

Centered Contentment

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Preacher: Billy Nye

[0:00] Well, happy Thanksgiving to everybody. Oh, thank you. Hopefully your Thanksgiving holiday was full of good things and gratitude for those good things.

It is sweet, it is good to gather around a full, abundant table together with our families and the people that we love, friends.

And we obey the words of the old hymn to count our blessings, to count them one by one. It is right and good for us to do that. We are a joyfully indebted people.

We are eternally in God's debt for his immense kindness to us in all things physical and eternal. But I think it is a little ironic that the day that we set aside to give God abundant thanks is also the day when, at least for most of us I am assuming, that our table is set with abundance.

That we have a house that is prepared for a feast. We give God much thanks in the abundance when our lives are full and rich, when the sun is shining, when our mouths are full of good things, and as well we should.

[1:17] These are good gifts from God. Everything comes from him. But that is in November at the end of the harvest season. What about in the dead of winter?

What about in January? When circumstances look bleak, when our table is bare, when we are feeling empty, when we are facing real difficulty and weakness, that's when the gratitude of November seems far away.

Now, I'm not just speaking economically. I'm also speaking about seasons in our lives when they are particularly difficult. That can be in November or any other month. Now, I bet most of us this morning have some kind of hard situation on our minds.

Maybe it's tension in a relationship. Maybe it's a delicate family situation. Perhaps finances are tight. Or you're grieving that someone dear to you has made some poor choices and is suffering for it.

Maybe you have a body that's not working very well right now. Maybe there's a hard situation that you're facing at work. Or maybe it's just the daily grind of the particular season of life that God has you in right now.

[2:36] Maybe some of you are floating on cloud nine, but I imagine most of us are in some kind of season where some kind of hard circumstance is looking at us in the face.

And it's hard to obey the command of Scripture that Mike mentioned in his prayer a little while ago to give thanks in all circumstances. It can be difficult when our life is impoverished, whether literally or figuratively, to give thanks to God.

We need fresh perspective from God's Word to transform the way we relate to all of our circumstances, whether they are abounding or difficult.

Whether it's on Thanksgiving Day or the other 364 days of the year. And so this morning in Philippians 4, if you're not already there in your Bibles, go ahead and open up there. We're going to receive some of that fresh perspective that we need from a precious letter written by the Apostle Paul to a Philippian body of believers in the church, the city of Philippi in Greece, 2,000-ish years ago.

So turn with me to Philippians 4. And what we're going to find in Philippians 4 is a big idea. One main idea I want to just drive home this morning.

[3:56] And then we're going to explore kind of the different ways that that gets worked out in our lives. Here's the main idea we're going to

see from Philippians 4. Having a joyful faith union with Jesus transforms the way we relate to our circumstances, good or bad.

So think of this message as a mountain spring cascading down from the high Sierras. The source of that is that first part of that big idea.

Having a joyful faith union with Jesus. That's the source. And then that source is going to split into three tributaries, three streams of ways in which that faith union with Jesus transforms the way we relate to our circumstances.

So we're going to look at the source. Then we're going to see three streams coming off of that source of how that joyful faith union transforms the way that we relate to our circumstances.

So first, let's dive in and let's look at the source. What is a joyful faith union with Jesus? When my wife Jessica and I were dating, once we got comfortable enough with each other that poking fun at each other wasn't dangerous, it wasn't going to cause a fight, she began to make fun of me because I kept using the word over and over again.

[5:34] And it was kind of like Princess Bride. I don't think that means what you think it means. I began to use the word essentially all the time. Or basically, one of those two. And she kept making fun of me for it.

It was such a part, it was a regular feature of my speech. I don't know how it got worked in there, but I guess I thought I sounded smart when I kept using it. So I kept using that. It was a regular feature of my speech.

Well, the Apostle Paul had a regular feature to his speech that he used all the time in his letters. It was so much a part of him that it just showed up in all of the letters he wrote.

And it showed up in today's passage that Abby read for us a few moments ago. In Philippians 4, verses 10 through 20, Paul uses the Greek preposition in, sorry for throwing Greek out here, but it's basically the same as English, in.

E-N, in English I-N. It's the Greek preposition in, three times in this passage in relationship to Jesus. Verse 10, our opening verse, I rejoiced in the Lord, referring to Jesus.

[6:43] I rejoiced in the Lord Jesus greatly that you revived your concern for me. So he's rejoicing in Jesus. That's one. The second is in verse 13.

It's disguised, but it's there. In verse 13, very familiar verse to us. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. That word through, although it's a very legitimate translation of the Greek preposition in, is hiding the Greek preposition in.

So literally, if you read it in Greek, I can do all things in him who strengthens me. Through is a very legitimate translation, but it really comes home nice and powerfully when we read it, in him who strengthens me.

I'll show that to us in a minute. The third time is in verse 19. My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

So that little phrase, in the Lord, or in Christ Jesus, or in him, shows up all over Paul's letters. It's a regular feature of the way he writes.

[7:47] It's the world he lives in. He loves that little preposition in. And when he uses it, this is what he's trying to communicate. He's trying to convey something of the rich relational union that the believers have with Jesus.

By faith. In fact, that little phrase, in Christ, is the number one way that the New Testament talks about Christians. The word Christian only shows up a couple of times in our Bibles.

Not much. And then a few other times, the word believer, or follower, or disciple. Of course, that's used to describe Christians as well. But nothing compared to the amount of times that Paul especially, but other New Testament writers talk about Christians being in Christ.

In him. Just for the sake of illustrating this, let's flip over to Ephesians 1. Ephesians is the book right to the left of Philippians. And I'm just going to read verses 3 through 14 of chapter 1 of Ephesians.

I want you to follow along with me. If you're taking notes, take tally marks. And what I want you to do is I want you to listen for how many times Paul uses the phrase, in him, or in Christ, or with him, or in Jesus.

[9:09] Anything like that. Okay? We might get a few different counts. But keep track with me of how many times he is talking about us being in Christ. Here we go. Ephesians 1, 3 through 14.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to this purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

[10:24] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

How many did you get? Just shout it out. 14? Anybody else? 11? That's a lot. That's amazing. Do you see how much Paul is thinking of this is who we are? We are in Christ. It's astounding. And dear friend, if you have come to realize how your sin is grievous in God's sight, and you are in need of forgiveness before God, and you've understood that Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for your sin, and you've put all of your eggs of hope and confidence and trust and faith in his basket, then you are in him.

You are united to him. Dead to sin as he died to sin. Alive to God as he is alive to God. Given new life in his spirit to have a present and real relationship with him.

Just as a man and a woman are united together with an unbreakable vow of commitment and care and mutual love, so you have been united to Christ in a joyful faith union with him.

[11:54] And it can't be broken. And this changes everything if we look at life this way. So if this is true of you, then you are anchored to a rock that is so high and so strong that no wave of circumstance or chaos can penetrate and shake you.

Just like in the Psalms when David's talking about being on a rock and he can't be moved, it's because he is established in faith on the rock of Jesus.

That's what Paul is standing on in Philippians 4. He doesn't talk about it particularly in those terms, but that's the rock he's standing on, and that's the rock that he keeps referring to. He is rejoicing in the Lord about something.

He's able to do all things in him who strengthens him, and he's confident of future provision because of being in Christ. So that is the source. That is the fountainhead of what we are looking at that's going to transform the way that we relate to our circumstances.

Now, let's explore the three streams that this source splits into, three ways in which this joyful faith union with Jesus transforms the way we look at our circumstances.

[13:17] The first stream is this. Having a joyful faith union with Jesus teaches us contentment no matter what our circumstances are. Having a joyful faith union with Jesus teaches us contentment no matter what our circumstances are.

Let's look at Philippians 4, verses 10 through 13 in a little more detail. Let me read them for us. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly now at length that you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

So Paul is at the very end of this letter that he's writing to his dear friends, the believers in Philippi, and he's coming to one of the primary reasons for which he wrote the letter, which is to thank them for a gift that they had sent to him through a messenger whose name was Epaphroditus.

[14:27] It shows up later on in the letter. We'll return to this gift that they give in the second point. We're going to take the gift that he just mentioned, being thankful for, and we're going to set that aside.

We're coming back to that in the second point. Because right after his initial joy of the Philippians showing concern for him, he goes off on this tangent in verses 11 through 13.

You can almost put parentheses around verses 11 through 13. There's just like an explanatory tangent, but it's a beautiful tangent. It's a wonderful tangent that provides a beautiful window into Paul's joyful faith union with Jesus and how it shapes the way he relates to his circumstances.

So he knows the Philippians have been concerned about him. He's grateful for that, but he wants them to know that he hasn't been pining for a change of circumstance or wringing his hands, waiting for their gift to get here so he could say, about time this thing got here.

Rather, look at verse 11. Not that I'm speaking of being in need. I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. Paul's circumstances, by the way, are not good.

[15:37] He's in prison. He's experiencing hardship economically. He is limited in his mobility and his ability to work. He's probably exposed to disease.

He is being slandered by some people. He's being abandoned by others. He is afflicted by inward weakness and outward temptation. And his death could be just around the corner.

And so it's amazing that he tells the Philippians, in whatever situation I find myself, I have learned how to be content. And he elaborates this in verse 12. I know how to be brought low.

I know how to abound. In any and in every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty in hunger, abundance in need. Did you notice all the education words that Paul is using?

I have learned, in verse 11. I know how, in verse 12. At the end of verse 12, I have learned the secret. Paul has learned this contentment.

[16:39] It is a skill that he has acquired over the years. When I was in eighth grade, I was forced to take a keyboarding class to learn the skill of typing.

Raise your hand if you were subjected to a similar kind of torture. Okay. It was on one of those MS-DOS computers with floppy disks to save your progress. If you are under the age of 25, turn to an older person next to you and ask them what in the world I just said.

I'm not that old, but at least I can kind of have some bragging rights for being old by throwing MS-DOS around. Little did I know that those annoying, unnatural, repetitive exercises were teaching me a lifelong, incredibly valuable skill.

I have often said that the most useful class I have ever taken was eighth grade keyboarding. And here is Paul near the end of his life saying, God, by his grace, enrolled me in the course of Christian Contentment 101.

And I strove to be a good student. And I can say that I indeed have learned through a very difficult process a very valuable skill.

[18:02] How to be content in each and every circumstance in which I find myself. If I am amply supplied with all that I need, I'm content. I'm not fixated on the stuff that I have.

And if I don't have enough, I'm still content. I'm not fixated on what I don't have. I don't know about you, but at this point, I want to be like, Paul, how?

How have you learned this? I want to know because it doesn't matter what gets thrown at me. I inevitably struggle with discontentment.

I complain about the stuff that God throws at me. So how did you learn this? It is so hard to learn this, Paul. How did you figure it out?

Before we move to verse 13 to find the answer, we have to define a very important word. It's the word that Paul uses for content back in verse 11. It was a word that the Philippians could have easily understood as meaning self-sufficient or dependent on no one or anything except my own inner resources.

[19:14] And this concept of self-sufficiency was the ideal of the Greek Stoic and Cynic philosophers of that age. The Stoics and the Cynics were pursuing this ultimate personal ideal of self-sufficiency.

Basically, they wanted to be MacGyver. They wanted to have all the resources in themselves to do anything at any time in whatever situation. That's MacGyver. One writer describes this ideal like this.

A man should be sufficient unto himself for all things and able by the power of his own will to resist the force of circumstances. But Paul takes that concept of self-sufficiency and whoop flips it on its head in verse 13.

He uses the same word but he totally transforms the idea. Yes, Paul was able to resist the force of his circumstances but not by the power of his own will or his own inner resources but as he would say by being in the one who strengthens me.

He was able to be content in every situation not because he was sufficient for himself but because he was united to Jesus by faith and Jesus was sufficient for every circumstance.

[20:33] In short, he was not self-sufficient, he was Christ-sufficient. Because the most important thing about Paul was that he united himself to Jesus by faith.

And because he was in Jesus, he was secure, he was forgiven, he was adopted as God's child, he was redeemed, he was being made holy and he was being inwardly strengthened to delight in God regardless of his circumstances.

Now let's turn this to us. What if each one of our circumstances was a gracious assignment from God, your patient and wise teacher in the course of Christian Contentment 101, an assignment in which he has purposed to teach you to find your sufficiency in Jesus, not in yourself, because you are in him.

So dear friend, what current circumstance is most on your mind? Causing you concern, anxiety, fear, despair, frustration, how are you relating to it?

Are you relating to it through self-sufficiency or through Jesus' sufficiency? Are you searching your own inner resources and exhausting your own will or are you finding your sufficiency in the one who strengthens you through your faith union with him?

[22:07] Last week, we saw in Revelation 4 that God is never shaken. Like we sang just a few moments ago, he never changes. He is on his throne.

As Jiwon mentioned earlier, there's no sea, there's no chaos in God's presence. No ups and downs of circumstances. He reigns over all. He is sufficient because he rules over every circumstance.

And he has orchestrated your particular circumstances at this stage and at this season of your life to teach you that he is sufficient for you so that you can find your full contentment in every situation in him.

So that's our first stream. We have our life joyfully united to him by faith and that transforms the way that we relate to our circumstances because we can find contentment in any circumstance.

There's another way that it transforms the way we relate to our circumstances and it's this. Having a joyful faith union with Jesus produces gratitude for things unrelated to our circumstances.

[23:21] Having a joyful faith union with Jesus produces gratitude for things unrelated to our circumstances. Let's look at verses 14 through 20. 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. Remember the whole last portion of this letter is Paul's way of expressing his gratitude to the believers in Philippi because they had given him a gift through a mutual friend to Epaphroditus.

They had no doubt heard he was in prison. They wanted to express their support for him and so they sent him a gift. This was probably a financial gift and they were trying to give him money to buy food and clothing while he was in prison.

[24:32] In today's prison system it is financially supported by the state through taxpayer dollars to provide food and clothing and shelter for prisoners. But Paul's prison experience in Rome was not.

It included a room but not board. A prisoner's family and friends were responsible for supplying all the food and clothing that a prisoner needed while he was incarcerated.

So you and I might expect that Paul's reaction might be something like man, guys thank you. If you had not sent your gift when you did I was running out of bread.

So thank you. I could see how God totally provided for my daily needs through your kind gift. But he doesn't mention that. He doesn't go there. He's just not thinking about himself.

He's finding all of his identity and all of his thought and all of his concern in different priorities than his own self-priorities. He certainly expresses joy in their concern for him but not because of how their concern for him benefited him but rather how it benefited them and then glorify God.

[25:44] So verses 14 through 16 Paul goes above and beyond to remind the Philippians of their active participation in his ministry ever since he had known them. They've been active supporters of Paul ever since he planted their church.

They had generously contributed to his gospel ministry in other cities around their region and even when he was as far away as Rome. And so you can tell there's this warm affectionate partnership between the apostle and this group of believers but look at verse 17.

This is where he clarifies why he's rejoicing in the Lord in verse 10. Not that I seek the gift I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. The word fruit was a common way of referring to compounded interest that accrued to the benefit of an account holder.

So if you got a savings account the more that you invest in that account then the greater your yield of interest from the bank. In other words the greater your fruit. Paul was rejoicing not because his circumstances changed but because the Philippians were investing more and more in the right account and it would produce a generous spiritual yield for their benefit both in this life and for eternity.

Now just for clarity's sake he's not saying that their generosity is kind of helping them climb some ladder of spiritual performance and get good points in return.

[27:14] That's legalism. That's not what Paul's talking about. Rather this is what Paul had been praying for back in chapter 1 of verse Philippians. In Philippians 1 verses 9 through 11 he prays I have been praying that you would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

So Paul wants these believers to be connected to Jesus in such a way that they are thriving and flourishing through their faith union with him and part of that flourishing is a costly concern for the needs of others.

They are bearing fruit and God takes notice of that and he rewards it in a form of either a present blessing favor or a future reward in eternity.

So Epaphroditus walks in Paul's prison cell hands him the gift and Paul's jumping up and down for joy and he's like yes! But it's not because he changes circumstances.

It's because their motives are right. It's because their hearts are in the right place. It's because they're giving generously. They're still focused on Jesus. They're still connected to him.

[28:26] This is going to be so good for them. Had the money gone to some other preacher in some other cell he would have been just as happy. He gives thanks for something completely unrelated to his circumstances because he has a joyful faith union with Jesus and that has changed his values and his priorities.

In verse 18 Paul shifts attention to himself just long enough to assure the Philippians that his needs are fully met through their generous gift and then he gets his eyes back off himself again and he starts rejoicing because not only is their generosity accruing spiritual benefit for them in God's eyes but is a precious and pleasing act of worship to God.

Look at the end of verse 18. He calls their gift a fragrant offering a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. Paul is jumping up and down for joy not only because the Philippians would reap spiritual benefit from their generosity but because it glorified God and their generosity pleased God.

He was giving thanks not because the circumstances changed but because the Philippians were honoring God. If your family is like mine you probably sat around a Thanksgiving table on Thursday and I'm guessing that we were similarly grateful for particular things.

Things that were related to our circumstances. Health. A roof over our heads. Vehicles. Money in our bank account. Food in the refrigerator.

[30:01] Food on the table. Family and friends. And these are circumstantial kindnesses of God and we ought to give thanks for them.

However, if my faith union with Jesus is the most important thing about me then these circumstantial things shouldn't be the only things I should be giving thanks for.

When Jesus is the center of my life and we are joyfully united with him by faith we don't only give thanks for the things that immediately affect us in our circumstances we also give thanks for a whole new set of spiritual realities that matter to us because they matter to Jesus the one we're connected to.

So do you give thanks for what Jesus give thanks for? If you are intimately connected to Jesus by faith if he's the center of your life then his priorities are your priorities just like Paul's priorities were not focused on his circumstances but on greater spiritual realities.

The things that he values we ought to value. The things that Jesus delights in we ought to delight in. So in this passage there are at least two things that we can see through Paul's Jesus centered lenses that we can give thanks for and rejoice in even though they don't immediately affect us or our circumstances.

[31:29] It's when others are spiritually growing and thriving and when God is honored through the spiritual fruit bearing of others. So that means that I should be giving thanks not only for God's work in my life which affect me but when I see evidence of God at work in the heart of someone in my life group because they're learning how to be content with a hard circumstance because they're making God their sufficiency.

Or I should be giving thanks when it appears that God is softening my neighbor's heart to the gospel. I should be giving thanks when I hear someone talk about how God is exposing sin in their life and teaching them to put it to death and trust in Jesus more fully.

I should be rejoicing when I look at the bulletin and I see last week's offering amount not because it was higher than last week and then we want to have a good bank account for our church but because of the fruit of generosity that is overflowing in our church that is pleasing to God and it's for our spiritual benefit.

So we should give thanks for these realities because they matter to Jesus. Our circumstances matter to Jesus too obviously but this is opening our eyes to a whole new realm of things to be grateful for because our life is connected to him.

There's one last thing in this passage in verses 19 and 20 one more stream in which our joyful faith union with Jesus transforms the way we relate to our circumstances.

[32:58] We've seen that it teaches us contentment no matter what our circumstances are that it teaches us gratitude for things that are unrelated to our circumstances and lastly this having a joyful faith union with Jesus makes us confident that God will provide for us for our needs in the middle of our circumstances.

Having a joyful faith union with Jesus makes us confident that God will provide for us for our needs in the middle of our circumstances. Let's end this sermon where Paul ends his letter verses 19 to 20.

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. This is wonderfully short and sweet.

Paul is rejoicing in Christ because the Philippians were flourishing in Christ by bearing fruit of godly generosity and concern for others. And because of their faithful fruit bearing in Christ, Paul has no doubt that God will be faithful to supply all of their needs just as they had supplied for his.

again, the Philippians hadn't earned some benefit here. Rather, Paul is promising that God takes notice of the needs of those who are in his son, Jesus, and the Philippians have shown the proof that they are in his son by showing concern for Paul in the middle of his need.

[34:31] So if we are in Christ, if we are united to him by faith, then all the riches of God's glory are ours in Christ. So if our circumstances

seem perilous, dark, empty, hopeless, like Paul's did, then we must not forget that God is abundantly able and eager to supply what we need.

He's loaded, as Pastor Mike likes to say. Remember Revelation 4 from last week? Our God sits enthroned in might and power and glory.

He's totally unmoved by chaos or circumstances, and he loves his people. His power is funneled and channeled toward those who are in Christ, and it's this power not for bad, for good.

And notice what Paul calls God in verse 20. are God and Father. If you are joyfully united by faith to Jesus, God is your adoptive Father.

He has placed the spirit of his Son in you, calling out from the depths of your being, Abba, Father.

He has united you to Jesus in such a way that you call out to the same Father, and your Father answers because you are in his Son.

[36:02] So dear brother, dear sister, if you are in need in the middle of your circumstances, and who of us isn't, this promise is so delightful.

Your Father has glorious riches, and you have intimate access to him because you are in his Son. and he delights to provide what we need in the middle of our circumstances because he gets great glory in caring for and providing for those who are in Jesus.

So dear brother, dear sister, if you are in Christ, then you are able to daily, moment by moment, draw joy and strength from the source of your mountain stream.

Your faith union with the all-sufficient one who never changes, who gave himself for you, who makes us content in all kinds of circumstances, who enables us to get our eyes off of ourselves and on our circumstances and on things that are important to him and his kingdom, and who is able to supply all of our needs in the middle of our circumstances.

You have access now to rejoice in your union with him. So if you find yourself tempted toward discontentment where you are, or towards living in a self-absorbed way, or towards despairing and doubting whether your daily needs will be provided for, then jump in the stream and swim up to the source.

[37:47] Drink deeply of your faith union with him. spend some time contemplating what we just read in Ephesians 1, that sample passage I read for us earlier, of all the benefit, every spiritual blessing, ours in Christ.

Ask him to teach you contentment, to help you to give thanks for what he gives thanks for, to make you more confident in his ability to supply all of your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ. In just a moment, I'm going to pray. And what I want to encourage you to do is spend a few moments engaging with your all-sufficient one. Engage with your God. Ask for greater joy in your union with Jesus, that he may transform the way that you are relating to your circumstances right here and now.

And if you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus in this way, you're aware that you don't have a faith union with him in this way that we've been talking about, then turn to him in faith.

Ask him to open your eyes to the glorious riches of being in Jesus. Let's pray together. Amen. Oh God, we need your help.

[39:15] We are a people that are quick to discontentment, to grumbling, to complaining. We tend to have our eyes fixed only on ourselves and our circumstances.

We tend to be faithless and we need your help. So we come to you, God, all-sufficient one who never changes. Would you show us the joy of being united to your son?

And may that transform the way that we see our circumstances. Help us to live by faith in him. In Christ's name, amen.