

Contentment in Christ

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[0 : 00] Philippians chapter 3, it's on page 1180 in the Red Church Bible.

Philippians chapter 3, starting at verse 4, 4-11. Though I myself have reasons for such confidence, if anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more, circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider lost for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, so that somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

[1 : 26] And then just moving on to the next chapter, chapter 4, starting verse 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.

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances.

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 can do everything through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.

For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

[2 : 44] I have received full payment and even more. 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.

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. We finish there, verse 20.

I'm going to ask Ralph to come up now. Ralph's going to speak to us. Just before he does, we'll just pray for him. Our loving Heavenly Father, we just thank you for each person here this morning.

You know our needs, Lord. You know if we're not contented, Lord. We just pray that you would help us to learn to be contented in you. Lord, we pray for Ralph as he speaks, that you would anoint him with your Holy Spirit, Lord, and would give him the words that you want him to say.

We just ask these things, Lord Jesus, in your precious name. Amen. Amen. Good morning, everyone.

[4 : 09] Thank you, Ian, for leading this morning and introducing our theme. We're going to be looking and focusing in on the verses in chapter 4. So if you could have your Bibles open.

I think that would be a good help as we go through the verses. Sorry, that's actually very difficult to see, isn't it? Can people read that? Just about? Okay. I'll pick a different color next time.

Okay, so if you could just click on to the next slide. Thanks, Xavier. Okay, that's a bit better. How many of you recognize these two verses this morning?

Are they familiar? Are they ones you've come across or heard in different contexts? From the section that we're going to be looking at in Philippians chapter 4, these are really the two standout verses, aren't they?

They're the ones that really are easy to latch onto because they're positive, they're full of hope, they're full of promise. They're really easy ones to kind of focus in on. And indeed, I think they are two of the key verses in this passage.

[5 : 13] But I think one of the reasons why these two verses are so familiar to us is because they're often quoted publicly by Christians. So they're not verses that are just known by us as Christians, but they're kind of verses in some ways that are out there.

Philippians 4.13 is loved by professional sports athletes. So sports people love to quote it because it very powerfully associates their sporting success with their faith in Jesus.

And that's why they'll often quote verse 13. And so in the post-match interview, as they quote this verse, the meaning that's coming across to people is really this. Whatever we want to achieve in our life, Jesus is going to give us the strength to do it.

And that's the kind of meaning that comes across. And 4.19 is popular for a slightly different reason. It's this. It's those that you might see on satellite television, those that preach that your best life is to be lived now.

God is here to bless you. God is here to prosper you because you're a child of the King. He's going to supply all your needs. So you know what? You should have physical well-being.

[6 : 23] You should have prosperity. You need happiness and you need success in your life. And that's often how verse 19 is quoted or made known to people. So given how popular these verses are in those contexts, it's hard, isn't it, to read them sometimes in any other way.

You see, the use or what I would say the misuse of these verses is so great that at times we fail to see how glorious and how Christ-centered these verses actually are.

You see, these verses and this passage is not ultimately about striving for sporting success and striving for financial well-being. These verses, ironically, point away from those things and point instead to contentment in Christ.

The abuse of God's word is twisted. It's dangerous. It's sinful. But we can take the precious words of God off the page of the Bible and apply them.

We can do that. But we better be very sure that what we speak and how we speak them is how God speaks them. So I want to lay in front of you this morning from the beginning what I believe that God is teaching us through his word that we're looking at this morning.

[7 : 42] And this is the theme that I want to build on and come back to again this morning. And it's this. The source of Christian contentment is Jesus himself.

He himself meets all of our needs and he himself is our strength for every life circumstance. Now there's a lot packed in there, but we're going to look at it together.

So with this in mind as a focus, because I believe that's what the passage is teaching, how do we understand then verse 13 and verse 19? How do they fit in? Where do they come up? And I think to do that properly, to have a good grasp of verses 13 and 19, we need to put the verses in context, don't we?

We hear that a lot, but it's true. We need to look at the verses in the context of the passage. We need to look at the context of the book of Philippians, what's going on there. And I think ultimately they have to fit within the bigger storyline of the Bible so that it makes sense, it hangs together, and we can have confidence in what we understand.

So if we look at the book of Philippians, Paul, the Apostle Paul, identifies himself as the author. He's writing a letter to a church in Philippi. So the city of Philippi doesn't really exist anymore, but it was located in what we know as modern-day Greece.

[8 : 58] So it's that part of the world where the early apostles and Christians went to as the word began to spread out from Israel. And Paul set up this church in Philippi. So it's a church that he knows, and it's a church that really has a special place in his affections.

If you read the book of Philippians, he loves the church. He cares deeply for the church. And chapter 4, as you can see, because we're nearing the end, is the last chapter of the book.

And as we reach verse 10, Paul is speaking directly to the church. And he's talking about their, what does he say, their renewed concern for him. What's that?

Well, if we look down at verse 18, we'll get an idea. I have received full payment and even more. I am amply supplied. Now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, they are a fragrant offering and acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

So Epaphroditus, who is the person who brought this gift from the church to Paul, he was mentioned earlier in the book of Philippians, back in chapter 2. And there we learn a bit of the context.

[10:04] The church in Philippi had sent Epaphroditus essentially on a missions trip with two aims in mind. We heard about Yelena's missions trip this morning, and she had a particular aim or purpose in that, and it was a main focus.

Well, Epaphroditus was doing a similar job for his local church in going to Paul. The first role, he was going as a messenger to bring news about the home church to Paul. And the second role was as a carrier of this gift.

So the church was sending some type of gift to Paul. It may have been money. It may have been food. It may have been writing materials. We don't know. But it was some gift that was very valuable to Paul in meeting his needs.

So with that in mind, we can certainly say that at a basic level, these verses are a thank you note, aren't they? They're a thank you note from Paul to the church because of their generous gift.

And they're no less than that. That is one meaning of these verses, a kindly worded thank you note from Paul to a supporting church. But somehow, in the midst of this thank you note, Paul manages to sneak in verses 13 and 19.

[11:16] What's the connection? How does Paul weave together what at one level is a simple thank you note with such celebrated and well-known verses? Well, verse 10, again, starting there.

Paul starts out in a joyous mood, rejoicing because of their renewed concern. And if we, again, if we look at the context, we can see Paul's own circumstances because he refers to him in the letter. And we might even get an idea that we think we know why he's rejoicing. It makes sense. Paul is writing the letter from prison. He's under attack, under attack from the authorities that have taken him and incarcerated him.

And he's even under attack from other Christians who are actually happy about him being in prison and are making trouble for Paul while he's imprisoned. So he's in a very desperate situation. Where are his loyal churches, the ones that he set up that he sweat blood and tears to establish?

Where are they in this? Where is the support that he needs? Where is the relief that's going to come? Because he's suffering and he deserves relief. He deserves support. And at last, the gift arrives.

[12:20] It's relief. It's joy. It's happiness. It's food. I don't know about you, but if I was in prison, if I was hungry, if I was chained, if I was having my ministry under attack in that situation by other Christians, you know, I think it would be okay to be at least a little bit happy about a gift that came in.

The package. I'd feel relieved, elated, joyous. At having my needs met. Happy that at last my circumstances are improving.

We're in for shock. Paul is rejoicing. But not for those reasons. Not for the reasons that we would think. Verse 11 and what follows simply blows away our assumptions about Paul's rejoicing.

Verse 11. I'm not saying this because I'm in need. For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Paul will give us the reason why he's rejoicing greatly in verse 14 and onwards and we'll get to that.

But now we just want to look at verse 11. And the main point that Paul is making in verse 11 is that his rejoicing has nothing to do with his change in personal circumstances.

[13:32] Due to this gift, he's shifting the focus away from the gift. Where we might in those circumstances with, and I have to say some justification, rejoice in the gift and the change that's brought about.

But Paul doesn't. His reason for rejoicing is not because his physical needs have been met, as it says in verse 11, but because he has learned contentment whatever his circumstances.

And he goes on in verse 12 to explain this, doesn't he? He says he knows what it is to be in need.

And he knows what it is to have plenty. He knows what it is to be well fed. He knows what it is to be

hungry.

To live with much and to live in want. Paul has experienced it all. And it's been through all of these different circumstances that he has learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. So the gift arrives. His contentment remains where it is. It's unmoved by the change in circumstances. And we can miss this very easily, can't we?

[14:37] We can miss how counter-cultural this all is of what's happening in verses 10 to 12. Because we all long, don't we, naturally, for comfort, for relief, for having our needs met.

None of us like to be put out. So we look for it. We look for these things. And we expect others to look for it, to be like us. And likewise, when we provide things for others, whether that's within a family context or to friends, you know, we do it expecting that in some way their happiness is going to be increased because of our generosity.

We expect, you know, when we do these things, that there's going to be some change, some increase in happiness, that we're going to bring relief and people will be happy because of what we've done. So there's something quite unfamiliar at work in these verses, things we're not used to. And it's unfamiliar because it's not our experience often day by day, is it? Contentment like this. Now, we use different words. So I want to open this up a little bit more.

You know, we talk about being happy. It's a word we use. We talk about being peace or being calm or being satisfied or the Jewish word shalom, which encompasses all of those things.

[15:51] But when we speak of contentment, it comes with this constant qualification. It's contentment that is based on circumstances. But such contentment dependent on circumstances is clearly, compared to what Paul is speaking about, a counterfeit contentment.

Because he speaks of contentment apart from circumstances. So the contentment that is based on circumstances is a lie. It's a counterfeit contentment. Now, the list of circumstances that we can base our contentment on is endless.

And I think you'll know why. It's easy to understand why it's an endlessness. Because whatever we set our hearts upon, that's where contentment is going to lie, isn't it? Whatever we want in our hearts.

So a few examples. They're not here, so I can speak about them easily. For my three- and five-year-olds, for Christopher and Kalina, contentment is based on completing a collection of toys. So whether that's a series of Happy Meal toys from McDonald's, whether it's a set of Lego sets of Ninjago Lego. If it's a set of Princess toys, it doesn't matter. They promise me they'll be happy once they get all of the set, once the set is complete.

[17:05] And do you know what? They are. For a whole afternoon. It's great. But then a new set comes along, doesn't it? And there's something else on the telly that they want. And it's contentment based on advertising.

I'm going to take a short little aside for parents. The Happy Meal toys you can buy without buying a Happy Meal. They'll sell them to you for about a euro. So that's my tip for anyone that's stuck having to complete a set of Happy Meal toys.

But it's contentment based on advertising, isn't it? And for certain types, and again, this is an easy one because it's me included, it's gadgets. There always seems to be a gadget that I'd like.

For the last while, it's been a network-attached storage drive for homes so we can put all our photos and all our music and all our movies on a backup drive and access from any of our computers or whatever around the house.

And I got it a few weeks ago, and it's brilliant. But I know, and it's already starting to happen, that my attention is switching to another gadget. So it's contentment that's based on stuff, on things.

[18:07] And they're the easy examples to list off. And another set of easy examples is to look around at those that seek to live without society's moral constraints. So we can look outside, maybe, of the church, and we can talk about the rioters in London finding contentment in lawlessness.

Or we can take the usual suspects. We can talk about people that find contentment in alcohol, drugs, casual sex, whatever it might be. And so we look at the world outside, and it's very clear that counterfeit contentment is rife outside the church.

Contentment that's based on immoral living. But now there's harder examples to face. Ones that I hope shift us around in our seats this morning.

You see, counterfeit contentment will latch on to anything and everything it can. Our contentment meter can be tuned to family life.

If we're managing to not argue too much at home. If I can sit in peace and quiet for an evening, then our contentment will last as long as that.

[19 : 14] Our contentment can be affected by our jobs. Times when we're happy with our jobs. Times when we're just simply fed up. Contentment can be affected by church life.

You know, if people would just agree with me, things would just go so much better. Don't they see that? But then they start having other opinions and ideas and thoughts. And our contentment about church life is just shot, isn't it?

You see, counterfeit contentment does run through the world out there. But it runs through the church in equal measure and in equal ways within here. So all of us, whether it's outside or inside, will struggle with circumstances that rob us of our contentment.

And do you know what? And we see this in these verses. It doesn't matter as well how much you have or don't have. When we feel that we're in need materially and we don't have things, we're not content.

And when we feel that we have plenty, the reality is we're not content. Because we're looking over our shoulder in case it's taken away. Or we're looking ahead for the next thing that we need to get. You see, things come and things go.

[20 : 23] Contentment on those things will ebb and flow. But now, now let's look at verse 12 again. And let's read through to verse 13. Do you see it?

Do you see it in those verses? Hunger, food, plenty, want, all have been replaced by this truth. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Paul is no more and no less content because of the gift. He faces into the gift with Jesus as he has faced hunger with Jesus.

You see, Paul has shifted the focus of his contentment off himself and off the things around him.

And he's firmly placed it on the person of Jesus Christ. This is the secret learned by Paul and that he's sharing with us here this morning through these words.

I don't know what kind of questions you have when you hear something like that. It's a grand statement. It's a great verse. But what is Christ's contentment, firstly? And how do we learn it?

[21 : 52] They have to be the key questions because what is this? How do we get it? Well, the good news is that Paul has already shown us back in chapter 3 what Christ's contentment is.

And that's why we read those verses in chapter 3 earlier. Now, we can but glance back at chapter 3 and dip our toes into the shallow waters. But I hope that what we see there will lead you back to chapter 3.

And you'll spend some time. Your appetite will be wet for God's word. And that you're going to come back here. Philippians 3. I'm just going to focus in on verses 7 to 9.

But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

[22 : 56] Again, can you see it? Can you feel it in those verses? Or better, can you see him? Can you feel him? Jesus Christ.

His perfect record. His perfect death. His perfect obedience and life in exchange for the rubbish that we want to base our contentment on.

And when Paul says rubbish, he doesn't just mean letting go of the bad things in our life. If we look back at verses 4 to 6, Paul, what's he doing there? He's listing all of the good things.

His righteous achievements. All his good works. All his good deeds. All of his moral behavior. Rubbish. Crap.

Contentment robbing. Enslaving. Self-salvation records that need to be dumped and tossed to the side.

[23 : 55] The source of Christian contentment is Jesus himself. He himself meets all of our needs. And he himself is our strength for every life circumstance.

If we leave behind our own efforts to find contentment, and we replace them with the person of Jesus, then it will be his strength that allow us to face all of life.

Have you hit any crisis points in your life? Maybe you've hit crisis points multiple times. Maybe there's one at the moment. You know when things are just turned upside down? The stable things are just no longer stable?

Marriage is hard. Church has been threatened. Work has no escape. There's no joy in making decisions about college or school or the future. Think back.

Where was your contentment then? Eating more food? Watching more television? Playing video games? Getting drunk? Dodgy internet websites? Just trying harder not to slip?

[25 : 04] Thinking about, well, you know, I'm not as bad as some others in the church. Is that where your contentment was? You see, a crisis will show up for us, our counterfeit contentment. And it should drive us to learn the secrets of contentment in Christ.

You see, Christ's contentment will be there for us to give us strength in every circumstances, any circumstance, the good and the bad. But unless we count everything as rubbish compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ, then we're going to continue to fall back to our own performance and idols whenever our contentment is threatened.

And that's what's going to happen. So I think that's one thing that we need to do. It's to discipline our hearts so that our gaze is away from these things, away from counterfeit contentment, and we're focused on contentment in Christ.

And now the second question, well, how do we learn this? If this is what Christ's contentment is, how do we get it? Well, we need to actively cultivate contentment. And for that, we're going to come back to, remember Paul said he was rejoicing in verse 10, and we saw that that really wasn't about having his needs met.

We come back to that because if the gift from the church meant nothing to Paul's contentment, why was he rejoicing in verse 10? What's that about? And I believe it's this, because in the gift, Paul saw that the church in Philippi was cultivating contentment.

[26 : 33] This is why he rejoices. It was good of them to share in his troubles. Isn't that what he says? This gift, hand-delivered by Epaphroditus, it continued a long-established pattern that they had of supporting Paul, and we see it in verses 15 and 16.

Again and again, they sent him gifts when he was in need. And Paul calls this support, in verse 15, the matter of giving and receiving, or if you like, the business of giving and receiving.

And in this transaction, there's two parties involved, isn't there? There's the party who gives and the party who receives. The party that gives, the party that receives. There's the party that reduces their plenty, in order that the party in need may be in plenty.

Change circumstances for both parties. One party, the giver, is made poorer, and another party is made richer. Change circumstances that highlight for both Paul and for the church where their source of contentment really lies.

Verse 17. Paul, in all of this, he explains that he himself is not seeking a gift, but what may be of benefit to the church.

[27 : 49] So Paul is rejoicing. He's rejoicing at their renewed concern, knowing that the church in Philippi, in his absence, are still cultivating contentment in Christ.

And the extent that they have learned it can be seen, can't it, in not just the fact that they gave a gift, what seems to have been a very generous gift, because Paul says he's been well supplied, but the fact that they were willing to send one of their own people to deliver that gift.

A journey which almost cost Epaphroditus his life because of serious illness. What contentment they've cultivated. And all of this, all of this, is pleasing to God.

It's a sacrifice and an offering that is based on contentment in Christ. So there's an application here for us, isn't there? Like the church in Philippi, we have to seek out ways and means of giving and serving others.

We must demonstrate our understanding of Christ's contentment that, like the Christians in Philippi, affects our wallets and affects our travel plans, as well as affecting our hearts and our minds.

[29 : 02] There's no point this morning saying all of this and believing all of this unless it has a practical outwork and unless we're cultivating contentment. You see, it's possible to demonstrate our contentment in Christ.

It's not just an abstract concept. We can show it each day in our decisions that we make about our money and our time. Cultivating contentment is this. We practice contentment.

Practical giving to those that are in need at our own expense. You see, it's through changing our own circumstances in this way that we're going to move our contentment off ourselves and off our things and we're going to place it in Christ and we're going to make it practical.

There's another way that this happens. God also comes along sovereignly and cultivates contentment in our lives through blessing and through suffering.

How do we react to change circumstances in our lives, the things that are beyond our control, when we lose our job, when a boyfriend or girlfriend leaves us, when the exam results don't pan out as we expected?

[30 : 08] Are we less content? Or does all of this show a growing contentment in Christ apart from our circumstances? Or we can look at it the other way because we often focus on this, the difficult times, don't we, and the suffering and learning contentment through that.

It's natural, isn't it, to feel more content when we get a pay increase at work. We're happier. Or we get the college course that we wanted.

Our contentment goes up. Or we start dating someone. Or we finally get the mobile phone that we always wanted. In those circumstances, are we cultivating contentment in Christ?

Or are we feeding some selfish addiction to the good gifts that God has given us? What's happening then? So this is how we arrive at verse 19, isn't it?

And its precious promise. God will be proven true. All of our needs will be met according to God's glorious riches that are in Christ Jesus.

[31 : 15] That's verse 19. If we cultivate contentment in Christ, verse 19 is our promise. In some ways, it's a difficult promise to claim because it's been so hijacked and abused and counterfeited by the prosperity gospel preachers.

If we pluck verse 19 out, off the page and we quote it, then we can make it suggest that we can expect for God to provide all of our wants. Cars, houses, jobs, relationships, gadgets, whatever it might be.

Just say the verse and claim it. But we have to ask, are those the things that we really need?

Having read from verse 9 through to 19, can we now say in verse 19 that our needs are based in houses and cars and safety and in health?

If we equate this verse with material prosperity, you know what we're doing? We're replacing Jesus, the creator, with created things.

The gospel is trodden beyond recognition if we do that. You see, the source of Christian contentment is Jesus himself. He himself meets all of our needs and he himself is our strength for every life circumstance.

[32 : 39] When preparing this talk, I was reminded of how well John Piper, he's a pastor and an author, confronts this sort of attack on God's word where the gospel is sold with the promise of prosperity, health and wealth in this life.

And this is how he puts it. When was the last time, I can't do an American accent, when was the last time that anyone who saw you driving a BMW said, Jesus is all satisfying.

Never. They'll say, did Jesus give you that? Oh, I'll take Jesus. That's idolatry. That's not the gospel.

That's elevating the gift over the giver. I'll tell you what makes Jesus look beautiful. It's when you smash your car and your little girl goes flying through the windshields and lands dead.

God is enough. God is enough. He is good. He will take care of us. He will satisfy us. He will get us through this. He is our treasure. Whom have I in heaven but you?

[33 : 47] And on earth, there is nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart and my little girl may fail, but you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

that makes God look glorious. God, not as the giver of cars or safety or of health. You see, all our needs are met in Christ Jesus himself.

We sit under the terrible wrath of a righteous God because of our rebellion. You know what? We deserve to be punished for worshipping created things and finding our contentment in them.

We deserve God's wrath. Our one need is to be saved from God's wrath and brought into a relationship with his son, Jesus Christ.

You see, God has given us everything we need in his son. Jesus is the gift paying the price for our sin so that we can know contentment in him.

[35 : 04] Let's pray.