

My God Is So Big

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[0 : 00] This evening, let's focus our attention for a few moments on the words that we find in Philippians chapter 4 at verse 19. The words of Paul, and my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

If I had to entitle this sermon, I would say the title would be, My God is so big. You know, the chorus that children sing often at holiday camp clubs or things like that, my God is so big, so strong and so mighty.

There's nothing that he cannot do. And the apostle Paul believes in a big God, and he preaches a big God, and he prays to a big God, and he encourages his audience then and now to place their trust in that big God, who is without limit, who has no qualifications or who has no limitations in what he can do or in what he can achieve.

And this evening, we need to be reminded of how great our God is. And you'll notice that when we're looking at Philippians chapter 4, the apostle Paul has something to say about himself, and then he has something to say to other people.

And really, that's a critical distinction, because you can never really serve God. You can never really tell someone about God until you yourself experience him personally.

[1 : 38] A good friend of mine, when he was growing up, he was brought up in a Christian home in high school. He went to a weekend away with his church, very similar to what you would have here. And the theme was sharing your faith, and he came home to his mother and showed him this book that he got, How to Share Your Faith.

Now, at this point, my friend would have admitted that he was a Christian, but a nominal Christian. Went to church, kind of read the Bible here and there, but his relationship with God was more of what he did on a Sunday rather than what he did from Monday to Saturday.

And the first thing that his mother said when she saw this book, How to Share Your Faith, she said, Well, the one problem, Greg, is that you don't have any faith to share. You need to have a personal relationship with Jesus before you hope to share that relationship with anyone else.

And this evening, if you're not yet a Christian, you need to realize that Paul is speaking to you about Jesus, but in order to appreciate or benefit from what Paul is saying, you have to know Jesus for yourself.

It's fine to hear about Jesus. It's fine to hear other people's stories or testimonies about their relationship with Jesus, but to benefit from the message of the Bible personally, you must have that personal encounter with him.

[3 : 02] You must know him. You must believe in him. You must trust in him. You must follow him. And then these great words of Paul become your promise, your truth, your reality, because the great thing this evening is that circumstances don't matter.

Because we were reading two passages. We read first from 2 Corinthians and we read secondly from Philippians 4. And when you hear Paul saying in the Philippians passage, he says two things. He says, first of all, my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus. But before he says that, he says in Philippians 4, verse 13, I can do everything through him who gives me strength. I can do everything.

And you might say, but what we've just read contradicts that statement because Paul spoke first of a thorn in the flesh. This messenger from Satan that tormented him. It caused him pain. It caused him distress. It caused him anguish and anxiety of some sort.

We don't know what the thorn was, but three times we're told that he pleaded with the Lord, that it would be removed from him. Something was keeping him back. Something was limiting him physically or emotionally or spiritually, keeping him back from experience the fullness of his ministry

in one way or another.

[4 : 33] So you might say, how can Paul say I can do all things through him who gives me strength when he speaks of this messenger, this tormenting messenger of Satan, this thorn in the flesh?

Secondly, if you read the whole letter to the Philippians, you realize that Paul's current circumstances make such a statement seem illogical because he's writing from a prison cell.

So Paul, you're saying I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength? You can't. You can't go where you want to go. You're a church planter. You can't plant churches. You're an evangelist. You can't go and tell people, the gospel. You can't go where you want to go. You're in a prison. You're in chains.

So how can Paul say I can do all things through him who gives me strength when there's this thorn in the flesh and when there's this circumstance of being in prison?

Well, that's the key to a relationship with Jesus. When you have a relationship with Jesus, your individual circumstances no longer matter. When you have a relationship with Jesus, your individual limitations do not matter because you are now united. You are now connected with one who has no limitations, who has no restrictions, who has no confinements.

[5 : 54] So when we look at Paul's promise to us, we must first look at his individual or his personal confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ, in what God can do through him.

Now, this is not self-confidence. This is not pride. This is not boasting. This is not arrogance. But this is a humble but yet sincere confidence.

So as a Christian tonight, it is not arrogant to say that you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. It is arrogant to say that you can do all things, that you can do everything, that you have great ability, great intellect, great skill.

But if you attribute that skill and that ability, if you attribute all that you can do to the one who gives you strength, then you are giving him the credit and you are giving him the glory.

So in Philippians 4, verse 13, I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Do you have that confidence tonight in Jesus Christ? Do you have a personal confidence that Jesus can and is and does work in you and uses you to accomplish his purposes?

[7 : 10] He doesn't use the great. He doesn't use the mighty. He doesn't use the wise. But he uses people just like us, the weak and the frail and the foolish.

He uses people like us so that he can demonstrate his power, so that he can demonstrate his authority, so that he can demonstrate his grace.

Because if we have all the answers, if we have all the strength, if we have all the wisdom, then we don't show him off. But if we recognize, as the Apostle Paul did, that in his weakness God demonstrates power, that the grace of Jesus is sufficient for him and the grace of Jesus is sufficient for you.

So there's a personal confidence that comes through knowing Jesus Christ. And notice what comes out of that confidence. That's why we began reading in chapter 4, and you'll notice in verse 4 that there's joy.

A relationship with Jesus produces joy in your life that is not tied to circumstances. You can rejoice in the Lord always, and Paul says, in case we missed it, I will say it again, rejoice.

[8 : 28] So there's joy in the Christian life, no matter what your circumstances are. You can be crying. You can be sad. You can feel bereavement. You can feel separation. You can be lonely, and yet you can still have joy. Because joy in this life is related to a relationship that doesn't change.

When you know Jesus, that relationship will never change. You will never lose him. He will always be with you in the highs and the lows and in the in-betweens. So it is possible with the Apostle Paul to have joy, to have this character, to have this kind of approach to life that does not depend upon the weather, that doesn't depend upon your emotions, that doesn't depend upon the kind of day that you are having.

Is this true in your own Christian experience? Can you equate your relationship with Jesus with your day-to-day reality? Joy at all times. Paul goes on to say, let your gentleness be evident to all the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So this kind of relationship with Jesus changes how we act. It transforms our character. It makes us prayerful. It makes us dependent.

We realize that we do not have, that we require help, that we need God. We don't have the natural resources to sustain ourselves. We don't have the natural wisdom to answer all of life's questions. We are weak and we are frail and we are foolish. That's why we pray and that's why we ask and that's why we seek and that's why we knock at the door so that God can open the door for us.

[10:22] So you see, a relationship with Jesus shapes our character. A relationship with Jesus gives us this kind of prayerful attitude. And notice even in verse 8 that our relationship with Jesus changes how we think. It changes the thoughts that go through our minds.

Because Paul is saying, finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

So your relationship with Jesus isn't just exterior. It's just, it does not skin deep, but it goes into the recesses of your mind. It goes into the depths of your heart.

So that your relationship with Jesus is reflected by the thoughts that are now in your mind, by the feelings that are now in your heart, by the lives that you now live.

The apostle Paul from his prison cell is saying to this church in Philippi, this is what a relationship with Jesus looks like. This is what being weak personally, but being strong in the faith looks like. This is what a confidence in God and in his promise looks like.

[11:40] It affects all of us, our head, our heart, our lives, our attitudes, our actions. It affects us in private when we're praying. It affects us in public.

It affects how we live, what we do, what we think, and what we feel. Paul goes on to say, think about such things, yes, and whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you.

You remember the sermon that Jesus gave on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. Jesus says there are two kinds of listeners. There are those who hear the words of Jesus and do them. That's the wise man.

And there's those who hear the words of Jesus and don't do them. And that's the foolish man. The wise man builds his house on rock. The foolish man builds his house on sand. And you know the consequence.

So this evening we've all heard the word. We've all sung the same songs. We've all added our amen to the same prayer. But the question and the challenge is what about the practice? What about taking the word of God and putting it into practice?

[13:00] Believing, trusting, relying on God, believing in Jesus, and then putting his word into practice. So that what he says you do. What he tells you to think about, you think about.

What he tells you to say, you say how he tells you to live, you live. What he tells you to avoid, you avoid. What he tells you to dwell on or to focus on, you dwell on and you focus on.

Because that's putting the word of God into practice. Now the audience here, now Paul is writing from a prison cell. He's writing to a church.

And it's interesting that this is one of the churches in the region of Macedonia. If you read in 2 Corinthians you'll find out that these were churches that were poor, materially, physically.

But these were churches that were rich in God's grace. They took God's word seriously. And in fact these poor people were noted for their generosity. They were noted for their liberality.

[14:04] That doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense that the Apostle Paul writing from a prison cell can say, I can do everything through him who gives me strength, nor does it make sense that poor people can become generous people.

It does when you bring Jesus into the equation. Because he changes everything. He changes our hearts, he changes our minds, and he changes our lives.

The Apostle Paul goes on to say that not only does he commend this character, not only does he commend this mindset, not only does he commend this kind of joy or this kind of prayerfulness, but he says to us that there's something called contentment.

He says, verse 10, I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed you have been concerned, but have had no opportunity to show it.

I'm 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.

[15:17] This last year for me has been a year of marriages. I've married a lot of people in the last 12 months. When I meet with a couple that want to get married, the first question I ask them, I usually ask them, how do you meet?

Are you guys in love? The question I ask is, when you're getting married, you're making a promise to each other in the sight of God, in the presence of your friends and family.

That promise is an unconditional promise. You're going to love her when the days are good, and when you're healthy, and when you've got money in the bank.

You're also going to love her when the day is bad, when you're not feeling well, and when you have no money in the bank. Is that the kind of love that you have for this woman, and then for the woman, is this the kind of love that you have for this man, that you want to be together no matter what?

It's not to say that you would prefer the happy days and the healthy days and the wealthy days, but when it comes down to it, you will be together forever. Because then and only then can I, in good conscience, marry a couple because they are saying yes.

[16:30] When we say that we, by God's grace or by God's strength, we mean that. We intend to be together for the rest of our lives. That's the kind of contentment that Paul is speaking about here.

That is unconditional. That doesn't, it's not determined by what kind of day you're having. It's not determined by the bank balance that you have today. It's not determined by the level of health that you're enjoying.

Ben Franklin put it this way. He said content can make a poor man rich, but this content can make a rich man poor. America's first billionaire was a man called John D. Rockefeller.

He made money with railroads, with oil, and he was once asked, Mr. Rockefeller, how much money would it take to make you happy?

He simply replied a little bit more. When he died, his accountant was asked, how much money did Rockefeller leave?

[17:35] And the accountant replied, everything. He left it all. Can't take it with you. A man who had everything but never really had enough because he never did get that bit more.

He always wanted something more. And I believe there's another quotation which he said, when you're worried about \$100 million, that was when \$100 million was still worth something.

He said, the care of looking after \$100 million is enough to keep you up all night. That's not contentment. That's not satisfaction. That's not this idea of being content in any and every situation. The apostle Paul from the prison cell could say, I am content, and my relationship with Jesus gives me that kind of contentment. Can you testify that you have a contentment with life?

That doesn't mean that you would prefer that things might be different. It doesn't mean that you might wish you were in a different job or living in a different flat or your life circumstances might be different or changed.

[18:36] But can you say today that your relationship with Jesus gives you a peace and a contentment? So that no matter what God puts in your life, you can say, I can be joyful.

I can be content. I can be satisfied because I know that no matter what, even if I feel completely alone in this world, I know that Jesus is with me because the Bible tells me that he will never leave me and he will never forsake me.

And if I have nothing else in this world, I know that I have a house in glory because he tells me there's a mansion waiting for me, and he will bring me one day to be with him.

Notice how Paul is bringing his faith into his life, bringing his relationship with Jesus into the day-to-day reality of life. Is that your testimony? No matter what your situation is tonight, can you say that everything that I have is because of Jesus?

Everything that I enjoy is because of Jesus. And even if my life is not particularly joyful, not particularly happy today, I know that God has a plan.

[19:43] And I know that Jesus has a purpose, and I'm convinced that he knows what he's doing. Faith doesn't mean that you know what he's doing, but faith means that you know that he knows, that he understands, and that he doesn't make mistakes.

Because sometimes in life we have to admit, I don't get it. I don't understand what's going on. I don't understand why this is happening. I don't understand why that isn't happening. But I understand who's in charge, and I understand who's in control.

So the first statement, or the first promise, is I can do everything. But you need to finish that statement through him who gives me strength. And the second great promise is a promise for others.

There's a personal promise there in verse 13, and there's a collective promise in verse 19. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

My God. What do you understand about God? What do you understand about his character? What do you understand about his nature? When Paul says, let me tell you about my God, do you have the same God in mind?

[20 : 57] Do you understand the God of the Bible? Because the God of the Bible has no limitations. We are limited. If I expend energy, that makes me physically tired. It's energy that I do not have to expend.

If I spend money, that impoverishes me to some extent. For example, my friend, Lockie MacDonald, right? Lockie says to me, look, I'm having a difficult month. I'm having difficulty making ends meet. Could you spare some money? I said, well, here's a tenor. He said, well, I actually need 100 pounds. I said, okay, here's 100 pounds. Now that 100 pounds is now his, but I'm 100 pounds poorer. I'm 100 pounds less well off.

Now my God is never impoverished because my God gives and never loses. My God expends energy and never gets tired.

My God's resources are infinite and eternal, so he gives and he keeps on giving. He works and he keeps on working. He never gets tired. He never gets weaker. He never loses forgiving.

[22 : 02] So the apostle Paul can say, my God will meet all your needs, whatever they are, no matter how big they are, no matter how small they may seem, no matter how insurmountable the problem might be.

He says, let me tell you what my God can do. And he's speaking now to a people who have put their faith to the test. I said earlier that the Macedonian churches were a poor group of people, but Paul is commending them for the generosity.

He's commending them because they gave and kept on giving. He says, look, I don't need it, but I appreciate it. I don't need your gifts, but I thank you for your kindness.

But he's restating a phrase that is often used. He's saying that what goes around comes around. One of the proverbs, puts it this way, it was at Proverbs 11, a generous man will prosper and he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Philippians, you've been kind. Philippians, you've been generous. Philippians, you've looked after me. Let me tell you who's going to look after you. When you serve God and when you care about others, you can be confident that somehow, some way, God will make sure that you have all that you require.

[23 : 33] Now, you don't show the kindness, you don't show the generosity to get, but Paul says you will get and you will receive and you will be provided for because of the God that we worship and the God that we serve.

Story was told of a young man called Herbert Hoover. He was an American president, but this wasn't when he was president. He was a university student and he and his friends had this idea of how to make money.

And they rented a hall, a concert hall, and they invited Jan Petaruski, one of the great pianists of his age, and they invited him to give a concert and they promised that they would pay him \$2,000 for the concert.

Well, the concert wasn't very successful. They wrote to Petaruski and they said, look, we only got \$1,600. Here's \$1,600. We'll give you the \$400 when we get it.

Petaruski wrote back, he tore up the check, he wrote back and he said, take off your expenses, take off 10% for your own efforts, and give me the rest.

[24 : 42] You've done your best. I'm not going to take your money. I'm not going to make you poor. Just give me whatever is left over. Thirty years pass and this concert pianist is now the president of Poland.

It's 1947 and the people in Eastern Europe are starving because of a lack of food. And the head of the European food program was a man called Herbert Hoover.

And Petaruski went to Hoover and said, thank you so much for rescuing my people. He didn't have anything to eat and you provided us food. And Hoover said, you don't need to thank me. You won't

remember this, but many, many years ago when I was poor, you were generous. So it's a good thing, I'm happy now to be able to help you when I have the resources to help. And that just kind of shows us that what does go around comes around. If you're a generous Christian, God will make sure that you never lack. If you're a selfish Christian, you'll find that ends will never really meet. You'll find that things never really work out. [25 : 46] If you keep and hoard and hold on to stuff, never give, never share, never show generosity, never invite people to your home, never give to others in need, God will find a way to make all that you have of no value to you because you've enabled it to be of no value to other people.

So Paul is saying, Philippians, you're poor, but you're generous. And let me tell you about my God who will make all things abound to you out of his glorious riches.

This is the faith that Paul has in his God, what God is able to do, what God can do, and what God does. My God will meet all your needs.

God is self-sufficient. We read from Romans chapter 11, that great doxology. And those words of the Apostle Paul are quite striking. He says this, Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out, who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, who has ever given to God that God should repay him.

When's the last time God asked you for advice? When's the last time that God had a problem and he asked you for a solution? When's the last time that God had difficulty making ends meet and asked you for a loan?

[27 : 12] The answer, of course, is never, because he owns everything. He has control over everything. He's made everything. He sustains everything. He has infinite wisdom. So he doesn't need our help.

But the great thing is, he's pleased to use us. He's pleased to use us in his service. He's pleased to give you work to do in his kingdom. Did he need the Apostle Paul to found the church?

No. Did he need the Apostle Paul to write the letters of the New Testament? No. God didn't require anything, but he used them. He used this man 2,000 years ago to write, to preach, to teach, to plant churches.

Does he need you today here in the city of Edinburgh? In one sense, no. He doesn't need you. But in another sense, yes, he does. He needs you to speak for him.

He needs you to serve him. He needs you to make him known. He needs you to encourage one another. He needs you to invite people to hear the Gospel. He needs you to go out with help and with hope.

[28 : 14] He's pleased to use people like us. And he's pleased to give us infinite resources at our disposal. Henry Ford, the great auto manufacturer.

Henry Ford was a wealthy man. And he was vacationing one day in Ireland. And there was an appeal for funds for an orphanage. And he wrote a check for \$2,000, 2,000 pounds.

2,000 pounds then was a pretty significant sum of money. But it was reported in the local newspaper, Henry Ford gives 20,000 pounds to orphanage.

When the paper was published, the director of the orphanage phoned up Mr. Ford and said, I am so sorry for this misprint. I will notify the papers immediately and they will print a retraction.

Ford said, there's no need to do that. And he wrote the man a check for 18,000 pounds. Why? He had it. It made no difference to him. His resources were such, 2,000, 20,000, it didn't matter.

[29 : 16] If the paper said Ford gave 20,000, he would make sure that it was 20,000. When you don't deal with rich people, you forget what wealth looks like.

But when you have a connection at times with people who really do have money, you realize that sometimes money is of no object. That there are some people in this world who have that kind of money, but they can write a check for any amount and they don't feel it.

And when you think about rich people, you think, well, God is the richest. God is the most powerful. God is the wisest. So if rich people can do things like this, what can God do?

The apostle Paul tested in Saul how good and gracious God was. He experienced firsthand the power of God. He experienced firsthand the resources of God, the riches of God.

And he could then commend God to others. Do you have a relationship with Jesus that you can commend to other people? Have you seen for yourself what God has done?

[30 : 19] Have you taken Him in His Word and seen Him change you? Change how you live? Change your attitudes? Change your actions? Change your life? So that you can say to other people, let me tell you about Jesus.

And let me show you what He has done for me. A couple of miles from here, there's a church called the Nidri Community Church. Very similar. You know, they sing hymns and songs and they pray and they read from the Bible and they hear sermons.

So in many ways, very similar to what we're doing. But when you start talking to the people there, you realize that God is doing miraculous things in the lives of these people, as He's doing in our lives.

There was a fellow that I met just a few months ago, his name's Paul. He's from South London and he speaks to somebody who was from South London. He's got a lot of tattoos that I can see and probably more that I can't see.

And he said to me, he said, I've been 20 years addicted to crack cocaine and other drugs. And he said, I've been on a 12-step program for 20 years.

[31 : 23] And you know what? They don't work. These programs have not stopped me in my addiction. They've said, but you know what? I've been a Christian for two weeks and that does work.

The 12-step program left him addicted. But a relationship with Jesus left him clean and sober and in his right mind. And every week I see him come into the free church building on the mound for a training course to learn more about the gospel, to learn more about the Bible and to learn more about Jesus.

It seems to work. The message of Jesus seems to work. It still seems to change people's lives. So if you're not yet a Christian, let me tell you Jesus still is in the business of changing your life.

Changing how you live, changing how you think, giving you hope now and giving you the promise of eternal life to come. And if you're a Christian here tonight, and maybe you're being honest and saying, I'm a Christian but I find that I'm struggling in my faith.

And if you're in a relationship with Jesus as distant rather than close, I find that my best days as a Christian are in the past, not in the present. Remind yourself of who God is.

[32 : 37] And remind yourself of what God is able to do and how he can answer your prayers according to his riches. According to the measure of his wisdom, according to the measure of his power.

And I love history, so the stories of history are really appeal to me. And the story was told of Alexander the Great, the great conqueror of the ancient world. And he was riding on his horse and a beggar asked him for money.

And Alexander the Great threw him a bag of gold coins. And one of his courtiers said, why are you giving this man gold? Copper would have done.

And Alexander the Great said, well, you're absolutely right. Copper would have served this man's needs. But gold is suitable for Alexander's giving. We might be satisfied with copper, but God's willing to give gold.

We might be satisfied with something small, but God wants to give something big. We might come to God with small requests because he says, come to me with big requests. And you know what? I'll fill your big requests and give you even more than you ask.

[33 : 46] This is how great our God is. This is how powerful our God is. He loves solving problems that can't be solved. He loves fixing relationships that can't be fixed. He loves changing lives that can't be changed.

Twenty years addicted, sober in his right mind. He loves to demonstrate his power. Let him demonstrate his power in your life tonight.

And let him through you demonstrate his power and his grace so that you can testify to others. Let me tell you what God has done for me. And you know what? My God can meet all your needs according to his riches that are in Christ Jesus.

Take his word for yourself. Take him at his word. Trust him and let others see that God is faithful. And maybe they too will come to trust in Jesus for themselves.

May God bless his word to us. Let us pray.