

**St P&P New Years Message. 2011-01-23**

***God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4.19***

***Almighty God, creator and sustainer of the earth, guide us deeper into your truth that we may rejoice in it and live in it's light. In Jesus name, Amen***

**A bit late I know -what with the snow and Israel and all that -but here is a simple text of encouragement for the coming year. I'd like to take a little time to unpack it this morning in the hope that as this year unfolds you will find it a resource, and comfort and maybe even a challenge.**

**It is not hard to get your head round the idea of need. As a church 2011 will highlight all sorts of needs. There will continue to be financial challenges. There will be a very pressing challenge to build up our work amongst teenagers. There will be challenges around the proposed train line, there will be the basic need to keep our expression of the love of Christ fresh and relevant to an ever changing world. –And more -I could write you a list.**

**To some of us our personal needs and family needs overshadow the needs of the church. Perhaps we have problems with ill health – with old age –with unemployment -with family troubles -with our personal faith. Sometimes these needs seem so great that they frighten us and even maybe make us despair.**

**So this text evidently applies to our individual and family lives. And of course none of us know what 2011 will bring. Some of you have had a very tough year in 2010 -but none of us know what of good or ill this new year holds. But whatever it brings says our text, *God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.***

**Now this is a promise -and the promises of God need to be properly understood. One of the reasons that Jesus was rejected in his lifetime was because the Jews misunderstood the promises of God and expected the wrong thing. Many Christians have come to grief because they have laid claim to what God never promised.**

**So a promise needs to be understood in three ways at least.**

- 1. In terms of the whole setting of God's love and holiness - however we take this promise needs to be congruent with the whole of the rest of scripture.**
- 2. In terms of the immediate setting or context -the verses around this verse give us that... and**
- 3. In terms of the precise language of the promise itself -what exactly it says -what it includes and what it excludes.**

**So as part of the greater picture- just this: A promise like this shouldn't be understood to mean that we stop working. Many other passages make it clear that God intends us to work -if work is available. It is good to work and work well and work hard. Because this is the larger picture it is clear that this verse doesn't mean that we don't need to work because God will meet all my needs. Its not a passive text.**

**The immediate setting? Well Paul was in prison in Rome and the Christians of the Philippian church wanted to help him and show him some kindness. So they got together a gift or gifts for Paul. They are not specified -possibly money, maybe books, clothes, food even -but anyway a considerable gift that would make life in prison more bearable. This gift has been taken to Rome by Epaphroditus and personally delivered to Paul. He obviously shared with Paul some of the difficulties in the Church and Paul addresses himself to them in this letter, but one of the principle reasons to write was to express his gratitude to them and that is what he gets round to eventually in the second half of the final chapter.**

**It's a very interesting passage. Paul thanks them for their concern -but then goes on to say that he was not really in need because he had learned the secret of Christian contentment in all**

**circumstances. This he says not to boast -he can do all these things only through Christ who gives him the strength -that's how it is.**

**Then he goes on to remind them that they have been generous to him before -indeed they are the only church who has been so good to him personally. He tells them that these gifts have been pleasing to God -so that's it -thank you very much -God is pleased and so am I.**

**But no -not quite finished -in the light of all that -says Paul -I want to say -that God will meet all *your* needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**

**Can you see -Paul is saying 'you see how God has met my needs? Here I am in prison, plenty of people would like to see me dead - and now -out of the blue as it were, comes this generous gift -for which I thank you. But let me gently remind you that it comes through you from God. He it is who gives every good and perfect gift.**

**You see how gently and deftly Paul has made his point? Of course he thanks them -but the implication is crystal clear -God is the one who meets our needs -God has done this for Paul -so the Philippian Christians should therefore take heart and be encouraged. God will do it for them -he will meet their needs also. Perhaps by equally unexpected means and perhaps in equally needy circumstances. Here was Paul in prison. He has no words of complaint or self-pity, nevertheless the Lord has allowed this to happen.**

**Being a Christian and being an apostle had not exempted Paul from any degree of suffering. He'd been in prison many times. He'd been flogged and beaten and stoned and shipwrecked, he'd gone without food and drink and sleep -yet God has meet all his needs in those circumstances -so that he was never overwhelmed.**

**And here was exactly the same paradox. God didn't stop him being arrested and imprisoned and held captive in Rome, but in that situation he meet his needs so that Paul could say 'I am amply supplied.'**

**Watch out for this paradox in your own life. God doesn't exempt us from the valley of the shadow of death, but he does go through it**

**with us. We may even go into the furnace sometimes -but with us is one *Like the Son of God.***

**So we learn something already about how this promise ticks -and how it doesn't. Take heart for yourselves -says Paul. God does not have favourites -even me -he will meet all your needs just as he has met all mine.**

**In fact this is a very solid scriptural theme. Again and again in the bible the people of God are pointed to what he has already done - the whole Passover narrative works that way, and in Psalm 34 for example the story is personal: *I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.***

**So take a look at the evidence -this is a gold plated promise -since the time of Abraham we have a great trail of proof that God faithful. We have the witness statements. Above all, Paul would argue, we have Christ himself -the living expression of the depth of God's love.**

**If you get a wobble, and doubt that God is there for you get down on your knees at the foot of the cross and say 'he loved me and gave himself for me.' That's the kind of loving and giving that surrounds me now. I will not doubt it. Supremely the cross, then every other example of his care in time past forbids me to think he'll leave me to sink this time.**

**Now I think that's the easy bit of this text. God will meet my need. He will meet it in and through Jesus Christ. Yes. Amen. 100%**

**So here's the tricky question.**

**What is my need?**

**In the way an alcoholic might say they need a drink -so we are pretty rubbish at understanding the nature of our need. If you went down on your knees and prayed for your next drink -God probably wouldn't produce it, because God loves you so much that he wants to meet your real, not your presenting needs. 'Oh God won't you give me a Mercedes Benz' doesn't cut the mustard.**

**So think for a moment if you dare. If -along the lines of Solomon -God were to pitch up here in a literal sort of way and ask you 'Jenny, Tim, ....tell me....tell me about your need -no messing**

**about with a higher salary or a face lift -but deep down what is it that makes you a needy person. (And I can promise you we are *all* needy people) I can meet that need...what is it?’**

**What need makes you damage your relationships? What need makes you crave constant approval and recognition? What need gives you a sharp and bitter tongue? What needs makes you hold people at a distance even though you crave intimacy?**

**Now I have no idea where your faith sits in your life -but I have to say that for me there is not a lot of point in declaring myself a Christian if my faith doesn’t, won’t, can’t penetrate right down into this stuff: the inner me that I find hugely hard to access, the complex me that I don’t know how to share with my spouse, my best friend or even myself: that truly holy conversation with God that is sometimes articulated and sometimes not.**

**But if I can’t even access it myself how can God meet that need?**

**Well, there are all sorts of good, proactive ways -and I am very much in favour of a life -time journey of increasing self-knowledge, self awareness. That, I would suggest, is the path to maturity and the path to becoming a more compassionate person. Talk. Think. Above all pray. Share what you can of yourself with people you trust. Sometimes seek some heavy weight helps....my Mother was outstandingly good at this. When life threw up times when she felt unable to understand her own reactions, when she felt she needed deeper understanding in order to move forward she would take some time with a skilled person. As a result of this I had the privilege of growing up with a Mum who was herself always growing up.**

**All this is God-given of course. A person who can do some of the travelling with you is the most fabulous gift. A night spent in prayer can be a life changing gift -do you see prayer as a gift from God rather than a duty?**

**But I know that for all of us there are times when that is just too hard. When even trying to put words to need is scary, threatening to unravel the careful structures that hold us moderately sane.**

**I'd like to suggest that there is a mystical level at which God meets our needs. Meets them in ways that we neither can, nor indeed should understand.**

**Let me tell you a little of how that happens for me - you'll work out what it is for you -I can't do that.**

**Three examples -not comprehensive:**

**1. When I stand in the mountains I feel at my most vulnerable, I feel truly myself -no role or responsibility -I know I am weak and I am strong. I can't explain it -I just feel *right*. Loss and hope merge into a sort of oneness with God.**

**2. Listening to superb music -the sort that turns your blood into liquid gold –**

**3. Receiving this bread and wine -don't get me wrong -I don't get a funny feeling, mostly my emotions are untouched –but I know as I do it that my feet are planted on solid ground -bigger and safer than any of my feeble efforts. It is right. It is good. It meets my needs in a mystical way which is so profound that it is right that it transcends human explanation.**

**Well -that's a bit of me -what about you -seriously -**

**Our time is gone -but what a rich and encouraging text. Please pin it up somewhere and allow it to both comfort and challenge you in the coming year. In the name of Christ. Amen.**