

A Greater Hope

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13 KJV)

If you’ve been in Christian circles for any amount of time, there is no doubt you’ve seen this verse on bookmarks, t-shirts, mementos, and home décor. For many years I used this verse with exuberance as a battle cry, “Watch out, world! I can accomplish anything through Christ.”

More recently, I have come to appreciate the context of this verse.

In this passage, is Paul proclaiming that he will do amazing, triumphant things for God? No.

Is he talking about triumphantly taking the gospel to all the world? No.

Is he declaring that he will preach Jesus Christ in front of rulers and magistrates? No.

He is talking to the Philippians about enduring hardship, about being content when circumstances aren’t great -- not quite as exciting.

In surrounding verses, Paul says:

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...to be full...and to be hungry...to abound...and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philippians 4:11-13, KJV)

Paul is talking about being content in all circumstances and looking to Christ for his strength. In this life, there are times of lack and times of plenty. This was the case even for Paul, an apostle of God. Paul is not talking here about using God’s power to overcome all his circumstances. His point is that we can endure all these things, good or bad, through Christ. The circumstances do not limit our ministry and service to God.

We, as librarians, probably do not suffer need on the same level as Paul is describing to the Philippians and as many people around the world suffer. Yet, we can still take helpful application. As we face increasing costs and decreasing budgets, the weight of the financial pressure can seem overwhelming. Perhaps we have faced years when we have been full and abounded. Perhaps now we are trending toward abasement and need.

What is our response? “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” We say this with the solemnity of one who faces uncertain financial situations with no easy answers.

It is only *through Christ* that we should persevere through these things. It’s not through the hope of additional staffing. It’s not through the hope of a generous donor. It’s not through the hope of more budget dollars. It’s through the hope that we have in Christ which is certain and sure and sustaining.

Paul concludes this passage with a reminder for all of us: “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (4:19)

While increased budget dollars and adequate staffing in our libraries may be a long time coming or may never come, we can celebrate with our fellow library staff, our students, and our entire campus communities the riches we have through Christ Jesus and the infinite grace he has freely bestowed on us through Jesus Christ. It is here that we find the strength to face whatever lies ahead of us.



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