

A Fragrant Offering

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 4. We are coming to the end. This will be the last sermon that I'll preach in Philippians 4. Philippians 4, we've moved. Sometimes we've just looked at a verse. Sometimes we've looked at two verses. We're looking at quite a big chunk, but it has the one theme, and that is why we will deal with this together as we bring this to a close. I've preached through Philippians a few times.

The Lord has blessed it to various churches. I've seen personally a change in churches through this series. That's why I never hesitate to do this. But to my great shock, whenever I begin a series, I always start it. I always, when others that are in the church can preach, I make sure I preach in the first two or three, set the tone, and I usually finish it. I've never finished this sermon, this series. I couldn't believe. I must have preached in it in Derbyshire, but for some strange reason, all I could find was my PowerPoint slides, which I don't have. I'm not using them. I'm using other ones tonight. No notes whatsoever. It came as a shocking Wednesday when I looked at this. I thought, wow, I'm going to have to start refresh and look at this. So maybe, hopefully, the Lord will speak to us. At least, as they used to say in Paddy's Market in Glasgow, selling off, it's all fresh stuff now, missus. As this junk was hanging on these wire fences that you wouldn't dare wear. At least, it's all fresh stuff, missus. So it's all fresh as we look at this passage together. Now let's read together from verse 10, setting the context for verses 15 to the end. Paul writes to this church that supported them, I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.

Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only.

For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts, what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Great letter of the Apostle Paul. Let's stand before we look at this together, and let's use this. And thank you for choosing that tune. That's a great tune to that song. I'm really pleased that you chose that. That's great. Turn with me back to Philippians chapter 4 as we bring this series to a close. And let's just ask for the Lord's help once again. Father, as we come to your Lord now, we pray, Father, that you will speak to us. Lord, give us ears to hear, Lord, what you would say to us as a church and as individuals. In Jesus' name. Amen. We have, as Christians, we have one Lord and one faith, one baptism, one gospel. But sad to say, in many ways, we have so many different denominations.

[4 : 22] I came across this image during the week. I can't verify its truthfulness or whether it's a completely accurate picture of how you start with Jesus, the apostles, and the early church, and how over history it begins to branch out. Eastern Orthodox, the Roman Catholic Church, and then the Protestant Reformation, and then you have various different denominations. I'm sure you can add to them and put other arrows in as well. It's very confusing. It's very confusing for those who aren't Christians. Why is there so many different denominations, especially in the Protestant faith? We all believe roughly the same things, but we begin to major in certain things, and perhaps rightfully so, but it ends up fragmenting. And it can be very confusing. What's the difference between you and them? The danger with this is, and this is what I find quite sad, is that sometimes we all preach, many of us preach the same gospel, but because we disagree in certain things, we don't have fellowship in that way with perhaps others. We are Baptist, and it's good when I move into an area or come to,

I always try and link in with other evangelical churches, people who preach the same gospel, maybe not so much those who preach a different gospel, but those who preach the gospel. But even in FIEC, here's the logo for FIEC, the word fellowship is a big word within FIEC. It's they always try and promote fellowship amongst the churches, 600 or 700 or so, churches in the UK, and regional gatherings. But usually the ministers are good at having fellowship, but not so much the churches. I don't know, Charlotte Chapel might be our nearest FIEC church. Usually on the last Sunday of the month when I was in Derbyshire, another church would meet with another FIEC church, and we would have one big service. That would be good. You'd have a job trying to squeeze Charlotte Chapel in here, and if we went there, we just wouldn't be noticed really. But it would be great if there's a local FIEC. I'll need to find out about that, and that's a good thing, to fellowship together.

Why am I saying this? Because when the Lord saves us, it's good that we partnership in the gospel. We work together with other believers to promote the gospel. And really, that's what these last few verses of this book are all about. We're ending our series in Philippians, where we are encouraged to shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life. This was a church that Paul founded in a very short time on his second missionary journey. He was only there for a week or two, and the Lord saved the Philippian jailer, Lydia, and others. And this was a small church that was bound together, despite the fact that Paul and Silas were thrown in prison, singing at midnight, and the Philippian jailer got saved. God did a work in this place. And he writes to them. He leaves. He writes back to them and wants to encourage them to keep shining as stars as they hold out the word of life.

That's really what we've been looking at over this. And we've looked at many things about prayer, the advance of the gospel despite chains, living a life worthy of the gospel, standing firm, imitating Christ's humility, not grumbling or complaining, following good examples in the church, resolving personal conflict. And then lastly, the past two or three sermons we've looked at, as Paul finishes this, he wants them to live a stress-free life, to know a life of peace, even in the midst of trials and difficulties. And over the past few weeks, he's looked at prayer, prayer in all circumstances, and think about the right things, do the right things, and the God of peace will be with us. These were big topics. And then last time we looked at the rare jewel of Christian contentment, about being content as a Christian. And we looked at, it doesn't depend on circumstances. It can only be found in Christ when we walk with Christ, when we know Christ through his power through his strength, but it can be learned. You don't arrive at contentment the day after you're saved. It's lifelong learning. But Paul has learned this, he said, and perhaps I'm sure each one of us are still learning what it means to be content. Now, having said this, he now brings his letter to a close. And in some ways, he's still thinking about contentment as he finishes this. He's basically saying here that when we, we will have our needs met, and we will know what it means to be content when we think of others, when we think of serving others, especially in gospel ministry. Paul here, in verse 19, near the end of this letter, he says, my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ. It's how he finishes. This church has cared for Paul's need, and he says, my God will meet your needs. And that would certainly make us content this evening. So, he says here, he calls such activity when we care for others a fragrant offering. And that's what I've called this sermon. Verse 18, he's received full payment. He has more than enough. He's amply supplied.

He's received the gift from Epaphroditus. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And that's what he wants to talk about as he finishes and how God will meet them.

[10:18] So, I want to mention five things very quickly this evening as we look at this together. I want us to look at the giving that this church were involved in as it relates to Paul and his ministry. First of all, it was a unique giving. In verse 15, when that's the passage we've not preached on up to now, he returns to what he began with in verse 10. And this in verse 10, he says, I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you'd no opportunity to show it. Then he talked about living a stress-free life. And in verse 10, he comes back to verse 10. He says, Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me more and aid more and more, or more than once when I was in need. In other words, Paul recognized it wasn't always easy for the

Philippians to practically give to Paul. But whenever they could, they grasped it with both hands, and they gave to the apostle Paul. They helped him in his needs. Now, that's quite an amazing fact. This was a young church that Paul didn't spend a year. I've been here probably about a year now, Lucille and I. It was January, I think, when we first came, and we left for a couple of weeks, and we came back, and then the pastor announced he was leaving. And I think the first sermon I preached in recent days was February, the end of February. And it's coming up a year. I can't believe it.

Almost a year since I've started to preach to you, and more so when May came. But this is a church that Paul hardly knew, but he was involved in their conversion, and they really took Paul to heart.

They really—so, so much so that when he left and went to Thessalonica, which isn't far away from Philippi, they sent him aid again and again. They really partnered with Paul. Right at the start of Philippians, he mentions this. Right at the start, verse 4, And all my prayers for you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. In other words, since the first day you were saved as a church, you really stood by me. And you—when I went to Thessalonica, boom, you sent me gifts right away.

It's quite a remarkable thing, especially when not other churches did this. And it really is—he mentions this—not one church shared in the matter of giving except you only.

[13 : 05] other churches that Paul founded never bonded with him in quite the same way as the church at Philippi did. And it's a sign of their true friendship and in their partnership. And it was interesting studying this. You see this in the way that Paul spoke to them. He uses words—he almost talks about his relationship with them like a business contract here. The words he uses is—he says he uses commercial language. Look at verse 15. No other church in the matter of giving and receiving. Sounds very formal.

Verse 17, Not that I desire your gifts. What I desire is credited to your account. Verse 18, I have received full payment. It's a strange way to talk. It's almost as if, well, we entered into this business contract and you've done it. Everyone's been credited. I've received full payment as if they owed him. But that was the way friendships were conducted in those days. If you were a friend, it was almost like a legal binding contract. If somebody professed to be your friend, they were obliged. They had a duty to care for your needs. I'm sure if you have a friend, and they're a true friend, you would expect them to come to your help, help you practically. And that's very much what friendship was in Paul's day. So there was this sense of duty. And they would talk in that way, not, I'm paid up your credits in good form, and so forth. And they could be counted. This whole idea of giving and receiving. We don't talk like that. We don't use those words. Thanks, I'm fully paid your counts and credit. But that was the way. That was the language that they used there. And it's especially interesting because Paul was very sensitive about giving and receiving, receiving help from other churches. And if it was one thing, it really—there were so many hustlers going around preaching, making money, doing it in order to make money. So Paul went out of his way. The church at

Thessalonica, chapter 2, verse 9, the first letter, Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship. We worked hard night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel to you. Second letter, he says the same thing, Nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling that we would not be a burden. He says the same to the Corinthian church.

We worked hard. We didn't want to take your gifts, lest you think that we're just doing this for the money. And so much so that in verse 17 of the passage we read, Paul almost has to say to that, look, we didn't really want your gift. We didn't really need your gift. And so he feels almost kind of guilty, but yet at the same time, he really appreciates what they've done. Some visiting preachers are a bit like that. If you preach in another church and then usually at the end of the day, the church treasurer saddles up to you just before you leave in some kind of creepy way and you're going, yeah, what are you doing? And you know what's coming next. They give you some kind of wee envelope, thanks, brother, that's for you. I was mentioning to the elders once that some churches are not particularly good at paying for visiting preachers. There's a good article on the FIC website called The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly. If you just search for that on the FIC website,

I mean, some focal, and the illustration was, there's something for the journey home, and it's like two boiled sweets. And they think that's in gospel partnership with you. A couple of odd fellows will see you back home. And this church wasn't like that. This church really appreciated the ministry, and that's something churches, I think, do need to take seriously, isn't it? I'm amazed at how churches will pay a plumber 200 quid for two hours, whereas a preacher will spend 14 hours in the study and come and he gets 20 quid or something for turning up. It's a thing that churches need to take. And the Lord repays that, as we'll see in this sermon as well. So, this was a church that were unique. They really loved the Apostle Paul, and every opportunity they had, they contributed to his ministry. Secondly, it's a generous gift. And they were generous. They did so generously. Look at verse 16, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Verse 18, I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied by the gifts you sent. In other words, they gave as much as they could. This is a big thing for Paul. Paul, you remember, was, I think he was, in his travels, he would say to the churches, I'm coming through, pick up a collection so that when it's there, I can just pick it up and be on my way. When the Lord saves us, it's one of the evidences that we are really saved when we start to give to the Lord's work. It was especially true in Paul's day, when you had

[18 : 40] Jew and Gentile, and never the two should meet. But once you become a Christian, there is no longer Jew or Gentile, you're brothers and sisters in the Lord. And one sign that that was true was it affected your purse or your wallet. You were prepared to give to a Jewish church or a Gentile church.

And that's why this collection was not just for practical reasons. It really heralded the power of the gospel, that people would give money to the Lord's work. And that's why it's important. The gospel should touch our finances. It should touch what we can give. As I was thinking about this week, this whole topic, I came across a blog. It's Tim Charlie's blog. I'm thoroughly enjoying this.

It's just a great blog. If you want to know, if you want to just keep yourself fresh with current thinking as well and good stuff, I'll recommend it to you. He did an article on Tuesday, I think it was, of this week, entitled, How Much Money Am I Supposed to Give Away? And I went, well, that's good. I'm just preaching on this, and Sunday I'll have a wee read at that. How much more, how much money am I supposed to give away? His short answer was this, enough until it matters. You are to give enough until it matters.

And he explains it in this way. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul says this, he instructs the church to take a weekly collection, where each person is to give as he may prosper or in keeping with his income. Let me read it. On the first day of every week, Paul says, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up so that when I come, no collections will be made.

That verse tells us that we have different levels of income, different levels of giving. God prospers us all differently. So, our income levels are different, and therefore what we give back to him in many ways can be different. He said an interesting note on the 10% tithe. When I do marriage classes, I always say to folk, see if you can give 10%. I still stand by that. I say, because you're newly married, you want your telly, you want your carpets, you want your kitchen. It's very easy to go, Lord, I have nothing left, and so forth. You set aside money. But he was saying, I do not believe that we are instructed to give the tithe. You're obliged to give the tithe, a flat 10%. The Old Testament context, where the tithe was a tax as much as a donation. In other words, you were providing for civil and religious structures. So, in the Old Testament tithe, it wasn't just religious. It was a tax that you had to pay this. But anyway, we give that as a guideline. But what he says, we are to give enough that it matters. Let me read this. I mean that we should give enough that it makes a difference to our lives, to our lifestyle. Those who give much without sacrifice are reckoned as giving little. We're meant to give enough that there are things we cannot do and cannot have because of our dedication to the Lord's work. For some people, giving away 10% may mean that they are giving enough that it matters. Maybe they cannot have the vacation they would otherwise have. Maybe they are buying a used car instead of a new one. Maybe they are saving for an extra couple of years before fixing up the kitchen or putting a down payment on that home. For other people, that may come when they give 2% of their income. For others, it may be they are giving 75%. I don't know anybody that gives 75%. But I see what he's saying, that they give in such a way that it matters. And that is why it is called a sacrifice.

[22 : 37] That is what Paul says here. It's a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice. I wonder if me or you can say that when I give Lord, it hurts. It is sacrificial. A sacrifice is a painful thing for the animal, for the thing that's being offered. It may be that the money that you put on this. Jesus was impressed by that type of giving. Paul here says this is a fragrant offering to the Lord because it's sacrificial. It's an acceptable sacrifice. Jesus, remember, he looked up and he was sitting there, and the rich were putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He saw a poor widow put two small coins in. Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave of their gifts out of their wealth. She is given out of her poverty, all she had to live on.

She gave that it mattered. She gave that it hurt her to give. And that is why Paul says, such giving, such full payment in verse 18, is a fragrant offering. It is an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. He ends the article, Tim Charles, by saying, giving that does not impact our life at all is not sacrificial and is therefore not enough. And he quotes C.S. Lewis by saying, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them. Does that make sense?

I find that very challenging. It's not just the treasurers that will be saying, preach it, brother. It should be a sacrifice. The church at Philippi gave generously. It cost them to give, and so should our be given. So are we giving sacrificially that it hurts us that we deny yourself something? That is the big question. That is really, in 2024, in the affluent West, we need to hear that. Thirdly, here's an incentive. It's a fragrant giving. I've already touched on this fragrant offering. The picture here is a pleasing aroma to God. It's mentioned many times in the Scriptures, usually to do with burnt offerings. When an offering is made according to God's Word, it is a pleasing aroma to Him. The first time it's mentioned when Noah stepped out of the ark.

They came out in Genesis 8, him and his wife and his sons and all the animals. He built an altar to the Lord, taking some of the clean animals, clean birds. He sacrificed a burnt offering on this altar.

The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of their heart is evil from childhood. And it is that. It is this fragrant aroma when we do this. It pleases the Lord. It is an acceptable sacrifice. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. So don't leave this service saying, the pastor says it has to hurt. So I'm just going to go about Wednesday with the tears blinding me, and I'm not crying enough, then I'm not giving enough. You're still to give cheerfully.

[26 : 28] But it's a sacrifice. It hurts. It hurts us. And that's the way we should give to the Lord's Word. That's the way the Philippians gave to Paul in gospel ministry. So do we please the Lord with our generous, self-sacrificial giving? Is it a pleasing aroma to Him? Here's another incentive, incentive, sorry, credited giving. I was struggling to get the headings here. But Paul says here, he says, what I desire, I don't really desire your gift. Look at verse 17. What I desire is this, if there's one thing that he desires, is that it may be credited to your account, using this business commercial language again. He wants the giving that they have given to him to rebound on them again, to benefit them. And he's basically saying that that's a proper motive for Christians to cultivate, to seek opportunities to give to others, and therefore build up treasure in heaven.

I wonder how many of us are, I wonder what our bank balance looks like in heaven. It might look healthy here just now. But I wonder if we have given in such a way that our giving has been credited to our account. That's what Paul wanted for this church. Jesus said this in Luke 12, didn't he?

Sell your possessions. Sell your possessions. Give to the poor. Provide purses for yourself that will not wear out a treasure in heaven that will never fail where no thief comes and no moth destroys.

Matthew 19, 21. Jesus answered, if you would be perfect, go, sell your possessions, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me. He's basically saying, in many ways, what you do, especially with possessions, does have an impact on heaven and in glory. It doesn't save you. But there is this area, this whole area of rewards. And because God doesn't forget our works, he remembers this. Remember Jesus said in Matthew 10, if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is truly my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose his reward. And remember, Jesus said, I needed clothes, and you clothed me. Matthew 25, I was ill, you looked after me, I was in prison, you came to visit me. The righteous said, Lord, when did we do this? And he says, truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of these, at least of my brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Hebrews 6, 10.

God is not unjust. He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. Such an important thing that we can benefit others, give sacrificially, and in such a way the Lord does not forget that, and it's credited to our account.

[29 : 39] That's why he used these words, paid in full, credited to your account. So, here is an incentive that we build treasure in heaven as we give. He's no man's debtor. Fifthly, returned giving.

Don't put that up just now, that'll just depress some folk. So, returned giving. Here is, Paul is not saying, not only you get treasure in heaven, when you give, the Lord gives to you, even in this life.

Paul is in prison, and he cannot return their favor. He can't say, you gave to me, so I'm going to give to you. He doesn't have the opportunity to do this. So, what does he say in verse 9, 10? He says something better. And my God will meet all your needs. I can't meet your needs. You've met mine, paid in full, blessed. But my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in heaven. Here's a principle for the contented life, and it's linked to God's work in his people.

If you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly. If you sow generously, you will also reap generously. 2 Corinthians 9. God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, having all you need, you will abound in every good work. Luke 6, 38. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. As you give, it will be used in that way. Going back to this image, when I was in Nidre, I remember at some point, I rather naively thought that, I'm going to work in Nidre. There'll come a time. We need a new building. It's a rat-infested old mission hall.

How am I going to, I just thought that Charlotte Chapel would say, we've got loads of money. We'll just write you a check, 500,000. There's the building. Maybe not quite as much as that, but I really thought they'd dig deep. And I can still remember the words, John, there is no money.

[31 : 53] We can pay your salary, and that's it. And I suddenly think, how are we going to get the money to put up a new building, which we needed? The council were going to demolish the old one. We needed a new building, purpose-built building, rooms, blah, blah, blah, 500,000. And I remember saying, every time I had to present the work, I didn't have evening services. I'd go to Charlotte Chapel. And it's easy for some nutter to just come along and go, God's doing a work. Yeah, we're having a jolly. We need loads of money. Just write a check. That's it. People needed to be convinced that God was doing a work. And he gave us so many divine coincides.

But I knew the time was coming when I had to present this to the chapel, the big appeal, five or six hundred thousand. I went to Highbrook's. And I hadn't been to Highbrook's for years.

And I saw this, be part of Highbrook's for life, buy your brick today at the Rangers Superstore. And I thought, if you're a, whatever, you can use hearts or hibs or whatever you want to use, some netball club, whatever does it for you. But anyway, if you're a mad Rangers fan, and you thought, wow, that must be great. I looked at that George Stevenson, whoever these folk are. And I thought, if I had a grandchild or something, they could come and say, there's my grandfather's brick. There's this thing. There's this name. You'd see it every time you went in.

And you thought, I'm a Rangers supporter. And there's this brick. And you're immortalized in this brick. And I thought, I would buy a brick. I wouldn't hesitate. I want a brick up there. I'm not died in the little Rangers fan as much as I used to be. Anyway, but I thought that was a great thing.

So I said, we need bricks for the work at Nidre. But this isn't about bricks and mortar. It's a spiritual work, a work that will last forever. By giving to this, you're not erecting a brick building. You're doing an eternal work, a gospel work. And who knows who will be saved by the way in which you give to this building, which is only a tool to serve the people? It was especially good using that illustration because the senior pastor at the time was a Celtic supporter.

[34 : 03] He used so many Celtic illustrations. So in one sermon, I was able to redress the balance. And it's that. It's investing in the future and seeing this work as eternal. When you give, you're not just giving to bricks and mortar. You're giving to an eternal work, people being saved, God being glorified. And the Lord sees this, and the Lord is able to bless us. So he is able to bless us abundantly. He is able to return the joy. So what have we said? Here's a good church. They love the Lord. They love Paul. They love the gospel. They want to be involved. When other churches don't give, they gave. They gave generously, painfully. It was sacrificial. It pleased the Lord. It was an acceptable sacrifice that he delighted in. And God would credit this to their account, heaping up treasure in heaven. But while they're on this earth, Paul says, my God will meet all your needs. While you're here. You give, and he will return. How does this letter end? It ends with them being a family. I like this image, gathered round the cross. It ends with this benediction or greetings.

And I like this, verse 20, to the God our Father. We are one Father. Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, they send their greetings. Verse 22, all God's people send their greetings, even those who belong to Caesar's household. We are a family. We are part of the family of big churches, other churches, gospel churches, other missionary work. It should be in our heart to give as the Lord prospers us as we give sacrificially to see the work of God continue. May the Lord help us to do that.

We close by singing a song that I was in a church in, not that, a couple of Sunday mornings ago when I wasn't here. And we sang this, and I hadn't sung it for years. Take my life and let it be.

Consecrated Lord to thee. Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold. Easy to sing. The Lord knows if we mean those words. Let's stand and we'll sing together.