

I Can Do All Things.....

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 March 2017

Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] In Philippians chapter 4 we read at the 30th verse, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

All things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Now of course as I've said many times in the past, every text has its context and it would be a mistake for us to take this verse out of its context and to take it in isolation and to pretend thereby it says, oh it says in the Bible we can do, we can do anything, we can do absolutely anything and Christ will help us to do it.

Which means that we're transformed into some kind of superhero status with superhuman strength that Christ gives us so we can do whatever we want. It doesn't say that we can do whatever we want or even whatever we please.

But rather all things we can do, and there's a difference between can and will, you know the difference between I won't do something or I can't do something, are the question of the will.

To say I won't is I will not, I do not desire to do this thing. To say I can't do it means I do not actually have the strength or capacity to do it.

[1 : 16] If I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me, it means that I will be given the ability, the strength, the power to do all things through Christ.

Whatsoever Christ may require of me, he will give me the strength, the power, the ability, the tools to do it.

Now in the original context here, Paul is speaking about the different conditions in which he might find himself. Verse 11, not that I speak in respect of want, for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.

I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed. In other words, I am taught by these providences, by these circumstances, both to be full and to be hungry.

Both to abound and to suffer need. And then our verse in question at verse 13. Something we should notice in this verse 12 in particular is that the Lord does not expect his children always to be in a perpetual state of spiritual famine.

[2 : 34] Always to be in times of need. Always to be in times of hunger. Always to be in times of suffering. Always to be in times of woe. If we are to follow Christ, then there will be such times of testing.

And this is where perhaps, you know, the kind of health and wealth of the gospel. All we just believe in the Lord and our bank account will be full and everything will go swimmingly and so on. Such shallow deceit is not true to the gospel.

But nor is it the case that if we follow Christ, everything's going to be miserable. Everything's going to be dealt all the time. It's always going to be up against it. You're always going to have problems. There will be times when you do have problems. There will be times when hard things and perhaps hardships will come to you specifically because you have followed Christ.

What Paul does not see is, it's always been against me when I've been a Christian. But rather, I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound.

[3 : 37] There are times when I am full, just as there are times when I am empty. Everywhere and in all things, I am instructed, I am taught by these things, both to be full and to be hungry.

Just as there were times when our Lord rejoiced to sit down with his disciples to eat and drink and enjoy the good things his father gave. So there were likewise times when, for example, he is driven out into the wilderness.

When he is hungry and thirsty and tempted by the evil one. And I would suggest to you that in this Christian life to which we are called, there will be, obviously, you know, there will be times of

difficulty.

There will be times of trial and testing. But sometimes the devil may also try or test us with times of blessing, with times of fullness.

And I say, sorry, the devil may try and test us. What I mean is, the Lord may give us these things and the devil may try to twist them, to tempt us with them. For example, if, let's say, a Christian is being imprisoned and tortured and so on.

[4 : 52] And then suddenly it lets up. He or she may bear up tremendously under the fierce torture and under all the sufferings that they endure. And then they are left alone in their cell for, you know, a few days or whatever to recover from their injuries.

And then the next thing they know, somebody brings in lovely plates of food and they are able to wash themselves and get clean clothes and get dressed. And they feel so much better.

They are being nicely treated for a little while. And then the interrogator says, now, tell us what we want you to know. And all this can continue. You know, you get your nice food.

You get your good, your good treatment. Or we can go back to the torture chamber. Now, if they just left them in the torture chamber all the time, they might have gone on and on and on. But now they've tasted a wee bit of goodness.

They've tasted a wee bit of fullness, of prosperity. And temptation may be the greater when you've had a wee bit of blessing, a wee bit of fullness, a wee bit of joy.

[5 : 51] And, oh, you just want to hang on to that. You just want that to continue. You don't want to let go of what you... You've just finally got your hands on some good times for a wee change.

And sometimes these good times, this fullness, this blessing, not necessarily simply in a torture context, but even in an ordinary life context, we may be able to grit our teeth and deal with the hardship and say, well, yes, this is part of my Christian life.

But then when you get blessing or when you get fullness, this too may be testing just as much as the hardship. And what Paul says here is, I am learned, I am instructed in these things.

How to deal both with the fullness, to receive it as a gift of God, to enjoy it while it lasts, but to know that just as there's the mountaintop, surely there will be the valley afterwards.

And just as there's the valley, you will climb up again to the mountaintop. We're an island here. We are surrounded by the sea. If you look out and you see the sea is low and there's sort of feet and feet and feet of black seaweed round about on the rocks and you know the tide is out.

[7 : 08] And you know the sea is low and the tide is out and so the levels are much lower. And you don't think, oh my goodness, look at this. Global warming and climate change. The sea used to be so much higher when I was young.

You know that if you look out the window again a few hours later, then it'll be up and a much higher level up the rocks. You know that the boats will be sitting higher than the water because the tide will have come back in.

That is the way of the world. It is the way also that the Lord deals with us not only in earthly terms but also in spiritual terms.

I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound. We are so accustomed, perhaps, in this part of the world to decline, to struggle, to a day of small things, to difficulties.

We are almost used to it. We are hardened to it. We can grip our teeth. We can get on with it. We are used to this. But perhaps come a day of blessing, perhaps come a day of the tiding in and fullness, are we ready and able to deal with that or might that tempt us away from our first love?

[8 : 18] What Paul is teaching us here is there is times of fullness and we should expect times of fullness. Just as there are times of being hungry and empty and I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer me.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. This is the sense of it here. This is what he is meaning by it.

Just as in the midst of the love of Christ, as he says to the Ephesians, passeth all knowledge that ye might be filled with the fullness of God. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

It's in this context of being able to live for Christ, being able to do whatever he requires of us, and to know that he will supply whatever we need.

This is the sense, the context of this verse. If we take it in isolation, we can be led down a wrong path. Just dance. For example, Matthew 21, verse 22.

[9 : 27] All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing ye shall receive. Well, James, that sounds like a blank check, doesn't it? Sounds like, oh, if I just ask for anything I want, wow, then I'm just going to get it.

That's great, isn't it? John 14, verses 13 and 14, where we read likewise. Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it. And again in chapter 16 of John, verse 24. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name.

Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. But if we were to go back a verse in John 16, verse 23.

In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you. And the sense there in that verse in John 16 is not so much ask whatever you want for your bank account to be full, for umpteen cars in the garage, for big property, big houses, and lots of money, and all the things you could ever ask for.

[10 : 40] The sense in John 16 there. It's really about, you know, in terms of asking a Father. It's like asking the teacher a question when you don't quite understand something.

It's when you want to know more. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. It's in the sense of, Lord, I don't quite understand what's happening here. I don't quite understand what you mean by this bit in your word.

I don't quite understand what this particular teaching is meant to be. Ask, and it will be revealed to you. Ask, and it will be given. It's like the teachers always used to say to us at school, put your hand up if you've got a question.

Don't just muddle on and try to do your best and make a total mess of it if you don't understand it. Never mind the fact that everybody else seems to be scribbling away around you. You ask, and you can bet your bottom dollar that half a dozen other people round about you wish that they had been able to ask the same question.

So ask, that's the sense of it there. Ask, and it will be made known to you. It will be revealed to you. And it's in the same sense here of supplying me.

[11 : 49] It's not about knowledge here now in Philippines. But of supplying our need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

And notice it's strengtheneth, which not strengthened or will strengthen. It's present tense. In the authorised version they tend to use F-T-H as opposed to an S at the end.

But the sense here is of what they would say in language terms is present and continuous. So it's strengthens me just now and continues to strengthen me in an ongoing relationship, ongoing situation.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. In other words, whatsoever the Lord might require of you. The key thing is to discern where it is he wants you to be, what it is he wants you to do.

And if you know it's him asking it of you, you can confidently ask for whatever you need. I often cite the example of it. You know, if you think about Abraham when he's sending off his steward, his servant, to go and find a wife for Isaac.

[12 : 58] How the steward doesn't need to go to him and say, Oh, Abraham, actually, would you mind terribly if I took some of your camels and some of the gold and some spices and some ornaments, you know, as presents for these people when I go.

It says that he took whatever he needed. He took ten camels full of goods and gold and presents and whatever. And he didn't have to go cap in hand to Abraham to ask for it because everything that he had was in his hand.

If he was doing the master's business, then he had a completely free way to take whatever was required to do it. He wasn't taking Abraham's camels in his future and heading off into the desert to set up his own wee business.

He wasn't stealing it. He wasn't even borrowing it. He was taking what he needed to do the master's business. Now, we may not be in a position to just help ourselves to vast resources, but we are in a position to go to the master and ask for what we need to do his business.

If, for example, the Lord were to call you to be a missionary from Mongolia or something, and you thought, Well, if I'm going to go to Mongolia, Lord, I'm going to be able to have to learn Mongolian.

[14 : 16] So, help me to do this. Give me the resources that I need and give me the understanding to unlock all the nuances of this language. Then you can be certain that if the Lord is calling you there, he will help you with those things that you need.

But if you were to say, Well, I feel the Lord calling me to Mongolia. So, instead, I'm going to go and learn Swahili, a language of Kenya or some other part of Africa, and I'll learn a totally different language, or French, or something else that's completely unrelated to where the Lord wants me to go.

Is the Lord going to help you with that? Or is that just a little bit of self-disobedience and ignoring God's desire? Well, it doesn't mean that you won't be able to learn French or Swahili or anything else, but, you know, it's God's time that you're wasting, pouring your time and energy and resources into those languages and culture study and so on.

When if he's calling you to say Mongolia, you pour your resources, time, energy, understanding, language, and so on into that, he will open the way for that.

He will make that known. He will give you everything you need for that. We do not become, by having all things through Christ to strengthen us, we don't become, as we say, superhuman celebrities.

[15 : 32] It's not that I can suddenly lift up a car above my head because I'm so strong, because I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me. It's not that I somehow become an expert in high finance or banking or mathematics or whatever, because, hey, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

But if I were in a situation where I needed an understanding of numbers or mathematics or finance, and I was putting that to the Lord's service, I don't doubt he would give me everything I needed for that.

I can do all things, whatever it is that the Lord requires of me, he will give me the means to do that. So what is the key thing then?

The key thing is to discover what it is the Lord requires of us. It is to discover where the Lord might want us to be, what the Lord might want us to do, what he might want to do with our lives, and maybe that will be where we are just now.

Maybe that will be in the context that we are just now. Maybe it will be somewhere else in some other calling. As long as we know that it is the Lord's purpose that we are serving, then we can confidently ask for whatever we need to do it.

[16 : 46] Not to make ourselves more aggrandized or more flush or cut above what we think we are now, but rather whatever we need to do his will and his work, he will supply.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Whatever it is you need, and I say need, to serve him with, you know that you can ask for.

This is what Jesus is saying, you know, ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. God is sovereign in all these things.

God is in control in all these things. And that means not that he's a capricious, a sort of spiteful toying with us kind of God. He doesn't say, well, I'll send them somewhere where they can't possibly do the task.

Ha ha. I'll give them this task or this purpose. I'll make this happen in their life. And just see how they cope with it. No, but he might test us or put us under a little bit of pressure or just try us to see where do we go when the going gets tough?

[17 : 59] Where do we turn when we know that we haven't got what it takes to do this task? To whom do we go? As Peter says, you know, to Jesus, Lord, to whom else shall we go?

Thou is the words of eternal life. If God is sovereign, it means that God is in charge. And it means that we don't need to be afraid, whatever it may be taking us, whatever it may be that the Lord desires.

You know, if I was reading an article in this past week about somebody visiting a friend in Scalpy and coming through the Harris roads and so on.

And they were describing these roads that they were driving on, having never driven them before in their lives. Now you can imagine what the road from Tyrebrook to here and then the roads within Scalpy feel like if you've never, ever driven them before.

And that was exactly how they described them, like a sort of rollercoaster switchback kind of road that they were driving. Now it is. Having been here so many years, that's what I thought.

[19:00] I don't think that anymore. Yeah, this is just the roads. This is just how it is. You don't have to be afraid if you're used to it, if you know it. And so likewise, if I'm coming on roads that I've never been on before and somebody was in the car with me saying, so can you turn here, there's a steep hill here, there's a blind summer there, watch out for that.

You're not worried. You're not afraid. You're not anxious. Because you know that even if you don't know where you're going, they do. They know exactly where they're going. They know every pitfall. They know every twist and turn. So you don't have to be worried because they're effectively in charge. And so it is with the Lord. You don't have to be afraid of whatever may be around the next corner.

You don't have to be afraid of not having enough to face this particular task or duty or burden or anxiety. Because you can do all things through Christ which strengthen it you.

Present and continuous. Strengthen it. Now and ongoing. Strength is what he supplies. If, for example, you had soldiers in an army base.

[20:10] And let's say one group of soldiers were being sent off on an arctic mountaineering expedition. And a bunch of others were going to do some crowd control in the city.

Then if the one who is going up the mountain, if he goes to the quartermaster and says, I need my crampons. I need my snow tent. I need my waterproofs.

And my ice axe. And I need, you know, the warm weather clothing and so on. And he's going to draw all these things from the quartermaster. He's going to sign for them. And that will be fine.

Because he'll say, I'm going on this trip, this expedition. I'm sending this post thing. These are the things I need. And he'll get them all. But if the guy who's going on crowd control in the town, in the city, instead of saying, well, I need my bulletproof vest.

And I need my riot shield and my crash helmet and so on. Instead of saying that, he says, well, actually, I'd quite like some crampons too. And I still tend to. That would do me just fine. I could get a nice axe as well.

[21:07] So can I get these things I think would be really useful for my crowd control in the city?

And the quartermaster's going to say, there's not a chance. You can get this, this, and this for what you need. You're not getting the Arctic stuff.

Because you don't need that. That's not your duty. That's not what you're being said. You can have the things that you need. You're not getting what somebody else needs. And so likewise, the Lord will supply all that we need for where he is calling us to be or to prove us or requiring of us.

Whatever the task, whatever the purpose, whatever the calling, whatever the particular opportunity he presents, for us, we don't have to worry about not being able to do it, not being up to the task.

You and I, we don't have to be up to the task. Christ is up to the task. You know, sometimes you get the testimony of ministers at communion times.

You know, like a Jodo at the Tarver Communion there. And one of the things you'll often hear, and I can testify to this myself, is that a lot of these men, when they went into college to train for the ministry, they did so with fear and trepidation.

[22:17] They thought, how can I go back to studying now after years away from school? How can I face the likes of Greek and Hebrew and all these other complicated subjects that I haven't got a clue about?

How can I ever get through? And yet, they will testify that out they came the other side. Yes, having slogged and studied and sweated, but passed.

Having done what they needed to do. Having been given the strength to get through that particular task. Ask that particular calling. Not so that they can be puffed up and say, oh, look, I can do this language.

I can do that language. But they need these things for their calling, so they're given them. It's like Abraham Stewart taking the camels, taking the gold, taking the silver. That he needs to do the master's work.

Now, if we are called to follow Christ, we are not called to sit on our hands or just snuggle ourselves away and shout out the world and say, here I am. A Christian cocoon in my little bubble.

[23:18] We're not called to do that. We're called to go forth and bring forth much fruit. That's what the Lord desires us to do. That his Father may be glorified. That we may go and bear much fruit.

Now, we can't bear fruit without being in contact with other people. Whatever the situation, whatever the context where the Lord wants us to be in contact with other people, we may think, oh,

I can't say a word to people.

I'm all tongue-tied. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me, present and continuous.

Strengthens me now and will continue to strengthen me. And it's not just, oh, somebody else could do it. Well, they're gifted that way. They can do it. I, me, little me that hasn't got strength, hasn't got gifts.

I can't do this. Can't do that. Can't do the next thing. And that's what we tend to focus on, isn't it? We focus on what we think we can't do. We focus on what we think we don't have. And sometimes it becomes a bit of an excuse as to why, oh, I could never do this.

[24 : 23] I could never do that because I don't have the gift. But Christ has all that you need. Christ is the quartermaster from whom you can draw whatever is unique for his legitimate calling, his legitimate work, where he is designed to send you.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me, present and continuous. Whatever is our present weakness, we can know that Christ is strong.

Whatever his present strength, we know that he doesn't just hold it and say, look at me. I'm God. I feel the heavens and the earth. I'm wonderful. He takes that strength and he gives it to his weak children or a portion of it such as they are able to handle it.

Christ which strengtheneth me. Christ is already super strong. He can already do whatever he wants. He doesn't actually need the likes of us to convert the world or to bring people to himself. He could do it all without us. But he chooses for whatever reason in his inscrutable providence, he chooses to make use of such earthen vessels as we all are.

[25 : 44] No doubt because it glorifies him more that this treasure is seen to be in such earthen vessels. As opposed to the treasure being an angelic powers of pure, divine and celestial gold.

Yes, of course. This is going to be great treasure. Look at the vessel it's coming in. The vessel is nothing. The earthen vessel, the clay jar is nothing. But the treasure is all of Christ.

And although we continue to be but earthen vessels, we can nevertheless do whatever it is he calls us to.

Because he will strengthen us to do it. He will supply our every need. He will give whatever is necessary.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. And this little word as we said of caution, if we look again at these previous verses, 11 and 12.

[26 : 49] We are almost accustomed to the tide being at, to the days of difficult, to the days of spiritual famine we might say. But sometimes the fullness and the tide coming in can be just as hard to deal with.

Just as difficult to cope with if we're not prepared. If we're not suitably trusting in him rather than in ourselves. The worst thing we can do is think, oh yeah, look at all this blessing.

Tides in this and isn't this because we're so great, because we're so spiritual, because we're so powerful. God must be really pleased with us. The tide comes in. God blesses.

God gives grace. God gives good things for a time. You know, we talk about revivals in the past. But if the revivals lasted forever, then we'd end up being a permanent, ongoing state revival.

The tide comes in. And then the tide goes out again. Sometimes the tide seems to stay out for a very long time. But it does come back again. And it does come in.

[27 : 54] And God does pour out his spirit again. What we need to do is wait upon him and pray to him. And ask him where and how he would seek and desire to use us.

As you know, all the communions mentioned was made again of Isaiah 6. Here am I. Send me. And it doesn't necessarily mean the Lord wants us to go out here or go out there or go out somewhere far away.

Whatever it is he may want to direct us. To whomsoever he might want to direct us. Into whatever situation or opportunity he might want to direct us.

It may be here. It may be somewhere else. It may be the ends of the earth. Or it may be exactly where we are just now. The point is that the life that we have and the gifts with which he has endowed us are not simply given to us.

To bury in the earth or to wrap in a napkin and stick in our back pocket. They are given that they might be invested, utilized, traded with.

[28 : 58] That they might make more. That they might give out more. This so that the Lord may be glorified. So that the treasure that we have in our earth and vessels will be even more treasure by the time the Master comes.

This we cannot do of ourselves. This we do not have the power or the strength to do of ourselves. And sometimes if the Lord makes one thing to prosper as opposed to something else.

What we cannot ever do is say, oh no. What was the thing that I did to make that happen? What was the sequence of events that I did this, this and this. And this is what happened. I did this, this and this. And look, God blessed it.

God is not one to be commanded by magic spells. He is not one to be conjured up by a certain routine of steps or formula. God acts when, where and how he pleases.

He is sovereign. But act he will. And he does choose to use such earth and vessels as we are. Who have no strength in and of ourselves.

[30 : 06] And of ourselves we can do nothing. But as Paul says, what is applicable to him is applicable to me and you and I and each of us. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Present and continuous. For today and for all the days that he gives us. His strength will never be held back from us. His giftings, his blessings, his guidance, his help.

All that we need, he will supply. Because this is his promise. And this is his infallible heart. Let us pray.