

Philippians Ch4v10-13

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[0 : 00] It's always a good sound, isn't it?

The pitter-patter of little feet running out of Sunday school, praise God. Just a huge thank you for all your care and your support over the years. So not only while we were here, myself and Maeve, as part of the congregation, but we really have felt and known your love and your prayers from afar geographically, and so we just want to express our thanks and our love and our care.

There's been loads of good reasons for us to feel glad as we've come back to Cork, but certainly one of the main ones has just been able to reconnect with people here in the church family.

So thank you so much for that. We're going to look at the letter of Paul to the Philippians. And so I invite you to open your Bibles to chapter 4 of the letter to the Philippians.

And if you're using the Red Church Bible, it's on page 1181. So 1181 if you're using the Red Church Bible.

[1 : 16] Let's take a moment just to ask for God's help as we look at his word together.

Heavenly Father, thank you that this is your word to us this morning, and thank you that the unfolding of your word gives light. And Father, as we read it and as we hear from it, we ask that you would be at work in each of us.

Father, that you would be making us more like Christ or drawing us to Christ in the first place. And Father, we pray that in your kindness you would continue the good work that you've begun in us through your word to us this morning.

Amen. So we'll read from verse 10 to verse 13 of Philippians chapter 4. Paul writes, In John's Gospel, Jesus says that he does not pray for his followers to be taken out of the world.

He does not pray for his followers to be taken out of the world. And the reality of trusting in Jesus, following Jesus in this world, doesn't remove us from what's going on in the world, the circumstances of life that everybody else faces.

[3 : 30] We face all the ups and downs, all the joyful times and all the difficult times that everybody else faces as well.

And a question for us, as we look at this section of God's word together, is how do we cope? So how do we cope with the times when we're going through hardship or grief?

How do we cope when we can't find work? How do we cope when we can't find friends? How do we cope when people disappoint us or let us down?

How do we cope if we're struggling at school or in our neighbourhood? Or how do we cope when life is going well?

Isn't it strange that sometimes it's when we have plenty that we struggle to cope? You've all heard of the lotto winners who've thrown it all away within a short space of time because they cannot handle having plenty.

[4 : 39] And for us, sometimes it's when we have plenty of money, plenty of food, plenty of work, plenty of rest that it's actually difficult to handle, difficult to cope. Well, Paul tells us in verse 11 that he has learned how to do this.

He says in verse 11, I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Or in verse 12, halfway through, I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.

Now, when Paul says that he has learned to be content, he's not telling us that he's able to walk around with a false smile on his face regardless of what's going on in life.

What he is telling us is that he has found the resources that he needs to be able to face all that life throws at him, whether that's going through a high or going through a low.

And it is hard to be content, isn't it? All the time. And yet this is what Paul says to us here in verse 11. And the reason he's telling us that he has learned to be content is not to boast to us, but so that

we too might learn contentment.

[5 : 57] So we're just going to think, first of all, about how contentment is something that we need to learn. So you see that Paul says in verse 11, I have learned to be content.

And in verse 12, I have learned the secret of being content. So sometimes, or some things when we become a Christian, when we walk with Jesus first, we get them straight away, don't we?

So we're forgiven. We're made a child of God. We're justified before him. So we're assured of our place, our position before him as a forgiven sinner.

But some things we have to learn. And one of those is contentment. We have to learn contentment. I remember when I was learning to play the piano.

And when you're learning to play the piano, or anything else for that matter in life, there can be times when it's easy, and you're encouraged. And there can be times when it's difficult, and you're struggling.

[6 : 58] It feels impossible. You think you're making no progress. Sometimes it feels like you're going backwards. And when it comes to learning contentment, it can be like that, can't it? So one day we face all that life throws at us really, really well, and the next, it's not just that life throws this at us, but we are thrown by it.

We need to learn to be content. And it's understandable that this is something that we need to learn, because, as I mentioned earlier, it's not that we're plucked out of the world as God's people, but we live in the world.

That was the reality for Paul. Paul was in prison, wasn't he? So he was writing this letter from prison. He was dependent on other people to supply his needs. So in prison in the first century, he relied on other people outside of prison, friends or family members, or in the case of Paul, his church family to provide for his needs.

And so if they forgot to bring him round a meal, he went hungry. And he says that in verse 10, I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.

Of course he did. Because they've provided what he's needed. But he has known what it is to be hungry and to be well-fed.

[8 : 17] He says that at the end of verse 12, whether well-fed or hungry, he has learned to be content. Now, if Paul was anything like me, hunger and contentment did not exist at the same time.

For me, if I'm hungry, contentment is something that I'm not experiencing. But Paul says that he has learned to be content. It's not only understandable that we need to learn contentment because of the world we live in, but it's also because of the hunger and the want that we feel.

And it might not just be because of hunger for food. It can be a hunger for other things as well. It can be a longing for something.

A longing for change in somebody's life that we know. And actually, sometimes we need to learn contentment because we are well-fed and because life is going really well.

Isn't it strange at Christmas when the kids open the presents, when they have more than they could ever have dreamed of, that about five minutes later they're dreaming of more?

[9 : 29] Making the list for the birthday? Isn't that what goes on in our hearts? When we have plenty is often the time when we are least content. And so this is something we need to learn, not just when we are going through times of want and hunger, but when we are in times of being fed and in plenty.

And that's a comfort to us. That's an encouragement that the Apostle Paul needed to learn this, and we too need to learn this. What we want to see, secondly, is that we have strength in Jesus to face every circumstance.

This is what Paul says in verse 13, I can do all this through him who gives me strength. So in other words, I can face all the ups and downs in life with contentment through Jesus who gives me strength.

Now Paul is acknowledging here that we need strength because life is hard. What would some of the voices around us tell us of how to respond when life gets hard?

Well, the multinational company Nike, what would they tell us? Just do it. And on a Monday morning, I say to Nike, but Nike, I can't just do it.

[10 : 49] I'm not able. I don't have the strength to face this day or this week. Barack Obama would say, well, yes, we can. And you think, well, what if we can't?

What if we don't have it within ourselves to face what life is throwing at me or at us right now? Paul says clearly that we need strength, but it's not in ourselves that we find strength.

It's not in ourselves that we find the resources we need. He says in verse 10, it is through him, that is through Jesus or in Jesus that we find strength. Paul was in prison.

Paul was in need. Paul was in hunger. Paul was in want. Paul, I'm sure, was probably in the cold in the evening times. He was in a difficult situation.

He was in all these places. But for Paul, the most important place that he was, was in Christ. And for you and I, as those who walk with Jesus, the most important place we are in is in Christ.

[11:55] We are united to Jesus. And that, Paul says, is what gives us strength. We don't find strength in ourselves. We don't find resources in ourselves. We find it in Jesus.

It is in Jesus that we receive strength. We're just going to think about the two, two of the ways in which we find strength in Jesus, to face every circumstance, to be content in every circumstance. We find strength in Jesus in his death. So for Paul, and for us, we find strength in Jesus in his death.

Because as a believer, we have died in Jesus. We have died with Jesus. We have died to the power of sin.

Sin is no longer our master. We can say no to sin. We don't do it perfectly, but we can say no to sin.

[13:07] I remember when I was in college, before I was walking, following Jesus, I couldn't go out without drinking too much. And when I wasn't going out, I wanted to go out, regardless of who was out.

It wasn't about the person I was with. When I started walking with Jesus, I realized I can actually say no. This doesn't have to control me.

I can say no. And guess what? Realizing that I had died with Christ, and I could say no to sin, actually led me to contentment.

That I didn't have to keep saying yes. In the letters of the Philippians, Paul speaks about people who are ruled by their belly, whose God is their belly, that they cannot say no to their belly.

Paul says he is not ruled by his belly. He's able to be content even if he's really hungry. Or look what he says in verse 11. I'm not saying this because I am in need.

[14:17] So he is in need, but that's not why he's saying it. Look at verse 17. He says, Not that I desire your gifts. Not that I desire your gifts.

So for Paul, he is in need, but he's not in want. So he says, I don't desire your gifts.

He needs them, but he doesn't want them. Because he's not allowing himself to be controlled by his belly, by his needs.

He's able to say no. This isn't going to be what what I find contentment in. You see, the reality is, very often, we can make a bad or a difficult situation worse by saying yes.

But Paul doesn't allow that to happen. He knows that he can say no to sin, and he does. And if we have died with Christ, we too can say no to sin.

[15:26] It's not only that we have died to sin, but we have died to ourselves. We have died to ourselves with Christ. John read for us Philippians chapter 2.

Philippians chapter 2 is this wonderful truth about who Jesus is. That though he was in the very nature of God, he did not consider equality with God. He'd be grasped.

He wasn't selfish, self-seeking, self-serving. He came to serve others. And that is the pattern for us as Christians, that we die to ourselves.

If you flick back to Philippians chapter 2, verse 4, just for a moment, in Philippians chapter 2, verse 4, Paul says, we're not to look out for our own interests only, but each of us are to look to the interests of others.

What is that? That is dying to self in order to serve others. And we see this reflected in Philippians the whole way through.

[16:32] We see Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus is a guy who is sick. And when he's sick, he's not just thinking about himself and his sickness, he's thinking about others. In chapter 3, verse 26, it says, sorry, not chapter 3, verse 26, chapter 2, verse 26, it says, Epaphroditus longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

What's going on with Epaphroditus? He is sick and he's more concerned that they are worried about him than he is about his own sickness. He's following that pattern of dying to self, being more concerned for others than he is for himself.

And guess what? That leads to contentment. When we realize that we have died with Christ, that we are dying to sin, dying to ourselves, it leads to contentment because it isn't all about us. We are able to look out for the needs of others. It's not only that we are in Christ and his death, but we are also in Christ and his resurrection.

Paul highlights this in chapter 3, verse 10. He says, I want to know Christ.

[17 : 49] Yes, to know the power of his resurrection. When Paul says he wants to know the power of Christ's resurrection, he's using the same word that he uses in chapter 4 when he says, I can do all things through him who strengthens me, who empowers me.

There is power for the believer in the resurrection of Jesus. It's not only that we die to sin and die to self, but that we live to God.

We have been raised with Jesus. We have been given new life in him. Not yet physically, though that will one day be the case, that our physical bodies will be raised, but we've become spiritually alive to God.

Spiritually responsive to God. to his word, to his voice in the Bible. This microphone, if I was to switch it off, it would not be responsive to my voice.

It would be dead to my voice. But because it is on, because it is live, it is responding to my voice. It is, in a sense, hearing my voice. And for the Christian, for those who have trusted in Christ and are united to him in his resurrection, we are alive to God.

[19 : 12] We can respond to his voice. We can do what he calls us to do. That's what happens to us in Christ.

There is real and substantial power for us in the fact that we are alive to God. Not perfectly. Paul says in chapter 3, verse 12, not that I've already obtained all this, but there is power for us because we have been raised with Christ.

Strength to do and to face any and every circumstance, the highs and the lows. How does that work?

Well, one of the ways in which that works is because the resurrection of Jesus, the fact that he is risen and we will be raised with him is a banner over our lives.

This is the way things will one day be. I remember watching a New Zealand rugby match and they won!

[20 : 26] Believe it or not. And at the end of the match, one of the the crowds, one of the supporters had this big banner up, never in doubt.

I don't know whether they had the banner up at the start of the match, but for the Christian, there is a banner up from the start of your life with Christ all the way through that says never in doubt.

And that banner is the resurrection of Jesus. He has been raised and we have been raised with him. We are alive to God, alive to his voice.

Now what that means for us is that as we face the highs and lows of life, that we can actually live for him, that we can live to him, that we can be responsive to his word even when we are really struggling.

he enables us to do that. We don't buy into the lie that we are dead, that we can't respond, that we can't live for him.

[21 : 40] Because we have been made alive with him, we can live for him. Whether we are in a time of plenty, plenty of food, plenty of friends, plenty of work, plenty of time in our hands, or whether we are in a time of want, when we are in want of food, or friends, or time, or money, the question for us is now that I have been raised with Christ, how do I live for him in this circumstance?

This might have been a very different letter, the letter to the Philippians. It's often known as the epistle of joy or the letter of joy.

It could easily have been the epistle of discontent. Paul could have began and said, I can't believe you've forgotten about me. And another thing I'm really unhappy with is the Roman bureaucracy. Where is my paperwork? Why am I still in prison? Do you know how hungry I am? Do you know how sore these chains are on my hands? And he could have gone on and on and on in discontent. But he doesn't. It's a letter of great joy. Not a smile plastered on his face in fakeness, but deep content.

[23 : 05] His circumstances are very, very difficult. He's not denying that. And like the psalmists, I'm sure that there were times when he wept, cried out to God.

Why is this happening? And yet, because he had died with Christ, because he was raised with Christ, he was able to die to self, die to sin, and live for God in what he was going through. And guess what was happening? His guards heard about Jesus. Other Christians were encouraged to speak about Jesus. There are people in Caesar's household, he says, at the end of the letter, who have become believers.

And on and on it goes. Paul is able to see the pattern of Jesus, the power of Jesus, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, shaping believers, shaping him, shaping the community. And that gives him great reason for contentment. I don't know how you look into the future.

[24 : 19] What I generally tend to do is I tend to think that I know what's going to happen in the days ahead. If you ask me afterwards, I can tell you what I think is going to happen this week.

I have it mapped out in my mind Monday morning, Wednesday afternoon, Thursday evening. Guess what? I have no clue. I have absolutely no idea what's going to happen.

Sometimes what we expect and what happens, they're exactly aligned. But sometimes we face circumstances that we never saw coming. Grief that we never anticipated.

Life seems to throw something at us that we just couldn't have imagined. Paul wants us to realize that through all of life's ups and downs we have opportunity to learn contentment.

And it's not easy. It can be really tough at times. But what he wants us to stay fixed on, stay focused on is that we are in Christ, that we have died with him.

[25 : 30] We can say no to sin, no to self, and that we've been raised with him. That we can respond to what God is calling us to do in every circumstance of life.

To look out for others, to care for those around us, to be concerned for the needs of others, following the pattern that we have in Jesus who gave himself for us.

Let's take a moment to pray and to ask God's help as we learn this. Heavenly Father, thank you that you are carefully in control of all things, all of life's ups and downs, all of our joys and delights, all of our griefs and heartaches.

Things. Father, we know in our own minds and in our own hearts, Lord, that we can often be thrown and shaken by the circumstances of life.

We can often lose our focus on Christ and we can often, Lord, be more concerned about ourselves. Father, we pray in your kindness that you'd help us to learn contentment even as we face the highs and lows of life, that our primary concern would be to live out of this truth that we are in Christ, that we have died with him and have been raised with him.

[27 : 01] Father, we pray that you'd strengthen us to do that this week. In Jesus' name, Amen. We're going to sing in response to what we've been thinking about.

We're going to sing You Are My Strength When I Am Weak. So I invite you to stand and join us as we sing.