

Joyful Contentment in Jesus

Philippians 4:10-23

Introduction

Contentment can be a vague pursuit. We pursue what we think will make us happy only to find that it did not work; in fact, we were happier before we ever started the pursuit.

An airline pilot was flying over the Tennessee mountains and pointed out a lake to his copilot. “See that little lake?” he said. “When I was a kid I used to sit in a rowboat down there, fishing. Every time a plane would fly overhead, I’d look up and wish I was flying it. Now I look down and wish I was in a rowboat, fishing.”

We make up our minds that we just will not be satisfied or happy until we get the one thing. Maybe it is for that job or career you’re spending years in school to have. Maybe it is to get a license or that new car. Maybe it is turning 18 years old and leaving your parent’s home, so you have the freedom you have longed to have; only to realize things get much more difficult as the responsibilities increase.

The lack of contentment that marks our nation is echoed in many ways. We see it in our high rate of consumer debt. We are not content to live within our means, so we go into unreasonable and outstanding debt to live just a bit better than we can afford, but then we suffer anxiety from the pressure of paying all our bills. We fall for the advertisement’s tactics aim to convince us that we cannot possibly be happy unless we have their product. I must have that next new smart phone because the one I have last year’s.

Discontentment is especially marked in our marriages. We go into marriage with this idea that it will make us happy. Sadly, there is an estimation as of 2018 that 42%-45% of marriages will end in divorce (<https://www.divorcelawyersformen.com/blog/divorce-rate-us-2018/>). At

point it was over 50%. Such as a sad sight to me, especially when how wonderful marriage is when Christ in the center. Majority of these are because of lack of contentment with their spouse. So, they leave their mates in for another, only to find that the same problems reoccur. Let me tell you this, your happiness is not meant to be rooted in your spouse or another person; your happiness is to be rooted in Jesus!

It even marks the mobility. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the average person in the United States moves residences more than 11 times in his or her lifetime (<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/10/us-geographic-mobility/504968/>). Some of the moves are demanded by the need for decent jobs and for safety reasons. But some of it is motivated by discontentment that we think will be satisfied when we find the right living situation.

So, how should the believer view contentment? What is the secret? The answer lies in the closing of a personal letter of gratitude by Paul. Paul is a man who sits in prison because of corrupt officials awaiting his possible death sentence over spreading the Gospel. We'll see what God through Paul says what contentment looks like.

In this letter to Philipians, Paul is giving a heartfelt expression of thanksgiving for the financial gift they sent him. This church was dearly beloved by Paul as he expresses repeatedly in the letter:

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(Reading of the text)

Philippians 4:10-23: But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. (11) Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (12) I

know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. (13) I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (14) Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. (15) Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. (16) For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. (17) Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. (18) But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. (19) But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (20) Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (21) Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. (22) All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. (23) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Outline

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I. Contentment found in Jesus, vv. 10-13

A. The reason for his rejoicing, v. 10.

1. Paul says he greatly rejoiced because of their care “hath flourished again.”

a. The care is referring to the financial support the Church sent to Paul through Epaphroditus.

- b. The phrase “Hath flourished again” is a compound word used only one time in the New Testament. A compound of “ἀνά” meaning “again” and “θάλλω” meaning to revive, flourish”

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G330 ἀναθάλλω anathallō an-ath-al'-lo

From G303 and θάλλω thallō (to flourish); to revive: - flourish again.

- c. The word was used in reference to flowers in the time of year blooming again. Paul used the word as a metaphor showing his appreciation of the fact that the Philippians were again able to care for him and help him financially.
2. Paul then acknowledges that it wasn't that they weren't supportive earlier, but that they wanted to, but lacked opportunity.
 3. The moment the Philippians had the opportunity to show their love and care for Paul, they took it.

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B. A rejoicing not based on what is lacking, vv. 11-12.

1. While Paul was certainly in need, his rejoicing is not because he was needy.
2. He states it is because he has learned in whatever state he is in to be content.
 - a. The word content from our text this morning comes from the word “αὐτάρκης.” It is a compound word made up of αὐτός and ἄρκέω. The word literally means “self-sufficient or self-dependent.”

- b. The Greek Philosophers that Paul interacted with in Athens known as the Stoics elevated this word as the ability to be free from all want or needs. It is the chief of all virtues to them.
- c. However, this is not true contentment. The Stoic philosophy was marked by detachment from one's emotions and changes to life. Basically "I love and care about three people: me, myself, and I, I don't need anyone in my life."
- d. The pagan view is clearly not the sense in which Paul meant the word, since in 4:10 he shows that he greatly rejoiced in the Lord when he received the gift, not because of the money, but because it showed the Philippians' heartfelt love and concern for him. Paul was not detached from people nor from his feelings. He loved people dearly and was not afraid to show it.
- e. A person has told me before "I am not happy; I am content." The two are not meant to be disconnected from each other.
- f. Neither does contentment mean complacency or never pursuing anything.

Note: As believers, we can work to better our circumstances as we have opportunity. The Bible, if we are free from greed commends hard work and the rewards that come from it. If you are single and desire a relationship or marriage, there is nothing wrong with seeking a godly mate. It becomes a problem if you are so consumed with your pursuit that you lack the judgment and settle for someone who does not love Lord. If you are in in an unpleasant job, there is nothing wrong with going back to school to train for a better job or from making a change in careers, as

long as you do so in submission to God and it keeps you serving Him. Contentment also does not mean being okay with sin in your or stop growing. We have command to continuously confess our sin to God, put off the old man and put on the old man. The Christian life is to be a life that never stops growing in the Lord.

g. So, what is a good definition of a believer's contentment? Contentment is an inner sense of rest or peace that comes from being right position with God and knowing that He is good, and He is in control of all that happens to us.

Note: It means having our focus on the Lord and serving Him, not on our material things. If God grants us material comforts, we can gratefully enjoy them, knowing that it all comes from His loving hand. There are many great things we can thank the Lord for! If all that was taken away from you, your joy in Him would remain steady because you know Christ is enough. It is a life centered on a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. So, no matter what happens to us or what others do to us, we have the steady assurance that the Lord is for us and He will never leave nor forsake us. No matter what where we are at, we can have confidence and say that Christ is enough! Two excellent passages of Scripture:

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Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (6) So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

(Extemporaneous comments)

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In regard to false teachings that godliness is a means to becoming wealthy:

1 Timothy 6:6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (8) And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

(Extemporaneous comments)

3. Contentment does not come naturally. Note that Paul writes “I have learned.”
 - a. This was not something Paul learned during his time under the feet of Gamaliel with his Pharisee studies.
 - b. This is something he learned through Jesus throughout his ministry!
4. No matter the circumstance, Paul says he is content.
 - a. He states he knows how to be abased. This means to be brought down low.
 - b. He states he knows to abound – to be in well-off.
 - c. He states he is instructed in both to be full and hungry – whether he is well fed or not.
 - d. He states whether both to abound and suffer need- to be living in abundance or great need.
 - e. None of this here is rhetorical, he lived it. He is in a Roman prison as he writes this for committing no wrong facing the high possibility of execution from Emperor Nero of Rome.
 - f. Consider some of things that happen to him prior to this:

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2 Corinthians 11:23-31 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. (24) Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. (25) Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; (26) In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; (27) In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. (28) Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. (29) Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? (30) If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. (31) The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

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C. The secret to Paul's contentment despite all the hardships, v. 13.

1. This verse well-known to the Christian vocabulary. Many have dedicated this as their life verse. It gives the one who quotes this inner confidence to overcome adversities and challenges.
2. Because it is such a well-known passage of Scripture, it is important to understand what he means by it.

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3. This verse is not to be disconnected from 11-12. Let's read it again as whole:

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (12) I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. (13) I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

4. This verse is in regard to remaining contentment in any circumstance.

Unfortunately, take this verse is often taken out of context and used to reinforce a “triumphalist” or "super-Christian" mentality, instead of seeing that the strength of Jesus in Paul's life was evident in his ability to be content when he did suffer need.

5. It has nothing to do with physical abilities or achievements. Paul did not have in mind a football being thrown, dunking a basketball or go off and conquer the world when writing this under the divine inspiration of the Holy Ghost. It is true that being able to achieve these kind of things is because of the Lord, and He deserves the glory, but it is not what 4:13 is talking about.

6. He is able to endure all the hardships, because Christ is the one who strengthens him.

7. This is the separation from the world's contentment to the believer's contentment. This contentment is not self-sufficient or self-dependent. It is Christ dependent! This kind of contentment is truly learned and tested when all you can depend on this the Lord.

8. Just like Jesus told his disciples when He told them to abide in Him to bear fruit “for without me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

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II. An expression of gratitude, vv. 14-19

A. His gratitude towards their giving is continued, v. 14.

1. He tells them they did well in supporting him. In speaking about his ability to be content, Paul did not want to give the impression that the Philippians had somehow done something wrong in supporting Paul.
2. There was a real sense in which the giving of the Philippians was better for them than it was for Paul.

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B. The specific partnership of the Philippians with Paul, vv. 15-16.

1. He commends them for being the only church that supported him during the time he was in Macedonia and Thessalonica.
2. The “beginning of the Gospel” refers to start of his ministry in Europe recorded in Acts 16-17.

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C. The assurance of the church’s needs to be met because of their generosity, vv. 17-19.

1. Paul’s interest was not so much on the gift, but rather that church was giving, and God would bless them.
2. The Philippian church was not a church full of wealth to give either.

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a. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, he uses the Philippians as an example of giving.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; (2) How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and

their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. (3) For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; (4) Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. (5) And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

b. They gave willingly, and they gave out of their own need (sacrificially) after they first gave themselves over to the Lord.

3. Paul described the gift of the Philippians in terms of sacrifices in the Old Testament. A sweet smelling savour as described.

4. “My God shall supply all your need”: As it can be derived from 2 Corinthians 8, the Philippians were not wealthy benefactors of Paul who could easily spare the money.

5. He overall says to them, “You have helped me; but my God shall supply your need.”

6. The supply is according to God’s riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

a. We can know God’s supply will never run out!

b. When we live our lives dependent on Him and know He supplies all our needs, we can have true contentment.

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III. The closing of the letter, vv. 20-23.

A. Closing with giving God all the glory, v. 20.

1. Here, Paul begins his conclusion with his usual closing doxology.

2. All glory goes to God!

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B. Mutual greetings to and from the saints, v. 21-22.

1. Greet every saint: Paul did not here give specific greetings to individuals as he did in other letters. Rather he greeted every saint in Christ Jesus.
2. “Saint” is another term to describe Christians. When we are saved, we are called Saints!
3. “All the saints salute you,” Chiefly (especially) those of Caesars household.
 - a. “All the saints” is most likely referring to believers who traveled with Paul.
 - b. Caesars household here refers to imperials of Rome. The Gospel was even extending to these people!

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C. The final peace wish.

1. Just as in majority of his epistles, Paul concludes with the peace wish “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”
2. This is not to be taken lightly, grace is the very essence of Jesus. It was as saying “may the very person of Christ be present with you continually.”

Application

In conclusion, true contentment is a virtue that is not found in yourself, it is learned as you continually depend upon Jesus. It is a joyful contentment. How could someone who has faced such hardship be so content and have so much joy. It is because it dependent upon the strength of Jesus. Some may think “is that all.” It is not just all, it is everything! If you were to lose all what you have, will you boldly proclaim, “Christ is enough?” When the doctor comes back with tragic news over your health, will you boldly proclaim, “Christ is enough” When your family forsakes you because of your stance for Jesus, will you proclaim, “Christ is enough?” He is always enough! If there has never been a time where you have put your trust in Jesus to save you from your sin, there is something you should not be content with. You should not be content with where you will spend eternity. By the love and grace of God, Jesus paid for your sins on the cross and rose again on the third day. If you put your trust in Him on that basis, the Bible says you will have eternal life. Do not brush off getting saved because you think you are okay! He is Savior, He is in control, and He is all-sufficient!

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Reflection questions

1. Are you content with the situation in which you are?
2. What are some steps you can take in your faith of being fully content in Jesus?
3. How will you grow this week to have your confidence in Jesus in your current circumstances?

To conclude, how is it someone can have everything seem to fall apart, but their joy and contentment remains strong and they seem to love Jesus more than ever before? Because you can do all things through Christ, which strengthens you!