

Hudson Taylor Joy in Contentment

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 January 2020

Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. My name is James. It's good to see you all this morning. Life can feel like a treadmill, seeking contentment and happiness. Maybe when I've earned this amount of money, then I'll be content. Maybe when I make it to the weekend, then I'll be content. Or maybe when I make it to the holiday, I've got bad news for you. It's Sunday, and that means that tomorrow we have to go back to work. Maybe you're on school or uni holidays, and as the holiday gets closer to ending, all your happiness and contentment erodes. Is anybody feeling like that at the moment? Any school students, uni students, worried about what's coming up in the next couple of weeks? You're anxious as the end of holidays come because you can see it disappearing like a fog. I was talking to someone the other day who was sharing that they have an issue buying things online because there is no contentment when you buy things online because there are always more things to buy online. But what do we do in this situation? Do we just try and find happiness where we can find it? Do we just guilt each other into feeling worse that we're not happy with what we have? What do we do when we are on a treadmill of seeking a contentment that will last? Is there anything that can be done? Are we content with what God has given us? The Bible promises that Jesus is enough. It promises that Jesus is the yes to every one of God's promises. But what does it look like to be content in Jesus when we have so many desires and so many needs? Today, as we continue in our series looking at the heroes of the faith, as we see Christians from history who have not been perfect but have been people who have been challenged by God's Word, we're going to look at a man named Hudson Taylor. He's the man standing with his wife on the far right in this picture. He was an English missionary to China and we will see what his contentment looked like and he will show us what it looks like to have contentment in God.

So please let me pray for us as we look at this today. Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word to us and we thank you for other Christian brothers and sisters throughout history who model to us what following you looks like. Father, we ask that this morning we would be encouraged and challenged to find our contentment in you. Amen.

Hudson Taylor was born in England in 1832. He grew up in a Christian family and not long after he took hold of Jesus himself as a teenager, he struggled with defeat, with discouragement and after one particular defeat, he called out to God for help. He wanted to live a life pleasing to God in everything and he felt that he would go anywhere, he would do anything for God if God would give him clear assurance of direction. He would do anything for God if he had clarity. And so he wrote this after calling out to God on this particular day and he felt as if he was in the presence of God and felt something say to him, your prayer is answered, your conditions are accepted. And from that time forward, he felt a conviction to go to China. From that call on, his response was extremely practical.

He began devoting more time to prayer and Bible study and of course, he had to learn Chinese. At that time, a rare book of Chinese grammar would cost \$25, which was a lot of money at the time. And an English to Chinese dictionary was even more expensive, \$75. And he didn't have that kind of money. So what Hudson did was he bought a Gospel of Luke in Chinese. And he spent time comparing the Chinese Gospel of Luke to the English and made his own dictionary of about 600 characters.

[4 : 45] And that's how he started learning Chinese. So, you know, I'm trying to learn Chinese, so I really have no excuse, do I? At this point, he also began training in contentment. To go overseas as an isolated missionary, it would be a challenge. And so Hudson wrote, to me, it was a very grave matter to contemplate going to China. Far from all human aid, there to depend on the living God alone for protection, supplies and help. I felt that one's spiritual muscles required strengthening. And so he stripped back his food to only the basic things he needed to survive. So he could save for

the voyage, the several-month-long boat voyage to China, and to depend upon God. He ate plain, insubstantial food, and he wasted nothing on luxuries. Before he left, it seemed that there was one other trial for contentment. Hudson had fallen in love. That's an appropriate response. That's good. He had known a young music teacher. These music teachers, they're deadly people. He'd known a young music teacher for two years. And though she was a Christian, she did not feel called to mission. She asked Hudson if he just couldn't serve God at home instead of going to China. But Hudson was convicted of his call by God. And he wrote of his wrestle with desire. Why should you go to China after all? Why toil and suffer all of your life for an ideal of duty? Give it up now while you can yet win her. Earn a proper living like everybody else and serve the Lord at home for you can win her yet. This struggle, a desire and a conviction from the Lord to go overseas and do missionary work where there was a very small amount of the gospel, very few missionaries at that time. A desire to do that, a conviction from God to do that, and a desire for this person. And yet the Lord revealed his love to him, made him happy in his

Savior's love to continue without fear of what was to come. He was content in God's love. And so he sailed to Shanghai, a fairly eventful boat trip. And even when he finally came ashore in Shanghai, he had to find his contentment in God alone. Whilst he was joyful to have finally arrived, the loneliness and reality of his situation sank in. He did not know a single person in the country. No one on the entire continent knew his name. He eventually got settled in Shanghai. He learnt four Chinese dialects. I assume Mandarin and Shanghainese were one of those. And even at this point, he could have been content to stay in Shanghai or in one of the other port cities where the rest of the foreigners were, where there was other missionaries. But it was not enough to preach the gospel in Shanghai. There were others doing that. He wanted to get to the interior, to the heart of China, where the gospel had not yet penetrated. His heart was burdened with a sense of responsibility for those who would never hear the gospel unless someone took it to them. And so despite the comforts of being in Shanghai, he went alone into the areas of China unreached by the gospel. Many of these parts of China had never seen a white person, a yang guizzi or white devil. And so Hudson Taylor did something else radical. He took to Chinese dress. He shaved the front of his head. He grew his hair long. He put black tar in his hair to make it black. You know, we could just buy dye these days, but he had to put tar in his hair. And he dressed like the people of the time. Here's a photo of Hudson from later in life.

I think that beard is something to long for. So we'll see how we go with that. His contentment in Christ was so great that he was willing to dress like the people he ministered to, even if that meant being rejected by the other Europeans.

He travelled into the heart of China, into the interior, and he had great success as a travelling missionary. But he couldn't do it alone. So he founded the mission organisation called the China Inland Mission, which later became OMF. But supporting other missionaries was always hard, as they lacked finances. In one of these times, years later, after he'd been there for a while, he'd gotten married, and he retreated to his office and was reading the Bible. And then he would pray a while, and then he would look at the finances, the very dire finances. And then he would pray a while, read the Bible, and then look at the finances again. And then he'd pray a while, and read the Bible.

[10:20] And after a while, he left his office. His wife, Maria, who he'd married in China after some time, asked, what are we going to do? And Hudson said, we have 27 cents, and all the promises of God.

What more do we need? Now, I could talk at great length about Hudson Taylor, his life and ministry, his joy depending on God in the face of adversity. I could talk of him being chased out of towns, being sick and in ill health, being forced to head home from illness to England before returning to China.

I could talk of losing his wife, Maria, to cholera at the age of 33 after she'd just given birth and that child had died. By the end of his life, it is reported that he and the ministry, the mission agency he'd started, the China Inland Mission, had brought around 849 missionaries to the field.

He'd trained some 700 Chinese workers. He'd raised \$4 million. He'd developed a witnessing church, a Chinese church of around 125,000. It has been said that at least 35,000 of these were his converts, and that he baptised some 50,000. But how could Hudson Taylor live this kind of life? How could he move to another country, learn the language in multiple dialects, see people all throughout China saved, lose a wife and children, be set by sickness, but be content that he had

everything in Jesus?

How could he do that? How could he live to see many, many people come to know Jesus? What was his secret? In his biography, it says that he was able to do this because of the simple, profound secret of drawing for every need, temporal or spiritual, upon the fathomless wealth of Christ.

[12 : 38] He was content in Jesus, and he was able to be satisfied by what he was given, whether he was rich or poor, when he was in good health or poor health, with his wife by his side or when she was with the Lord. He managed, because of his secret, contentment in Christ at all times. Yes, he struggled, yes, he sinned, but he learned how to be content in Christ. He is a wonderful model to us of what Paul preached in Philippians 4, which Sue Wing read for us. Paul learned how to be content in Christ. His letter, which was part of it, was read for us, that was written while he was in prison. That is usually a strange place to write a letter saying how content you are. But in chapter 4, Paul says that he has learned to be content whatever his circumstance. From verse 12, 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. Paul has been in both situations. He has been high and he has been low. He has been well-fed and he's been living with plenty, but he's also been hungry and brought low. He has been brought low in prison. He's been able to be content when everything was stacked against him, when he is shipwrecked and flogged and attacked, when he is stoned and persecuted. And yet he can say here in prison that he is content, all because he's learned the secret to being content. The link between his situation and his contentment is he knows that God is in control. Back in Philippians 1, while he's in prison, it says, now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. He is in chains so that people hear the gospel. It's almost that Paul can see that being in prison is a good thing. People are hearing about Jesus and his fellow disciples are trusting God more because he's in chains and they're becoming more confident and courageous. But Paul also knows what it is to have plenty. Chapter 4 verse 18, there we go.

I have received full payment and have more than enough. I'm amply supplied. And even when in abundance, he is content, not yearning for more, all because my God will meet all your needs, according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. Paul knows that God has met all his needs in Jesus and he knows that God will provide the church, the Philippian church, with all that they need to. Paul's secret to contentment... I feel like I should write a book, *The Secret to Contentment*. It seems like it would be a very on-trend book. Everybody loves *The Secret*. Paul's secret to contentment is not learned when he's rich. Paul's secret is not learned when he is poor. It's because he knows what both situations are like. Imagine for me a person who is incredibly wealthy. They come from a wealthy background and they have never lacked anything in life. And imagine that suddenly that person had everything taken from them. Do you think that they would be comfortable and content in poverty? I don't think so. Imagine someone from the opposite situation. Somebody that has come from a very poor background. They've learned how to be content. They've learned how to survive uncertainty and to depend and trust on God. But would they continue to trust God if they were suddenly wealthy? You see those statistics about people who suddenly win the lottery and they go from very poor to very wealthy. Those stats say that people who go from very poor to very wealthy do not find contentment.

Money does not bring contentment. It just brings more pain. Paul insists that his contentment is found because he knows what both situations are like. And he's not longing to be wealthy. Imagining that it will bring him joy and happiness. And he's not longing for a simple life. Paul has learned how to be content in both situations because his contentment is independent. It is outside himself. His contentment is not found in his situation. His contentment is found outside. Whether rich or poor, his contentment is focused on enjoying all he has given in Jesus. Paul talks about the beauty of this contentment in verse 13. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Now, you may have heard this verse before.

[18 : 08] Usually this verse is just plucked straight out of the Bible and used totally out of context. Usually it's used to describe ourselves. I can do all this. I can walk on water because God gives me strength.

I can be as strong as Arnold Schwarzenegger. Don't you think? No? Oh, thanks, Noeline. Shaking your head there. I can be as strong as whoever because God is going to give me that strength. I can do whatever I want because God is going to give me that power. Yeah. And we think it's a

really encouraging and really exciting. Yeah, Adrian, you can do everything because God will help you to do everything.

But that's not what the Bible is saying and that's not what Paul is saying. To take it a step back, to go back to verse 12, from halfway through, I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do all this. I can be content in any situation. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. I can do what God wants me to do. I can preach to people in prison. I can preach to the wealthy. I can do all that God needs me to do because he is the one who gives me strength. It is not about me. It is about me serving God in any situation because he is the one who gives me strength to find contentment in my situation. How do we get there?

How do we become content in Jesus? How can we affirm that Jesus is all I need? Because I have so many needs. I have so many wants. I have so many desires. And I find it hard to just give up my desires and say, oh, Jesus is enough. On Tuesday, I was doing the washing up. And I was thinking through this.

And at that moment, I can still picture the moment, standing over the dishes, hot water a little bit too hot. And God rebuked me in that moment as I was thinking about this topic. I have three young children. And when I get to seven o'clock at night, I long for my children to be asleep.

[20 : 32] I want to have time to sit down and watch TV and relax. I'm longing for the freedom of burden and responsibility. And I get frustrated when my kids don't go to sleep as quickly as I would like.

I get frustrated when cleaning the house takes longer than I think it should at the end of the day, because I want me time. And as I've been reading about Hudson Taylor, who he lost two wives, he lost four children before the age of 10. It made me reflect on what I'm chasing and what the cost is. I'm chasing freedom from responsibility. I'm chasing freedom from burden. But I have that in Christ. I'm free to serve and love him because he has the responsibility to save. I'm chasing rest, but I get my ultimate rest in Jesus. Because even though I long for rest at seven o'clock at night, and I get that when my kids are asleep, that is gone the next morning. And my kids are awake, and I'm longing for that night again. Whatever we are pursuing that we think will make us content, the answer is actually Jesus. The boat or the holiday that we are longing for, it is a desire for freedom and rest. And that's only found in Jesus. The new job or the promotion that we long for, it's seeking security and respect. But that's only found in the God who chose to die for us. A desire for close friends and intimate relationships.

What a friend we have in Jesus who will not betray us, who will not abandon us. Maybe we're not content until we have a family. Well, we have an older brother in Jesus who brings us to the best father and into a family, the church. Even with Chinese New Year coming up, the giving of red envelopes and the giving in return of a blessing, what is that but a desire for money and riches to have security. Working hard to earn a certain amount of money to buy a house, to buy another house. A longing and desire to have security. But Jesus is eternal security.

A security that can't be destroyed or burnt down. The longing for security is answered in Jesus. The desire and longing for love is found in the arms spread on the cross. The hope for tomorrow is found in the resurrection of the dead. Our peace is found in his blood, buying it from God. Health, we have a great healer in Jesus. Riches, we are made heirs of the God of the universe.

[23 : 41] Rest. Rest. God says, come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest.

What will make you content? Is it the lollipop my child is asking for? What will satisfy? Because that hit of sugar is not going to last for long. The things that we seek contentment from do not last long. They are temporary things that we chase.

The only thing that will satisfy is Jesus. We can be content regardless of life's circumstance. Our contentment is not based on what is going on around us, but what Jesus has done. It is not a philosophy like Buddhism that we seek to have no desires. We seek to rise above our desires. Rather, in the midst of difficult situations, people like Paul and Hudson Taylor sought and trusted in God and looked to Jesus.

In him is every longing and desire satisfied. Being content in Jesus is a very dangerous place to be. Because there's consequences of being content.

Being content doesn't fit with the rest of the world. The world is not content around us. But the world is chasing personal desire at every turn. I had a strange moment at youth group last year, towards the end of the term. I was sitting there. I was sitting next to a younger person. Most people at youth

group are younger. Actually, everyone at youth group is younger than me.

[25 : 32] I'm the old, odd one out. And I was reading my Bible on my phone, and one of the younger people was reading a Bible on their phone. That's a fairly normal thing these days. And they said, oh, how do you cope only having an iPhone 8? You need an iPhone 11.

And I was taken aback. This phone I have, it's enough. I'm more than content in it. But even that, not having the very latest technology is weird.

When we are content with what God has given us, He will do dangerous things with us. Hudson Taylor strove to be content in what God had given him.

And God sent him across the world to minister to a people who did not know God. And God used him to do marvellous things. The same with Paul. He was content to say that to live is Christ and to die is gain. That is a wonderful contentment.

One that can see him understanding why he was even in prison. We can be content. Every longing and desire of ours is met in Jesus.

[26 : 51] It's not met by earthly things. Jesus is the yes to all of God's promises. And imagine what God would do with us if we were content with Him.

Let me pray for us.

Father, we thank you for our brothers Hudson and our brother Paul. Lord, we thank you that they have learned contentment in you.

Father, we ask that as we are encouraged by their model, that we would see Jesus as the yes to all of our desires. Father, help us to be aware of the things that we long for.

Help us to see the heart of them. And to see how you have answered that already in Jesus. Father, help us not chase things that will not satisfy.

[28 : 05] But to be satisfied and content in all that you have given us in your Son. We pray that we would do this so that you would do dangerous things with us, Lord. That you would make us fearless proclaimers of the gospel, not afraid of what other people would think.

That you would send many of us out to preach the gospel, just like Sue Wing, across the world, across Sydney and our country, Lord. So that more people would come to know and love you, so that you would have all the glory, Lord.

Amen.