

Feb 5th 2012 "The Clue To Perseverance" Phil 4:13

This morning it is my desire to take a well known verse of Scripture and to make it come alive for you by uncovering the thoughts that lay behind the words that Paul uttered. That Scripture is Phil 4:13:-

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Some of you will remember Ray Hardy. He is one of our older members who lives in a nursing home and has been unable to attend church for some years. He was already past retirement age when he and his wife were converted out of the Herbert Armstrong Church of God and began attending this church. Together they were alive for Jesus. Then Lil Hardy was stricken with Alzheimers and her deterioration was speedy. Ray had to put her into a home and suffered the agony of watching her decline over many months and finally die. He suffered so much, and still misses her and longs to be with her. He often reminds me of the verse that kept him going then, and keeps him going still, and it's this verse. And I believe that Ray's use of this verse is extremely close to the way Paul first used these words about himself when he wrote to those Christians in Philippi. For this verse is about survival in the Lord's work. About perseverance in the Faith through the good and the bad. About the trust in Christ that seems to get stronger, when the circumstances would suggest that the opposite should be happening.

The context of these words is a thank you note. Paul had planted the church at Philippi many years before and the Christians in that place had never forgotten the debt they owed him. At the beginning, because of persecution, he had only been able to stay with them for a short time, but from then on they had kept up with the news of his journeys and had sought to encourage him through the financial gifts they sent, and through those who would visit and work alongside him for periods of time.

However, there had come a time when this persecuted group of Christians had been unable to support Paul. They had never stopped praying for him but financially or physically they could do nothing. Then things had improved for them, and when they heard that Paul was in prison they sent to him Epaphroditus, one of their elders to support Paul, and also financial gifts to help Paul survive.

So Paul writes in 4:10

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

So far so good!!! It's the classic 'thank you note'. The type that lets the giver know how much you appreciated their gift and hopefully leaves the way open for them to do the same again in the future. That I can appreciate.

When I was a boy I was very aware of three great Aunts I had on my father's side. They lived a long way away but every year they would send my older sister and myself a birthday card each with a 5 shilling postal order enclosed. Then after the joy of the gift came the task of writing the thank you letter. Mum had to pester me until I did it, and her most effective argument was—If you don't write it, you might not get your 5 bob next year!

But that's not what Paul uses his thank you note to do. He does exactly the opposite. He uses it to let them know that he is not saying thank you because he really needed their gift. Indeed he writes in the next verse:

¹¹ I am not saying this(I'm not rejoicing) because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

In other words Paul doesn't want them to think that without their gift he would not have been able to persevere. That without their gift he would not have been able to keep living every day for his savior. To keep on ministering for Him, with courage and fortitude. He was grateful for their gift but he was not dependent on it. He could have easily managed without it because of a truth he had learnt for himself and now wants them to learn too.

I have learned, he said, to be content, whatever the circumstances.

→That word content in the Greek means sufficient. Paul had learnt that whatever he had or didn't have, he had sufficient to keep on living, being, doing for Jesus.

At times he had no freedom. Beaten and abused—thrown into a prison cell, but there he had sufficient to serve Jesus. At times he had no food, no lodging, no money, but even then he had sufficient to be what Christ wanted him to be. There were times when all his friends had left him and even the other Christians leaders opposed him. Preaching seemed without success or encouragement, but even then he knew this sense of having sufficiency.

When his health failed and the road of life was hard he had learnt that he still had all he needed. Paul never looked for the excuse , never whinged because he had learnt sufficiency.

And conversely when he had plenty of all those things he did not depend upon them, or grasp them tightly to himself, or let them become his pride for the sufficiency he had was not dependent upon such things.

Now I'm not sure how it was for Christians in Paul's day but it does seem to me that in our Society we put a lot of emphasis on the need to have things in order to do what God wants us to do, as far as ministry for Him is concerned. We need time, we need better health, we need money, we need to be younger or maybe older, we need this particular training seminar or better facilities.....And not having any of those things quickly becomes our excuse for not doing. Paul writes in v12

I have learned the secret of being content(sufficient) in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Paul has learnt the secret of always feeling sufficient to do or be everything that God wants him to do and be, and in the next verse he tells us what that secret is:-

¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

The actual Greek text of this verse puts the words that Paul wants to emphasize first, and it looks like this.

All things I can do through the One empowering me.

The 'all things' relates to the tasks God had for Paul to do—big and small. The person God wanted him to be and the testimony God wanted him to live out. Paul had discovered that he had the sufficiency within himself to do all those things because of the One, Jesus, who empowered him.

That word empowered is the Greek word **Dunamos** from which we get our English word, **Dynamite**.

We may occasionally say about a person who never seems to put themselves out in order to do or achieve something—Christians who use every excuse to avoid extending themselves for the Lord,—' they need a

stick of dynamite behind them!’ Paul I’m sure would admit to times when he sensed the power of Christ like a stick of dynamite behind him.

I know I have. Times when I just haven’t felt sufficient to do what I felt God was calling me to do and I’ve looked for any excuse to avoid it. Going to see someone at the end of a long day when I felt tired and washed out. Preaching when I have no confidence in what I have prepared. Facing someone in a conflict situation or challenging another about commitment to Christ. And on those occasions when despite those feelings I have chosen to be obedient I have felt the dynamite of Christ’s power behind me. The words have flowed in a way that surprised me. The response of the other person has amazed me. The sufficiency of Christ has astounded me.

And I know that many of you have known something similar. When you have felt really unable, stressed, uncertain, unworthy, unwilling to do a certain task but you have done so anyhow, and Christ has made you so sufficient that you didn’t just do it:--you seemed to do it better than normal.

What Paul was sharing with the Philippian believers that day in his thank you note, was a challenge. A challenge to let nothing stop them from doing what God had laid upon their heart. To let no excuse derail them but to trust in the fact that Christ would empower them for all things.

The challenge of Phil 4:13 for us this morning is still the same. That we check out whether there are reasons or excuses that we are giving the Lord for not continuing, or not doing the things that He wants us to do. To honestly ask ourselves if there is anything that we are allowing to stop us from being obedient—and then to replace our doubt, fear, hesitation with our Faith in Christ to fill us with that explosive power that will make us effective for Him.