out to him somewhere remote. Say Lord, I have no strength, I am weak, but come under my blanket.'

See, that's the Jesus Paul learned every time his boat sank, every time he was whipped with those 39 stripes. The first stripe would be bad enough, the second stripe painful, after the third or fourth he might begin to go a bit numb, but every stripe, for this I have Jesus.

I've learned the secret. Of course, the pain was as intense as it would be for the next person. But you see, this is why this letter to the Philippians is such a remarkable letter, such a powerful letter, because there is more autobiographical information about Paul's life in this letter than probably any other letter, maybe in second Corinthians there's a lot, but here in every chapter he talks about himself and every time it's about the things, that humanly speaking, should have knocked him down. But every time exposed again that his security, his life, his strength, is Jesus. That's why he could say in Philippians 4:19, "my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus." See, that is either a tongue in cheek tease and it's OK to quote that when everything's going fine. It's either that or it's the very essence of spiritual reality. We're going to look at that verse in particular next week.

But as I finish, I want to ask you if you know Jesus this way? You may not know him at all, but God has been speaking to you. And by his Holy Spirit, out of a love for you, he's drawing you. To seek for Jesus that's not just someone in history, but who is alive today and adequate and sufficient for your need today. Maybe some of you here this morning you've been through the Christian life, you are a Christian, you became a Christian maybe a long time ago. But you've lost the reality of the Jesus who is under the blanket with you. And you cannot say of the circumstances you face tomorrow. For this, I have Jesus, because you have somehow left him somewhere along the roadside back in your past. You need to go back and say, Lord Jesus once again become the central point of my life.

That night at Spring Harvest, Manko Graham Kendrick, who is a songwriter, was leading the worship and he wrote a song that night. Called, for this, I have Jesus. For the joys and for the sorrows, for the best and worst of times, for this moment, for tomorrow, for all that lies behind. The fears that crowd around me for the failure of my plans, for the dreams of all I hope to be, the truth of what I am, for this, I have Jesus, for this, I have Jesus. For the tears that flow in secret in the broken times, for the moments of elation or the troubled mind, for all the disappointments or the sting of old regrets, all my prayers and longings that seem unanswered yet, for this, I have Jesus. For the weakness of my body, the burdens of each day, for the nights of doubt and worry

when sleep has fled away, when needing reassurance and the will to start again. A steely eyed endurance, the strength to fight and win, for this, I have Jesus. For this, I have Jesus.