

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. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² 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. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ 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; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We are beggars, This is true.

You get off the freeway and at almost every exit you'll find someone sitting with sign. What do you do? Slouch a little more in in your seat, position the a-pillar so you can't see them, lock the doors, and by all means don't make eye contact. We'll do anything we can to avoid them. I don't want to give them money mostly because I don't have cash on me. But you feel heartless and cruel for not helping. So it's easier to just ignore the situation.

It can be uncomfortable but is that how we look at the church when we pass the plate on Sunday? Slouch a little more, try to position the bulletin between you and the usher, and by all means avoid eye contact. He's coming anyway. Quick grab whatever change we have and throw it in the plate. If that's how we feel about the offering, please don't give. We make it a point to let people know that you are under no obligation to give. First you should learn what it is we believe and teach before you support us.

Our offerings should be given out of joy and a desire to give back a small portion what God has given us. God allows us to participate. Philippians do just that. They participated. They were one of the only churches to do so. They were the country bumpkins that supported the apostle as he headed to the coastal elites of Corinth. Paul gives thanks to God for their gracious gift in supporting him while he sits in prison and rejoices. How could he do such a thing? He's lower than a beggar. He's imprisoned, held captive? Paul realized the great gift God had given him and even in death he had so much more than just this life. We have so much more than just this life. Everything that we have is just gravy. That God would consider us worth the price of his son and then on top of that to bless us daily in this life! That may take us a lifetime to fully understand but when Martin Luther died a note was found in his pocket, "We are beggars, this is true." We may not have much in this world. In fact there is nothing we can give God, we simply receive all that he gives and joyfully return a portion of it. We are beggars this is true.

Paul was a beggar. The thing we don't realize is what prison was like for Paul. Our prisons are nice, air conditioning, cable, a hot meal, and a place to sleep. But it wasn't so nice in Rome. Back then a prisoner had to pay for his food while in custody. A prisoner had to have family or friends to bring him food or they didn't eat. When Paul says, "*I know what it is to be hungry.*" He really means it. Paul was confined and unable to travel freely and the Philippians did something about it.

They sent an offering and friend for Paul, Epaphroditus. They were concerned even when they didn't know how to help. We don't know what happened. It could have been the famine that hit their land and they were unable to send help, Paul spent two years in a holding cell in Ceasarea before he appealed to Caesar. Paul then sailed against his will, was involved in a ship wreck, washed onto an island and finally taken to Rome. Maybe they simply

lost track of Paul. So many things could have prevented them from gathering an offering, looking in his direction, taking a different exit. But they demonstrate their concern for the apostle and send Epaphroditus with an offering to serve the apostle.

Paul rejoices. He's careful not to say that he rejoices in his circumstances or their gifts, but *in the Lord*. There is no, "Thank you for the gift, I'm glad for it, and can certainly use it. I'm starving." He says, "Thank you for the gift. I'm glad for it, because of what it says to me about you." Paul is deeply grateful to the Philippians but he doesn't want them to think that earthly things are suddenly of great importance to him. He doesn't want them to think he's fishing for more gifts. Paul is more thankful about the attitude of their heart than the gift he has received. Paul thanks God for what he has received. He is grateful for any scrap that is tossed his way. Paul realized, "We are beggars before a gracious God."

We are beggars. Does it feel like it? It doesn't even look like it, when you put America into the context of the world and realize that if you make \$15 per hour – you are in the richest 1% in the world. If you're feeling left out because you only make \$11 per hour then realize you're still in the top 2% of the world. We have more than most can imagine but are we content? I'll admit, "I have not learned the secret to being content." I know the secret but I'm still so tempted by the sinful nature to want more, to do more, to eat and drink more, and then just look at the garage. I'm not that content and if I'm honest I don't think you are either.

Christianity in America is in a sad state. The theology of glory teaches that if we just believe more, give more, plant the money tree seed – then God will bless us and give us more. That's giving for the sake of getting more. It treats God like a piñata and our offerings as the stick used to beat the blessings out of God. The heart is all wrong. It's in the wrong place. Rather than rejoicing in the opportunity to support the church we may misuse the gifts God has given us to gain more. We're not so content.

We want more, a bigger, brighter TV, faster car with more options, better fuel efficiency, me – more tools, animals... The list goes on. Our desire for more is condemned under the last two, often the ones we think of the least, the 9th and 10th commandments. These tell us to be content with what we have, but we don't often live within our means. What if a Father sent his son to the grocery store to buy bread and eggs for breakfast and that child spent everything on candy? Do you think dad would do that again? God gives money, talents, time, and he tells us, "Don't give it all away. Use it to support your family. Use this to care for your wife; she needs some time away from you. Use this to pay your taxes. Use this to support your church." How would he feel if we squandered it all on wild living? Do you think God should give us more?

Maybe we need less. Maybe like Paul we need to learn contentment because when we breathe our last our things won't matter. We are beggars.

Paul learned how true that is. He had to learn contentment and it was a tough learning experience. He wasn't born with it. It didn't come naturally. He couldn't buy it in a store. But a secret was revealed to him and it is this secret which he is about to tell us. *I can do everything through him who gives me strength*. He says, "I can eat or starve, live or die, I can do all these things through him who strengthens me." (We mostly hear that verse ripped out of context and placed on posters in locker rooms – what it really means is, "I can suffer and die when God strengthens me." I can do all things, through him. The emphasis is on the "him," and not what I can do, but "*the him*", who is the God who creates and sustains.

The God who redeems, the God who knocked him off a horse, blinded him, and made him a tool to reach the Gentiles. That him is Jesus who didn't enter into our world hiding behind the a-pillar, trying to avoid eye contact, as he rummages around for a pocket full of change. He entered into this world, and came for those who couldn't help themselves, and to them he gave his holy precious blood, his innocent suffering and death. He came for the Philippians and for Paul. Jesus came for those who didn't know the value of the gift he gave. He didn't think

of what it might cost him, it was for our sake that he became poor, humbled himself, he came down from the riches of heaven to tent with us in humility.

This is the one Paul writes of. This is the one that motivates the Philippians to respond in joyful support for Paul and the church. It was his work that motivated them to support Paul and seek him out. It wasn't the first time either. After Paul was forced out of Philippi, short visit after he was imprisoned he writes that *not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;* ¹⁶ *for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.* ¹⁷ *Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.* These gifts, fruits of faith keep piling up for the Philippians and on the Last Day God will point to their deeds as evidence of a genuine faith in Christ. They loved their neighbor, they shared in his suffering. They looked for opportunities to serve God, his work, and his workers. They were the ones who remembered. Their offering was a fragrant offering, a pleasing aroma to God. That's worship language of when Israelites would bring their gifts and sacrifice to God. In order for a sacrifice to be pleasing to God, it must have its origin in love toward God and in gratitude for the benefits received from God. They are beggars who have received God's unearned grace.

While we learn contentment, realize we won't always be able to do or buy everything we want. It's okay. We don't need everything now when we have an eternity later. And if you do have everything, more than you can imagine, if you fit in the world's top 1%, don't feel guilty, it's not a bad thing to have money, and no one should make you feel guilt about the blessings God has given but use them, enjoy them, and give thanks to God.

Not only has he given us his Son he also gives us the things in this world. We are forgiven for finding comfort in the things of this world and we rejoice. We rejoice because there isn't anything that we can do that God hasn't already done for us. We can't gain righteousness through our own efforts or good works. We cannot earn God's favor by going above and beyond the call of Christian duty. You cannot offer God anything for your sins. We are beggars, we have nothing. But we have everything in Christ.

Like the Philippians your generosity, your good works continue to be added to your account. You've supported the ministry. You've exceeded our budget this last year. You increased mission offerings and we have so many opportunities around us. These are just the things you've done in church, not to exclude those things outside of us. I'm not asking for more money. I don't want you motivated to give via guilt or shame. That's the wrong attitude to give. It's not a fragrant offering. We are amply supplied. I only ask that we faithfully use the gifts God has entrusted to us and in doing so we can rest assured that *my and your God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

We are beggars, this is true. We were sitting beside the freeway only interested in feeding our addiction to sin when God came to us, clothed us, bandaged our wounds, brought us into his family, and gives us an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade... kept in heaven for you. It isn't because of any gift we gave, it isn't because of any sacrifice we've made, it is all because he is a gracious and merciful God who gives gifts to beggars and makes them heirs. That is the God we gladly and joyfully return our offerings to for him and his glory. Amen.