

Where Do You Find Contentment?
Philippians 4:10-23; Philippians 1:21
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Greg L. Price

In times of hardship and affliction (hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, wars, conflict in the home, disease, and death), God lays bare the very issues of life. All pretense and superficiality flee in the face of such trials and there is revealed in our lives one of two responses: (1) faith in the Lord like that of Joshua and Caleb who saw the same giants in the land of Canaan as did the other 10 spies and yet trusted that God, who had promised to give to them the land would provide all that they needed; or (2) unbelief like that of Israel of old, who though they witnessed God's miraculous salvation in sending 10 nation-crushing plagues upon Egypt, in dividing the Red Sea to rescue His people and to destroy the army of Pharaoh in it, yet they disbelieved the Lord by complaining, "Can He provide a table for us in the wilderness? He brought us out of the land of Egypt and into this wilderness in order to destroy us and our children!"

Dear ones, it's so easy to proclaim with God's people each Lord's Day, "Yes, I believe the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." But do we practice it when we leave the communion of the saints, and face the assaults of the enemy that are all under the control of our good God?

This Lord's Day I would like to turn your attention to one who was an expert in suffering, affliction, and persecution, and yet one who has left us a glorious testimony to his overcoming faith in all adversities of life which he summarized in three truths concerning which he was absolutely certain: (1) There Is Contentment in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:11-12); (2) There Is Strength in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13); and (3) There Is All-Sufficiency in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:19).

I. There Is Contentment in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:11-12).

A. In our study through the Book of Acts, we saw some of the trouble Paul faced in the establishment of the Church in Philippi. Upon crossing the Aegean Sea, Paul arrived in Philippi (accompanied by Silas and Timothy) where Lydia was converted, and she and her whole household were baptized. Paul then delivered a young girl from satanic power who brought her masters profit from a spirit of divination. For this Paul was beaten to a bloody pulp, placed in stocks, and mercilessly thrown into jail. While singing and praising the Lord in jail, the Lord sent an earthquake and the doors to the jail were swung open, the chains and stocks fell from them. The jailer was ready to take his own life fearing the escape of all his prisoners when Paul cried out that they were all present and accounted for. This gave Paul the opportunity to preach to this jailer and his household who were brought to faith in Jesus Christ. When Paul and Silas left Philippi the next day, there was a small congregation of believers that had been established in that city. Out of Paul's suffering and affliction, a church was formed in Philippi to the glory of God.

B. Paul most likely wrote this letter to the Church of Philippi some 10 years later toward the end of his first Roman imprisonment (in about 61-62 A.D.). Note the references to his imprisonment (Philippians 1:7,13,14,16). Despite what Paul had suffered in being stoned and left for dead, whipped with the painful Roman lash upon his bare back, bound with chains in a cold damp prison, maligned and lied about, his apostolic authority denied, and deserted by friends in this time of isolation, this letter is filled with expressions of joy, contentment, and thanksgiving.

C. As Paul now draws this letter to a close, he does not want the emphasis to be upon his needs,

upon his afflictions, upon his suffering, but rather he desires all attention to be focused upon the sufficiency of Christ our Savior. Here he was languishing in prison and his desire is not to complain about his trials, but rather to encourage the Philippian brethren to look in faith to Jesus Christ for everything that they need.

D. The first undeniable truth with which Paul closes this letter is this: **There is contentment in Christ** (Philippians 4:11-12). Why was Paul in prison? Had he committed some crime worthy of imprisonment? No, he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the unbelieving Jews did not like it. Now, I'm sure Paul could have given a many reasons why he should not be in prison, but there he was by God's appointment. And he was content to be there knowing that the Lord could do him no wrong.

1. The Greek Stoics used the same Greek word, "content", found in Philippians 4:12 (*autarkēs*) to describe their own self-sufficiency. They did not need anything outside of self to be content. This is also the doctrine of Eastern religions: look inside of yourself to the god inside you to find peace, joy, and contentment. But dear ones, all looking to ourselves for self-sufficiency is futility. For such a philosophy denies that man is finite and totally depraved in every faculty of his being. The fact that man is both finite and corrupt due to sin makes man absolutely dependent upon God for his very being, life, and eternal blessedness.

2. Nor will you find contentment by going to the opposite extreme and indulging yourself with every outward pleasure. For there will always be something you don't have that you believe will make you content once you possess it. You will never be content in this endless search because you cannot find in all your searching that which truly brings contentment. When you think you have found it, the novelty wears off and you are off looking once again in this endless search. And even if the novelty does not wear off, you live in fear of losing that which you believe will make you truly content, so that you are not content although you finally have what you wanted.

3. Dear ones, what would make you content in this life? What would you place in the blank: "If I only had _____, I would be content in this life." What would finally put an end to all your murmuring, complaining, self-pity, and coveting? A good paying job? A beautiful home? Dependable transportation? No more bills? No more taxes? A loving husband? A submissive wife? Obedient children? Parents that give you more freedom? Health, wealth, fame, and security? Dear ones, if you have to have them in order to be content, then you will never know contentment in this life. If your contentment is dependent upon how people treat you or upon your financial security or upon your goals and dreams being realized, you will sadly always be in search of contentment, but never truly knowing it (Solomon tried it and failed). We either choose to be discontent by looking to persons or things in this life as the source of joy, or we choose to be content by looking to Christ alone as the source of our joy. We can never blame our lack of joy or our lack of contentment on not having certain things in this life, for it is the gift and privilege of every Christian to be content in every circumstance in which we find ourselves. The grace of contentment is yours in Christ; however, you must apply it by faith. The Lord Jesus purchased it for you, and He deposited it into your account when He died for you who trust alone in Christ alone. You must withdraw it by faith in Jesus Christ every day.

4. Carefully note that Paul says he had "learned" in whatsoever state he was in to be content. It did not come natural to him. Paul did not immediately practice this grace in all of its fullness upon becoming a Christian. He had to learn by God's grace to exercise that contentment in every circumstance. The key for Paul was to realize that the source of Christian contentment is found alone in Jesus Christ. The reason why Paul could learn contentment in all circumstances (and it is unlikely that we could compare our afflictions with his) is that Jesus Christ was his life (Philippians 1:21). Jesus was not simply one part of Paul's life. Jesus was not simply most of his life. Jesus was Paul's life. Jesus gave meaning and purpose to everything in Paul's life (when he went without, when he was ill and sick, when he was stoned, whipped, and imprisoned, and when he was deserted by friends).

5. Dear ones, when Christ is our life, and when Christ in all of His love, faithfulness, and power is seen in every circumstance of life, how can we not be content? Have you ever considered that when

you find yourself discontent, overcome with discouragement, wallowing in self-pity that at that point in time something or someone other than Christ has become your life and that is the reason you are discontent? If Christ were consciously your life at that point, you would not be discontent, for you would see him ministering to you with the eye of faith as clearly as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego saw Christ ministering to them while in the midst of the fiery furnace. Beloved, Jesus Christ is all-sufficient to make you truly content in this life regardless of what you face. And the only reason we as Christians are not growing in our contentment is because we have not learned consciously to make Christ our life in all our disappointments, discouragements, pains, trials, and afflictions. When Christ is consciously our life, even death itself cannot discourage us, for death will only usher us into the very presence of Him who loved us and gave His life for us.

II. There Is Strength in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13).

A. Immediately the cry of the child of God who realizes his own sin and finite weaknesses is, "I don't have the strength to learn this contentment in my own life. If you only knew how very weak I am when it comes to giving in to discouragement, to self-pity, to worry, to complaining, to envy, to discontentment. When life doesn't go the way that I want it to go, when my plans are disappointed, when trials overwhelm me, I seem to cave in." I'm glad to hear you confess that you cannot do it in your own strength, for then you are ready to hear how and only how you may be strengthened (John 15:5).

B. Dear ones, the second truth presented at the end of this letter which gave to Paul an overcoming faith and caused him to rejoice greatly even in his hardships, trials, isolation, and persecution was that he could do all things **THROUGH CHRIST** who strengthens him. Just as Christ was Paul's life and reason for living, so Christ was Paul's strength and power for living (through His death and resurrection). Do you think that one who could victoriously conquer death could also give strength to weak Christians to conquer sinful discouragement, self-pity, worry, complaint, and discontentment? If the Lord overcame all the forces of darkness during His ministry on earth, if He secured our justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification, is there anything so great that He is not yet greater still? How big is your God? Beloved, you can only learn contentment in life when you learn that you can't be content in your own strength, in your own gifts, or in your own resources. You can only learn contentment, a peace that passes all understanding, and an abounding joy in the Lord when you are daily looking by faith to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as your strength.

C. The Greek verb is in the indicative mood of fact and reality, "I can do." It is not in the mood of mere possibility or probability, "I may or might do." Is this the promise to which your struggling faith clings? If so, you will have the strength of Christ to learn contentment in all circumstances. And even more than that, Paul says, "I can do not some things, but ALL THINGS through Christ who strengthens me" (i.e. all things which the Lord calls you in His Word to do). If the Lord would have us suffer the loss of a loved one, He will give us the strength to use it for His glory. If the Lord gives us family, friends, or co-workers to whom we might proclaim His truth, He will give us the strength to honor Him in it. If the Lord gives us a thorn in the flesh to subdue our pride, He will give us the strength to make His power perfect in our weakness (as He did with Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). If the Lord blesses us with health or wealth, or sickness or poverty, He will give us the strength to use it to extend His kingdom (even if we only possess two mites as did the poor widow who gave all she had).

D. We can always seem strong when we are enjoying those times of blessing in our lives (when the wind is to our back and moving us along), but can we be strong if the Lord does not alter that hardship, trial, or affliction (when strong winds are in our face and can barely move at all)? We can be strong and learn

contentment in the midst of those seeming hurricane-like winds of adversity because Christ is our life, Christ is our contentment, and Christ is our strength. That is not a mere possibility, but a reality for the Christian.

1. The Puritan divine, Thomas Brooks, put it correctly,

In God is fullness, all fullness, infinite fullness; and if this with a little of the world will not satisfy thee, I know not what will. If God for thy portion will not content thee, all the world will never content thee (*Works*, 2:52).

2. Dear ones, there is hope for all who trust in Jesus Christ, for you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

III. There Is All-Sufficiency in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:19).

A. In Philippians 4:14-18, the Apostle Paul rejoices with thanksgiving in the compassionate giving of the Philippians in the hour of his need on more than one occasion. Then Paul states the third and final truth to be grasped and embraced by the Christian: **Jesus Christ is all-sufficient to meet all your needs.** God manifested in flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, continually supplied the needs of those who fled to him in faith during His earthly ministry: multiplying a few fish and loaves of bread to feed five thousand and the four thousand, healing the sick, raising the dead, forgiving the guilty and receiving all the prodigal sons, and showing mercy to weak and struggling disciples who were proud, unbelieving, and fearful at times.

B. Notice the amazing promise here. Literally, “And my God will fill your every need.” Not every want, not every desire, but every need (and not necessarily what we ourselves consider to be a need, but what He Himself deems to be a need). If you need food, clothing, shelter to sustain life, you may pray for your daily bread and He will supply it. If you need grace to overcome a besetting sin, lift up your empty hands to Him, He will fill your hands with the grace that is needed. In fact, He has likely already done so, but you are simply not acting in faith to apply it. And if you do not receive that for which you have prayed, then it may be that it was not as needful as you thought (Matthew 7:11—if God doesn’t give it, then it wasn’t good or needful for you to receive it).

1. Promises are only as good as the ability and faithfulness of the one who makes them. Beloved, there is no lack of heavenly resources or divine faithfulness to fill your needy hands as you lift them to the Lord Jesus. For all the riches of heaven are at His disposal to distribute to His children who cry out to Him for mercy. How often has He filled our empty hands, and we will not believe He has, or we do not like that with which He has filled our empty hands. We asked for healing, and He gave us grace to endure the pain and suffering.

2. But if the Lord withholds from you that which you believe is a need, will you be content in knowing that Jesus Christ is your life and will you trust Him in knowing that He is infinitely wise and withholds what you have sought for His glory and your good? Will you still love Him? Will you still serve Him with all of your heart? If you will, it is at that point, dear ones, you will truly learn contentment, for you will have wholeheartedly surrendered all to Jesus. And only when He has all of us, and we stop fighting Him and begin resting in Him will we learn contentment in all that we face in this life.

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