

What's the Message? Part 3: "All Things"

Philippians 4:10 ESV I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. **11** Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. **12** I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13** *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

- I. Philippians 4:13 is arguably in the "Top 10" of the world's most recognized and quoted Bible verses.
 - A. If you mark or highlight your Bible, there is a better than average chance that this one is marked. I know it is in almost all the Bibles I own.
 - B. We love this verse so much that we surround ourselves with reminders of Philippians 4:13.
 1. Doing a quick search on Amazon, I found almost 12,000 available items that are branded with some variation of this verse. The list includes...
 - a) iPhone and iPad cases, all manner of wall art, t-shirts, watches, coffee mugs, Bible covers, throw pillows and blankets, journals, golf balls, yard signs, bumper stickers, bookmarks, keychains, tote bags, sticky note holders for your desk
 - b) refrigerator magnets, weight lifting straps (to put the cross in your cross fit routine!), ball point pens, door mats, shower curtains, back packs, license plates, I.D. badge holders, angel figurines, clocks, aluminum water bottles, socks, wrestling singlets
 - c) insulated lunch bags, wallets, guitar picks, "onesies" for your baby, cupcake toppers, covers for your portable video game system, checkbook covers, magnetic mailbox covers, pet I.D. tags, mousepads, letter openers, and messenger bags.
 2. Then there are the books: Some on weight loss, some on business, some for children, some on living a spiritually blessed life. There are devotionals for men, women and people with disabilities. There are self-help and motivational books, all with "doing all things through Christ" as their theme.
 3. And music! I found 315 songs on Amazon Music with "I can do all things" as a part of the title. You could have an Philippians 4:13 playlist that would consist of over 31 full-length albums!
 4. Additionally, a quick Google image search will turn up 100's of different designs for Philippians 4:13 tattoos!
 5. Christian athletes love to inscribe Philippians 4:13 next to their autographs. It is probably second only to John 3:16 in popularity among famous Christian athletes.
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- II. There are 31,102 verses in the Bible, so what is it about **this verse** that has so captured our imagination?
 - A. The first and most obvious answer is that it is a **tremendous promise**. It is a promise of strength to be given to us in order to accomplish tasks and overcome difficulties.

1. Many times in my life I have found myself in a tough situation in my work or family, or struggling to complete an important yet difficult task, only to be reminded by the Holy Spirit that, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
 2. This verse and many like it remind me that nothing good has ever happened in my life that was not orchestrated by God's allowance. I have never received any gift or blessing that was not bestowed by my heavenly Father's gracious hand.
- B. **James 1:16 ESV** Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. **17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above**, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
1. When James says "no variation or shadow due to change" he is reminding us that God is consistent, that you can count on him. He will always supply his strength and bestow upon us good and perfect gifts.
 2. So if that is clearly the message of Philippians 4:13 (which I don not dispute), why would we include it in a series on often misinterpreted passages?
- III. The problem is that many people who approach this verse have forgotten one of the primary rules of Biblical interpretation: The crucial role of **context**.
- A. The dictionary defines "context" as "the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.
- B. If we fail to understand the context (the circumstances that form the setting for this statement, Philippians 4:13), a few things are likely to happen.
1. We will inadvertently diminish it's meaning, drawing a boundary and limit around the Apostle Paul's original meaning that shouldn't be there.
 - a) That is to say that we can actually imagine this powerful passage to mean less than what it actually means. In so doing we limit our understanding of the sufficiency of Christ in us, who makes us able to face "all things".
 - b) The context, instead of limiting or restricting the passage, will help us to see **everything** that God wants us to see, know everything he wants us to know, and experience everything he wants us experience through his word.
 2. We will potentially misplace the focus of the verse, causing us to concentrate on the wrong thing.
 - a) Taking a scripture out of context will make us miss the main point of the text.
 - b) Only when we understand the context can we be assured that we are looking at the right thing in the passage; getting God's message and not creating message of our own design.
 3. We will make the scriptures into one giant fortune cookie, to which we look to give us platitudes and helpful hints instead of allowing it to be the living and complete Word of God.
- C. Not discovering the context of a passage is like coming up at the tail end of someone else's conversation and and trying to understand what is being discussed and joining in. Occasionally, you might get lucky, but more often than not, you're going to look clueless.

- IV. So what exactly is the context of Philippians 4:13?
- A. Paul is writing to a church that he planted 13 or 14 years previous to the writing of this letter. In fact, the church at Philippi was the first church Paul founded in Europe.
 - B. In between planting this church and writing his letter to them, he planted other churches and written several other letters to those churches.
 - 1. But his ministry of church planting and letter-writing should not be construed as some celebrity preacher cake walk! Listen to his account of his years in ministry...
 - 2. **2 Corinthians 11:24 ESV** Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; **26** on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; **27** in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.
 - C. In fact, when Paul wrote this letter, he was sitting in a Roman prison cell, awaiting trial before Caesar as a troublemaker in the empire.
 - 1. So he writes from prison to the Philippians. The purpose of the letter was two-fold:
 - a) To thank the church for it's continued financial, material and prayer support.
 - (1) This was comforting to Paul. Being a prisoner in Paul's time was a tremendous social stigma, and yet the church stood by him.
 - (2) **Philippians 4:14 ESV** Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. **15** And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. **16** Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. **17** Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. **18** I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.
 - b) To encourage the church to continue its progress in the gospel.
 - (1) Though the letter is overwhelmingly positive (especially compared to other writings of Paul's like 1 Corinthians and Galatians), Paul tells the church to continue to press in to all that God has called them to be as saints.
 - (2) **Philippians 3:14 ESV** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **15** Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.
 - 2. In chapter 1, Paul addresses the very real possibility that he will be executed for his proclamation of the gospel.

- a) **Philippians 1:19 ESV** for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, **20** as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, **whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**
 - b) Paul's earnest desire that Christ be honored in his body, whether by life or death, sets the context for the passage from Chapter 4 we began with today. Let's take another look at it...
- D. **Philippians 4:11b ESV** for I have learned in whatever situation I am to **be content. 12** I know how to be **brought low**, and I know how to **abound**. In **any and every circumstance**, I have learned the secret of **facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do ALL THINGS through him who strengthens me.**
- 1. Often this verse is assumed to be a kind of "magic bullet" or "trump card" to ensure that we can successfully climb every mountain, overcome any obstacle, make every shot, win every battle, etc.
 - a) But that is clearly not the context of the man who wrote it! He is not saying that he can do all things through Christ as a guarantee of success, as much as a guarantee of endurance.
 - b) John Piper has said that, "One of the most important things to remember about that amazing verse is that the 'all things' includes some pretty hard things."
 - 2. Charles Ellicott (18th century Bible commentator) says "I can do all things" is properly understood by the context to mean, 'I have strength in all things,'; to **bear** all things, rather than to "**do**" all things.
- E. The apostle is telling us that his life is not defined by his circumstances, for better or worse, but by the overcoming, resurrection power of Jesus Christ!
- 1. The Stoics were Greek-influenced teachers and thinkers very popular during the time of the Apostle Paul. They taught that the best indication of an individual's philosophy was not **what a person said** but **how that person behaved**.
 - a) Stoicism taught the value of **self-control** and **inner fortitude** as a means of overcoming destructive emotions; the philosophy held that becoming a clear and unbiased thinker (unaffected by personal misfortune) allows one to understand the nature of life, and to be wise.
 - b) This is why we say that someone who is unemotional in the face of disaster is greeting their hardship with "stoicism".
 - 2. But Paul drew a clear distinction between this popular cultural ideal and the claims of the gospel.
 - a) Stoicism said that we face life with a stiff upper lip so that we can have a deeper humanity, but the humanity is still our responsibility to cultivate.
 - b) Paul says that he could bear up under all things ("do" all things), not because of a strength that he has mastered self-discipline, but rather **through Christ** who gives him strength.

3. Which would you prefer? Your own inconsistent attempts at self-mastery in order to deal with the craziness of the world around you, or would you rather have an unlimited supply of the strength that is given by Christ?
- V. It is at this point where we see the fallacy of the way many in our culture interpret what Paul said in Philippians 4:13. Often it is merely a renewed stoicism or self-will disguised by Christ's name in order for us to give our ambitions increased credibility.
- A. Philippians 4:13 is basically constructed of 3 parts:
 1. "I can do"
 2. "all things"
 3. "through Christ"
 - B. Culturally, many in our culture have jettisoned the last third of Paul's complete thought to form an entire new and foreign thought: "I can do all things."
 1. This is not speculation on my part. When I was looking at all those items on Amazon and all those tattoos on Google it was extremely common for people to shorten the verse to simply say, "I can do all things", yet they would still include the reference to Philippians 4:13!
 2. But when you remove Christ from the equation of this verse, you change it's meaning entirely! It becomes a statement of mere humanism and self-idolization.
 - a) Even when the full verse was included, it was usually emblazoned across an image of a basketball, or on the cover of some kind of motivational success oriented book.
 - b) Any casual observer, having no exposure to the scripture or the gospel would most likely conclude that the true meaning of the verse was, "I can do all **good** things, I can achieve all **successful** things, I can earn all **rewarding** things through Christ who gives me strength!"
 3. But this was clearly not the limited meaning of Paul's thought. Without a doubt he gave credit to Christ for every success. He calls it "abounding" and "abundance", and "facing plenty".
 - a) It is good and right to praise God for our wins, and to chalk them up to God's credit; evidence that he is good, and not that we are deserving.
 - b) But I think that this verse may be teaching us that God doesn't always define the win in the same way we do!
 4. This is because Paul also says that Christ gives him strength to be "brought low", and to face "hunger" and "need". And in this we find the explosive power of this verse! Here we find that God defines the win, not by our frail definition of success, but by our increasing dependence on him!
 5. It is a win for God's ultimate glory when we can **not only** say the we can do sports, or business, or weight loss, or family through Christ who gives us strength; but we can also say I can do cancer, and abandonment, and lack, and loss, and surviving abuse through Christ who gives me strength! Truly I can do **ALL THINGS** through Him who gives me strength!
 - C. You will only understand the true meaning of Philippians 4:13 when you flip it around. Instead of "**I CAN** do **ALL THINGS** through Christ who gives me strength", we must come to recognize that "I can do **NOTHING WITHOUT** Christ, who gives me strength.

1. I can taste no success that will last. Every gift, every talent, and every skill will be corrupted by my own humanness. Every trial, tribulation, and hardship will consume me.
 2. Jesus said it bluntly to his disciples so they would get off on the right foot. **John 15:5b ESV** "...apart from me you can do *nothing*."
- VI. How does this work? How are we able to face the good, the bad, and the ugly of this life through Christ who gives us strength? The simple answer is that it is a miracle of grace. But I think we get a clue from Paul's beautiful words in chapter 3 of Philippians...
- A. **Philippians 3:7 ESV** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. **8** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith — **10** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
 - B. Paul is saying here that Christ alone is his treasure, everything else being "rubbish". He says he has willingly suffered the loss of "all things". "All things"... does that phrase sound familiar? (I can do all things...)
 1. His point is that because he has let go of "all things" in order to gain the one true treasure.
 2. He can do "all things" because since he has gained Christ, he realizes that when he succeeds, he adds nothing to what he already has, which is everything!
 3. When he fails he suffers no loss, because in having Christ, he has everything!
 - a) He is the pearl of great price and the treasure hidden in a field! He is the great reward of the descendants of Abraham! Knowing him is "surpassing worth" as Paul says here!
 - b) You may notice that I refer to Philippians 3 a lot. There is a reason for that. I want Christ to be my only treasure! I want to want him more than the glittery piles of nothingness in this world that are constantly calling my name!

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,
 I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
 I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land,
 I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.

Than to be the king of a vast domain
 And be held in sin's dread sway
 I'd rather have Jesus than anything
 This world affords today.

I'd rather have Jesus than worldly applause,
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame,
I'd rather be true to His holy name.

Than to be the king of a vast domain
And be held in sin's dread sway
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today...

Philippians 4:13 only works if Christ is all you've got.

My prayer is that City View becomes a people who have nothing but Jesus so that we'll be a people who have everything, succeeding and suffering only through Christ who gives us strength.