



Sermon: When the Little Engine that Could...CAN'T

Christ First Church
Sunday, April 25th 2021
Pastor Wayne Chasteen

Philippians 4:13

INTRO: To our guest let me extend another welcome. Thank you so much for choosing to worship with us here at C1C. HEY, let's look at something (Demotivational Posters)

Now, turn your Bibles, or turn them on, to the book of Philippians. It's number 11, of 27 books in the New Testament. It's a short book of only 4 chapters, so if you're having trouble finding it, look for 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and then PHILIPPIANS. Colossians follows. If you get to the "T" Books, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus, in that order, you've gone too far.

Philippians is one of the four "prison" epistles. So called, because Paul wrote the four letters while under house arrest in Rome. These letters include, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and the little book of Philemon. These were all wrote between the years AD 60-62.

The letter to the Philippians has been called the BOOK OF JOY! That seems ironic since it was written from a prison cell, but all through it Paul has this overwhelming happiness about him, and encourages the Philippi believers to enjoy the same.

Today, we want to look at a verse from the last chapter, chapter 4 verse 13. (BTW, this is my wife's favorite verse. Her life verse. And it just so happens, that today is her birthday as well. So, Happy Birthday Cathy!)

Let's read this verse together, then I will give you the backstory and context of the verse before I get into the sermon.

Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

WOW, that is a bold and audacious statement! To fully understand what Paul is saying, let's look at the context of the verse. In vv 10-20, Paul is commending the believers at Philippi for caring for his needs, financially. He shows tender appreciation as he thanks them for their kindness toward him in their giving. Then he says concerning his needs, I have learned to be content with whatever state I find myself in. He goes on to say, that since becoming a preacher of the gospel, he has known times of plenty, and times of little, that he has, at times, been full, and at other times, been hungry, that he knows what it is to both, abound and suffer need... Then he makes this tremendous statement in v 13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The Greek literally reads, "I have strength for all things in Him Who strengthens me." Or... "In all things I continue to be strong by the One Who infuses His strength into me."

The Living Bible expands the text this way, "I can do everything God asks me to, with the help of Christ who gives me strength and power." I LIKE THAT!

Today, I want to preach on the subject, "WHEN THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD... CAN'T" (Put up Title slide now).

If you are here, or listening to me today, and you are thinking, "Well congrats to Paul, for having it all together, but I don't." Then I say to you, I get it. I have more in common with you, than I do Paul, myself. But let's take a moment together to see what God's Holy Word has to say to people like us that are struggling.

In the story, "The Little Engine That Could", when the little blue engine was faced with a colossal task, it was her positive attitude that got her across the mountain. "I think I can... I think I can... I think I can... I think I can... until finally she did! I can certainly appreciate a positive attitude. Lord, knows, we need more positive thinking in this negative world. But the truth is, with many of life's problems, just grinding and grinding away at our troubles, and repeating the phrase, I think I can, I think I can, only leaves us exhausted and feeling helpless and hopeless. So, what are we to do When The little Engine that could... Can't? Well, let's talk about it. Notice...

I) OUR CAPABILITY: v 13a *"I can do all things..."* I can do ALL THINGS? The first thing we must do is determine, through rightly dividing God's Word, what is meant by ALL THINGS. Is this meant to be taken literally, or is it meant to stay within the context of Paul's conversation? Well, let me just tell you, I can't go outside and start saying, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can IN JESUS NAME, jump over this building, and actually pull that off! That's not how it works. THIS STATEMENT DOESN'T GIVE US A BLANK CHECK TO TRY ANYTHING WE CAN THINK OF. But if it's not to be taken literally, then how are we to understand what's being said. This is why it's so important to understand the context of the scripture you are reading. HERE, in this passage, Paul is saying that he can do all things, pertaining to, God's will for his life. If God calls him to preach the gospel, that gets him thrown into jail, and even causes some discomfort and pain in the process, then God will provide what is necessary for him to manage and even overcome that very present hardship. Paul is saying, I CAN DO THIS, WHATEVER IT IS THAT GOD HAS CALLED ME TO, because I have the strength of God to help me, in this call!

Listen, God's WILL never CALLS us, where His GRACE can't CALM us!

If you are in a place that is outside the will of God for you, and you are trying to claim a promise that doesn't apply to your situation, you are certain to fail. And it won't be God's fault when it happens! God has promised us His strength to overcome, when we are in His will, performing His purpose for our lives. If that's where you are, then you too can say, I CAN DO ALL THINGS, through Christ who strengthens me! THE QUESTION IS, ARE YOU IN GOD'S WILL?

Dwight Pentecost sums up this verse writing that... "We are commanded to live victoriously over sin. We have no ability of ourselves to fulfill this command. But we can live victoriously, because we can do all things through Christ. We are enjoined to defeat Satan in our warfare with the evil one. We can do all things through Christ, for He is the victor. We are commanded to be lights to the world, to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. We can do all things through Christ, because He is the light. We are commanded to love the brethren. We can do all things through Christ, because He is love. All that Jesus Christ is today in glory can be manifested through us, because it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. There was no limit as to what Jesus Christ could do when He was here on this earth. On the authority of the Word of God, we say there is nothing that Jesus Christ cannot do from glory through us. "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."

I) OUR CAPABILITY: v 13a “I can do all things...” CONTINUED Notice the two words, “can do”. These two words are translated from the single Greek word, *Ischuo*. That’s important to the meaning of this verse. The word, *Ischuo* means, to be strong in body or resources. This verse is not just talking about mental or spiritual strength. This particular word denotes that our whole being is engaged in this statement. Think of little David killing the giant with a sling and a stone, or Samson killing a thousand Philistine soldiers with the jawbone of a donkey. When Paul says, “I CAN DO all things”, he meant that! Paul had learned that the Lord’s commands are always the Lord’s enablements. Where the finger of God points, the hand of God provides the way! OH, the CAPABILITY with have in Christ Jesus our Lord!

I could stay here a long time, but I need to move on. Notice...

II) OUR CHAMPION: v 13b “I can do all things through Christ...” Jesus Christ CHAMPIONS every person He calls to service!

The phrase, “through Christ”, literally means, “IN Christ”. 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Romans 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

And the Word of God doesn’t just talk about us being IN Christ, it also talks about the fact that He is IN us. It’s from His position IN us that He is able to CHAMPION His work through us.

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Warren Wiersbe, “All of nature depends on hidden resources. The great trees send their roots down into the earth to draw up water and minerals. The most important part of a tree is the part you cannot see, the root system. And the most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees. Unless we draw on the deep resources of God by faith, we fail against the pressures of life.”

Listen, Paul depended on the power of Christ at work in his life. “I can—through Christ!” was Paul’s motto, and it can be your motto too.

Now notice lastly,

III) OUR CONDITION: v 13c “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” It is Christ who gives you strength! He is more than a conditioning coach. He doesn’t just help you get strong, He INFUSES His strength in you! He CONDITIONS you!

“*Strengthen*” Gr. *Endunamōō* (en-doo-na-mo'-o) It means, to be strong, endued with strength, to receive strength. DO YOU SEE WHAT’S BEING SAID HERE? We will never be able to claim strength in and of ourselves, in the Christian walk. Because none of us are sufficiently strong to take on the devil ourselves. But when we need it, we receive strength from God. He endues us with power to be overcomers in the place He plants us to serve.

I) OUR CAPABILITY: v 13a *"I can do all things..."*

II) OUR CHAMPION: v 13b *"I can do all things through Christ..."*

III) OUR CONDITION: v 13c *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* CONTINUED **Jesus is all the strength we need!**

There is a poem that seems to state plainly who and what we are...

I cannot do it alone!
The waves dash fast and high;
The fog comes chilling around,
And the light goes out in the sky.
But I know that we two shall win in the end—
Jesus and I.

Coward and wayward and weak,
I change with the changing sky,
Today so strong and brave,
Tomorrow too weak to fly.
But He never gives up,
So we two shall win in the end:
Jesus and I.

CONCLUSION: SO, what do we do WHEN THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD... CAN'T? We turn to the ONE WHO CAN!

Philippians 4:13 *"I can, I can, I can, I KNOW I CAN DO all things through CHRIST who strengthens me!"* When the little engine that could... can't — GOD CAN!