

“Diving Deep - My Strength”

Scripture: Philippians 4:13

Graphics: scuba gear, water, diving, bible, strength

Big Truth: The word of God guides our lives, but so often we skim the surface with our reading or bible study. This series will take us deeper into common verses that hold incredible meaning for our lives. The people of the Panama UMC are called to dive deeper into the Word for life.

Focus Phrase: Contentment is the strength of Jesus in my life in every circumstance.

1. Introduction

A. Let's PRAY!

- B. Diving Deep is the title of this series of messages as we begin 2022.
- C. Scuba divers are able to go deeper, see more, and learn what they can below the ocean's surface...to see more than they could ever see from the surface, even if snorkeling or swimming.
- D. This series is about diving deep into **one verse** of scripture each week...to go deeper, see more, and learn all we can...**SO THAT** we can apply that to our lives...to be growing disciples of Jesus Christ for life.
- E. Last week, we dove deeply into John 3:5, when Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” Salvation is offered to anyone who accepts God’s grace in Jesus and is born again!
- F. Today, we’re heading to Paul’s letter to the Philippians, chapter 4, verse 13.
- G. If last week was about salvation in Jesus, this week’s verse gives us this truth (write this down): **Contentment is the strength of Jesus in my life in every circumstance.**
- H. As we dive deeply this morning, begin thinking, with me, about your circumstances right now. Your life circumstances. Maybe there’s one thing that’s keeping you awake at night. Maybe there’s joy because things are good! I suspect that, if you’re like me, there’s a perplexing mix of good, sad, happy, frustrating, and everything in-between.
- I. God never promises that life will be easy...He only promises to walk with us through it all. How we view our circumstances and future makes a difference.
- J. Let’s get our diving gear on and plunge over the edge of the boat...to dive deep. Turn with me in your bibles to Philippians 4:13...let’s read this together.

2. Scripture

A. READ Philippians 4:13 (together)

- B. As we said last week, there’s always a danger of pulling ONE verse out its context and proclaiming that it means something it doesn’t mean - that the original

author didn't intend. There's also a danger that the verse will lose its meaning entirely. So, we want to avoid that like a hungry great white shark at 100 feet below the surface. Amen? Sharks are scary.

- C. Let's get some context for today for the verse we just read...
- i. The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the young church in Philippi from a prison cell. Paul was being held in that prison on capital charges...and was pretty sure he'd die there in that cell.
 - ii. Before Paul went to prison that time, he had previously started the church in Philippi somewhere around 50AD. He was writing, now, from prison, to reassure his readers that he was doing OK and to tell them that their friend Epaphroditus was leaving Paul to come back to them.
 - iii. But the other reason Paul wrote this letter was to give the Philippians thanks for a personal gift that they'd sent to Paul.
 - iv. So, you have Paul in prison. The church sent a gift to Paul to him...which, helped, even though he was still in prison.
 - v. And now Paul was giving thanks to the ones who sent the gift...and he was rejoicing because of their love and concern for him.
- D. Does't that sound a lot like our lives, at times? We have difficult circumstances, and yet there are blessings mixed in with the pain...there are sleepless nights, but also the grace of God, oftentimes through others.
- E. On the surface, Paul was writing to a group of Christians who sent him some money so he could eat in prison.
- F. Yet, the deeper we go, the more we see. Let's look around a bit...
- i. Once we get to Philippians chapter 4, verse 10, Paul was wrapping up this letter, saying thanks and giving them some insight for Christian living.
 - ii. Yet, he also took time to make this a teaching moment.
 - iii. Even though he was thankful for the gift, his thanks was not JUST for the gift...and not JUST for their concern for him.
 - iv. Paul was rejoicing and thankful for something WAY more profound. He was thankful and rejoicing for the fact that even though he was in prison, (listen) HE WAS **CONTENT**. Turn to your neighbor and say, "He was content!"
 - v. Sure, the gift from the Philippians helped that...but he reminded them that he has, in his life, experienced great plenty and been, at times well-fed.
 - vi. Other time, like in prison, he knew what it meant to be in need, and be hungry and cold and lonely.

- vii. So, Paul said, it's great that you sent this gift - thank you - but the secret to being filled with joy and able to give thanks is not just money and food.
- viii. The secret is that Jesus has given him the humility and confident power to be CONTENT no matter what!
- ix. Compared to having Jesus as Lord and Savior of his life - that Jesus wrecked his life of wealth and well-being on the road to Damascus that day - compared to JESUS, everything else PALES...it's rubbish, Paul would say in another letter.
 - a. Hunger isn't easy, but Jesus is bigger than hunger.
 - b. Financial need or crisis isn't easy at all, but Jesus is stronger than money.
 - c. Having a full stomach and a warm house is great, but being obedient to Jesus - even if it means giving it away - is SO MUCH more eternal!
 - d. Compared to Jesus, whatever his circumstances, Paul wanted the Philip-
pians to know that he was content. And because he was content, he
could focus on the mission of telling people how Jesus changes lives.
 - e. The secret to being content in ANY circumstance, Paul wrote, was this:
"I can do ALL things through Him who strengthens me."
 - i) I can do hunger or being well fed.
 - ii) I can do having plenty or having little or nothing.
 - iii) I can do difficult circumstance or easy.
 - iv) I can do young or old, healthy or sick.
 - v) In a different letter to the Corinthians, Paul went as far to say that he
can do life or death...it doesn't matter. Because, Jesus.
- G. Now, you may have heard our verse for today...seen it on a bumper sticker...
on a plaque...shared it on social media during a difficult time.
- H. And while there's great encouragement in this verse because of Paul's circum-
stances, here are some cautions with this verse.
 - i. First, this verse is not a free pass to do what you want and slap a Jesus stick-
er on it and expect that He'll make it happen.
 - a. I want a new car. *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*
And a new car would be sweet. C'mon Jesus!
 - b. I'm sick of my job. I want a new one. *I can do all things through him
who strengthens me.* And a raise would be good too, Jesus.
 - c. I want to win this game and make the playoffs. *I can do all things
through him who strengthens me.* We're going to win for sure! Let's
GO, Jesus (you're watching the game, right?)

- d. You get the idea! It seems silly when we say it like that, but we DO that. We have this notion that Jesus is our Genie and will do what we want because, well, ***I (I) can do all things through him who strengthens ME.***
- e. Jesus wants to change you, before your circumstances change. He wants you to be thankful for the car you **have**, the job you're **doing**...to be thankful for the ability to play or watch the game. It's a matter of humility and contentment in ALL things - win or lose, hungry or well-fed, happy or sad.
- ii. The other caution is that we think, "If I just try harder and pray more and maybe squint, I can create the future that I really really want...and then Jesus will bless that."
 - a. And if it doesn't happen, we get angry with God. We, at the very least, get disappointed, feel trapped, or feel like we're entitled to something more than we have.
 - b. We want our circumstances to change SO BADLY that we do things we later regret. We haven't taken it to the Lord in prayer. We've day-dreamed about it and with enough brain-power, think we can materialize it.
 - c. The reality is, your circumstances may not ever change. But God wants to change YOU to be more holy, humble, and ready to serve Him. And when that happens, Paul says, you can do ALL things through HIM who gives you strength.

3. Application

- A. Remember where we're heading: Contentment is the strength of Jesus in my life in every circumstance.
- B. So, as we dive deeply into this word today, what is it that God is trying to tell us in His Word and contentment? And how do we apply that to our lives today?
- C. The deep dive shows us SO much more:
 - i. First, **Give thanks to God and others despite your circumstances.**
 - a. Paul was thankful despite being in jail...and hungry and cold and lonely. It gave Paul great encouragement to have contact with the Philippians and to receive their gift (whatever that was). Despite it all, Paul gave thanks...first to God and then to the church.
 - b. A heart of gratitude always shifts your thinking from self-focus to other-focus. And when you can focus on God and others, then your circumstances don't dominate your whole mind and thinking.
 - c. You may be hurting or distracted or find yourself in prison, physically or emotionally. You may feel trapped in a circumstance that seems to have

no end and within which you can't affect change. Yet, you DO have the opportunity to give thanks...nothing can take that away from you.

- d. It's definitely easier to give thanks in good times, when there's less weighing you down. But, the next challenge is coming...the next lonely night...the next difficult conversation...or death of a loved one. Give thanks in ALL circumstances, and then allow the Holy Spirit to help you rejoice in spite of some difficulties.
 - e. Give thanks to God AND give thanks to others.
- ii. **Second, make plans and dream dreams but always put those before the Lord in prayer for guidance.**
- a. Contentment is the strength to accept the circumstances you're in, not give up or give in.
 - b. God calls us to dream about a future and make plans for what's next. Contentment is not apathy or defeatism. Contentment is strength because it puts your feet on the ground and helps you to make a stand.
 - c. In football, the linemen get into that three-point stance because they know that in 2 seconds, someone will come across the line to try to knock them over. They have no way to predict the future. That doesn't mean they don't get ready for it.
 - d. You can't predict the future. You only know where you are today. Being content in this season means that you can look ahead with hope and pray for God's guidance.
 - e. Being restless and anxious about where you find yourself, wanting desperately to change, makes us push too hard for change.
 - f. Make plans and dream dreams, but then let Jesus take the wheel.
- iii. **Third thing (and maybe the point of this whole verse): be content with Jesus in your circumstance until God changes things or changes you.**
- a. Patience. There...I said it. We have to have patience.
 - b. Look, Jesus doesn't leave you in the dust. He's walking with you. Sometimes, you and I either think Jesus doesn't understand us and is way behind, or that he's too far out in front for you to catch up. Remember Emmanuel, God WITH us? That's Jesus!
 - c. He's going to either change your circumstance as he walks with you or change you IN the circumstance.
 - d. Either way, change takes patience. Romans 12:12 says, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

- e. Paul had no expectations about his circumstance changing. In fact, he was pretty sure he was going to be executed. He was content in that... and yet, he was also content to suffer more for Jesus.
 - f. It was ALL about Jesus...and so he was patient in the circumstance. Jesus had changed him to such a degree that he was content.
- iv. Finally (and this one's about our mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ by giving everyone in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus): **share in the circumstances of others to help THEM be content.**
- a. Paul's main goal for writing this letter was to invite the Philippian church into the suffering...but also to share in his joy from their gift.
 - b. Entering some else's world is what Jesus did every day. He sat and ate with sinners, healed lepers, he invited the woman at the well and Nicodemus to think in a new way about God. He shared their circumstances. He listened and loved and walked with them.
 - c. It's really that simple: listen, share life, and let the Jesus in you greet the Holy Spirit of Jesus working in the other.
 - d. We get opportunities every day to do life together. And our technology has made that even easier in some ways. Reach to someone in a tough spot. Tell them you're praying (and then PRAY - or better yet pray WITH them right then and there).
 - e. Give them genuine words of encouragement from scripture. Don't throw platitudes at them. Give them your heart-felt care and love.
- D. When we dive deep into Philippians 4:13, it's so much more than what God can do for me. It's about finding the contentment that comes no matter what circumstance...no matter what trial or success.
- E. Contentment is the strength of Jesus in my life in every circumstance.

4. Conclusion

- A. Stephen Curry is a top basketball player in the National Basketball Association (NBA). He is known for inscribing Philippians 4:13 on his sneakers to remind him that he succeeds by God's power.
- B. One Sunday night, his team lost a game to the Cleveland Cavaliers and he was devastated. He could not understand how his team lost when he always declared, "he could do all things through Christ who strengthens him." He thought this inspirational Bible verse meant he could win as many NBA titles as he desired. After the game, he went to his locker and pulled out his Bible and went through Philippians 4:13 again to see whether he had gotten it correct all these years. To his shock, he found the real meaning of the verse when he read it in context. He read the adjacent verses and discovered that the verse meant

learning to be content in any situation. It didn't mean doing anything at all because of Jesus. He sat down in his locker room in disbelief. (<https://lordsguidance.com/blogs/bible-verse-meaning/what-does-philippians-4-13-mean>)

- C. Contentment is the strength of Jesus in my life in every circumstance.
- D. Diving deep into contentment gives us courage to follow Jesus for life.
- E. Diving deep, we find that strength is not something WE muster, but comes from the One who holds everything in His hands. Jesus.
- F. Let's Pray!**