

Between the Finally and the Amens

The Philippians' Conclusion that Also Happens to Be a New Year's Eve Sermon
Philippians 4:8-13, 18-20

If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old has passed away. Behold, new things have come.

287.2 miles in 4 hours and 9 minutes. That's my best time traveling north on I-75 from Lake City, Florida to Atlanta, GA. It's a record I don't think I'll break anytime soon. For in Lake City, FL, my wife likes to visit Falling Creek Falls. In Valdosta, Ga, I like to look to see if I can find a deal on Vidalia Onions. In Tifton, GA, my son likes to make a pitstop at Hog-N-Bones BBQ. And in Warner Robbins, GA, my daughter likes to stop anywhere she can get Peach Ice Cream. 287.2 is a long road for anyone to travel. But when you finally get to Atlanta, GA, your journey most likely isn't over. You have some decisions to make. You can continue your route on I-75 North to Chattanooga. Or you can head west on I-85 to Montgomery, Alabama. Or you can go east on I-85 towards Greenville, SC. For in interstate travel right here in the Southeastern part of the United States of America, one long journey of 287.2 miles in 4 hours and 9 minutes is followed by another one.

This today – December 31, 2023 – New Year's Eve – The Last Day of 2023 – is a lot like arriving at that spaghetti of a junction in Atlanta. The 287.2-mile journey of 2023 has been a long and eventful one. There have been some stops along the way. Some were beautiful. Some were necessary. Some were planned. Some were not. But regardless of how we've arrived, arrived, indeed, we have. But there is no rest for the weary. For tomorrow, we choose a direction at the junction and trust and pray that it is blessed by the Lord in 2024.

Fittingly and providentially, the conclusion of Philippians is one of reflection and motivation. It starts with the word "finally" in 4:8 and concludes – twice – with two "amens," one in v20 and then again in v23. It's a conclusion filled with reflective statements from Paul about his ministry. It's also a conclusion that contains words of motivation for the church at Philippi. He welds them both together in order to move the Philippians forward as they pursue what God had for them with the joy of the Lord as their strength. For us, this combination of Paul's reflection and motivation forms the basis of what resolutions grounded in living in and protecting our joy in the Lord should look like. I call them the resolutions between the "finally" and the "amens." Living in and protecting your joy going forward requires (a) a Resolution on Thinking; (b) a Resolution on Situations; (c) a Resolution on Strength; and (d) a Resolution on generosity. We'll see these as we walk through Paul's conclusion to Philippians beginning with the word "finally" in 4:8. But before we do, pray with me.

The Resolutions Between the "Finally" and the "Amens"

1. A Resolution on Thinking (4:8-9)

- **4:8-9:** ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. ⁹ 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.
- **Stinkin Thinkin Stinks:** (1) On the door of my mother's office at the University of South Carolina Upstate, reside three words for everyone who walks by her door to see: "Stinkin Thinkin Stinks." (2) That's kind of fitting for someone who has devoted her life to psychological nursing. (3) It's also why she likes colloquialisms that have the word "mind" in them, most especially "where is your mind."
- **A Resolution on Thinking:** To live in and protect your joy going forward, you must be resolved dwell in your mind where you know you need to dwell, not where you don't.
- **The Battle Between Joyful Righteousness and Joyless Carnality Has Raged in Philippians from the Opening Verse:** (1) Paul is in prison. But joy is in his heart. (2) Some preached Christ from selfish ambition. But nevertheless, Paul rejoiced. (3) Euodia and Syntyche raged at each other inside the church, but Paul found joy their names were in the Book of Life. (4) He had two choices: (a) dwell in his mind where he needed to dwell; (b) Dwell on the lies that Satan tried to weave in the world of his mind in his current situation. (5) Paul chose the former and commands the Philippians to do so as well.
- **For Where We Dwell in Our Minds is Where We Go with Our Feet:** (1) All of the statements in verse 8 are anchored around the command "think," which means to dwell. Whatever is true...think/dwell. Whatever is noble...think/dwell, etc. (2) Everything in verse 9 centers around the command "put into practice." Where we dwell is where we will go.
- **App:** We make numerous resolutions every year. Few of them deal with where our minds will be. For Paul and the Philippians, it was the first place to start. It should be for us also. Where will our minds dwell?

2. A Resolution on Situations (10-12)

- **4:10-12:** ¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² 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.

- **I've Been There. I Know That Feeling.** (1) When a person comes to you with a personal story, whether it's good or bad, the odds are great that, if you can relate to it in any way, the odds are rather great that "I've been there," or "I know that feeling" will be introduced by you into the conversation. (2) We say those words from experience because we've been in similar situations.
- **A Resolution of Situations:** To live in and protect your joy going forward, you must be resolved to say, regardless of the situation, that "I am content. All will be well because God is good."
- **"I am Content. All Will Be Well Because God is Good" Isn't Natural. It's Learned:** (1) Paul tells us in v11 he has "learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (2) It's not natural to face an uncomfortable or difficult situation and resolve yourself to knowing that situation is going to work for God's glory. (3) It's only something that can be learned through walking with Jesus and experiencing his goodness.
- **What We Learn Becomes the Basis for Our Situational Awareness:** (1) Paul says in v12: "Whether in need or plenty. Whether well fed or hungry. Whether living in plenty or in want." This is an argument from extremes. And in both extremes, Paul found Jesus faithful. (2) Therefore, he has learned the secret to being content in all situations. The secret is learning from those situations that God has not forgotten him in prison. He cares. He is with him no matter what. He is content. All will be well because God is good.
- **App:** "What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword? No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom 8:35, 37). Seeing situations from that perspective isn't natural it's learned. And it's only learned by living in the truth that all will be well because God is good. That's a resolution we all need to implement.

3. A Resolution on Strength (4:13)

- **4:13:** *¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*
- **Christian Cardboard and Eye Black:** (1) Turn on the television on New Year's Day to watch a football game and the odds are great you'll see one verse displayed on a cardboard sign behind a goal post: John 3:16. (2) But if you look at the sidelines when the player's helmets are off, the odds are great you'll see Philippians 4:13 in eye black on one of them. (3) Both have been the most popular verses in the Bible for Christians over 2000 years. And they are still today.
- **A Resolution on Strength:** To live in and protect your joy going forward, you must be resolved to know that no situation, no suffering, no problem is too difficult to face. For you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength.
- **What Philippians 4:13 Doesn't Mean:** (1) It doesn't mean you are a Christian superhero. (2) Such an application of this verse is devoid of context in the passage. (3) Many will tell you in this congregation that if I put Philippians 4:13 under my eye and challenge them to a sporting competition, they will not be very intimidated.
- **What Philippians 4:13 Does Mean:** For every child of God, in every situation of life, most especially the tough ones, no trial or tragedy is too hard to face, no assignment or task is too difficult to accomplish. For you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength.
- **App:** The word strength is referenced 360 times in the Bible. Most all of them apply it to the "power, strength, and might" that belongs to God that he imputes to his people. Be resolved to receive it and apply it to every situation.

4. A Resolution on Generosity (4:18-20)

- **4:18-20:** *¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*
- **Randy Alcorn:** "God is the greatest giver in the universe, and He won't let you outgive Him. Go ahead and try. See what happens.
- **A Resolution on Generosity:** To live in and protect your joy going forward, you must be resolved to say: "Lord, you have given me two hands, one for receiving and the other for giving. And I will therefore be generous because you have been generous to me."
- **In the Ancient World, Prisoners Were Forced to Raise Support for Their Needs for Their Imprisonment:** (1) Epaphroditus, as we learned earlier, was sent out by the church at Philippi to Paul for this purpose. (2) It was a long journey for Epaphroditus to go to Rome. It was costly, for he got sick and almost died. (3) But the journey and the difficulty of Epaphroditus displayed the true character of the church at Philippi: they were generous. They met the needs of Paul in his most difficult moments. (4) And God rewarded them by preserving their legacy in the New Testament.
- **Their Generosity Led Paul to the Conclusion that God Will Be Therefore Generous to Them:** (1) Paul saw their gifts in v18 with OT sacrificial eyes. They were "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. (2) Then he links their generosity to Gods in v 19: "my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."
- **App:** Stinkin Thinkin Stinks. All will be well because God is good. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. You can't out give God. Lord Jesus, help our minds to be here in 2024. Amen.