

## **Blessed to be a Blessing**

### **Philippians 4:14-23**

**Covenant Waterfall, 10 December 2023**

#### **Introduction**

Many of us have been in churches where money is spoken about in almost every sermon. Guilt tripped into giving more money, with the promise that the more you give, the more God will bless you with more money or will heal your sickness. This sort of teaching is unfortunate evidence of the widespread influence of the prosperity gospel in our church context.

It is easy in response to having been exposed to this manipulative prosperity gospel teaching to react in another extreme direction, whereby we don't speak of money at all, and in fact view it as something unspiritual, bad in itself and unconnected and irrelevant to our Christian faith.

Yet biblical teaching on money is neither of these extremes. The Bible definitely does not teach that we are to give money so that God can give us more money. Nor does the Bible teach that money is unspiritual, in fact it teaches quite the opposite, that how we use money has a direct connection with our heart toward the Lord.

We've reached the final verses of this letter to the Philippians. In these few concluding verses, Paul talks about money. He thanks the Philippian church for supporting him financially, even though they were a very poor church. As we look at these verses this morning, we'll observe some important biblical truths regarding how we are to steward money as believers in Christ. We'll see that because God is abundant in riches, he will provide for us richly through his grace, so that we can bless others for the sake of the gospel – we'll see that we're blessed in order to be a blessing.

- Missionaries' investment and reward
- The church's investment and reward

- True riches: God's grace in Christ

### **A. Missionaries' investment and reward**

Last Sunday – verses preceding these – finding contentment in whatever your circumstances. Those verses prepare the way for how Paul thanks the Philippian church for providing for him in the direst of circumstances. We're first going to focus on Paul from his perspective of a church planter-missionary-pastor – his investment into the ministry, and then his reward.

Investment? Verse 14 opens with Paul addressing the Philippians:

**“Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.”**

“Trouble”? Understatement of the year. Paul has been enduring all sorts of extreme hardships for the sake of the gospel, as we've seen through this series. He's faced persecution for preaching the gospel, he's been beaten, he's imprisoned in Rome, lost all his freedoms and comforts and he's waiting to hear whether or not he will face a death sentence. Big part of Paul's investment – suffering for the sake of the gospel – there is always a price to pay.

Next aspect of his investment – verse 15, **“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel...”** What does Paul mean by “the beginning of the gospel”? He's reminding the Philippians when they first heard the gospel preached, years back when he arrived in Philippi to plant the church. We read of that history in Acts 16, where together with Silas, they preached the gospel in the city – Lydia was converted. Then they were arrested for preaching the gospel, but even in prison, their jailer received Christ as they proclaimed the good news.

Paul's investment – not only suffering for the sake of the gospel, but also labouring in faithfully teaching and preaching the gospel, discipling people in God's Word and seeing God's Word take root in people, transforming them for Christ.

This investment is the similar for all who labour in preaching God's Word, those who pastor the flock, who plant churches, who are missionaries locally and internationally. Like we've

seen with Paul, there is a great price to pay. May not be imprisonment and hard core persecution (though certainly the case if you minister in a country where Christianity is illegal). Suffering mainly in form of missionaries who must leave their families and live in strange places, giving up many of their creature comforts. Church planters and pastors who face much rejection, opposition and hostility from people as they preach the gospel and live sacrificial lives in service to the Lord. No such thing as a pain-free, cost-free calling. Follow the way of our Master who laid down his life in obedience to the Father.

But there is also a reward for those who labour in gospel ministry and mission. See this here with Paul. Verses 15-18:

**“when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. <sup>16</sup> Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. <sup>18</sup> 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.”**

Paul’s reward? Financial support from the Philippian church. They faithfully supported him – in fact they were the only church to do so (v.15). The nature of their support was significant – not a few pennies! Verse 18 – Paul received **“full payment, and more”**. He says he was **“well supplied.”**

Clear that Paul is not shy about talking about money. Doesn’t see it as something dirty or unspiritual, but a necessity in facilitating gospel ministry. In order for him to continue to preach the gospel, his **“needs”** need to be met (v.16). He needs food, he needs a roof over his head, he needs money for transport and clothing. He needs these needs to be met so that he can get on with the business of ministering the gospel and reaching the lost and caring for God’s people, instead of being distracted by trying to earn money through other avenues. Generally the NT pattern is that those who proclaim the gospel, should get their living by the gospel, as 1 Corinthians 9:14 teaches.

Though Paul is thankful for this generous financial provision from the Philippians, it is ultimately not what he seeks. Money is never an end in itself for Paul. See this especially in verse 17, **“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”** He’s

essentially saying to the Philippians – thanks for the money, but that’s really by the by – it’s not what he’s really seeking. The greater reward for Paul is **“the fruit that increases to your credit”**. He is more concerned about the seed of the gospel of Christ taking root in peoples’ lives, that they grow up in their faith, in obedience to Gods Word, putting to death sin, growing in godliness and in the grace of Christ and living God-glorifying lives. That’s the real reward for gospel ministry!

### **B. The Church’s investment and reward**

As Paul sacrificially invested and gained reward through gospel ministry, so we see in this text that it is the same with the church. The Philippian church invested sacrificially in their support of Paul. Verse 15 tells us that they **“entered into partnership with me (Paul) in giving and receiving”** for a prolonged period of time – since he left Macedonia (region where Philippi was) and even when we was in Thessalonica. Nature of this support was, as we saw earlier in verse 18, abundant.

It would be easy to assume then that the Philippian church was able to provide long term, abundant financial support to Paul precisely because they were rich – lots of excess cash to give to mission work. This however was certainly not the case. The Philippian church was a very poor church. See evidence for this in 2 Corinthians 8:2, where Paul is speaking about all the churches in Macedonia, where Philippi was, and says they were in **“extreme poverty”**.

The incredible thing is that despite their extreme poverty, they were exceedingly generous in their giving. They **“shared”** (or participated – koinonia) in Paul’s trouble as verse 14 says. They sent abundant financial gifts to Paul through Ephaphroditus to help him in his darkest hour during his imprisonment. They practiced sacrificial giving. See this clearly expressed in verse 19: **“I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”**

Paul deliberately uses OT sacrificial language from Exodus 29:18 here in order to make the connection between sacrificial financial giving and worship. The reality for every Christian is that giving of your finances is an act of worship to God. It’s not an optional extra, it is an integral part of our worship. Why is this so? God desires that we bring glory to him by giving

him our first fruits – lay down before God what is dear to us, as a sacrifice. The reason why this is so important is that the pull of idolatry is so strong on all of our hearts. Our sinful tendency is to worship the creation, not the Creator. This means that our hearts are drawn especially to things like money and the abundance of possessions. There is an attraction to these things, an allure about them that promises happiness and fulfilment. The act of giving of our finances sacrificially to the Lord keeps our hearts in check. It trains us to hold on to money very lightly, to not let it get a hold over us and instead for us to trust in the Lord that he will provide for us, and that we would find our satisfaction in him and not things.

An excuse that Christians often give for not giving financially is that they say that they don't earn enough in order to give, or they're in debt, or there are too many other important monthly expenses that prevent them from giving. They say, once they earn more, then they'll give. This attitude unfortunately betrays the fact that money is an idol in your life. The Philippians were in extreme poverty, yet they gave sacrificially out of their poverty. The poor widow in Mark 12:42-44 gave her two coins - all she had to live on.

Need to get into a monthly practice where you give to God first – and give sacrificially – give something that hurts to do so – that's the point of a sacrifice. The rest will fall into place. Those who have been giving sacrificially for years can certainly testify to this. What this may mean is that you will need to sacrifice other things in your life – going out to eat, buying that new pair of shoes, Dstv or Netflix subscription, gym membership, hoarding away less in your savings account. Re-organise your monthly budget that it glorifies the Lord. You will see very quickly where your heart lies in how you use your money every month.

The Lord Jesus really does need to be Lord even over your finances. How you handle money is a deeply spiritual issue. This is precisely why Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-21:

**“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

What this all exposes is whether or not we really do trust in the God's providence – in his hand to provide for us faithfully and generously. This is why Paul continues in verse 19 –

**“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ**

**Jesus.”** Trust that God is faithful to supply your every need precisely because he is God – he is our infinitely rich, eternal Creator, the One who set the stars and planets in the heavens, the One who sustains the birds of the air and waters the lilies of the fields. Jesus, Matthew 6:30, **“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”**

Reward of the Philippian church? Verse 15 – Paul says that in their partnership with him, they both gave and received. Clearly gave, but what did they receive? Their motive was certainly not to give in order to get more money (prosperity gospel heresy) – they gave so generously to Paul because they had received true treasure from him – the gospel. They gave because God had blessed them so much – forgiven their sins, counted them as his own adopted children, assured them that he would finish the work he began in them. In turn, they were moved to bless others, specifically bless Paul in his mission work. What was their reward in this? The privilege of participating in gospel ministry.

Support of mission work, giving to local church – motivation for giving, not to get anything in return, instead to bless others because God has already blessed us so much in Christ. God has already been so abundantly generous to us in pouring out his undeserved grace on us in Christ. How can we not be generous in response to this, and bless others for the sake of the gospel? Never lose sight of the fact that our giving to the local church or mission causes means, like the Philippians that we are Able now to partner in a greatest mission of all – helping the gospel, the most important, relevant and life transforming message, be proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

### **C. True Riches: God’s grace in Christ**

One of the greatest errors of the prosperity gospel is that it is incredibly man-centred. It is based on the assumption that if you have an abundance of money and possessions and are physically healthy, you will be content and enjoy the blessed life. Certainly benefits to not being poor. Yet life is so much more than what you can see and touch. Why is it that so many rich people are desperately unhappy and depressed? Demonstrated for all to see in celebrity culture. The reality is that the abundance of money doesn’t solve all your problems.

Rather the fundamental issue that effects every single human being – not a lack of money – but sin. Sin is the reason for deep unhappiness, brokenness, pain, depression and anxiety. Ultimately sin is the reason why outside of Christ, we are estranged from God, living in rebellion to him and deserving of his wrath.

This is exactly why these final verses lift up our eyes to God – they cause us to be God-centred – verse 20 “**–To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**” It is only when our hearts are lifted Godward to our gracious and loving heavenly Father, that our deepest desires and needs are satisfied. Church Father Augustine “–Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you”.

How so? Through God’s provision of his only Son, Jesus Christ. Final verse 23, a benediction, “**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.**” It is only the grace of our Lord Jesus that truly satisfies and gives us rest. Though we deserved wrath because of our sin and idolatry, and love of money, in Christ, God paid for our sins. He took the punishment that we deserved on the cross. Rising again on the third day, he wiped away our debt of sins, reconciled us to himself – all a gift of undeserved grace. Blessed by this abundant undeserved grace in Christ, we are able to be a blessing to others through the gifts God has given us.

Repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, trust in the one who left heavenly riches and became poor – became man, took on flesh, whose body was broken on the cross, whose blood was shed – so that you could become rich. Not in earthly riches but in riches that are infinitely more valuable – heavenly inheritance: Christ and his benefits – who forgives your sins, grants you new life in the Holy Spirit, who truly satisfies you and gives you peace, promising you eternity before his glorious presence, enjoying his majesty and beauty! These true riches which, “**no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined**” (Isa 64:4) are yours in Christ by faith.

Amen.