

Sermon – 16/05/2010 am

My Provider

Study Text: Philippians 4:19-20

There was a terrible famine in Israel when the Lord told the prophet Elijah to go down to a town in Sidon. He met a widow there who was gathering sticks to cook a meal for herself and her son. She thought it would be their last meal because she only had enough flour and oil to make one more piece of flat bread.

This complete stranger asked her to give him some water and some bread. But that would mean less for her son and herself. How could this stranger expect her to give him the last piece of bread she had? But that is what she did. From her last handful of flour, and draining the bottle of oil, she baked a cake and gave it to Elijah. Did she and her son go without? No! *The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah* (I Kings 17:14).

The Lord supplied the need of this poor widow. He did so in response to her faith; her trust in the promise of the God spoken by Elijah. *My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus* (4:19). This was the promise of God written by the apostle Paul to the believers at Philippi after they gave sacrificially to the imprisoned apostle. God is no man's debtor. *Give and it will be given to you, said Jesus, a good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over* (Luke 6:38).

My God

The son of the widow of Zarephath later got sick and died. She began to blame Elijah. Elijah cried out to the Lord saying 'O Lord my God'. From the depths of his heart he prayed to 'my God'. Elijah knew God intimately. He knew that God could and would supply the needs of this widow. When the son died he cried out to God to let the child live. God heard his cry. The child revived and the widow worshipped the God of Elijah.

My God shall supply all your need wrote Paul. He began this letter saying *I thank my God* (1:3). Paul was a man of prayer. He was a man who knew God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew the grace of God in Christ Jesus. He knew the glory of God in Christ Jesus. He knew God the almighty creator and ruler of heaven and earth. He knew *the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone... dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see* (I Timothy 6:16). He knew the God for whom nothing is impossible. He called God *my God*.

How well do you know God? Do you call upon God in a personal way or are your prayers formal and impersonal? Are you aware of what God has spoken in the Bible? Do you believe the promises of God that you find there? This is what trusting in the Lord is all about. It is not simply about having the right doctrine; it is about knowing God and his promises and trusting in him. 'Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey'. Do not trust in princes or in a human being in whom there is no help ... *happy is the man who hope is in the Lord his God who made heaven and earth ... who gives food to the hungry and freedom to prisoners* (Psalm 146:3, 5, 7).

Faith without works is dead. If you have faith in Jesus Christ then walk by faith and not by sight. Step out in faith and stand on the promises of God. This is what the apostle Paul did. This is what

the believers at Philippi did. It landed Paul in prison but that did not make him doubt the will of God, or the power of God. He was content; he was rejoicing. God was as close, if not closer, to him in prison than anywhere else. He prayed with confidence that God who began a good work in these believers would complete that work (1:6). He prayed with confidence that *my God shall supply all your need*.

Your Need

In this verse Paul is very specific about who is giving to whom. *My God shall supply your need*. He is not sprouting some new philosophy or some law of karma. He is not talking about giving in the hope of getting something in return one day. Why do the ungodly give? For some it is because it makes them feel good. For others it is because they expect something in return one day. If they do you a favour they expect you to do them a favour – and some have long memories! Even Christians can get into such modes of giving.

Paul was writing to men and women who believed in Jesus Christ. He was thankful for the gift they sent him – thankful to them and to God. They did not give with selfish motives. They did not expect Paul to do them a good turn. They gave because of the grace of God. They gave because the Lord moved them to give. They first gave themselves first to the Lord and then to Paul (II Corinthians 8:5). What Paul did remind them of was that God took note of their giving and God would make sure they would not be in want of any good thing. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want* is the promise of Psalm 23. God knows your need and is able to provide for you from his infinite resources.

This verse is one of God's greatest promises to you if you believe in him. Most Christians know it and many have, of necessity, clung tightly to it at some time in their life. Can you remember such a time?

Recently a pastor was returning from a conference in New Zealand to his home in Asia. At the airport he was surprised to find that he had to pay a departure tax – but he had no money. The man behind him in the line was a pastor from India. He took out his wallet and paid the man's tax for him. He will probably never see this man again this side of heaven. The Indian man came to our church and was given gifts by various people. Both men rejoice in the Lord for his wonderful provision of their needs. Let us also rejoice in the Lord who supplies all our needs, both material, and spiritual.

'What are our needs?' asks Boice in his study of this verse. 'Firstly there is forgiveness, then fellowship with God, and God's defence against our enemies' says Boice. To be sure we have great spiritual needs. Our greatest need is to know what these are. We are well aware of our material needs but not always aware of our spiritual needs. The apostle Paul spoke of spiritual blessings that the church at Corinth had received through his ministry, while at the same time teaching them about material giving to the ministry (I Corinthians 9:11). Nevertheless, in the context the focus of Philippians 4:19 must be upon material needs. I am sure a pastor in a poor country would not think this verse was only about spiritual needs, as indicated by Boice.

Churches which take Philippians 4:13 out of context tend to do the same with this verse. They teach that 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' means Christ will empower them to perform amazing feats, even miracles. They teach that 'God will supply all your needs' means God wants you to have the best of whatever the world offers. 'Your need is not simply a car; it is a shiny red BMW' they say. 'Ask for big things because God is big'. They read the word 'greed' in place of 'need' in this verse. God knows what you need and will supply that need in order that you might give him thanks and glorify his holy name.

His Riches

God will supply all your need because of the relationship he has with you. That relationship is in Christ Jesus. This promise is only for those who believe in Jesus Christ. If you do not believe you are still in your sin and cut off from God. You have no relationship with God. God forgives your sin because Jesus took the penalty for your sin on the cross. You were once far off but have been brought near through the precious blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). We are brought into a covenant relationship with God in the blood of Christ.

If God did not spare his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32). It is in Jesus Christ that we have access to the throne of grace. If we ask anything in his name, and according to his will, we can be confident that God will hear us and supply our need.

The word 'riches' often has a negative connotation in the Bible. It is hard for rich people to enter into the kingdom of God. But in this verse the word 'riches' is attached to the word 'glory'. We can read 'glorious riches in Christ Jesus'. Paul preached *the unsearchable riches of Christ* (Ephesians 3:8). By this he meant the glorious gospel of salvation; the rich spiritual blessings we have in Christ. But we are body and soul. We have physical as well as spiritual needs, as God our creator well knows.

Just as the apostle was full and abounded because of the gift of the Philippians (4:18), God would make them full and abounding in him. They had given to the Lord and the Lord would give to them a full cup, running over with abundance. God is able to do this because he is God. He will do this because of the riches of Christ. God is infinite. His resources are inexhaustible. There is no end to his abundant provision for the needs of his children.

A missionary speaker reminded his audience of words found in Psalm 50 – *Every beast of the forest is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills*. He said if God owns the cattle on a thousand hills he can sell a few from time to time to supply your need!

Now to our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. The apostle was deeply moved by the amazing grace of God in the giving and receiving of this church. He was so filled with awe and wonder at the greatness and goodness of God that his heart overflowed in this expression of joy and rejoicing in the Lord. Overcome by such awe and wonder he burst forth with this doxology, giving all praise and glory to God.

Paul did the same thing a couple of times previously in this letter (1:11, 2:11). This time he adds 'Amen'. 'Amen' means 'so let it be'. He can say no more. He called upon the readers of this letter to join him in giving all praise and glory to our God and Father who is in heaven; the King of kings and Lord of lords for ever and ever. Amen.

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