

I Have Learned The Secret

"I know how to abound and I know also how to be abased: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:12-14).

Paul had been given the apostleship to make known both to Jew and Greek the mystery which had been in God's mind before the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:8-11). This mystery was a revelation which came *"not from men, neither through men, but through revelation of Jesus Christ"* (Gal. 1:12). Now he tells the Philippians he was privy to another secret; a secret he had learned. The secret? *"In whatsoever state I am, therein to be content;"* the secret *"both to be filled and to be hungry."* Paul had experienced great extremes from the exhilarating height of mountain tops to the dark recesses of the valley. Without doubt, Paul had through the long years of preaching, known many joys and disappointments. In these two verses there are three couplets of contrast: abound versus abase; filled versus hungry; abound versus want. Put simply, abounding and filled versus abased, hunger, want. Of these latter three Paul elaborated: *"in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness"* (2 Cor. 11:27).

In all Paul's writings there are two things noticeable absent from them, bitterness and regret: Bitterness because of the trials he had suffered in life; regret because of the life he left behind him. One need look no further than Paul should he be called upon to give an example of one who had followed the Master's words: *"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Mt. 16:24). His was a spirit of serving. He told the Ephesian elders, *"I coveted no man's silver, gold or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those that were with me. In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:33-35). He could write these things because he had learned the secret: how to be full; how to be empty.

He shared with us the source of that secret and the serenity of spirit he possessed: *"I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."* Certainly this ability had a broader application than just knowing how to be full or how to be hungry, but it certainly included those things. Through the strength which Christ supplies, we can face any trial, be victorious over any enemy we are called upon to face, if we will never forget that however weak we are, Christ

can and will, if we let him, give us strength to face whatever daunting challenges we face.

Paul's confidence that Christ would supply him the strength to meet his challenges lay in his confidence in Christ. As he reflected on his life, for the greater part behind him, through the suffering he experienced for the master he wrote, *"For which cause I suffer these things: yet I am not ashamed. For I know him whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12). Reflecting on his approaching martyrdom he wrote, *"I am already being offered and the time of my departure has come. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is a crown of righteousness laid up for me which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me in that day and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing"* (2 Tim. 4:6-8). May our Lord help us also to learn the secret Paul had learned: to live with whatever things the day brings to us -- to be able to do so because we believe, with Paul, *"that we look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Cor. 4:18).

Jim McDonald