

Financial Partnership

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the assistant pastor here at Shine Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you this morning.
- Special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad you're here, and we're glad you're here not because you are filling a seat, but because, as I say every Sunday, we are following after Jesus together as one community, and we are convinced as we follow after him that there is no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it.
- And so we're glad that you're here because God has something to say to everyone, and everyone needs to hear what God has to say in his word. And so that's why we spend this time looking at everything that God has to say to us.
- Now, I know that many of you have faced an incredible challenge this past week, and that was the incredible challenge of cooking a turkey. Now, if you cook turkeys, you know there's lots of things that can go wrong.
- You can undercook them and make some of your guests sick. You don't want to do that. You don't want a dirty bird. Or you can overcook them and give your guests the unpleasant experience of eating dry bird.
- [1 : 1 7] And there's lots of different tricks that you can use to try to make sure you're hitting the right spot, but there's only one real fail-safe. There's only one way to know exactly and precisely whether you've cooked your bird enough, but not too much.
- And that is the great modern miracle of the instant reed thermometer, which you can use. And, of course, you have to know the right places to put it in the turkey, right? You have to have some skill in using this. But if you know what you're doing, this is your fail-safe method of making sure you don't mess up your turkey.
- Now, we are in the book of Philippians. And if you've been with us, you know we've been going through it for a while. And we are now at the very end. We're in the last section.
- This is our last sermon on Philippians. And we have covered a lot of ground. If you've been with us, you know that we've talked a lot about the gospel. We've talked a lot about the partnership that comes with the gospel.
- And then last week, really two weeks ago, we talked about the joy that comes from the gospel. And these are all the things that Paul wants to emphasize. He wants to tell this church in Philippi over and over again.
- [2 : 1 9] And we've talked about the fact that this is a letter. It's a letter that's written from Paul, who's in prison at the time, and it's written to a church. And this church is very much like our church. And we have talked once before about the logistics of this letter.
- So when we talked about Timothy and Epaphroditus, remember Epaphroditus was a man who was in the Philippian church, and he visited Paul. And he visited Paul for two reasons. One was just to help him, to assist him.
- Paul is under house arrest. He can use all the help he can get. It's great for him to have a companion, someone to be with him. But the other reason he came was to deliver a financial gift. These folks in Philippi had learned that Paul was under house arrest.

They knew his needs. They were concerned for his needs. And so they took up a collection of money, and presumably some other things, and sent them to him because they cared about him. They wanted him to know how much they cared about him, and they also wanted him to be provided for.

They wanted him to have everything that he needed. And so as we come to the very end of this book, we're going to find Paul's thank you note. This is his thank you note to the Philippians for what they've done for him, what they've given to him, and the ways they've sacrificed.

[3 : 26] And so Paul, as he always does, never just says something or thanks someone, but he uses it as a chance to teach. And so in this very end, Paul is going to teach about money.

And what we're going to find out is that money is the instant read thermometer of our spiritual lives. There's many different ways we can try to understand where we are spiritually.

But it's money that Paul presents here as a great test, a great way to know instantly what is true of our hearts. This is what we saw in our preparation for worship when we read from the Gospel of Matthew, that we can have treasure in heaven or treasure on earth.

And so we're going to see three tests here of money. First, we're going to see a test of our joy. Second, a test of our partnership. And third, a test of the Gospel.

A test of our joy, a test of our partnership, and a test of the Gospel. We're in Philippians chapter 4, and we're starting at verse 10. Remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

[4 : 42] And so please read with me now, starting at verse 10. I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. Verse 12. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

Verse 13. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Verse 16. Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

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.

[5 : 54] Verse 19. And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Jesus Christ. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Lord, please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you do strengthen us and that you do provide everything that we need in Christ Jesus.

And so we ask that you would do that for us this morning. That you would help us as we listen to your word. You'd help me as I try to speak your words. That all of us would hear from you and be changed by you.

We ask this in the name of your son. Amen. If you remember from two weeks ago, we talked about joy and the fact that it is the strike anywhere match of the Christian.

[7 : 06] And so it's something that we should be able to have regardless of our circumstances. Happiness is tied to our circumstances. Joy is tied to what is not our circumstances. Things that cannot change.

It's tied to everything that we have in God through Christ. And so Paul starts out with this again. Remember in verse 4 he had said, Rejoice in the Lord always. And now in verse 10 he says, I rejoice in the Lord not always this time but greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me but you had no opportunity. And so Paul brings up this topic of joy again. And his joy it seems at first comes because the Philippians have sent him this gift.

But there's a problem because if his joy comes from the sending of the gift, it means it must be tied to his circumstances in some way. And so Paul eager to make sure that the Philippians know that his joy is not rooted in money gives an immediate qualification here in verses 11 through 13.

Yes, I rejoice. But it's not because of the money. I rejoice because you were concerned for me. And then in verse 14 because they share his trouble.

[8 : 17] And the reason he doesn't take joy in the money is because he has learned a secret. He's learned this secret in verse 11 of being able to handle multiple circumstances. That there's this skill when it comes to having money.

That a skill that applies not just to not having enough but having more than enough. That being rich is in some ways just as challenging as being poor.

Because we can either trust God or we can trust money. If we trust God, we'll manage and control our money. If we trust money, our money will manage and control us.

If we trust money, our money will manage and control us. If we trust God, we will manage and control our money. And so in the midst of this gift, Paul wants them to know that regardless of their circumstances, money is not the source of their joy.

There's a skill. There's a skill for the rich and for the poor. Paul has experienced both, we find out. He's been brought low and he's abounded. He's had plenty and he's been hungry. But in all of those circumstances, he hasn't let his joy rest on what his financial state is.

[9 : 33] He's learned this secret and he knows that it's a challenge for everyone. This is an instant read thermometer, not just for people who have a lot of money, but people who don't have enough. It's a challenge for everyone to not find joy in the resources that we have, but the joy in what God has given us that we cannot lose.

I have a friend who immediately after he graduated from college became a ski instructor here at Keystone in Summit County here in Colorado.

So this was his first job out of college and his paycheck week to week was dependent on who signed up for lessons, you know, whether it was a private lesson, which he would make more money on, whether it was a group lesson.

He had to figure out living expenses in this ski town. And so he had a lot of variables from week to week financially about how things would go for him. And one day he had a big break. So there was a group of executives.

There was a CEO and all his executive team, his vice presidents, who came to Keystone and they decided this was going to be their business retreat. They were going to spend all this time together. This would be a time for them to bond and plan.

[10 : 45] And they were going to spend the entire morning all taking private ski lessons. And they would then meet back up in the afternoon to debrief, have time together. They were going to actually have time with their ski instructors and do the business that they had before them.

Now my friend, his name was Camper. Camper was assigned vice president of a company. This was at the time a billion dollar company. And he had a bad feeling right away.

This vice president was an older man. He was not in great shape. He had never skied before. And so Camper thought to himself, here's this powerful man who has everything.

And I'm going to ask him to put really slick things on his feet and then ask him to get on a slick surface. And so they got out and started the lesson. And this man became instantly frustrated.

He became angry. And about 20 minutes into the lesson, he just rips his skis off and he throws them down on the ground. Just says, I am finished.

[11 : 45] His wife is standing there, by the way, just completely embarrassed. And so he walks away, but he walks up to my friend first and he takes a \$100 bill and he shoves it into his hand.

He said, here, this is for you. My friend said, I can't accept this. You didn't enjoy it. You only spent 20 minutes of your three-hour lesson. And I'm going to get to ski by myself on the slips for the next three hours.

And I'm still going to get paid. So I can't accept your money. You take it. You didn't enjoy the lesson. You go. So the man looks at him and he said, when you have as much money as I do, then you can say no.

And he shoved the \$100 bill in his hand and walked away. And so on the one hand, we have someone who knows how to abound, who has plenty.

And yet there's security. Their worth, their identity is found in their money. This is someone who, though they have no need, they don't know what Paul talks about here.

[12 : 57] They don't know how to be content in every situation. They don't know how to do all things through him who strengthens them. Instead, this is someone whose money was where they tried to find their joy, their meaning, and their identity.

And so when anything challenged that, a ski lesson that went wrong, a ski instructor who didn't want to say yes to their tip, that was what they turned back to, their money.

On the other hand, you had someone whose income would fluctuate week to week, who could really use \$100 to buy groceries as he's trying to figure out his post-college life being a ski instructor here in Colorado.

And yet this is someone, my friend, who has great faith. And so he's not willing to take this \$100 because that's not the source of his joy.

Even as he's trying to figure out how he's going to support himself and make it week to week, that is not what he looks to for his security. And so Paul here is speaking both to those who have a lot of money and those who do not.

[14 : 05] Both the man who shoves the \$100 bill into someone else's hands and says, you don't get to say no to that, and the person who takes it. There's a skill to knowing that our joy doesn't come from our material circumstances.

It comes from God. And so that's why Paul says he rejoiced in the Lord greatly. He's grateful for this gift that the Philippians give to him, but it is not the source of his joy.

And so both the rich and the poor have the challenge of taking confidence in their things rather than God. If you're rich, you have the temptation to be confident in things rather than God should make you smug and numb and insulated.

If you're poor, you have the temptation to take confidence in things rather than God, making you anxious and fearful and grasping for money. But Paul here is telling us that there is a different way, that there is joy that comes in trusting in God and others.

And it's not just something that people outside the church need to learn and grow in, but us inside the church as well. So my friend Camper, he went skiing for the next three hours, but he still had to show up at this lunch.

[15 : 23] So there was a lunch where the ski instructors and this executive suite were going to get together at the bottom of the hill. And so he went, he had his time skiing, felt terrible. This man had just completely belittled him, dehumanized him.

And so he walks into the lunchroom. And the vice president makes a beeline for him. And he said, Camper, I treated you terribly earlier.

I was frustrated because I couldn't ski, but I shouldn't have talked to you that way. I shouldn't have treated you like that. Will you forgive me? My friend said, he said, yes, I'll forgive you.

And then this man said, I believe in Jesus. And he's been doing a great work in my life. My friend said, yes, I believe in Jesus too.

And he's doing a great work in my life as well. And so both the rich and the poor were able to reconcile there and walk away with a joy that they did not have before.

[16 : 30] The man who took confidence in his wealth, even he was someone who was following after Jesus, but he still struggled with what Paul is talking about here. He struggled with the skill of, as we see in verse 12, knowing how to abound.

He was still learning how to have a lot of money. And my friend, Camper, was still learning the skill of how to be brought low. But both of them together had access to God's grace.

This Christ president was not so bad that he couldn't have God's grace. And my friend, Camper, wasn't so good that he didn't need it. But both of them needed to grow and were growing in learning this secret, the test of joy.

That their joy comes not from their financial circumstances, but from their status in Christ. And so that's what Paul is telling us in verse 13 when he says, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This is a widely abused verse. There's a, Stephen Curry you may know as the most valuable player at several points in the NBA. And he's famous for having Philippians 4.13 written on his sneakers.

[17 : 41] In fact, I believe the story is that Nike refused to take his sneaker deal because of it. So he went to Under Armour and then Under Armour went to the bank. This passage is not about shooting basketballs.

Philippians 4.13 is not about being able to drop threes. But instead, Paul is saying that he can do all things through God who strengthens him. In other words, he can do everything that we've seen in the last two verses.

He can face every circumstance because it's God that strengthens him. He knows how to handle wealth and he also knows how to handle poverty. And so his joy does not come from either one.

In other words, I can find joy in all things through him who strengthens me. I can bear up under any circumstance through him who strengthens me. That is not the source of my joy.

And so joy comes from, as we talked about two weeks ago, trusting God and others. Trusting God and others here rather than money. And so money is the test of our joy.

[18 : 48] It's also the test of our partnership. You notice that Paul says here in verses 10 and then in 14, he finds joy in their concern for him.

In verse 14, it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you, Philippians, verse 15, yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. In other words, this is a partnership kind of church and they have shown their partnership by partnering financially with Paul.

We find out in a different letter that Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 that this church, the churches in Macedonia, and he's probably talking about the Philippian church, at least includes the Philippian church, it might include others, is known for their generosity.

He uses them as an example for other churches. Look at these Philippians who know how to be generous. Be like them. And so, they are practicing everything that we saw in Philippians 2.

[19 : 53] Remember in Philippians 2, Paul deals with their disunity by saying, look not only to the interest of others. Excuse me, look not only to your own interest but also to the interest of others. Do what Jesus did.

And we applied that then to the problem of unity, but here it applies financially as well. The church in Philippi did not look only to their own interest financially, but they were looking out for the interest of others as well.

They were looking out for the interest of Paul. And so here they're modeling being question people rather than answer people. The church in Philippi is asking. They're trying to figure out what Paul's needs are and then seeking to meet them and we find out they've more than met them later in this passage.

But then Paul, and we'll talk about this in a minute in verse 17, is not interested in the money they're giving them. He's interested in their spiritual growth. And so Paul and this church are a beautiful model of each of them looking out for the needs of each other.

But we're also seeing a key truth here which is that finances are part of our partnership. Paul thanks them for their partnership at various times in the letter, sometimes for their partnership just in suffering and being with him, their partnership in working side by side.

[21 : 03] But here their partnership is explicitly financial. They are giving him what's most precious to them. They're giving him some of their financial resources. They're giving him gifts.

And so if we are, as we talked about in our very first sermon on Philippians, if we are seeking after the treasure together, then we're also willing to give some of our treasure.

If we're seeking after the treasure together, the great treasure of the gospel, then we're also going to be willing to give our treasure to others along the way. I had a friend who in his senior year of college, there's lots of college stories here, year after college, year of senior year of college, he went to a conference with a bunch of other college students and he listened to a speaker and this speaker was at the time near the top of one of the largest consulting firms in the nation, if not the world.

And this man was a Christian believer and so he was giving a talk about finding joy in God rather than money. And he was very open during this talk at various points.

He said, you know, if you want afterwards you can come up and you can ask me anything. My friend listening to this talk was very cynical. He thought, this man has nothing to tell me about finding joy in God rather than money.

[22 : 26] He works for a major consulting firm. He has all the money he could ever need. What do I have to learn from this man? He has nothing to say to me. And so my friend was very bold and he went up after the talk.

He said, well, this man said we can ask him anything so I'm going to take him up on the offer. And so he started out with a very light and easy question. He said, you said we could ask you anything so I just want to know how much money do you make a year?

This man said, yes. I did say you could ask me anything so I'll tell you. It varies year to year based on how our firm performs but I make usually it's high six figures, low seven figures.

So this man was averaging about a million dollars a year. So my friend said, okay, I'm going to ask you another question. How much of that do you give away? The man said, well, I'm going to start with how much my wife and I live off of.

We have a house, we've paid it off. We have two cars, we've paid it off. We've put our kids through college. You know, we're near the end of our career. So we live off about \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year.

[23 : 32] And so my friend then asked him, okay, well, how much do you give away? He said, we give away the rest of it. My friend, thinking that he was going to show this man for the scam that he was and reveal that he had nothing to share about money, actually walked away not just humbled but encouraged and he thought as he walked away, I wish that there was a way of knowing that there are more people like that in the world.

And then as he watched this man for the rest of the weekend, he said, I could tell that this was a man who was filled with joy because he trusted God rather than money and so he managed and controlled his money rather than letting it manage and control him.

Now, most of us don't make high six figures to low seven figures a year, but the point is this, this man knew the secret of looking not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.

He wasn't going to the poor house over his giving but he also wasn't taking his money and using it to find his security and his worth. He wasn't storing all of it away as a way of investing everything in case something went wrong.

I'm sure this man had saved for retirement. I'm sure he had what he needed set aside but this was a partnership kind of man. This was a man who looked not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others and so that's what Paul is telling us here as well that our money is not just the test, not just the instant read thermometer on our joy but it's also the test of our partnership.

[25 : 17] If we are truly going after the partnership with one another, going after the treasure then we will share our treasure as well. And so money is our test of our joy, a test of our partnership but it's also a test of the gospel.

Paul tells us in verse 17 that he doesn't seek the gift primarily. It is useful for him. They have met needs of his but that's not his primary interest in their giving to him. Instead, he seeks what he calls the fruit that increases to your credit.

This again is what we talked about in chapter 1 of Philippians that they would increase and grow that their faith and their love would abound more and more. And then he tells us that he has received full payment that this has been a fragrant offering to God that this giving is a sign that the gospel has been at work in their lives.

Not only does it show that they're finding their joy in the right place, not only does it show that they're partnering fully, but it shows that they understand the gospel at a fundamental level. These are people who have understood the fact that God provides for them.

They know what Paul tells us in verses 13 and 19. They know that they can do all things through God who strengthens them. And then they know in verse 19 that God will supply every need of theirs according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 43] And so because these people have had trust in God, that has resulted in them. The fruit of their trust in him is that they've given.

And so the point is not that we need to give more to God or others to prove something to him or earn something from him. Instead, the point is the more that we understand that we have nothing to prove to God and nothing that we can earn from him, the more we will find ourselves naturally being generous to others.

That as Paul looks at the lives of the people in Philippi, he sees this giving as fruit of God's work in their lives. And so it reveals what is already true, that they understand the gospel, they understand what God is doing and what he's done for them, and so it frees them up because they trust God rather than money, because they manage and control their money rather than letting their money manage and control them, the very natural, intuitive, logical next step is simply that they would be generous with the people around them.

Many of you have probably already gone out and bought Christmas trees, and those of you who haven't will probably do so soon. And the one thing I find fascinating about Christmas trees is that they always look so symmetrical.

I'm not sure how they do that on Christmas tree farms, but if you go out in nature, if you're out in the wilderness, you will be very challenged to find a symmetrical tree.

[28 : 21] If you haven't thought about that before, the next time you're out somewhere that's not in a well-manicured neighborhood or a Christmas tree farm, just go out in the wilderness and look at a tree and see if you can find one that's exactly the same on either side.

And if you do, just go onto a different side and you'll realize you were wrong. Now there's a lot of reasons that trees grow differently on different sides, but one of the primary reasons is the way that the sun works.

So the sun is brightest when it's in the southern sky. We know that. That's why people like to get out early in the morning before it's too hot. And if the sun is brightest in the southern sky, then it only makes sense that the branches of the tree that are on the southern side are going to be longer and fuller.

Because the tree knows what's right. It knows that the sun is the source of its life. And so it knows that the more it points itself towards that, the more it's going to be able to grow.

And the more it grows, the more it points itself towards that. And so what Paul is telling us here, and he tells us that this is the fruit, is that the more that we know that God is the source of our life, the more we know the truth of verse 19, the more we will find ourselves growing towards him.

[29 : 48] And the more that we find ourselves growing towards him, the natural result, the natural growth, the natural fruit will result in our generosity to others.

And so Paul is not preaching a prosperity gospel here. He's not saying the more you give, the more you'll get. In fact, he's telling us that he's experienced poverty before.

But instead, he's telling us the more that we understand God and his provision for us, the more that we know that not a hair can fall from our heads without him knowing, the more we will look to him and the less we will look to money.

And so Paul ends where he began in this letter. Remember, he began by telling them he wished them to have grace and peace. Grace, the forgiveness that comes from God because Jesus died even though he didn't sin so that we could live even though we do.

And then he ends in the same way in verse 23, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. And so God has looked out for you not only in the past, not only in the grace that he gives you by what Jesus did when he died on the cross, but that means he's also looking out for you in the present.

[31 : 20] And so you can hope and trust in him as we wait now for the future. We can trust him with our lives because he looks out for us, not just in the past, not just in the future, but in the present.

And so we can grow more and more as we look to him as our source of life. Please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that not a hair can fall from our heads without you knowing, that you are the source of our life, that you provide everything that we need.

We ask that you remind us of it again, that you'd pour out your spirit on us, that you'd grow us, that we would grow more and more towards you and also grow more in our generosity towards others.

We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen.