

Philippians 4:10-23

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself.

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. You may be seated.

Well, it's good to be here with you this morning. George is the usual preacher. He's away at Messiah West in Kanata, so he asked if I would preach, which I'm happy to do. But maybe I should introduce myself a little bit. I don't know that I've met all of you. My family and I have been going to this church for about three months. And we moved to Ottawa last November from the north, from the Arctic. We had lived in Yellowknife for quite a while and Iqaluit for quite a while. And so my wife, Jen, isn't here.

[2 : 0 3] But my son, I won't send her you out, Ben, but he's in this vicinity over here. But we've been going here a few months and you've been very warm and welcoming to us. So we're grateful for that. What was I, what were we doing in the Arctic? Well, I worked for the Diocese of the Arctic.

I had a couple of different roles. One was I was a Suffragan Bishop. It's not a, not a suffering bishop, although there was a bit of that. Suffragan is just, it just means assistant. So in the Arctic, there's three assistant bishops. I was one of those and a diocesan bishop. And the reason for that, why so many bishops is, it's a very big, big, big diocese, 1.5 million square miles.

And so lots of travel, sparse population, but lots of travel. And so a couple other things I did. My wife, Jen, and I opened a theological college in Iqaluit. That's still going to train Inuit folks for ministry in the church. And then I was the pastor of a congregation for a while too.

But last year, middle of last year, we began sensing the Lord was releasing us from that ministry and calling us to something different. And so that path led to Ottawa and we arrived here.

I'm serving with a ministry called Christian Embassy of Canada that ministers to diplomats and parliamentarians. And that's been a big learning curve, like all ministry is, but it's been, it's been wonderful. So I can see the Lord blessing that. So lots of upheaval for us, but we're grateful to be here. All right. So we're going to look at the end of Philippians.

[3 : 34] Those of you who've been here have seen that George has been preaching on Philippians each week. This is the last passage from Philippians. So a little summary of Philippians. It's a letter that Paul wrote from prison. And it's very, maybe paradoxically, it's very joyful. It's a very joyful letter from prison. And Paul, in doing this, in writing this letter, is trying to encourage believers to live together in unity, humbly, and to continually rejoice in Christ, regardless of circumstances, and ultimately to keep an eternal perspective, so that you're not distracted by what's in front of you. Keep an eternal perspective. And that is how they find their strength and joy and peace in the Lord. So in the final passage that we're going to look at here, Paul talks about contentment. Contentment, which is, again, maybe a surprising thing to talk about. It's consistent with the themes of the letter, but most people who are in prison don't talk about contentment. They maybe talk about freedom, but Paul wants to talk about contentment. So what is contentment?

Well, I did a Google, I did a deep dive in Google, and here's the best definition I could come up with. Contentment. A peaceful satisfaction with what you have, apart from your circumstances.

I'll say it again. Contentment. A peaceful satisfaction with what you have, apart from your circumstances. And so the opposite of that is covetousness, where you want something someone else has, or envy, where you're jealous or you want to be someone else. Underlying all that is this restless desire for more and for different. That's the opposite of contentment. It's a lack of peace and a lack of satisfaction.

So contentment is a timely topic. I think it's always a timely topic, because it's something that we all seek. And if we were to scrutinize the decisions we make day by day, and week after week, and month after month, I think we'd find that a lot of our decisions are driven by this search for contentment.

Okay, so before we get into the text, I want us to imagine a scenario together. So here it is. You're in a bookstore. Take a drink of water. You're in a bookstore. Maybe you're on Amazon, I guess, now scrolling, but let's imagine it's a brick and mortar bookstore.

[6 : 11] And you're in, say, the self-help section. And you find a book. And a title grabs your attention. Here's the title. It's called, How to be Content in All Circumstances. That's the name of the book.

I would grab my attention. So you pull it off the shelf. And the first question I would have, as I pulled that book off the shelf, is, who's writing this? Who is it that claims to have the secret of contentment? That's what I'd want to know. And so you flip it around. It's usually a little bio, but maybe you Google the name and you get more information. And you discover that this author who wrote this book, How to be Content in All Circumstances, he's got a really interesting background. He used to be a religious extremist who had dedicated the first part of his life to eradicating a rival religious group. And I mean killing them.

And then he had some supernatural encounter that changed his life. And he became then a missionary devoted to spreading the faith of the group he tried to eradicate.

And he travels the world and faces all kinds of obstacles and hardships. He was flogged and beaten and attacked by mobs and unjustly imprisoned and shipwrecked, not once, but three times. And lots of stress that comes with organizational leadership, like betrayals and being undermined and being in conflict and corruption and all those sorts of things. And he never took a regular salary. He relied on the generosity of people.

And then his story comes to an end with him being executed by the government. He's killed by the state. Now, I don't know about you, but if I saw that book written by that person, I would think this person is probably worth listening to. Because this person has a lot of reasons to not be content.

[8 : 24] And so if he's found the secret of contentment, I want to know what that is. So of course, I'm describing the apostle Paul, okay? That's what I'm describing, of course. But the point, the reason I'm doing that is because I want us to realize that quite apart from what you do or do not believe about the Bible, this man, Paul, is worth listening to. Even if you don't believe the Bible is inspired by God, I do, but maybe you don't, this is a person you want to listen to. He's earned the right to speak on contentment.

So this gives me a lot of hope because I think, well, Paul, in all that upheaval and stuff we experience, if Paul knows the secret to contentment, regardless of circumstances, there's hope for me and you too, who probably live far less tumultuous lives. I don't think anybody here has been shipwrecked, right? Maybe. No? Me either. All right. So we're going to look at Paul on contentment. Before we get deep into the text, there are really two paths to contentment. And these are the same paths that were around in Paul's day. And they're still around today, these two paths. They're false paths.

They're ways people try to achieve contentment, but they're false because they don't get you there. Neither of these paths are going to get you to contentment. So here's the first false path.

And then I promise I'll get it to Paul. First false path is the path of worldly success. The path of worldly success. So the idea is, if you work hard, if you get the right job, if you get the promotion you want, if you get enough money in your bank, if you get the right romantic partner, if you get the ideal family, if you get the right opportunities and connections and all that, if it all works out for you, you're going to need a lot of luck probably. But if it all works out for you in this world, then you'll be content at the end of that. That's the promise of this path.

But see, what's the problem with this? Immediately you realize that you, if you don't know people directly, you know of people who have all this and who are far from content.

[10 : 52] They're anxious. They're tense. They're restless. They're miserable. And they've got all this stuff. Externally, they've succeeded. One of the most wealthy Americans of all time, John D. Rockefeller, he was a billionaire back when nobody was a billionaire, like 100 years ago.

And he was asked, how much money is enough? And he said, just a little bit more. You see? The problem is our desires are so restless and bottomless. And you're just not going to find satisfaction in this world. Scripture warns about this everywhere. But people still pursue this path.

And in the end, it ends up being like a bucket that you're frantically trying to fill, but it's leaking as you're filling it. And so you never get filled. And so this path of worldly success is not going to get me or you to anything near contentment. It's not going to get us anywhere near contentment.

So when people find out that one doesn't work, often they'll switch to this other one. Or sometimes people will do this other one first. The second path, so if this path, the worldly success path, is about immersing yourself in the world and all the world has to offer, this other path, which I'm going to call the path of detachment, is the exact opposite. It's about withdrawal from the world. An emotional, spiritual withdrawal, a detachment from the world.

Now, the assumption in this path, this detachment path, is that you're too attached to things. And if you can just let go of that and look in yourself, you'll find contentment there.

[12 : 45] Now, in Paul's day, Stoic philosophers, you sometimes have come across that phrase or that term in the Bible. They would teach something like this. In our day, spiritualities that are influenced by Eastern religion would teach something like this.

Often drugs are part of it because you're trying to disconnect from the world. You're trying to detach yourself. And I've got to say, at least at first, there's sort of a... Sounds like there's a wisdom about this. Because the logic is, if the world hurts you and disappoints you, then stop caring so much about it. Okay? And stop looking for contentment in the world. Okay. But then you detach from these things and you go inward. And now what? What do you do now? Once you've detached from the world and gone inward, you've maybe shut out suffering, but at what cost? Paul would say, not would say, does say, we have a lot to learn from suffering. Suffering in the hands of God is a teacher. And if you block that, you block the possibility of growth. And so Paul agrees in some ways with this. He would say, yes, the world does not satisfy. But then he would say, but don't escape the world. Engage the world in the name of Christ. So even in this letter, Philippians, Paul calls on

Christians to live together in humble unity, to practice joyful sacrifice, to be a courageous witness, to enter into generous partnerships for the sake of the gospel. This is all rooted. All these things are rooted in the love of Christ. But the trouble is, if you're checked out or detached or withdrawn, you're not going to do any of that. And so both these paths fail. They failed then and they fail now.

The path of worldly success, the path of detachment, they're both not going to get you where they promise. Because, because both of them rely on my strength. So the path of success is all about my external achievements. The path of detachment is about my sense of discipline and control.

But the point is, any contentment you're going to find has to be either earned or manufactured. And that is a crushing, crushing burden.

[15 : 35] And neither of these paths, success or detachment, can deal adequately with weakness and suffering. It breeds anxiety. It cuts us off from love and growth. These are dead ends. They were dead ends then and they're dead ends now.

And both paths prevent us from living the kind of abundant life our Lord promises us. From living the kind of life that Paul sets forward in this letter.

So, here's Paul's vision. It's not worldly success. It's not detachment. It's contentment centered in Christ.

I'm going to read this passage again. I'm going to read chapter 4, 10 to 13. You can put that back up there if you want. But, yeah, there we go. Okay, I'll read 10 to 13 again.

And just pay attention. What is the path Paul's laying out here? Verse 10. I know how to be brought low.

[17 : 02] I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. And in that great verse, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I said earlier that if anybody has good reason to not be content, it's Paul. The shipwrecks and the poverty and the sickness and all that kind of stuff. But you'll see in here that circumstances don't sway him one way or the other.

And it's that key verse at the center. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Now, what's the promise of that verse? It's not that you're superhuman strength or fortitude or something.

Or that your faith is bulletproof. Or that you're spared from hardship. No. What Paul's saying is that with Christ at the center of his life, he can endure anything.

He can persevere through anything. He's given the strength he needs to overcome anything. And so rather than wishing circumstances were more favorable, Paul keeps his mind on Christ and asks for the strength to be faithful today.

[18 : 22] The strength to be faithful today. And so that verse, I can do all things through him who strengthens me, is ultimately about perseverance. It doesn't mean circumstances are easy.

They're not. It's perseverance. In the name of Christ. Through it. So how does Christ strengthen us for all things?

Through faith. That's how we cling to Christ. Through faith. It's not just that we have beliefs about Jesus. It's that we have a deep trust in Jesus.

Right? The object of our faith is not a set of ideas, however nice they are. The object of our faith is a person who's died and risen and ascended to the Father.

It's a person. And so we... The Christian life is about participating in the life the risen Christ is living right now.

[19 : 22] The Christian life is about participating in the very life the risen Christ is living right now. And that's brought into us through the Holy Spirit.

You remember in... I don't know if you remember in the Gospel of John that when Jesus is telling his disciples that he's going away, he's going back to the Father, the disciples respond like that's bad news.

Because they think we're losing him. But Jesus says, no, actually me going back to the Father is good news. Because what's going to happen is Jesus ascends, and what happens next?

Sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and among us. And so, for us, Christ's presence is more available, more dispersed, than it was for the first twelve disciples.

The first twelve disciples, they met Jesus in the flesh, in the body, here and now, but Jesus could only be at that point, in one place, at one time. But now that he sent the Holy Spirit, his presence is now mediated to us all the time.

[20 : 32] Jesus is available to you right now, wherever you are, whatever's going on, he's available to you. So the Holy Spirit is this presence that mediates Christ to us and that strengthens us from within.

You know, one of the most, I mentioned being in the north, one of the most joyful people I've ever met. She just died last year, a couple years ago, maybe at the young age of 103, I think she was.

But she lived in the high Arctic and she lived a very simple life, lived in a little cabin in the high Arctic. I didn't even think there was electricity in this cabin, actually, to be honest.

But a deep, a Christian lady with deep faith, and she talked to people about being friends with the Holy Spirit. Isn't that beautiful?

She, what got her through this, these hardships? She said, friendship with the Holy Spirit who lives within her and within you. And so, intimacy with the Holy Spirit is one and the same with intimacy with Christ.

[21 : 39] And this, the deeper we go into this, the more our mind and life changes. New Testament, Paul elsewhere talks about having a renewed mind.

As you walk with Christ, in step with the Spirit, contentment becomes more natural, becomes more like a habit. But, as the Spirit does His work in you, you become a more content person.

You see? This, this isn't, this is a process, I gotta say. Paul does say something important. He says a few things that are important, but one thing is, that we might miss, is that Paul says, I have learned contentment.

I've learned it. When, when Paul had that, that life-changing, encounter on the road to Damascus, where he met Jesus, his life changed, but he didn't become content right away, like a light switch, or like being plugged into a power bar, or something.

Paul, like all of us, had to be taught by Christ, shaped by hardship, had to find contentment through discipline, through daily walking with Christ, in step with the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 59] And so that's a lifetime process, and sometimes it's maybe hard to see, hard to see progress, but there is, as long as you stay close to Jesus, there is transformation happening, and there is contentment, that's solidifying in your life.

That's happening, because God promises it will happen. He promised to complete the work, that he's begun in us. So we're not passive, we're active, and it, and we sometimes, I mean, this is all God's grace, it doesn't mean that, it doesn't involve effort.

God's grace in our life, is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning, we're not earning anything, but there is a sense, where we have to put effort in, to walk with Christ, in step with the Spirit, towards contentment.

So that's Paul's vision. It's quite different, from the worldly success, and the detachment route, it's contentment, centered in Christ. Just before we're done here, I want to look at, this part about money, Paul, this is sort of like, a real life test case, for contentment.

Money. So Paul, and I'll read this, chapter 4, 14 to 20, and you can put that up there, oh you beat me to it, check that out. I'll read this section here, this is Paul shifting to money, and we'll talk a little bit about that.

[24 : 20] Verse 14, Yet it was kind of you, to share my trouble. And you Philippians, yourselves, know that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me, in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs, once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit, that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more.

I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus, the gifts you sent. A fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. It's like an act of worship, right?

And my God will supply every need of yours, according to his riches, riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father, be glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen. So, this is like a real-life test case for contentment.

Paul, Paul planted quite a few churches, and when he was in prison, only one of them sent him support, financial support. Only one. Now, that, he may have been disappointed by that, but he wasn't bitter.

[25 : 34] In fact, he was grateful, and recognized that that shows real fruit in this congregation, that their gift to him is like an offering of worship. And Paul is not, so he's not trusting in circumstances, even when he expects, he probably expected these churches would support him more.

I'm sure he did. But he's not trusting in that. He looks to Christ for strength. He looks to Christ for strength, especially when things don't turn out the way he expected.

And he does that with gratitude. If you want to banish bitterness from your life and relationships, gratitude is the way to do that. And so, Paul is grateful.

Embedded in this text is a really, rich theology of provision, of God's provision. And it goes like this. God supplies our needs, but he does that through one another.

There's enough in the church to meet the needs of the church, as long as generosity flows. And that generosity actually fuels the Great Commission.

[26 : 54] There's enough to go around, but generosity needs to flow. And so you see how Paul's contentment is rooted in this deep confidence in God and his work in Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

And so he ends where he begins, with God's grace, God's kindness in Christ.

You could say that's the atmosphere of the Christian life. And it's that that sustains contentment when circumstances do not. So this, I think, forces some questions on us, this text.

Where are you, where am I, seeking contentment? In achievement? In relationships? In a certain kind of lifestyle?

In a certain kind of identity? In a certain sense of control? Have you tried the path of striving for success, only to feel tired and burnt out?

[28 : 05] Have you tried the path of detachment, only to be left feeling hollow? But Paul wants to say to us this morning, don't look inward because your strength will fail.

Don't look outward because the world will disappoint. Look upward because Christ is everything you need. He will not fail you. He's not failed me yet. And I know those of you who've been around longer than I have will say the same.

He did not fail us. Doesn't mean life always feels good. And it certainly doesn't mean it goes the way we expect. But Christ is with us every step of the way, strengthening us, and he will not fail.

And it's when we get that deep into us, we can say with Paul, I can do all things, all things, through Christ who strengthens me. All things.

Amen? Amen.