

I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Strengthens Me

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Date: 29 December 2019

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[0 : 00] let's turn to Philippians 4 and verse 13 Philippians in chapter 4 reading at verse 10 I rejoiced 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 from being in need for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content 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 I can do all things through him who strengthens me last year was different for every single person here nobody had the same year as the person sitting next to you because we are all different and we are all going through different things the year to come will be different for every single one of us and I don't know what lies before us but as we said in the notices this day faith never knows where it is being led but it loves and knows the one who is leading Oswald Chambers said that what I do know is that the same for last year and for this year to come really there are three ways of living three ways of living before God one way of living says I won't you reject God's ways God's word God's plan the other way is when you say I can't

I love you I seek to follow you I want to serve you but I just can't do it and the third way is when you say I do love you with all my imperfections and I do see the possibilities and the opportunities and I can I can as Paul said I can do all things through him who strengthens me ultimately our lives will reflect one of these three two of them perhaps all of them which one will be the major shaping in your life I won't I can't I can those who say I won't I guess they are the kind of people described by Paul in Ephesians in Ephesians chapter 2 the famous words you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world following the prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of humankind you see the description there it's a people who are dead dead not because they are physically dead but in terms of a relationship with God they just don't have one that really affects the way they live they don't do good works because they want to honour God they are dead in sins they do follow the course of the world they do follow the prince of the power of the air and this ruler we are told by Paul is right now at work within them so that they become sons of disobedience of course that is not how they see themselves they don't see themselves as sons or children of disobedience they think that they are just doing and living and going their own life their own way and they don't see that they are disobeying anything but from Paul's point of view from God's point of view that's what they are the passions of their flesh the desires of the body and their mind have taken over and they are following the course of the world under the prince of the world and these are the kind of people who will turn invariably towards God and say

I won't I will not read your word I will not take your commandments on board I will not use my gifts to honour you I will not use my year to come for you and your glory I have my own goals I have my own standards I have my own path and I won't go the way that scripture here calls us to go it's a very sad situation for people to be in but it's only sad when you see it from the other side for those who are in that situation they don't see the sadness in fact probably they are the ones who are laughing the most through the year they are the ones who really have so much joy in many ways and their hearts are thrilled but really from our point of view those of us who are Christians looking on there's this tremendous sadness that fills our hearts when we realise that here are a group of people some of whom we know and love dearly and they are characterised by

I won't I didn't last year and I have no intention of this year being any different I won't if that's you tonight one of the most wonderful things that is true for you is that God is actually calling you away from that life right now right here tonight itself the God who is rich in mercy is the one who is able to make you alive God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us he can change you so that you will just find yourself self saying I want to live for him the second group [7 : 46] I can't I guess they are the kind of people modelled in the life of somebody like Timothy Timothy came from good people Eunice and Lois were in his ancestry line they had become Christians they were people of faith they were people who really loved the Lord and yet Timothy though he had become a Christian he was somebody that was characterized by a terrible timidity a terrible timidity yes he says you have sincere faith says Paul in 2nd Timothy 1 this faith that dwelt in your grandmother Lois your mother Eunice and I'm absolutely sure he says it dwells in you as well when did you last go up to a Christian and say I am sure that you have this sincere genuine faith unhypocritical the real article have you been used to encourage any of the

Lord's people in that way well Paul is taking time to write this letter his last letter and he wants to remind this young man Timothy he has real genuine sincere faith but he says to him that's not enough I want you he says to fan and to flame the gift of God which is in you because you have sincere faith I want you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power of love and of self control so here's somebody like Timothy and perhaps that's the way you are you have been genuinely changed you're not unconverted you're not somebody who's still in the darkness you've seen the light you're somebody who knows about God and Christ you have come to him you've bowed the knee you've called him

Lord your thinking has changed your affections have changed your desires have changed your will has been altered and you do live differently from what you once did you also are somebody that sees opportunities you see possibilities you see things that could be done for the Lord you see all these kind of things that you would want to achieve and yet like Timothy despite the fact that you may be so gifted you always find a reason for not setting out from the shore you always find a reason for not sailing out you always find a reason it could be family circumstances could be things going on in the house it could be divine providence things that

God has allowed to come into your life and they're awful things it could be your own sense of personal limitation because you realize that despite the fact that you love the Lord such as you do still there are so many limits that you see within yourself quite honestly and you feel you just cannot possibly go beyond the line you can't possibly launch out you can't possibly go and soar in the service of the Lord so your life is changed and you're aware of possibilities you hear the call and sometimes you might even want to put your hands on your spiritual ears so you wouldn't hear the call but you hear it and you know what you should be doing but from the depths of your heart what really comes out is

Lord I can't I just can't do it I know what you're asking I hear what you're saying I'm aware of the calling but I just can't do it it may be that the Lord is calling you to a particular sphere of service it may be that he's asking you to speak to a neighbour or a friend it may be that he's wanting you for the ten thousandth time to share the gospel with a loved one and you just feel I can't do it he may be wanting you to bridge out and to go into a certain path and you feel within you that there are certain gifts unused but you just keep coming up to this I can't it may be that you feel as if you have been called to profess the Lord you may be like Nicodemus a secret

[13 : 15] Christian like Joseph of Arimathea and you do love the Lord but you haven't told anyone and you don't want to come and join his people because you're aware of your own failures and your own sins and your own shortcoming and you basically are saying to Lord I know but I just can't I can't do it you're not saying I won't you're not joining with those people who are rejecting God but you're in this kind of middle ground when you're saying I just can't so you feel as if you're birthed at the pier and the engine is running but you're just not setting out at all maybe the charts are there and you can see where you should be going but you just don't go

I can't I suspect most of us here for some part of last year were in that category I can't there may be some sins that you just can't turn away from there may be some opportunities that you just can't take up there may be some things that you're praying for and you just can't go beyond the prayer there may be things that are just too great for you I can't

I can't I can't that's the way Timothy was but that's not the way Timothy remained and that brings us to this third group and that's the group who say I can we're only just tapping into this kind of stuff

tonight and you saw in Philippians there Paul writing to them and saying I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me much in the people who read that for the first time I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me of course it doesn't mean that he can do everything that is conceivable for a human being to do that's not what this is about you don't have to play around with words but the kind of stuff that you know the

Lord wants you to do the kind of life that you know he wants you to live the kind of gifts that you know he wants you to exercise the kind of providence that he knows he has allowed I can do this I can I'm not going to stand before God and say I won't I'm not going to say I can't I'm telling the Philippians I can do all things through him who strengthens me of course Paul wasn't always in that situation and I don't think he was in that situation even on the road to Damascus when he became a Christian there were some things you see that even the great apostle Paul had to learn and he had to learn to be content to cope with hunger and want and plenty and fool he had to learn that he had to come to a position where he could say

I can do all things through him who strengthens me do you remember what he wrote to the Corinthians 1st Corinthians 15 he's in some ways comparing himself you might think rather boastfully but I don't think he was comparing himself to the other apostles you see they had the privilege of being with Jesus for three years Paul didn't they had the privilege of watching Jesus serving with Jesus watching the miracles here in the teaching Paul didn't Paul describes himself as like a miscarriage somebody that was born out of time the last apostle to be joined to the group but he says I did things I did things by the grace of God he says I am what

[18:43] I am and his grace toward me was not in vain on the contrary I worked harder than any of them though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me see what he's saying he's saying I worked harder than any of them you may ask both for Paul hold back your words and you might say well yes I would have changed a word here and there but look at the way he qualifies it by the grace of God I am what I am by the grace of God towards me I did what I did but it wasn't I he says it was the grace of God with me look at this what's the word that keeps coming up there is this word grace grace is a gift that we receive grace in this kind of context is the opportunity to serve and the strength to serve and Paul says do you know what looking back over my life he says

I did things but it wasn't me it was God's grace God's grace so when he's writing to the Philippians he talks about him who strengthens me when he's writing to the Corinthians he says the one who gave me grace and the two things are tied together the strength that God receives is a gift but it's a gift that he doesn't earn it's grace and that's the way it always is in the service of God the grace that you need is a grace that is given and everyone who receives it doesn't deserve it that's the reality it's this grace and this strength you find the same thing being said to

Timothy you then 2nd Timothy 2 and verse 1 you then my child Timothy be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus strengthened by grace see the kind of power and strength and might that the world out there treasures it's not one that is gifted it's one that is earned by hard effort but the kind of strength that characterizes the Christian and the Christian church is always a strength that is graced to every servant of God so we're going to spend just a little time exploring the kind of things that

Paul needed strength for and as we do so I want you and I to be thinking about what it might be that God would want us to do I want us to think of opportunities and not measure the opportunities by our own limitations I want us to be conscious of Christ's strength and I want us to be conscious of this grace that the opportunity to serve and the strength to serve does not depend on your goodness it's always always grace what is it that Paul needed strength to do what is it that he needed this kind of gracious strength to do well it's interesting the first kind of thing that Paul might mention would again be in

Ephesians in chapter 3 Ephesians in chapter 3 listen to what he says I bow my knees he says and he's praying to the father what is he asking for that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so he's asking God for strength in our inner being through his spirit why so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith why that you being rooted and grounded in love may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is it that we need such strength to know to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of

[24 : 06] God Paul says do you know what I'm praying for you Ephesians same as I've prayed for myself I've prayed for strength to know the love of Christ I have prayed for strength to know the fullness of God you need strength for that this is not a matter of going to ETS or the Saturday course or reading a few books by Tim Keller that's not what it's about to understand God you need strength to bear that knowledge you need strength to use that knowledge you need strength in the inner man through the spirit so here you are as a Christian and you're just embarking as it were you're there at the key side and you're wanting to set sail and that's what you want about everything else you want to know before you do you want the strength to know

God before you have the strength to serve God that's really important really important knowing God is the most important thing you can do in 2020 getting to know his love in Christ getting to know the fullness of God and to be filled with that fullness to know it up there in a way that affects you in here and then flows out into your life you need strength for that without his strength you can't do it now I know some of you say I've been a Christian for years and I still feel I'm part of the key you still say I just don't know how to grow as a Christian well here is how you don't say

I can't grow you say I can grow the opportunities are there and the strength is available by God's grace do you imagine for a moment that God looks at any of you and says I don't want you to know me yes you're my child but I don't want you to know me in my fullness of course not he wants you to know and his spirit indwells every Christian and the strength that that Holy Spirit gives will enable you to grow to go I was reading last night of a young Afghan boy you've all heard about Adam our friend who works among Muslims and he writes about a young

Afghan boy who had been kidnapped by the Taliban he'd been in a Quranic school for two years forced to become a child soldier and once he was made a soldier forced to murder people he escaped from the Taliban became a refugee in Germany and then in God's plan he was somewhere where Adam was preaching and as Adam preached God brought him alive and he professed faith and he came to Adam and this is what he said sir I have been delivered from the darkest of prisons this is the greatest gift I have ever been given what a beautiful person is Jesus Christ and what a marvelous message is his message to mankind he's only a young boy but look what he says what a beautiful person is

Jesus Christ see that kind of knowledge is only gained by those who are strengthened by the Lord asking for that strength so the strength to know the Lord and the gospel better it could also be the strength to exercise faith and love in the face of impossible odds Timothy is very much in my mind these days for some reason 1st Timothy 1 and verse 4 1st Timothy 1 and verse 14 sorry here's Paul little bit of his life story you know what it's like when you come to certainly ourselves as [29 : 32] Scottish people we look back on the past at this time of year but this is Paul looking back I thank him who has given me strength Christ Jesus our Lord because he judged me faithful appointing me to his service though formerly I was a blasphemer persecutor insolent opponent but I received mercy because I had acted ignorant and belief and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus see what he's saying there the Lord gave me strength not only to believe on him but to actually serve him the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus the rest of Paul's life would be the outworking of that faith and love often facing impossible odds interesting when he's writing in

Romans 4 about Abraham remember Abraham he was somebody who was promised a child he was an old man his wife was old humanly speaking impossible but what does Paul say no unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God there's Abraham facing the impossible odds how on earth am I going to cope with this God promised something that is humanly impossible how can I possibly be faithful in this situation but he was he grew strong in his faith even though he faced the impossible he was strong in his faith and that's the truth for you as well you may have impossible odds you may be facing situations and you've measured it all out and you say

I know the limitations I know my limitations I know the things that normally happen and I can't see a way out of this I can't see a way of this going forward and you're just like Abraham in that situation a promise has been made and you can't see how it can be kept but that's where you exercise faith and love and as you exercise it it grows strong that's the thing about faith and love and hope the more you exercise them the stronger they get or maybe you want to serve the church of Jesus Christ better you want to serve him better well remember what I said earlier Paul writing to Timothy you then my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus what you have heard from

me in the presence of many witnesses and trust to faithful men who will be able to teach others what do

I want you to do Timothy Timothy I want you to disciple other Christians and I want you Timothy to ensure that there will be other disciples prepared who will disciple other Christians that there will be faithful people to whom the gospel can be entrusted so that they can teach other people Timothy you are key to this I want you to entrust this to faithful men I want you to be the disciple in chief in this particular situation but to do that Timothy you need grace you need strength you my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus and what you have heard from me entrust to faithful people now you might say you don't need strength to pass on teaching you don't need strength to pass on testimony you do you most certainly do that's one of the most terrifying things happening in the church worldwide at the moment that we think we've solved things when we master a technique the reality is we need strength for every discipling moment for every discipling action for every venture whether we're trying to raise our children for the Lord or whether we are mentoring new

Christians in our congregation or whether we are trying to encourage the vision and the mission of God further afield in the bulletin this week you'll notice Billy Green he's I remember him speaking to me about this years back about these notes that he had prepared for his own family and now by God's providence they're being made available for others like ourselves and I will certainly be signing up for them because you never ever grow out of the need to be disciplined you never graduate you never come to a point where you don't need to be taught and here's somebody like Billy Graham and these notes born out of his own experience under God and in God's service in Fife in Edinburgh in South

[35 : 53] Africa with all the difficulties and the illnesses that he and his wife have borne over these years and all that filters into teaching that was delivered once in the past and now re-delivered by God's grace again I assume Billy will have asked the Lord for the strength to do that and here he is in his I don't know late 80s probably and here is this small man and he's being strengthened for a new task that's great and that's what you want to see Paul did so much of this he disciplined so many people in his own life he planted so many churches throughout the continents but you know one thing he says about the churches that he planted one of the things he says he prays for them night and day night and day when he's writing to the

Thessalonians he says we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking your faith when he's writing to Timothy he says with a clear conscience as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day here is somebody as he says to the Corinthians there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches see you plant a church you walk away people have often said how could Paul possibly be in a place for only three months and then walk away a few weeks and then off or maybe at the longest is maybe two and a half years in Ephesus and you think that's hardly any time but Paul once he left these congregations he never stopped pastoring them there was always on him the pressure and as he calls it the daily pressure you don't let it go you don't stop carrying the burden it's there all the time that's the sign of a pastor even when he's on holiday he doesn't switch off he can't switch off he's tired but he can't walk away he may be somewhere else but he's thinking about those whom he left behind now we can't always bear all the burdens that Paul did he had a specific ministry he was planting apostolic churches and these were crucial you and I are living in a different age but the principles still apply but you know you cannot pray night and day and you cannot carry that daily burden of the people for whom you have a role you can't do it in your own strength it's impossible or you might think well what else does

Paul need strength for he's writing second timothy last letter soon he's going to be martyred for the lord soon he's going to be in heaven and this is what he says I am already being poured out as a drink offering the time of my departure has come and how does he sum up his ministry I have fought the good fight I have finished the race I have kept the faith would you be willing to write that in your gravestone I have fought the good fight as a Christian I have finished the race that God gave me to run and in my sphere I kept the faith you must remember that when Paul used the I three times I have fought I have finished I have kept the faith what he really means is I fought the good fight for you I have finished the race for you and I have kept the faith so that you will have the faith to pass on to another generation Dr. Ian McDonald McDonald 61 years a member in Aberdeen Free Church 42 years I think an elder Nigel's dad Bill Anderson countless students

under his care people whom we know in this congregation who loved and then were taken home to be with the

Lord how many of them could say yeah I fought a good fight I finished the race and I kept the faith I passed it on I defended it I looked after it I stood up for it even when I was misunderstood I did so and I passed it on and now my time is finished you see Paul needed strength to do that going along with that there's the willingness to suffer for the gospel when he's writing to the Ephesians in chapter 6 Ephesians a very rich church spiritually within a generation they were going to lose their first love they didn't listen to what

[43 : 01] Paul wrote but listen to this finally he says be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might put on the whole armor of God why why do you need to be so strong in the Lord so strengthened by his might to put on the armor that God provides so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil how come the 21st century church sees no need anymore to pray Lord lead us not into temptation deliver us from evil how come the 21st century church feels at ease in going without the armor and mixing with the world indistinguishable from the world see you need strength from the Lord armor from

God to wrestle not against flesh and blood but against rulers against authorities cosmic powers present darkness spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places you just cannot do it without God's help without God's strength let me quote to you from Don Carson there have been more Christian conversions since 1800 than in the previous 1800 years combined and there have been more Christian martyrs since 1800 than in the previous 1800 years combined to this you have been called it's a myth that the

Christian church today is not persecuted it's not suffering it's not being afflicted it's a myth just because over in our part of the world we can sail as it were through our Christian lives without feeling these afflictions the reality is more have been martyred for the faith since 1800 than in all the 1800 years before that you have been called to this suffering for the gospel could be a lonely task a very lonely task again Paul alludes to this in 2nd Timothy in verse 4 interesting actually 2nd Timothy 4 and verse 9 writes to

Timothy do your best to come to me soon why does he want this young man well he says demons is in love with this present world he deserted me gone to Thessalonica Crescens has gone to Galatia Titus to Dalmatia Luke alone is with me get Mark and bring him with you for he is very useful to me for ministry and then he talks about Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm and then in verse 16 at my first defense this is when he was brought before the greatest ruler in the world of that day the Roman emperor at my first defense for the gospel no one came to stand by me no one came to stand by me but all deserted me can you imagine how lonely it must have been for Paul at that time in Rome you read in Acts that lots of people came to visit him this is two years later different situation and he says at my first defense no one came to stand by me all deserted me would you be willing to experience that kind of loneliness where you are the only person defending the faith in a certain area Paul graciously says may it not be charged against them but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me it's not great no one else was there but the

[48 : 07] Lord stood next to me and he was so near me that I experienced his strength strengthening me sometimes you have to be alone you have to be alone to experience that kind of strength we can strengthen one another and that can be an opportunity for another sermon but this kind of strength you have to be alone to experience John Piper says the worst type of loneliness comes from our sin and disobedience sin does bring loneliness for a while it brings company but ultimately it brings loneliness the second type of loneliness is that loneliness that comes upon us through our circumstances not all loneliness is our fault sometimes we thrust into it and then he says the third type of loneliness comes upon us through our obedience and courage the loneliness that comes from being

Christ's disciple that's what Paul was experiencing that kind of loneliness and the Lord became so precious and in his last letter that's what he says the Lord stood by me and strengthened me how did he know he strengthened him because he continued to stand up for the gospel he didn't flinch and as a result through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all Gentiles might hear it I was rescued from the lion's mouth Paul you're going to die a few days after this oh death I was rescued he says I was enabled to be obedient my death was gain especially when I kept the faith and then finally to bear with

God's providences which was the text that we started with Philippians 4 and verse 13 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 I can do all things through him who strengthens me to cope with plenty and to cope with want it's a learning experience and Paul says I've learned that one if you hadn't sent me any gift if you hadn't sent any financial help that would be okay I've learned to cope without that now that you've sent it I rejoice in it I've learned to do that but whatever it is that

God puts in my way whether it be times of plenty or times of want times of being in hunger being in distress or times when you wake up and your sleep has been sound I'm able to cope he says with all of that sometimes Paul had to cope with the thorn in the flesh and he says Lord I don't want it take it away three times he asked the Lord to take it away and the Lord said no he says my grace remember what we said about grace and strength my grace is sufficient for you my strength is made perfect in your weakness does that mean says Paul that even when I'm strong I still feel weak strangely yes because that's what grace does it never makes you proud you are strengthened not for tomorrow's tasks tomorrow's obedience your strength in for just now this moment and the reality is that's what

God wants us to do so as you go into 2020 I urge you as I urge myself more than I'm urging you actually ask the Lord for opportunities measure your willingness and ability to take these opportunities by Christ's strength not your strength and remember this one thing and this will close when you use grace it always leads to more grace last week I think or two weeks ago Nigel was preaching and the word became flesh dwelt among us we beheld his glory glory is the one and only from the father full of grace and truth out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace that's interpreted various ways but there is something about grace that once you have seen and used it you then receive more once you have seen the glory you always see more you never graduate out of seeing the fullness of the glory even of the word made flesh and it's the same with strength if grace leads to grace and the more you exercise grace the more grace you receive so it is with strength

[54 : 54] I guarantee you I guarantee you if you go out trusting in the Lord for something today tomorrow you will find God will strengthen you and as you do that you will find that the next day will be prepared for you and strength for that day give us this day our daily bread don't go beyond that just trust him take a step out you're there at the pier you're on the ship you have faith in Christ you're safe but you want to be useful you have been saved and then called and how are you going to live it's not I won't it's not I can't it's

I can because of God's strength and God's grace let's pray oh heavenly father we are thankful that you are the one who sets opportunities before us you open doors that no one can shut you are the one Lord that gives a vision you are the one Lord that shows before us our most wonderful mission so that we can like Paul long to preach the gospel where it has not been preached before serve your church in ways in which we have never served it before help us Lord we pray to do it by your grace by your strength may we be strengthened with the grace in Christ Jesus we ask it for your glory and your sake Amen let's close now by singing to God's praise in Psalm 73 Psalm 73 well known words 23 to 26 23 that's page 316 23 and you see there in verse 26 my flesh and heart doth faint and fail but God doth fail me never for of my heart God is the strength and portion forever Psalm 316 23 to 26 and the tune is weather and stop here with love and take place to bear once it stays up and to heal and spread in the heart and get how it