

"I Can Do Everything Through Him Who Strengthens Me."

Philippians 4:13, *I can do everything through him who strengthens me*. This morning we're going to look at this verse again but also at some of the themes in Philippians that lead us to this and speak to us all, both as individuals and as a church at this present time.

If you are part of our church family, you hopefully received an email last week, a Summer 2023 update from the elders. Among other things it said that at our annual meeting on Sunday November 12th the elders and I will be presenting Barry Cooper to you, the members of Christ Community Church, to be affirmed as our lead pastor to begin in 2024. That email included links to related documents, including frequently asked questions about the process and the plan for succession. It also linked to a form that allows you to share any questions not already listed. If you *didn't* get that email, please go to the welcome table to ask for it to be sent.

One thing we wanted to communicate is that while Connie and I are not leaving Christ Community Church there *is* a transition taking place in terms of my role. This annual meeting will be an occasion, not only to affirm Barry Cooper for the role of lead pastor, but also to do so in a way that reaffirms our confidence in God's faithfulness. In **Philippians 1:6** Paul says, *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*. I was struck this week with the recognition that, in Philippians, our confidence in the strengthening presence of Christ doesn't begin in **Philippians 4:13**, but all the way back in the very beginning of the letter.

And this is really a good place to begin our message today...

I. WE CAN BE CONFIDENT CHRIST WILL STRENGTHEN US BECAUSE HE IS FAITHFUL TO COMPLETE HIS WORK IN US.

This is a tremendous source of assurance spiritually and personally. What God begins he completes and so you can know on a personal level that God will never leave you or forsake you. But it's also interesting to note and important to understand that in the context of Philippians Paul was writing to a church and assuring them that just as God had been involved from the beginning at the birth of the church at Philippi he would continue to work in the church at Philippi.

I couldn't help but think about this for our church's history. I remember Connie and I coming here to a little core group of people in 1984. We didn't build this building until 16 years had passed. There were many seasons of stressful uncertainty, multiple moves to different rented facilities, uncomfortable folding metal chairs inadequate sound systems, and children facilities, financial hardship. If I had been able to see then, what would happen in terms of growing the church spiritually and physically, seeing the church flourish going on forty years now, buying land, building a building, paying it all off completely, adding staff, discipling people, helping the needy, helping to start other churches, sending missionaries and generously supporting diverse missions and ministries, I would have been thrilled.

How did any of this happen? It happened through the faith and faithful support of many people yes, but it ultimately because God who began the good work in us, not just individually but together, carried it forward through us and sometimes in spite of us. He is faithful.

In his book *Jayber Crow*, Wendell Berry, has the hero of the story say:

Often I have not known where I was going until I was already there. I have had my share of desires and goals, but my life has come to me or I have gone to it mainly by way of mistakes and surprises. Often I have received better than I deserved.... I am an ignorant pilgrim, crossing a dark valley. And yet for a long time, looking back, I have been unable to shake off the feeling that I have been led – make of that what you will.

I could say the same. If you read the book of Acts you discover the apostle Paul could have said the same thing. He hadn't planned to go to Philippi! When Paul says *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* that confidence is built on the assurance that God is faithful and always at work in our lives even when mysteriously.

A. Because God is faithful we can be thankful and we should be.

Philippians 1:3-5 says, *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* Thanksgiving runs throughout the book of Philippians, and it is intimately related to this idea of being strengthened by God. Ingratitude reveals a blindness to the grace and the blessing of God and that

weakens us in every aspect of life. Thanksgiving reorients us to God's faithfulness and that imparts strength.

I love that phrase in **verse 5**, *partnership in the gospel*. A few weeks ago I met someone new at our church and I referred to Barry Cooper as my partner. I found out later this gentleman thought he knew what I meant, but felt it best to ask another pastor to clarify in what sense that was meant. Here's the context, we are partners in the gospel. The same is true for all of us who share in and support the ministries of the church through our giving, our service and our prayers, our faith. Our partnership in the gospel is due to God's faithfulness in our lives and its cause for thanksgiving to God!

B. Because God is faithful he raises up people to minister to his church and he works through them.

In **Philippians 2:20** Paul says I'm sending Timothy to you, *I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare*. God used Paul to plant the church at Philippi. Then when God moved the apostle Paul out of that particular ministry focus he raised up others to serve the church at Philippi. I'm not comparing myself to the apostle Paul. But this is applicable in principle to how we look at transitions in the life of the church.

I want to read one section from the FAQ the Frequently Asked Questions document we linked to in the email that went out this week. Under the question when did the transition process begin we share some of the back history going back to 2015 and revisions were made expert advice was sought and multiple potential successors were interviewed then it says this.

Pastor Larry and the elders began to discuss the issue with Barry Cooper in late 2020 - early 2021. Various assessment tools to help us understand Barry's strengths and leadership style were employed. In depth interviews regarding theology and ministry philosophy also took place with the elders.

Then this is a key phrase:

During 2022 it became increasingly clear that the elders and pastor Larry believed that Barry was the one God was raising up to step into the role of lead pastor at Christ Community Church.

God raises up people when, and as needed, to accomplish his purposes. Part of being the church is bringing what we have and offering it to Christ for ministry, and also trusting that God raises up people to help us. That is one of the reason the idea of solitary Christianity, just you and Jesus, not a part of a church family, is neither biblical nor practical. Become a person available to be used by God to encourage and to serve his church and look around and be thankful for the people that God has raised up to serve him. Trust God. He is faithful and he raises up people to serve his purposes.

*All of this is foundational to and provides the background for the truth that we come to in **Philippians 4:13**.*

II. WE NEED THE STRENGTHENING PRESENCE OF CHRIST WHO CALLS US TO LIVE SUCH A RADICALLY DIFFERENT LIFE.

A. God calls you into a life that requires a special kind of strength.

That's implied by **verse 13**, *I can do everything through him who strengthens me*. Why do we need to be strengthened? Sometimes when we are in a difficulty God just delivers us! We pray and he simply removes the difficulty, or removes us from the difficulty. But sometimes he strengthens us so that we go through it and are able to endure it and persevere in it and grow deeper spiritually and glorify God because of it. The thing is God doesn't want us to remain hopelessly weak people who can't handle difficulties unless he miraculously delivers us. So sometimes we go through hard things and as we go through them he shapes and strengthens us. When I was young, I thought, surely when you hit forty you've got your wife, your kids, your house, your job, and life becomes this big float trip down the lazy river of love and laughter. I should have paid more attention to Bible stories.

A moving story from the Old Testament came to mind this week. It's a story from the life of King David, a man the Bible takes pains to make clear is a man of like passions with all of us. The story in **1 Samuel 29-30** takes place when David is one of the most discouraging points in his complicated story and had every reason, to not only struggle with depression but to succumb to despair. For years he had been running from the raging craziness of king Saul who wanted to kill him. As a result, he had been forced to take his remaining followers and their families and turn to his former enemies the Philistines for protection. It was humiliating for him and dangerous too.

And it got worse. Even the Philistines rejected him. They wanted nothing to do with him. They sent him back to the little village of Ziklag in disgrace. It was on the edge of the desert where his men left their families thinking it was a safe. Humiliated and demoralized David and his men returned to Ziklag only to find that in their absence the place had been raided by the Amalekites. Their property had been stolen, their homes burned to the ground their wives and children had been carried off as captives. **1 Samuel 30:4** says, *David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.* There was still worse to come. The Scripture says then the rest of David's people turned against him. They grew bitter. They spoke of stoning him. And the scripture says *David was greatly distressed.* No doubt: humanly speaking what was left to sustained David and help him get through that? Saul was out to kill him, the Philistines rejected him, the Amalekites robbed him, His own men wanted to stone him. But the story takes this amazing turn. **1 Samuel 30:6** says, *but David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.*

The Scripture doesn't spell out how David did it There's a spiritual intuition to these kinds of things. It's not as if everything can be prescribed with a set of tips or techniques. I imagine David thought back to the way God worked in his life even though, often mysteriously, always faithfully. I imagine he thought of the stories and Scriptures he knew by heart and the psalms that he himself had been inspired to write. He thought about the truths embedded in those psalms. The call to prayer that runs through all of them. He surrendered his life to God again and he strengthened himself in the Lord in faith.

God calls you into a life that requires a special kind of strength. And...

B. God can strengthen us in any and all circumstances.

Throughout **verse 12** there is a series of opposites. It says *I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need.* Then in **verse 13** he says, *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* There is a strength that doesn't depend on the circumstances and helps you face the circumstances.

One of my favorite Preachers, Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones preached in London during World War 2 during the darkness days – the most humanly hopeless period of the war. And Martin-Lloyd Jones said this: *When things were at their worst the then Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, would speak to the nation on the wireless. That's all he did.*

He did not change a single fact, but everyone felt very different when he had finished.

I wonder if at least some of you have either read or heard some of Churchill's wartime speeches especially the most famous one I know of. Churchill says, *Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous states have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule we shall not flag or fail we shall go on to the end....We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches we shall fight on the landing grounds we shall fight in the fields and in the streets we shall fight in the hills we shall never surrender.* So this is what Lloyd Jones is talking about and he says, *That's all he did he didn't change a single fact. He had done nothing but speak, but he had given us assurance he had made us feel happy.* "Happy!" That is the word Lloyd Jones used. He goes on to say that is so important because when you have that kind of strength and deep joy *every task can be surmounted.* Then he adds this... *and in a much higher sense the joy of the Lord puts strength into you it puts power into you.*

Paul makes clear here in the passage from **Philippians 4**. You and I have far stronger reason for strengthening our self and finding strength in the Lord than David had. He had not seen Christ as clearly as we have and in Christ we have seen, as he never did the ultimate revelation of the love and the care of God that forgives our sins and saves our souls and displays, in the resurrection, the power to bring new life, and new hope out of even the darkest moments.

Conclusion

There's a dramatic ending to that story that about David. Strengthened in the Lord. He doesn't just rest in the personal enjoyment of some renewed sense of inner peace. He seeks guidance from God as to what he should do and God tells him to pursue the Amalekites. He has to put faith to work. He has to act on his renewed strength and go after what was lost. He's outnumbered but he presses on. He finds and beats the Amalekites in battle and wins back everything and everyone he feared he had lost. And even that is not the end of the story. Second Samuel chapter one begins by saying that after the battle on the third day, if you know the Bible pretty well you may know that the third day is sometimes a very important day, on the third day a messenger comes and tells him the mad king Saul has died.

The messenger not only brings the news. He brings King Saul's crown and his arm bracelet because Israel's ready for a new king to be enthroned. David, as promised will become that king. Three days from betrayal, suffering, and darkness, to strength victory and enthronement!

Where else in the Bible do we see something like that happen? It is a pattern that reappears most dramatically in the story of Jesus.

And of course, I probably don't need to say that the Bible doesn't teach us that strengthening ourselves in the Lord our God will always bring about swift and dramatic changes in our outward circumstances. Sometimes that happens but that's not always God's way. What we are assured of is that there will be a final resurrection and with that the ultimate victory and vindication for all who belong to Jesus.

Do you know that you're part of that and this is your hope and hidden source of unfailing strength? If you've never come to Christ something literally wonderful could happen for you today!

You can turn to him and trust in him and discover a new source of strength that you cannot find anywhere else but in him. By the grace of God this could happen for you right here and right now. It can turn your whole life around. And if you have come to Christ then praise God you have a source of strength that you can never exhaust so place your hand in his renew your faith in him and now you can do all things through him who strengthens you.

Amen.

A Prayer Expressing faith in Christ

Almighty God, You have revealed your life-giving love in Jesus whom I claim and cling to as my Savior. I confess I have gone my own way and sinned against you. I can only cast myself on your mercy as I turn to Christ, trust in him for my redemption. I believe he died on the cross for my sins and rose again as victorious Lord and Savior. Thank you the new and eternal life promised to all who come to him in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, in my weakness I need the deeper strength that only comes from a vibrant, faith-filled, grace-drenched relationship with you. Help me to trust more fully, to see your faithfulness displayed in Scripture and revealed in my own story. Empower me by your promises, and your presence through your Holy Spirit to know and say in truth and humility, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Amen.