Philippians 4:14-23 *No Turning Back: Well Supplied*

***Other People’s Mail***Today we are finishing up our two-month series on the book of Philippians. We’ve been able to move relatively slowly through this great little book that is so full of memorable verses.

And we’ve seen Paul’s great passion for the Philippians to stand firm in their faith and press on into a deeper relationship with Jesus. It’s a very Christ-centered letter, with the great Christ-hymn in chapter 2 serving as the template for how we should think about our relationships with others and the reminder of why everything else is garbage in comparison to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings.

Now, as we come to the end of the letter, we are again reminded that we are reading somebody else’s mail. As important as the New Testament letters are for developing our theology and understanding of the gospel, we need to remember that they are at their heart letters between Paul and his friends. And so, there are parts of the letters that are very specific to the circumstances in which they were first written.

Today, we are going to see that the letter to the Philippians is really a Thank You Note. Paul is writing a missionary letter to those who have been supporting him financially. And so, the topic of our final sermon on Philippians is going to be Christian giving.

***One More Coffee Mug Verse***Throughout this series I’ve talked quite a bit about “coffee mug verses.” Coffee Mug Verses are the kind of verses that look good on a t-shirt or a coffee mug or a Pinterest post. They are quotable, memorable verses that say a lot in a few words.

And Philippians is full of them:

* 1:6 “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.”
* 1:21 “for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”
* 3:14 “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”
* 4:13 “I can do all things [hard things] through Christ who gives me strength.”

Those are just a few. There are a bunch more. And our passage today has one as well. It’s **Philippians 4:19**, and it’s a good one:

**19**And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

This is a verse worth memorizing. This is a verse with a lot of power and promise. This is a verse to put in your quiver of spiritual arrows.

But it is important for us to know the context to understand it properly. It’s important to remember that Paul says this as a part of his “thank you” to the Philippians for their financial sacrifice; as well as a part of encouraging them to continue to be generous. This verse is here to help us think about our own giving.

This verse reminds us that God is personal (He’s “my God”), He’s not poor (His riches are glorious, in fact), and through Christ He stands ready to meet our every need. And so, we can afford to give generously. Sacrificially even. That’s the argument here. I’ll put it like this:

**When God is the supplier of all your needs, you can press on generously in faith.**

Since God is not short of resources, we can give sacrificially to the work of His kingdom.

Now, this verse is near the end of this section. Let’s go to the earlier verses to get the context and understand it better. Along the way Paul is going to give us 3 ways to think about our giving.

***It was Good of You to Share***First, **when we give we are partnering in the work of the gospel.** When we give, it is a way of sharing in work we might not be able to do ourselves. **Verses 14-16:**

**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.

The word “yet” is a clue that we have jumped into this passage mid-thought. The “thank you” portion of the letter actually started back in verse 10. That’s where Paul said that he rejoiced that the Philippians had sent an offering his way through the life-risking ministry of Epaphroditus. But then, you can almost see Paul’s concern that he’s going to sound money-hungry, so he lets them know that he is “good” whether he has plenty or little. He says that he’s learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.

We remember what that secret is, right? That’s the great verse, Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” We can’t fast forward through the hard parts of life, but we know that Jesus is in every frame. And that’s just enough.

But then, Paul realizes that maybe he doesn’t sound all that grateful for their gift. That’s the “yet” in verse 14. I can do all things through Christ, yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. I am really grateful. You did well for me. Your generosity was good.

Paul is walking that fine line that every missionary, every Christian worker who is dependent on the gifts of others, has to walk. He’s grateful for the support. He relies on the support. But he doesn’t want to sound like he’s only interested in their money.

He sees something else going on here. Another reason—beyond his own care and feeding—that it was good of them to send him support. And the key is in that word “share.” It’s repeated in both verse 14 and 15. The Philippians have shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving.

Paul mentions a couple of place names here, so let me throw **a map up on the screen** and help us get our bearings. Paul is talking about his second missionary journey. You can read about it in Acts 16 and 17. That’s when Paul crossed over from Troas in Asia (modern day Turkey) to Europe for the first time. He came to the region known as Macedonia and his first stop was Philippi. That’s where he met Lydia the seller of purple, cast the demons out of the slave girl, spent a night in jail and then converted the jailer and his family. That’s when this church got started.

Then he moved on to Thessalonica, where he stayed only a couple of weeks. But even while he was there, the Philippians went out of their way to send him support again and again. That’s about 95 miles—they didn’t have Venmo or Western Union or even mailboxes that you could just write a check and put a postage stamp on—so when Paul says they supported him that means they not only got together an aid package, but somebody had to take the time and effort to travel 190 miles round trip to get that aid to him. Again, and again.

Then Paul moved on to Berea before eventually going further south into the region of Achaia and the city of Athens. And through it all, **verse 15 says,** the Philippians have been faithfully sharing in the work with him. Even now, years later, while Paul is in prison in Rome, they’ve gone out of their way to take up a collection and send Epaphroditus on the much longer journey to help Paul out.

There’s a word for that: Partnership.

That’s what the word “share” is getting at. By supporting Paul financially the Philippians are sharing with him in the work.

Both times the word “share” is used, the original word in Greek is a variation on the word “*koinonia*.” Do you remember that from our first sermon in Philippians? In 1:5 Paul talks about their “partnership in the gospel.” We said then that word was “*koinonia*”, which is often translated as “fellowship” elsewhere in the Bible. But it isn’t fellowship like we often think of it—coffee and donuts—but more of a mutual commitment, a partnership. My friend Matt coined the phrase “in-it-togetherness.”

That’s what Paul is talking about again here in chapter 4. By supporting Paul financially, they are partnering with him in the work of spreading the gospel. They are sharing in the work, even though they are not all physically out on the mission field.

And that’s a good way for us to think about our own giving to Christian work. When you give to Hope Church it is a way for you to share in the work the church does, even if you are not physically able to be here doing the work yourself.

There are 8 of us on staff here at the church. We are, in various ways, vocationally engaged in the work of ministry. It’s not necessarily because we are more holy, or that the work we do is more pleasing to God that the work that you all do. But, because of your generosity and support we are afforded the opportunity to spend more of our time specifically focused on Christian work. We are privileged to be able to do that work, but we are partnered with those of you who give. So you share in that work with us.

Or, again, we have that wall with pictures of the missionaries we support. These are folks who are doing Christian work in different countries or different communities around the U.S. We can’t all move to those countries or communities, but because of our partnership with these folks we are part of the gospel mission in those places. We share in the work. In fact, in our denominational mission program, the money we give as a church to our missionaries is known as “mission shares.” I don’t know it for certain, but I wouldn’t be surprised if that phrase comes directly from this passage.

One of the ways to think of your giving is as a partnership in the work of the gospel. When we give we get to share in the work that others are doing for Jesus.

***A Fragrant Offering***Second, **when we give it is pleasing to God**. Our giving is an act of worship. For the moment, I’m going to skip over verse 17 and **go to verse 18.** We’ll come back to verse 17 in a bit.

**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.

Again, we see Paul being very careful to emphasize that he doesn’t need more money. He says he has “more than enough.” He says he is “amply supplied.” (When you remember that he is under house arrest and that he is completely dependent upon people like Timothy and Epaphroditus to run all his errands and bring groceries, you have to wonder if his idea of “more than enough” is the same as our idea of what that means.)

It’s not that Paul isn’t grateful for their gifts. Obviously he is. But he wants them, and us, to see something more going on here. In this case, these gifts have become an offering to God. Not just partnership in the gospel, but also a way of praising God.

Now, we need to be careful with this idea of “pleasing God.” We need to be careful that we don’t fall into the error of thinking God needs us to supply Him. God is not lacking. Psalm 50 says that the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God. In his sermon in Athens, Paul explicitly says that God is not “is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything.” (Acts 17:25) When we give to the church or to other Christian work, it’s not like we are supplying something God couldn’t get in some other way.

But God still delights in our worship. When we give from a heart that is grateful and satisfied with what God has done for us and because we want to make all of our lives available to Him, that pleases Him.

The phrase--“fragrant offering”—is interesting. This is a reference back to the Old Testament sacrificial system. The altar at the temple, where people would bring bulls and goats and lambs to sacrifice them to God.

I don’t know if you’ve ever stopped to consider what that might have smelled like; but I imagine the smells would have been one of the most distinctive things about the whole process. Especially on the high holy days, when there would have been a continual line of sacrifice. I imagine the smell of a processing plant—not unlike the smell outside of Tyson’s—I can’t believe it would have been a good smell.

But also, meat was being constantly placed on the fire. The altar was really one big BBQ pit. And, frankly, one of my favorite smells in the world is the smell of good BBQ. As you approached the temple, it would have been kind of like walking towards a Famous Dave’s. Fragrant. And that smell would have been considered pleasing to God. Because it was a symbol of devotion and obedience and thanksgiving towards Him.

We don’t kill bulls and goats and lambs anymore. But we do sacrifice. We take out of our hard- earned money, our limited funds, and we give to the work of the gospel. There’s a reason we call that our “offering.”

In fact, we’re so used to using that phrase in the church that I don’t know if I’ve ever really connected it to the Old Testament sacrifice the way I have this week. It is like, when we give our gifts to the church—whether that is in an offering plate or through direct deposit or by mailing in a check—there is a sense that we are taking that money and lighting it on fire for the Lord.

It’s not wasted, but it is offered up to Him.

And when we do, we are worshiping. We are pleasing God.

It’s kind of ironic that at the beginning of the service last week I took the time to talk about our giving and how we are receiving our offerings during the pandemic. To be honest, I didn’t really think ahead to the passage this week.

My point last week was that we are not passing offering plates during our services, because that seems like a touch point we don’t need. We don’t need to be passing germs as we pass the plates. And, on the one hand, that’s o.k. Because, like Paul, I don’t want to make it seem like the church only wants your money. And, through this whole pandemic, the congregation’s giving has been very steady, even without passing the plates. And we’re grateful.

But, on the other hand, I said last week that when this pandemic is over, we will go back to passing the plates. Not because we see it as a better way to get more money, but because—as Paul says here—giving is a part of worship. Pausing during our worship service to give our gifts to God is an acceptable sacrifice. It’s a reminder to all of us that when we give, we are worshipping. We are pleasing God.

***Credited to Your Account***This passage is about how to think about our giving. When we give we are partnering in the work of the gospel. When we give we are pleasing God. And now, third “P”, when **we give it is for our profit.** When we give it is with faith that God will provide us with what we need.

Now we can go back to **verse 17:**

**17**Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account.

Paul is walking such a fine line here. It’s so easy for all of this to sound insincere. Like Paul is waving away their gifts with one hand, while the other hand is out there palm up.

But I believe Paul is really sincere here. I believe he means it when he says he can be content with a little or a lot. I believe him when he says Jesus is enough, that he can do all things through Christ.

And so, he means it when he says he is looking out for the Philippians. What he really desires is that “more be credited to [their] account.”

This is accounting language. Bookkeeping language. Paul already used this kind of language back in chapter 3, when he talked about how whatever he might have counted as profit he now considers loss for the sake of Christ (3:7). Christ is more valuable than anything else by far.

But Paul wants us to know that when we give to the Lord’s work, we do receive from the Lord.

It’s worth noting that the ancient world was a very transactional culture, very reciprocal. That is to say, the concept of doing somebody a favor out of simple kindness or grace was virtually unheard of before Christianity. The idea was, if you did something good for someone else, then they owed you. It might not get written down, but everybody knew. If you did somebody a favor, then they owed you a favor back.

Under that mindset, then, the financial gifts of the Philippians to Paul meant Paul was in their debt. But Paul is obviously not in a position to pay them back.

What he wants them to know, though, is that they weren’t just giving the money to Paul. They were giving it to God. And God is in a great position to pay them back, and then some. **That’s verse 19:**

**9**And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Now, we need to be careful here as well. Verses like this can easily be abused. I’ve talked before about how evil so-called church ministries are that promise if you just give to them, then God is going to repay your financial gifts many times over. There are too many pastors who peddle the name of Jesus in order to line their own pockets. That is the exact opposite of what Paul is getting at here. It’s why he’s being so careful to say that he doesn’t desire their gifts.

But as much as I want to avoid a “health and wealth” abuse of this passage, I can’t ignore that it does say that when you give to God, you are going to receive something in return. It will be to your profit. It will be good for you.

The phrase “what may be credited to your account” is hard to translate. It’s literally, “the fruit that increases to your account.” Some translations use the word “profit.” I think Paul is probably talking about spiritual fruit. He uses that word quite often actually. When you sacrifice, when you give out of a generous heart, you grow spiritually.

You receive grace and sanctification. When you bless others, you are blessed yourself. When you make an investment in the kingdom by faith, your faith grows!

And the God who is not poor is well-positioned to make sure you get everything you need. Maybe not everything you want. Probably not perfect health or a bulging bank account. But everything you need to be content in Christ and to glorify God through all your earthly days until He takes you home.

I know it has worked that way for me. I’ve said before that it was in our second year of marriage that Beth and I decided we were going to give at least 10% off the top of every paycheck. We didn’t have much at the time, I was full-time student and Beth was teaching and we were living in a high-rent suburb of Chicago. But we heard a sermon and we became convinced that if we waited until we felt we had enough to give we probably never would.

It stretched our faith. Sometimes we weren’t sure how we were going to pay our bills. But as we gave by faith, we grew in faith. It wasn’t just an investment in the church, it was an investment that yielded spiritual fruit in my heart.

And to this day, we’ve given at least 10%, and we’ve never been unable to eat or make a payment. Sometimes we’ve made some unwise choices, sometimes we’ve taken on more expenses than we should have, and we’ve had to adjust our budget and it has been tempting to think about changing how much we give away. Sometimes that 10% has looked like a solution to some problem; but we haven’t gone that route. And God has not let us down.

He hasn’t run out of resources. We’ve had to cut some other things back at times, but we haven’t gone without anything we really needed. God has proven again and again that we cannot out-give Him.

You can’t out-give God. God will not be in your debt. He gave it to you in the first place, and He will repay it all with compounding interest forever. He is debtor to none.

He is actually never receiving. He is always giving. Even when He’s giving through you to others or back to you. God is never in debt.

So don’t be afraid to give. And to give some more.

A few of you may need to be encouraged to give less. To save more. To be prudent with your funds. That’s between you and the Lord.

But my guess is that the vast majority of us need the other challenge. We need to be challenged to sacrificially give more so that we can partner in the work of the gospel and worship God and receive back from Him.

***No Turning Back***Finally, Paul wraps this letter up with an affectionate farewell. Again, we are reading someone else’s mail. **Verses 20-23:**

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

**21**Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. **22**All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.

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

In a lot of ways, this ending is typical of so many other letter endings in the New Testament. There’s a doxology, some greetings, and then a blessing at the end.

But what I want you to notice is how Christ-centered it is. Paul takes it all back to Jesus.

I called this series “No Turning Back” because I wanted to emphasize Paul’s call to us to keep moving forward in faith. To stand firm and press on and hunger for more and more of Jesus. The song we chose for our theme song uses the old camp chorus: “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” That’s the idea.

But the song is called “Christ is Enough.” And I think that really captures the argument of Paul’s letter as well. The reason he wants us to press on and stand firm and keep going after Jesus is because Jesus is all we need. He’s everything.

So whether it is deciding to give money to gospel causes or remaining faithful in the midst of hard things or just not being willing to settle for past experiences of grace, we need to be convinced that nothing compares to the all-surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus.

Christ is enough. He really is.