

I Can Do All Things Through Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Well friends, we're going to turn to read two, back to the chapter rather, that we read Philippians chapter four, Philippians chapter four, and we're going to take our text this evening from verse 13.
- And I can do all things through him who strengthens me. I'm going to begin by reading an extract from a poem, a poem I'm sure that many of us here have heard before.
- I'll just read it as I have it here. And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, give me a light that I may thread safely into the unknown.
- And he replied, go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.
- So I went forth and finding the hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And he led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone east.
- [1 : 1 9] This is of course an extract from that well known poem that was written by a many Haskins in 1908. It was published in 1912.
- That poem that's known as the gate of the year. And here we are tonight, friends, having just gone through the gate of 2023.
- And as we find ourselves here, we find ourselves on the verge of a new year. None of us here really know what this new year is going to bring in our experience for some of us.
- We have plans, we have aspirations, we have desires as to what the new year is going to look like. And life has surely told us that in reality, we don't really know.
- Things can come into our experience that we didn't expect, neither did we want. And we know going forward that this could be the case for us.
- [2 : 2 5] And so as we read poems like the one we have before us here tonight, we might be tempted to be critical, go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.
- That shall be to you better than light and safer than unknown. Wait, we might say, well, this is simplistic. This is idealistic. This is unrealistic.
- Yes, we know we might start off at the beginning of a new year like this with plenty of ideas of self-reformation and resolution, but we know that realistically for many, maybe for you, maybe for me, there will be times in 2023 that we simply will not be trodding gladly as this poem says, into the darkness of the unknown.
- And so we might say, well, this is unhelpful. But yet God says it's not unhelpful. In fact, through the voice of the Apostle Paul here, he says that really what we read in this poem can be our experience, that no matter what this next year might have in store for us, that really God, and this is crucial, God does not expect you or me to go it alone.
- Instead, what he does in his word is he reassures us, he reassures us that we can do all things through him who strengthens us.
- [4 : 0 2] Now, just a little bit by way of context, we know that Paul was no stranger to his friends in the church in Philippi. In fact, he'd known these believers more or less since the conception of this church.

You might remember in Acts 16, Paul had had that vision in the night, a vision that had told him to come over to Macedonia and to help the people there.

And of course, in obedience, Paul and Silas, they went to the city of Philippi, which incidentally was named after Philip of Macedon, who was a father of Alexander the Great. They went to Philippi, and as they came to Philippi, they found this group of women at the side of a river having a prayer meeting.

You'll remember that Lydia was the cellar of purple. She was one of those women. And it was from this group of women at this prayer meeting that really the church of Philippi came from.

It was from this small group of women. And subsequently, because of this, we see that Paul, he had a bond, he had a real bond with this church.

[5 : 18] Now, a lot of Paul's letters are letters which are very challenging. They're letters that justifies. They're letters that rebuke when rebuke was needed.

But what we see with the letter to the church in Philippi is it's more of a letter of encouragement. It is that there are some exhortations and challenges throughout, but generally it's a letter of encouragement.

And we see this no less in the chapter that we have before us. A chapter that is peppered with verses that are just bursting with encouragement.

I have learned in verse 12 in whatever situation I am in to be content. There are so many different verses throughout this chapter that we read in and they warm out hearts.

They give us confidence. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[6 : 29] All these promises that give us confidence and assurance. And we see this also in our text that we have before us tonight. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I'd like us just to notice three things about this verse. We don't have time to go into the whole context of the chapter and so on. We're just going to think about this one verse and we're going to notice three things about it.

We're going to notice that it's an extensive verse, an exclusive verse and an explosive verse.

What I mean exactly by those will become clear. An extensive, an exclusive and an explosive verse. Firstly then we see that it's an extensive verse.

It was the American theologian, writer, preacher Stephen Lawson who said that we need to have an ultra-venus hookup of this verse to be infused into our soul.

[7 : 37] In other words, in this verse there is that which can keep us spiritually alive. And it's not without good reason that Stephen Lawson makes such a claim because this is a verse that is bursting with hope, with positivity, a verse that reminds us of that extensive ability that tonight as we have gone through the gate of 2023 that is ours in Christ.

I can do all things, all things. Quite a claim, quite a claim. But it's not an idealistic, simplistic claim because sometimes friends in the Christian life and there's always a danger with this and we need to check ourselves against doing this that we can speak into difficult situations with a textbook answer.

We can speak into situations that we know nothing about, telling people how they should be, the difficult diagnosis, the death of a loved one, the economic uncertainty that follows being made redundant, the breakdown of relationships, even marriages, failing health, the loss of independence as we get older and in firm the list goes on and on and on.

And we can come from the sidelines and we can look in and we can impose our own opinions as to how people should deal in with these situations.

Yet with all along we ourselves know nothing about them. But that's not what Paul is doing friends.

[9 : 26] He's not just talking the talk. What we see here with Paul is he is walking the walk that Paul's claim here is a lived claim.

It's an authentic claim. It's an extensive claim because if we are to zoom in on Paul here, he's not writing this letter to his friends in the comfort of his own home at his desk pondering what he's going to say next.

That's not what we see with Paul here. Paul is writing this letter where? In a prison cell under what circumstances, a waiting trial from Caesar, his very life friends is hanging in the balance.

And what a lesson to us here tonight friends that even when we ourselves are going through things that are difficult, that we ought not to be paralysed or debilitated as the Lord's people.

That we still are caught and this is difficult I know but we're still called to service, to serve God absolutely but that service is seen through serving other.

[10 : 37] And that's what we see with Paul. Paul has a love. Yes, his life is hanging in the balance. Yes, he's in a cold, damp, dank cell but still his love for his brothers and sisters and Christ is leading him to encourage them.

What an example. The reality is he can do nothing. His hands are quite, his feet, they're quite literally tied.

He's at the mercy of the Roman governors and yet he's claiming to have this extensive ability. I can do all things.

But what does he mean? It's important that we unpack this, that we don't see it as a sweeping statement or a generalization.

This could be taken out of context if we were to look at it in isolation. Does it mean that he can do absolutely everything he desires in life?

[11 : 40] Does it mean that he's a master of his own destiny? Does it mean that as we go out into 2023 that no matter what it is we want to do, if we pray to God hard enough, he will give it to us?

He will give us our heart's desire that we have our own agenda set forth and we do as it were, run it by the Lord and he's bound to truly see to it that it'll come to pass because the verse says, I can do anything through him who strengthens us.

Well, it doesn't mean that and we know it doesn't mean that. Paul is in no way pursuing his own agenda here far from it.

He is saying that he can do all things absolutely. The all things that Paul is speaking of here is all things that the Lord leads him into.

All things that God calls him to. Every providence that he finds himself in at the hand of God, from the will of God himself, he can find himself coming through each and every one whether dark or bright, bitter or sweet.

[13 : 07] He can come through them all and you might say, well, of course he's saying that. He's the apostle Paul. He's got gifts beyond measure.

He has abilities beyond most, certainly beyond me. Of course he's saying this. This is a godly man. He's an exception. There's not many like Paul about.

We might say as well that as we reflect on possibilities of what the year would look like for us that if certain things were to happen in our lives, we simply wouldn't cope.

We couldn't cope that if such and such were to happen to us that we just we don't know what we would do if we would lose a loved one. If X, Y or Z was to happen, we could not possibly cope.

What Paul is saying here, we might think personality comes into it here that, okay, there are some who have that resilience in life.

[14 : 14] In this very building tonight, there are those who are strong by nature. When things come their way, they've got a steely determination. It's just who they are by nature.

They're able to cope better than others who are perhaps more fragile and sensitive. It's just the way people are made. We're all different.

What we have here, and this is of course our second point in this exclusive strength, is it an exclusive strength that is only for a certain type of person, a person like Paul, or a person like your minister or your elders or other leaders?

Is this the kind of strength that's exclusive only to them? Well, it is an exclusive strength, friends. This is important.

But it's exclusive because it can only be found from one source, only one source. And it's exclusive exclusivity that makes it found only from one source does in actual fact make it inclusive so that this strength, this exclusive strength that can be found from one source is indeed inclusive of everyone who comes to this one source.

[15 : 43] What is that one source? Or who is that one source? I can do all things through him. Who's him? Christ. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

He is the exclusive source of this strength. He's never ever going to call us to that which we cannot do.

You know, we might think, well, we need to site, and this is natural to all of us, no matter who we are, we need to site ourselves up for certain situations. And once we've psyched ourselves up and we've thought about it and we've reasoned in our mind and we've come to certain conclusions about certain outcomes, we're then ready to go.

But that's not what it says here. Because this extensive ability that we spoke of a minute ago is coming through an exclusive access not to our own wisdom or strength or anything else but to the Lord himself.

Isn't that something? You know, really we need to, and meet with you, we need to lay hold of this at the beginning of this new year. That the resources that we have in Christ are incomparable.

[17 : 06] It doesn't read here, I can do all things through Christ plus my own ability. We're very good at maybe trying to do things on our own and tagging rather Christ on at the end.

We need an emergency prayer, wanting him to mop up the bits that we ourselves can't quite see to. That is of course the wrong way around. Because our ability tonight and every other night and day of this year and every other year is found in Christ.

And if we have Christ, if we know Christ, we have everything. Jesus teaches this lesson in the sermon and the vine and the branches in John 15.

He is the vine, we are the branches. The branch does not bear fruit through self effort. It's ridiculous. It just doesn't work.

It cannot happen. The only way the branch bears fruit is by drawing from the life of the vine. And so it is with you and with me tonight.

[18 : 17] No matter what it is we seek to do in the year that's ahead. No matter what it is that we're faced with and out of experience, this can be applied to all different aspects of our lives.

The crux of the matter is that we come and we draw life from the vine. Without me, Jesus says you can do nothing.

You know we need reminded of this not just as individuals facing difficult providences but also as God's people, as the church.

Hudson Taylor, that great missionary to China, he'd been working hard for many, many years. And he felt he was trusting in Jesus for all of his needs.

He felt that he was reading and praying and doing all the things that he should have been doing but he lacked joy and he lacked liberty.

[19 : 17] He was in bondage as a Christian. He was dragging his spiritual heels so to speak. Why was this? Well, a letter from a friend soon opened his eyes.

This letter reminded him of the sufficiency that was his in Christ. And the letter said this amongst other things. It's not by trusting in our own faithfulness but by looking away to the faithful one.

And this was a turning point in Hudson Taylor's life because following on from this moment by moment he drew on the power of Christ for each and every responsibility of the day and Christ's power carried him through.

We can even, as the Lord's people, we can do religious activities and outwardly they're to be commended and they look plausible to our community, even to our family, even to our church family.

Yet all that we're doing is done out with the realms of faith. Yes, we go through the motions as Hudson Taylor did but we're not drawing from Christ as we do.

[20 : 38] When we come to church we don't have that spirit of worship. We might have a spirit of perhaps seeking to receive but we don't maybe have the spirit of worship, of giving, of praising the Lord from our hearts.

And you know when we return to the vine, drawing from the vine, we find that joy, that liberty is restored. We come to the cross, we need to be at the cross, we never in our history as a church have needed to be at the cross more than we do.

Now we can be so sidetracked and sidelined by good things but not the best thing. Jesus died for sinners, He died for you, He died for me, He died for people like those around us in Carlyway and in Pathke, we need to stay at the cross so that we're fresh, that we are alive in our spirit, that we are daily laying hold of that promise that His grace is sufficient for us.

His grace is sufficient for us because Scripture tells us that it's when we are weak, we are strong that when we cry out, I can't but you can.

It's then that His strength comes bursting forth and that's what strength is. This is our final point. It's an explosive strength.

[22 : 15] This is interesting. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Now the word strength in here, it comes from that Greek word dunamo.

What words do we get from dunamo? The word, maybe I've said this here before, in the past, we get the word dynamite. Dynamite.

And so this word strength, we could translate it. I can do all things through Him who gives me dynamite, who gives me that explosive strength and extraordinary strength and enabling strength and empowering strength.

And it's ours. It's ours for the taking through Christ and for Christ. It's not just a one-off strength that we get when we're converted that comes and goes.

This is a word that's in the present tense. We can look to the good old days of the past and they were in many ways. Of course, and it's good to reflect upon blessed times of the past, but this strength is a strength that Jesus in the past, but can also be in the present.

[23 : 29] This dynamite, this power of God's spirit. It was Martin Lloyd-Jones that said Christian life is a mighty power that enters us.

Not just a philosophy or how we see the world. We must be careful that we don't allow it to become just a philosophy or a worldview. Christian life is a mighty power that enters us.

There is a supernatural reality of Christ within us that is strengthening us. That's what we have tonight in the Lord.

We have all the power that we need to be able to meet each and every demand of life and life is demanding. This year is going to be so demanding for some people in here more than others.

Maybe last year was demanding for you. Maybe 2024 will be more demanding for the next person, but we all have seasons in our lives where life is demanding.

[24 : 37] The reality is we have the power not to get rid of the demands. They'll be there. God doesn't promise us an easy path, but what He does promise us is a way through the path.

We have that power that is adequate to make our way through these demands, these challenges, and we only need to release that power.

How do we do that? By faith, by trusting in Him, by allowing Him to work through us mightily for His glory, by having as the motto for our lives, I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Perhaps tonight you're not a Christian here, either here or online, and you want to be a Christian, but you're scared to be a Christian. I know what that's like.

I've been there myself. You're scared for many different reasons, but friend, this verse applies to you also. You might think, well, if you start following the Lord, you won't be able to carry on.

[25 : 53] You'll fall back and you'll maybe just be a flash in the pan as it were in terms of your profession and that you won't be able to carry on and you'll bring shame on everything to do with God and the church, and so you stay where you are.

It's easier to stay where you are, that you'll be a failure. But yet friend, such a, and I say this in love, I hope, such a view is a view that bases our profession on ourselves.

Of course we're going to be failures. We're all failures in here tonight. There's not one here who hasn't failed the Lord since their profession. There's nothing to be proud of, but it's fact.

It's reality. But the point is this, that when we look beyond ourselves to Jesus, when we look beyond our circumstance to the Lord Jesus Christ, it's then that we can move forward in our journey of faith.

It's only then. And so you see that it's when you're saying, I can do all things through my own obedience, my own this, my own none of that.

[27 : 11] I can do all things through him who strengthens me. I have to put my trust in him who can give me all the strength I need, not to be a perfect Christian, but to be a Christian nonetheless, who shows that he or she is putting his trust or her trust in one who is greater than them.

That's what it is to be a Christian, to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe this is a year that you just need to step out in faith and lay hold of this promise for yourself. When I was young, my late brother and I, we used to play a game called Trust.

And although he did all sort of terrible things to me as brothers do and they're growing up, he was always good to me with this.

He would ask me to fall back and he would catch me. And I couldn't see him. Fall back completely off my feet and he would catch me.

[28 : 19] And every single time he caught me, I couldn't see him, but I knew he was there. I trusted he was there. And that's what it is when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We fall on him. We have to come to an end of our own resources and acknowledge that really we have nothing other than that which is ours when we rest and we lean upon him.

Time has gone. At the beginning, I read an extract from that poem commonly known as The Gate of the Year. But you know that that's not the title that the author gave this poem.

The title that the author gave this poem is far more apt. The title she gave it is this. God knows.

God knows. That's the title of The Gate of the Year. God knows and so he does. He knows. Yes, we might be, we are for all of us, there's no doubt about it.

[29 : 31] We're walking into the darkness of the unknown of another year. We don't know what it's going to bring, but God does. God knows, he knows every detail of every second of every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of the coming year.

He knows and because he knows, we can trust in him. So friends, let's be encouraged not to take from us or to simplify or make small challenges that we have far from it.

But nonetheless, don't we need encouragement? Let's be encouraged by this as we go forward into the unknown. Let's be encouraged by the fact that because God knows, we can step out into 2023 with full confidence that we can do all things, whatever comes our way.

We can do all of it without exception through him who strengthens us. But because he lives, we can face tomorrow.

Let's join in prayer. We thank you Lord for the wonder of what it is to be in a living relationship with you.

[30 : 51] Forgive us for the fact, the reality that times we live our lives as almost functioning atheists. Those who profess to be yours but yet fail to lean on your promises, to rest on your word, to come and find comfort under the shadow of your wings.

We are all guilty. Forgive us, we pray. But help us, O Lord, even in a spirit of revival and renewal in the coming year to go out with boldness and faith, to be able to face the great tomorrows in the strength of the God of the great tomorrows, the God who is greater than all of our circumstance.

We thank you, O Lord, that you've not left us to ourselves. We pray particularly for any who are struggling here tonight to perhaps find it difficult to apply these words to their hearts that your Holy Spirit would do so and enable them to take that step of faith by even crying out that simple prayer.

I can't, Lord, but you can. Lord, just know with your blessing and forgive us for Jesus' sake.