

Think About It: Making sense of the the most misunderstood and misused passages of the Bible

Bonus- Part 5: Can Christians Really Do Anything?

Philippians 4:13

IN: Phil 4:13 I can achieve my dreams! I'm gonna win the game! Get that promotion!

I can do it! I can get what I want! Just gotta claim this verse and believe in myself.

Climb that mountain! Reach for the Stars!

{Head Shake} Sorry, Champ. That's not how it works.

BUT... if we actually look into what this passage is getting at, we can find one of the most important/encouraging/freeing gifts of following Jesus...

So Let's talk about it together.

WE: I know... "1st Jer 29:11 and now this?! Jon, Stop ruining my favorite verses!"

I'm not. What we have been trying to do in this series is to give the tools to discover the real story the biblical writings convey.

When we do the work of understanding the BW's properly we find something even better than what we thought they first meant.

We discover the real life Jesus offers.

The more we understand the meaning of the BW's, the more we discover the life Jesus offers.

And the reverse is also true... When we misuse and misunderstand scripture we miss out on the real life Jesus offers

And when we misuse and misunderstand this passage, in particular, we set ourselves up for discontentment, and circumstantial faith that rises and falls based on what is happening in that moment in our lives.

We claim that we can do all things through the power of Jesus and then we either succeed and Jesus starts becoming a lucky charm/genie Jesus/we start thinking he gives us a power we can tap into b/c we're the special ones...

Or we fail and either think we didn't have enough faith or that Jesus somehow let us down and we didn't get what we deserve b/c we "claimed" this verse.

So let's use our tools and study rhythm one more time and discover what this passage is really talking about and in the process we will discover...

Understanding scripture in its real context can grow real faith in our context.

Genre: Philippians, Epistle- Letter, written in Act 5 (Church) of our construct, telling these JF's how to play their role in the story of God in their 1st century context.

Written by Apostle Paul and Timothy to the JF's in the Roman colony of Philippi while Paul is in prison somewhere between 54-62 AD.

Philippi- Roman colony in Macedonia: Like a Mini Rome abroad - People were roman citizens. Latin was used along with Greek, Roman law controlled local administration and taxes

Many of its citizens were veterans of Roman armies.

So there is an influence of Roman patriotic nationalism in the surrounding culture.

Which also means likely there was influence of Stoicism on the population's thinking...

Rough paraphrase- emphasizes virtue/self-sufficiency.

In Acts 16 we read about Paul traveling to Philippi with his partner Silas/or Silvanus- my unconfirmed ancestor

They share the good news of Jesus' new Kingdom and start the first church in Europe

They heal a demon possessed slave girl who was being exploited by her owners b/c she could apparently tell the future and Paul & Silas are thrown in prison.

While in prison, in the middle of the night an earthquake occurs and the prison doors swing open. P&S stay in place and the jailer and his family become JF's

After P&S move on, the new JF's continued to face opposition as they were claiming Jesus was the true king of the world in a colony full of people devoted to Rome and its power, but remained a vibrant JF community.

Read the Context of the Whole Text

Remember it's a letter so if just jump into the middle, going to be confusing. So need to read whole thing like any letter.

Paul thanks the Philippian JF's for their partnership in spreading the good news about Jesus and his kingdom.

And he tells them that being in prison has actually been a great opportunity. Many of the guards have heard the good news and his imprisonment has emboldened other JF'S to talk about Jesus.

He says he's not afraid to die b/c dying would mean he will finally be with Jesus but it would be bad for them b/c he wouldn't be around to help anymore... so hed rather not right now.

He then instructs these Roman citizens to embrace their new identity as citizens of heaven- by having the same attitude as Jesus- though being God, he humbled himself to serve humanity.

Then talks about how knowing Jesus is so much better than all of the religious performances he used to think were important

As he finishes his letter he thanks the Philippian JF's for the gifts and support they have sent him while he has been in prison

And that's where we find our passage...

Engage the Text: Read it in its immediate context, chunks like paragraphs, not ind verses... and ask questions

V. 10-11- learned to be content

First... according to Paul, we can learn to be content in even the toughest of circumstances.

Contentment is learned.

But what does he mean by *Content*? Let's look it up on Blue Letter Bible...

BLB: Greek word means sufficient for one's self, strong enough or possessing enough to need no aid or support; independent of external circumstances; content with one's lot, with one's means, through the slenderest.

We see that this word is only used once in entire BW's here by Paul: should usually make us pay a little more attention.

Seems like an idea that would appeal to the former soldier/stoic readers or at least those familiar with the Stoic ideas... Self-sufficiency... not needing anything external... "Yeah, you're speaking my language... how can I do that better?!"

V. 12

Secret?- Let's look it up on Blue Letter Bible again

BLB: Phrase: "Learned the secret" Being initiated into the mysteries (hmm what does that mean? Later...), also can mean to be fully instructed..

- Also only time this phrase is used in the NT
- Might be important. In a bit we'll see if the experts say anything about it.

But first... so... What is this secret?

V. 13

So the secret Paul has learned (or somehow been initiated into) is how to be content in every circumstance...

He can do (go through/be content in) all things... What does he mean "all things?" All of what things?

Everything he just mentioned- having nothing/everything, having empty/full stomach, w/ plenty/little.

How can he be content? Through Christ/Jesus who strengthens him.

Paul has just explained something we all know but don't always put into words... or put into practice... or even know how to have for ourselves...

True contentment is not dependent on our circumstances.

We all know of people who seem to have everything yet are still unsatisfied/unhappy/discontent...

But we also know of others who seem to not have much but are content, at peace, even joyful... they say "I don't have much but I have all I need."

It's a contentment that comes not from self-reliance but God reliance. Trusting that he is good, that he is in control, and that he loves us.

So just from our own reading and questions and study... we see this famous passage isn't about achieving our dreams/winning a game/getting a promotion but being content whether we achieve our dreams or not.

Being content whether we have everything we want or nothing we want.

And it's not a contentment that comes from w/in us, our trying harder, ignoring problems, ascribing to the right philosophy of life, etc

It comes from Jesus... learning who he is and that he will give everything we need and relying on his perfect love to be with us in any and every situation... as Paul expands on further in the next 2 paragraphs...

V. 14-20

So this all seems to make sense... BUT.... Are we on the right track?

Are we understanding this properly?... Can we get some of our detailed questions answered, is there some more insight someone who has devoted their life to studying this can tell us?

Ask the Experts

Francis Foulkes, "Philippians," in New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition, ed.

He could honestly say that he had learnt the secret of contentment with outward circumstances, whether he had little or much. He knew that his Lord would not fail to give him what was necessary and to strengthen him to face every situation. In writing these things Paul uses two words that had significant religious and philosophical use in those days. The word translated content (Gk. autarkēs) means 'self-sufficient'. It was regarded by the Stoics as high virtue to be detached from outward circumstances and to have resources in oneself to meet every situation. Paul uses the word in the sense of his being independent of circumstances, but his all-sufficient resources were, he said, through him who

gives me strength, the living Lord Jesus. The other word, translated 'I have learned the secret,' was used in the mystery cults for initiation into a secret. Paul's secret of living was an open secret, available for all who would walk the way of Christ. It was the secret of contentment, since to know Christ and to be called to serve him was 'unsearchable riches' (Eph. 3:8). How far we know the secret of contentment and to what degree we are proving the sufficiency of Christ for all the demands of our lives are always challenging questions for us as Christians.

Ok so we were on the right track... It does seem Paul was using those words on purpose to get the Philippians attention.

To help them understand that this secret was a reliance on Jesus... that a JF's strength doesn't come from w/in them but from Jesus and they can be content/sufficient by relying on him.

The secret to contentment in any and every situation is learning to rely on Jesus.

We can be content with whatever he gives us b/c we know he loves us and He is in control.

Cool... knowledge is fun! but... it's actually pointless if it doesn't help grow/transform us...

YOU: Do Something with It.

What are your circumstances right now?

Have you achieved your dreams, are you chasing your dreams, are you about ready to give up on your dreams?

Are you content? What/who are you relying on? What/who are you trusting in to be content?

If it is something circumstantial, it will eventually fail you- health, money, success, relationships, yourself.

But if you can learn to rely on Jesus. To choose to trust his love and provision, no matter what is happening around you, you will discover the secret... **The life Jesus offers is a content life.**

Ex. Brag on my wife- Car died. 1st world prob. I wanted to just go in debt and get exactly what want. She said we are fine. God will take care of us if need new car. Prayed/Kids prayed... Waited. Felt time to ask. Got exactly what we needed for perfect price.

The content life is worth it... Obviously I still need to practice it sooo...

To practice... **Read Philippians.** (Maybe watch the Bible Project Overview first)

Underline the words Joy and Rejoice

Pray: Jesus, show me I can trust you in every circumstance, good and bad.

WE: So, is it wrong to have Phil 4:13 on your walls or tattooed on your arm? No. (Face? maybe)

Is it wrong to have hopes and dreams, even ambitions to do something more? No.

Phil 4:13 is a great promise that no matter what happens, whether things work out or if they don't, relying on Jesus will bring the true contentment you want.

When understood in its context, this passage gives us something so much better than a pithy inspirational quote... It gives us the secret to finding the life we actually want.. The life Jesus actually offers.

When we study the real meaning of scripture, Jesus transforms our real life.

Summary:

Many passages in the biblical writings have been reduced to a set of pithy inspirational quotes. When this happens we set ourselves up for discontentment and a situational faith that can't stand up to real life. When we use the right tools, however, we can discover the truth these passages are actually conveying and we can discover the life Jesus truly offers.

Main Points:

The more we understand the meaning of the biblical writings, the more we discover the life Jesus offers.

Understanding scripture in its real context can grow real faith in our context.

Contentment is learned.

True contentment is not dependent on our circumstances.

The secret to contentment in any and every situation is learning to rely on Jesus.

The life Jesus offers is a content life.

When we study the real meaning of scripture, Jesus transforms our real life.

Weekly Challenge:

Read Philippians.

Interact: Underline the words Joy and Rejoice

Pray: Jesus, show me I can trust you in every circumstance, good and bad.

Discussion Questions:

1. What stood out to, bothered, or challenged you from this week's episode?
2. Why do you think it's so easy to take passages like Philippians 4:13 out of their original context and have them mean what we want them to mean for our personal context?
3. Read Philippians 4:10-13. Have you seen this idea of contentment through Jesus play out in your life or someone else's experience?
4. How would you describe your current situation? How could/does relying on Jesus change your experience?
5. How can your group pray for you this week?

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SHOW NOTES

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 | FOR SALEM in AUGUST → Ice Cream FOR Everyone

Meet at Wes Bennett Park in South Salem on Sunday, August 21st to hand out free ice cream in the afternoon. Why? Because God loves them, and loves to give gifts. More details forthcoming, but mark your calendar.

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