

"True Contentment"

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[0:00] Lord, as we come to share your word now, open our eyes to your presence, our ears to your voice, and through your Holy Spirit speak into our minds, speak into our thoughts, take hold of our hands, and fill our hearts with your grace this very day we pray, in Jesus name, amen.

Amen. As we watch and listen to the news broadcast these days, I'm sure you'll agree it's obvious that we're living in a time of growing uncertainty and personal anxiety.

We enter 2026 with some concern for what will happen to the world, to our land of Scotland, to our church, to our friends, and to our families.

Many of us here this morning have health concerns, family problems, spiritual struggles, not yet answered prayers, and serious concerns about what the year ahead will bring us.

What the year ahead will bring for our loved ones. Many of us have our own issues that keep us awake late into the night. Our passage this morning gives us some words of encouragement for the year that stretches before us.

[1:29] Friends, instability is nothing new for the people of God. In every generation, believers have faced moments when doubts and uncertainty threaten to overwhelm our faith, and we can become discontented.

A reading here offers some practical help as we move forward into a new year. Friends 4, verses 10 to 13 is perhaps the greatest statement in the New Testament on the subject of Christian contentment.

These days, we need to hear God's message to us in the midst of so much panic and public and private uncertainty. We can define contentment in three ways.

Firstly, contentment is the belief that we have everything we need at this present moment.

Secondly, it's also the confidence that if we needed anything else, God would give it to us.

And thirdly, it's also the certainty that when we need anything else, God will give it to us if he thinks we need it.

[2:51] God has so ordered the universe that no matter where we are right now, we have everything. We truly need to be content. That's an awesome statement.

I know it's one thing to say that in a Sunday morning service. But it's something else to believe that when we have health problems or family problems or struggling to accept our present circumstances and so on.

How do we know we have all we need to be content? We know it because God has said it is true. He's promised to supply our needs.

He's guaranteed that he will feed and clothe us. He's promised to hear our prayers. He's given the Holy Spirit to lead us and the Word of God to guide us.

He's redeemed us from our sins, given us new life, taken us from the realms of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son, justified us while we were still ungodly, called us his children, caused us to be born again by the Spirit, adopted us into his family, sanctified us, promised never to leave us.

[4:09] He's set our feet on the road to heaven. He's broken Satan's power. He's removed the fear of death and guaranteed our future resurrection.

Friends, if all that is true, and it is, how can we ever doubt that God will give us what we need when we need it? Which means that if we don't have something we think we need, it's because our Heavenly Father knows best, and has chosen not to give it to us right now.

If we truly need it later, you'll see that we get it. And that applies to every area of life, to our finances, our health, our marriage, our friendships, our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, our parents, our church family, every relationship of life, and to all our dreams for the year ahead and the future.

We've got everything we need to be content right now. If we're not, we should not blame God. It's not his fault. In our reading this morning, we discover contentment is not automatic, but must be learned over time.

And Paul clearly states this truth in verse 11. He declares, I have learned to be content. And then in verse 12, he says, I have learned the secret of being content.

[5:51] Why did Paul have to learn contentment? Why wasn't it just given to him as a gift from God? The answer is that God is most glorified when we struggle through the process of being weaned from our dependence on the things of the world.

To be weaned is to have something removed from our life, which we thought we couldn't live without. Most of us live on the opposite principle.

In our hearts, we think, I would be happy if only I had a new house, or a new car, or new clothes, or a new iPhone, and so on. Since life is hardly ever that simple, we stay frustrated when we ought to be happy.

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us we must not chase after material things, because it's like chasing the wind. No wonder we're never satisfied.

Instead of being weaned from the material things of the world, we seem to want them more, don't we? Thinking they'll bring us happiness and contentment. And also happiness depends on our circumstances.

[7:15] Contentment comes from our confidence in God. Verse 12 lays this out clearly. It says, I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.

Paul also adds this phrase, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. It's easy to assume Paul means being well fed is good, and going hungry is bad, but that's not correct.

Poverty and prosperity, both have their uses, and both can lead us astray spiritually. If you take the words of Jesus seriously, in Matthew 19, Jesus reminds us, riches can wreck the soul much quicker than poverty.

And Paul knew that riches are not the way to contentment. So he was willing to hold material things with an open hand.

He refused to become a slave to wealth. He could walk away from prosperity when things to the Lord demanded it. Contentment rests on two great truths.

[8:33] Firstly, that God has ordained every circumstance of our life. There's no truth more important than this.

Hardly a week goes by that we don't hear about someone who's battling with terminal illness. We can't explain why it happens to one person and not to another.

Friends, we can go through life asking, why did this happen? Or why me? Why now? And we'll end up frustrated. We'll end up disappointed.

Because in this life, there is rarely a satisfactory answer to those types of questions. We simply don't know why some people live long and prosper, why others never seem to get a break in life.

In the world's terms, they are victims of bad luck. From the standpoint of Scripture, we can only say that God is working out his plans in ways we can't see from our limited vantage point.

[9:52] And you know, this can become very personal when we pray with someone or for someone if they're going through a difficult time or as they face uncertainties of life.

We don't know what God will do in a particular situation. Generally, we don't know what God is going to do.

We should just be content to leave matters in his hands. I'm sure you know the hymn, Father, I place into your hands the times that I've been through.

Father, I place into your hands the way that I should go, for I know I always can trust you. And in verse 12, Paul says, I have learned the secret of being content.

Don't you love secrets? It's always fun when anyone says, let me tell you a secret. So what's the secret of contentment? I think the answer can be found in two phrases.

[11:02] First, in verse 11, he mentions, whatever the circumstances. Then in verse 12, he says, in any and every situation.

These two phrases would appear to cover all that life has to offer. The secret of contentment lies in understanding that nothing happens by chance.

But everything, everything is ordained by the hand of a loving God. I like the word here, ordained. It's a very strong word. Simply meaning that God is in charge of all the details of life, the good and the bad, the positive, the negative.

And he has ordained not only what happens to us, but where and when and how it happens. It helps to remember that from our point of view, we simply see events unfold topsy-turvy.

[12:11] Everything seems random. Nothing seems to have a purpose. And so we react to life as it comes, not knowing what tomorrow will bring.

And here's where biblical faith comes in. As we stand and wait and wonder of what's happening all around us, we can be assured the invisible hand of God is arranging the events of our lives so that they work out just the way he wants.

Nothing happens by chance. There's no such thing as luck or fate. Contentment's possible when we realize that everything happens for a purpose.

Whether we see it or not, usually we don't see it even as it unfolds before us. And often we never fully understand it even in retrospect.

This is where the first rule of the spiritual life becomes so helpful. He's God and we are not. That leads us to a personal question. Are you and I willing to let God be God in our lives in 2026?

[13:33] Or do we intend to tell him how to do his job? We can be God or he can be God and there's nothing in between those two options.

As long as we try to be God we'll be miserable. We'll be frustrated and very discontented because we were not made to run the universe.

Not even the little part of it we call our life. Even that small part belongs to God and we'll never be happy. We'll never be content until we surrender our right to run our own life and let God be God in all things.

So our first great truth of contentment is that God has ordained every circumstance of our life and secondly that God will give us strength.

He'll give us strength in every circumstance to do his will for us. This is the true meaning of Philippians 4.13 I can do all things through him who gives me strength.

[14:44] This verse wonderful as it is has sometimes been misused by well-meaning believers who take it out of context and make it say more than Paul intended here.

Occasionally people will say things like you can do whatever you want to do as if it were a magic formula that could make them a millionaire or give them wings to fly through the air.

The phrase here all things must be defined by its context. Paul is talking about being content in every circumstance whether he had plenty or whether he had next to nothing.

Verse 13 explains how Paul managed to live above his circumstances. He did it only by the power of Jesus dwelling in him.

For him the secret of contentment was not a stiff upper lip or a positive mental attitude. No, Paul was content.

[15:52] He was content precisely because he had learned to rely completely on Jesus. Friends, this takes more, much more than positive thinking.

We've got to have Jesus on the inside. We've got to have Jesus in our hearts. Are we who believe better than other people?

No. Do we suffer? Yes. What makes the difference? We have the power of the indwelling Jesus who gives us the strength we need.

Is it enough? Is Jesus enough for the problems of life? Is his broken body enough? Is his shed blood sufficient? Is his intercession in heaven able to sustain us?

Can his power meet the problems of life? Yes. Yes, a thousand times yes. Paul got a long find despite all his hardships.

[16:58] Paul got on with things happily because he could see life from God's point of view.

Paul focused on what he was supposed to do, not what he felt he should have. He had his priorities right and was grateful for everything God had given him.

So how can we find true contentment? The answer lies in our perspective, our priorities, our source of power and the power we receive from our trust in Jesus is sufficient for all our needs.

Being content means have an inner sense of rest or peace that comes from being right with God and knowing that he's in control. he's in control of all that happens to us.

It means having our focus on the kingdom of God and serving him, not the love of money and material things. If God does grant us material comforts, we can thankfully enjoy them.

[18:14] You know, we should enjoy this new day the Lord has given us. It's a gift. That's why it's called the present. we should learn to appreciate the little things.

They're all around us. The love of a good friend, the love of a wife or a husband, a kind deed, a good night's sleep. Friends, when we appreciate what we have, it multiplies.

When we're grateful for the little things, God will give us so much more, so much more to be thankful for. count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

Knowing that it all comes from his loving hand, but also we seek to use it for his purpose, by being generous. If he takes our riches, our joy remains steady because we're fixed on him.

Contentment also means not being battered around by difficult circumstances or people, not being wrongly tempted by prosperity because our life is centered in our living relationship with the Lord Jesus.

[19:33] So no matter what happens to us or what others do to us, we have the steady assurance the Lord is for us and will never forsake us.

what will this year 2026 mean for the world, for Scotland, for our family, for the church, for us personally?

No one but God can answer those questions. But there's one thing we do know. God has given us everything we need for this new year ahead.

Therefore, we can be content. Whatever happens, the Lord will be with us. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do not know what the year ahead will bring.

And we ask you to walk with us wherever this year leads. Thank you we know we can step out in confidence and contentment in the knowledge.

[20:38] You will walk with us. You will walk with us every step of the way. In our prayer, in Jesus' name, Amen.