

THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE

Phil 4.19-23

INTRODUCTION

It's probably true to say that there are more famous verses in the book of Philippians than in any of the rest of Paul's letters – certainly, if we take the length of this letter into account.

- And what's so striking about the memorable verses we find in this letter is that they are so heart-warming, especially when we remember that this letter was written from inside a prison cell, with Paul chained to a Roman soldier.
- So as we come to our final study in the letter this morning, let's remind ourselves of some of the real gems we have come across in the letter.

(a) Let's begin back in Chapter One.

- **1.5** speaks of *partnership in the gospel from the first day until now*.
- **1.6** reminds us that *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*.
- **1.18** tells us that *the important thing is that in every way ... Christ is preached; and in that however it happens and through it happens, we rejoice*.
- **1.21** brings us Paul's inspiring catchphrase: *to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*.
- **1.23** explains why. *I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far*.
- **1.27** calls us to *conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ and contend as one man for the faith of the gospel*.

That's just Chapter One, and we're up to six memorable verses already!

(b) In Chapter Two, there are more.

- It begins, in **2.1-5**, with Paul's stirring call to Christian unity. *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*.
- Those verses lead straight into Paul's inspiring eulogy of Christ's self-emptying and exaltation, in **2.6-11**. *being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.
- Then we move onto some more memorable teaching about our Christian conduct.
- **2.12-13**. *Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*.
- **2.14**. *Do everything without complaining or arguing* – our motto verses for the Friday Club!
- Why is this so important? **2.15-16** tells us: *shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life*.

(c) And so we move into Chapter Three, and another great batch of memorable verses,

- beginning with the call in **3.1** to *rejoice in the Lord!*
- Why? because in **3.8** Paul declares *everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord! In him, Paul had received the righteousness that comes from God, 3.9, through faith*.
- And so in **3.10**, he gives us another great catchphrase: *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings*.

- *I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*, he declares in **3.12**.
- *One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*, **3.13-14**.
- Then down in **3.20-21**, we have those inspiring words about our future hope, which I have used so often at funeral services. *Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

(d) Those inspiring words simply prepare us for more in Chapter Four.

- **4.4.** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*
- **4.5-7** *The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
- **4.8-9.** *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*
- **4.12-13.** *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

When we come to pick out memorable verses from Paul's letter to the Philippians, we almost end up reading the whole letter, because so much to it is noteworthy!

And so it's appropriate, as we come to our final study this morning, that we should be looking at another gem of a verse, **4.19**. *My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* This is a wonderful verse, in the first place, because of

1. THE SCOPE OF THE PROMISE it contains.

If Paul had written, "God will meet *some* of your needs," that would have been good. If he had written, "God will meet *most* of your needs," that would have been even better. But what he actually writes is "*My God* – the God whose sufficiency I have proved personally," as he glances back over his shoulder to what he has just written in **4.11-13** – "*will meet ALL your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus*" – and what could be better than that!! It's that little word 'all' that makes this verse so wonderfully reassuring.

But notice Paul speaks about 'needs' here, and not wants. God promises to meet all our *needs* – not all that we might *want* from him. So we need to spend a little while thinking about what our real *needs* are.

- On Monday this past week, our house alarm went on the blink, and we needed to get it fixed. But I would hardly regard getting our house alarm fixed as my *greatest* need in life!
- In his cricket match on Monday night, Christopher's team needed 15 runs off the last over to beat the team from Lanchester. John Merton was batting (Paul Merton's son, from Westgate Road Baptist Church. The team has three ministers' sons in it!). Amazingly, he hit the first four balls of the over for 4,4,6 and 4, to win the match with two balls to spare. There was a pressing need for 15 runs; but again, scoring runs in a cricket match is hardly our greatest need in life.

So what is? We talk about our 'needs' in a very loose kind of way, don't we?

- We need food and water to survive, physically.
- We need clothes to keep ourselves warm in winter and respectable in summer.
- We need a home to live in; and a job to provide us with a source of income.
- We need friends and family to care for our emotional needs.

But none of these very real needs represents our greatest need in life.

1.1 Our need for Mercy

Our greatest need in life was highlighted by an incident early on in Jesus' public ministry. A paralysed man was lowered through a hole in the roof in the house where Jesus was preaching, and laid at his feet.

And the very first words Jesus spoke to that paralysed man were these, “**Son, your sins are forgiven you.**” [Mark 2.5]. I think that paralysed man must have been astonished to have been greeted with those words. I am quite sure that he was convinced his greatest need was for physical healing, because he was a quadriplegic, unable to move his arms or legs. But Jesus revealed his greatest need was to have his sins forgiven.

You see the greatest need each and every one of us has is the need to be shown God’s mercy. It’s what we were thinking about a couple of Sunday evenings ago, from **Psalm 130.3**. *If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?* The fact of the matter is that in our natural state, none of us can stand before God. All of us fall – literally – under his judgement. When God looks down from heaven on our lives, he expects to see his own glory reflected back to him – the glory of his own magnificent character, because that’s how he made us – in his image, bearing his likeness. But our sin – our decision to go our own way in life, rather than his way – has marred that image. We have been so bent on our own self-determination (doing our own thing, rather than carrying out his will for our lives) that his image has become horribly distorted. Instead of his own glory, God sees human ugliness reflected back at him – and how insulting is that to him! *By nature* – in our natural state – *we are objects of God’s wrath*, Paul tells us chillingly, in **Eph 2.3**.

- That’s why our greatest need is for God’s mercy.
- That’s why our greatest need is for God’s forgiveness.
- Our guilt has alienated us from God. It has created an unbridgeable gulf between us and God.
- And our guilt needs to be removed so we can be reconciled to God.

And this is the need God has met for us in Jesus.

- When Jesus died on the cross, he took all my sin to himself.
- Peter tells us that **Jesus bore our sin** as died on the cross for us [**1 Peter 2.24**]. And in using that word ‘bore’, Peter isn’t telling us that Jesus simply *carried* our sins to the cross and emptied them out there, like a dumper truck driver. He is telling us that Jesus ‘*carried the can*’ for our sins. He *bore responsibility* for them. He answered up for them on our behalf. He assumed responsibility for them.
- And as my substitute sin-bearer, he then suffered in his own body the death sentence they justly deserved. Jesus died in my place, as well as on my behalf, so that I could be released from my guilt, reconciled to my Creator, and received into God’s family as an adopted son or daughter. That’s the marvel of God’s provision for us, in Jesus.
- This is what Paul has got so excited about, back in **3.9**. After years of fruitlessly striving to commend himself to God through his own efforts, he has been shown *the righteousness that comes from God, through faith in Jesus Christ*. Being put right with God is pure gift of his grace, given to us when we trust ourselves to Jesus!
- Our greatest need is for God’s mercy, so that our sins are forgiven, our guilt is removed, and we are declared right in God’s sight. And all of this comes to us as a gift from God, when we accept his Son as our Saviour. This is how Alex Motyer puts it in his comments on these verses. *The gift is inseparable from Christ. Paul didn’t possess it before he possessed Christ. The gift comes to us when we possess him. Our salvation is all of God and all in Christ* [p226].

1.2 Our need for a new power

But God not only saves us from our sin and guilt through Jesus. He also imparts a new power for living to us, so we don’t fall back into our old ways of self-pleasing. In **2.13** Paul has spoken of the way in which God *works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*. God works at the level of the *will* so that our desires are changed. Instead of living to please ourselves, our desire is to please Christ in all that we do and all that we are. We start to live for him [**1.21**], thereby glorifying God – the very thing we were designed to do. *We press on to take hold of everything for which Christ Jesus took hold of us* [**3.12**].

- In John 6, after Jesus had miraculously fed a crowd of 5,000 people from a few loaves and a couple of fish, the people went in search of him for another free food handout. And Jesus had to say to them

[**John 6.27,35**], *Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. I myself am your food for life - the bread of life. The person who comes to me will never go hungry, and the person who believes in me will never be thirsty.*

- Our greatest need is not for material things – not even food for our bodies. Our greatest need is for a life from God that will survive the greatest challenge each one of us faces – our own mortality. Only Jesus can give us a life that will survive our own death, eternal life. Later on in that chapter, as some of the followers started to drift away from Jesus, he turned to those still with him and said to them, *Do you want to leave me too?* And Peter replied emphatically, *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*" [**John 6.67-69**].
- Our greatest needs are our spiritual needs: mercy, forgiveness for our sins, release from our guilt, reconciliation with our Creator, a new power for living, and a life that will survive death. And all of these God supplies us with in Jesus, his Son!

But God recognises we have other lesser needs too. In **Romans 8.32**, Paul says, *God didn't spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. How, then, will he not also along with Jesus, graciously give us all things?* – all that we need to live for him in the here and now. In view of God's goodness in meeting our greatest needs, we can surely trust him to meet our lesser needs – such as our material and social needs.

1.3 Our material needs

In **Matthew 6.31-33**, Jesus tells us not to worry about having enough to eat and clothes to wear. *It's non-believers who run after all these things; but your heavenly Father knows that you need them. So seek first his kingdom [his kingly rule over your lives] and his righteousness [his will for your lives], and all these [other] things will be given to you as well.* When we've got our priorities right – when God is taking first place in our lives – in all our thinking, and decisions, and goals and ambitions – we can trust him to meet our material needs.

1.4 Our Social Needs

Similarly, we can trust God to meet our social needs. There's a lovely passage in **Psalms 68.3-6** that reads like this. *May the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful. Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him whose name is the LORD-- and rejoice before him.* But why? The next few lines tell us. *A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.* God meets our social needs by setting us in families – not just our natural human families, but our spiritual family too – our local church fellowship.

- This is the forum in which our social needs can be met – our need for friendship, company, support and encouragement.
- 25% of households in Gateshead are single person households. That's an awful lot of people living on their own. For them, this local church can be their family.
- I think this is why there is such an emphasis in this letter on fostering a spirit of true community within the local church. We have seen it from the opening words of chapter 2, and we see it again in the closing words of chapter **4.21-22** here: *Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus – every single Christian, because each person within a local church fellowship is important. The brothers who are with me send greetings. The church is a family, in which we are brothers and sisters in the Lord, not just friends or colleagues. All the saints [Christians here] send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household – the civil servants and government officials of Paul's day – as he wrote from the imperial city to one that prided itself on its colonial status.*

When Paul penned the words of 4.19, he wasn't writing a theoretical text. He was speaking from his own experience of Christ's sufficiency, verses **12-13** have reminded us. *I know what it is to be in need, he writes out of his own experience of Christian discipleship; and I also know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* In every circumstance of life, Paul had proved the sufficiency of Christ, and invites us here to do the same.

1.5 Our Church Needs

I want to apply this verse to ourselves as a Church for just a moment. Every month at our deacons meeting, we shake our heads with wonder and amazement at the Lord's goodness to us as we table the monthly accounts. The way the Lord has met our financial needs over the past three and half years has been truly remarkable.

- We requested £370 for our Syd Little evening, and received a cheque for £570!
- In support of our monthly Tuesday night *Fun and Food for all the family evenings*, and our under-14's football team, we have received grants totalling over £5,000.
- For our International work, we have received grants totally over £7,000.
- For our regular ministry, we have received grants amounting to almost £24,000.
- For our building refurbishment work, we have received around £37,000 in grants and donations.
- That's a total of almost £74,000 over three and a half years.
- What is also very encouraging is the increase in our weekly offerings. When I began in the Church, in February 2002, they were running at £125 a week. Last month they averaged £351!

We have proved here as a church that our God will meet all our needs! That gives us great confidence to face the future, doesn't it? – with all sorts of challenges ahead.

We have learned to trust God not only for our material needs, but also for *our staffing needs*. As the church grows, more leaders are needed to staff our various organisations and activities. But Jesus has told us what to do [Mat 9.37-38]. *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few; so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field."* When we see the need for additional leaders, we must pray them into the Church, and pray for them to be raised up from within the church.

The scope of this promise is unlimited, only because

2. THE SOURCE OF THE PROMISE is unlimited too.

My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus, Paul writes.

Notice that Paul doesn't say God will meet our needs *out of* his glorious riches in Christ Jesus – but *according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus* – in proportion to them, on a scale in keeping with them.

- A new Harry Potter book is due out soon. It's estimated that it will sell 500 million copies worldwide. The books are now available in over 60 languages; and they have made JK Rowling, their author, richer than our Queen! Now supposed you received a gift *out of* JK Rowling's personal fortune. It might be as little as £1. But if you received a gift *according to* her personal fortune, it would have to be several million at least!
- So Paul assures us that when God moves to meet our needs, he doesn't do so merely *out of* his glorious riches; but *according to* them – in proportion to them.
- That's why **James 1.5** says to us, *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*
- Similarly, in **2 Cor 1.3-4**, Paul says, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.* If we are in need of comfort, God will supply it to us in abundance.
- *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened*, Paul writes in **Eph 1.18-21**, *in order that you may know ... his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms - far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*
- God meets our needs not merely through Christ, as if he were the conduit through which they flowed to us. God meets our needs according to the glorious riches that are to be found *in Christ himself*. So

when by faith we join ourselves to Christ, we are tapping into the very source of God's blessings to us. To possess Christ, is to have everything.

- *Every human need is more than adequately supplied from such a source*, someone has said [Martin, p183].

As we finish, notice two other points from this passage very briefly.

3. THE CONDITION ATTACHED TO THIS PROMISE.

Verse 19 begins with the little, but all-important connecting word *and*. The promise of God's provision is linked to what has gone before – the Philippians' generosity. If we cling on to what we have, selfishly, we will lose out in God's economy. But if we let go, we will make great gains. It's what Jesus taught us in **Mark 8.35**. *Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

And notice too

4. THE GOAL ATTACHED TO THIS PROMISE (v20)

It's not about securing our own comfort or convenience. God meets *our needs* in order that we can bring *him* the greatest glory. *To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen*, Paul concludes. So whenever we ask ourselves what we need, the question should be not, "What will make life more comfortable for me, or convenient for me?" But what will bring God maximum glory. Then we will prove this wonderful promise that *Paul's God and ours will meet all our needs in proportion to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*