

The Contented Life

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Date: 08 May 2022

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[0 : 0 0] to God's praise. Now to begin our worship in Psalm 86. Psalm number 86, this is in the Scottish Psalter version, page 341, and we're singing verses 12 through to the end of the psalm.

O Lord my God, with all my heart, to Thee I will give praise, and I the glory will ascribe unto Thy name always. Because Thy mercy toward me in greatness doth excel, and Thou delivered hast my soul out from the lowest hell. Verses 12 to 17, actually it is, in Psalm 86, to God's praise.

O Lord my God, with all my heart, to Thee I will give praise, and I will give praise, and I will give praise, and I the glory will ascribe unto Thy name always. Because Thy mercy toward me, in greatness doth excel, and Thou delivered hast my soul out from the lowest hell.

And Thou delivered hast my soul out from the lowest hell. O God, the Father, the Father, knowing that, and Thou relationships be right, and Thy environment.

and the head that for my soul hath so done thee before them hath not said but thou art full of faith ye Lord a God most gracious from suffering and in thy good and mercy plentiful O turn to me thy countenance and mercy on me have thy servant strength and the son of thine own hand may save show me a sign for good God may wish to be in his ear and be a ship because the Lord is self and comfort me let's now call upon the Lord in prayer we'll join together in prayer gracious and eternal God as we gather once again here in your presence we pray for your help we pray for your help that we may worship you as we ought to that our minds may be focused upon those things that are glorious in your work and in your person we pray for grace O Lord to focus upon your word which we find so central to our worship and we pray that you would enable us O Lord to not only read your word and hear it being expounded help us as speaker and hearers alike to take your word to heart apply it to our hearts we pray by your Holy Spirit to enable us thereby to give you the glory and the praise that you are worthy of in a due reception of your word we know Lord that when we receive your word as your word we thereby honour you we honour your name and we give thanks for the word that you have given us we ask O Lord that you would enable us in our understanding of your word to increase in that understanding daily we know that your word has so many aspects to it so many depths that we can find ourselves drawn into and even though some we cannot fully understand and comprehend yet we thank you for the benefit nevertheless of giving our minds to them we thank you for the plain message of your word in regard to our redemption we give thanks O Lord that your word shows us the way of salvation so clearly and that there are no aspects of that left as mysteries to us and Lord we thank you

[6 : 0 1] that as Jesus Christ is presented to us in your word in the message of the gospel we give thanks that thereby you speak to us you call us to yourself you impress upon us Lord the need to turn our back to sin to a life of selfishness which we are all O Lord by nature so much prone to we thank you tonight Lord for being together we thank you for the improvement in our situation with regard to the COVID pandemic and we thank you that we are able to express ourselves in song in praise in singing your praises in a way that is O Lord not hampered by even though the necessary masks were in place for some time we pray O Lord that for all of these good things and for everything good that comes from you we may tonight be thankful and we may be the more dependent upon you your word tells us we live and move and have our being in you however Lord we may progress in this world however much we may have of worldly success and however legitimate these things may be in themselves yet Lord we are reminded so frequently in your word that they are all from you as regards the good things that we enjoy and that it is by your power and by your might by your grace that you have given them to us help us to honour you with our daily lives help us to take

O Lord from our worship this evening that which would follow through into the rest of the week for us and help us to be concerned in our daily life to manifest the glory of Christ and to show ourselves

as willing servants of the Lord and to commend him to those that we meet with on a daily basis Lord forgive us we pray for our failures in regard to this we regard even the best of us Lord as not fully committed to this in the way we ought we confess O Lord we let many opportunities pass that they're gone before we realise that we ought to have made the most of them we pray your forgiveness Lord in regard to all our sins the sins that are obvious in our lives sins of speech and of behaviour as well as those that we find in our own hearts may not be known to any others but ourselves and you you are the

God who looks into our hearts keenly and perfectly and O Lord we know that we cannot hide from you and cannot hide anything else from you that we find in ourselves or in all that we think or do we give thanks for this but it is thereby Lord that we can come and place our entire selves our lives in your hand knowing that you are able to provide against all our need in all its variety in all its extent so bless us Lord we pray tonight as a congregation bless all the gatherings of your people in this town and beyond enable Lord your people tonight to know the empowerment of your Holy Spirit oh we thank you for your Holy Spirit we thank you for the ministry that your spirit exercises in bringing us oh Lord to know ourselves as sinners destitute of righteousness we thank you for the ministry of your spirit convicting us of our sin and of our misery we thank you for the ministry of your spirit in directing us to the saviour and in enabling us to embrace you as the living God the living saviour of his people

Lord we ask for your spirit to guide us in our Christian walk we give thanks oh Lord for all that you have been to us thus far we pray that whatever age we may be our lives may be directed by your holy spirit day by day we give thanks for the work of your spirit and sanctifying your people and preparing them to be with you in heaven and Lord we pray that tonight each of us may know that influence in our own lives our hearts being directed towards you and made conformable to you in your own will and purpose remember us Lord we pray in all that we seek to do throughout each week in your name both in regard to our young folks and other age groups too we pray for our young people and ask Lord as we are thankful for them we pray for each and every individual we pray for all the families that have young people that belong to us as a congregation Lord remember them we pray at this time and establish them in your ways we ask your blessing for youth fellowship this evening and pray that you would bless them as they meet together we pray for

Reverend Ferrier as he speaks to them we pray that that will be a blessed occasion to all concern and we ask oh Lord that you would continue to provide for our Sunday school or our creche for our tweenies for other groups Lord that involve our young people bless your own gospel to them and grant to protect them and show them the things that are in this world designed in themselves from the evil one to lead them away from your truth we pray that you would make them wise unto salvation remember those tonight whose hearts are heavy with mourning Lord remember all who mourn the passing of loved ones each and every week that goes by recently we know that those belonging to our congregation have experienced bereavement and loss Lord we pray for each and every family and each individual we pray for those who are still waiting for preparations regarding the funeral of loved ones we ask that you would give them grace

[12 : 06] Lord to wait upon you and to know your direction and your comfort at this time we pray for the outcome of the elections both locally and nationally oh Lord our God we pray for those in our own locality who have been elected to council those returning and those who are there for the first time we pray for them and ask that you would show them your ways and bless them especially Lord we pray that you would bring to them the sense of the sufficiency of your word of your own laws of your precepts help also those who offered themselves but ended up without being elected help them we pray to deal with that we thank you for the interests of so many and we pray especially for those of your own people who gave themselves to election but weren't elected yes Lord we do pray for them and ask that you would be pleased to draw near to them at this time and so we ask that in all aspects of our life individually and congregationally and in our locality and nationally Lord our

God be merciful to us show us your ways direct us away from the ways of sin and hear us we pray now and pardon us for Jesus sake amen let's now read God's word as we find it this evening in 1 Timothy 1 Timothy in chapter 6 we'll read through the whole chapter from the beginning 1 Timothy in chapter 6 let all who are under a yoke of slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers rather they must serve all the better

since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved teach and urge these things if anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus

Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing he has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words which produce envy dissension slander evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth imagining that godliness is a means of gain now there is great gain in godliness with contentment for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world but if we have food and clothing with these we will be content but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation into a snare into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs but as for you oh man of god flee these things pursue righteousness godliness faith love steadfastness gentleness fight the good fight of the faith take hold of the eternal life to which you are called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses i charge you in the presence of god who gives life to all things and to jesus christ and of jesus christ who in his testimony before pontius pilate made the good confession to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our lord jesus christ which he will display at the proper time he who is the blessed and only sovereign the king of kings and lord of lords who alone has immortality who dwells in unapproachable light whom no one has ever seen or can see to him be honor and eternal dominion amen as for the rich in this present age charge them not to be haughty nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on god who richly provides us with everything to enjoy they are to do good to be rich in good works to be generous and ready to share thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is truly life oh timothy guard the deposit entrusted to you avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge for by professing it some have swerved from the faith grace be with you amen may god bless again a reading of his word to his own praise and glory i'm going to sing again in psalm 68 now it's 68 in the scottish psalter version not the sing psalms version that's on your bulletin sheet so it's psalm 68 verses 7 through to 11 o god what time thou didst go forth before thy people's face and when through the great wilderness thy glorious marching was then that god's presence shook the earth then drops from heaven fell this sinai shook before the lord the god of israel through to verse 11 the lord himself did give the word the word abroad did spread great was the company of them the same who published that's psalm 68 on page 302 in the scottish psalter singing from verse 7 to verse 11 o god what time thou didst go forth o god what time thou didst go forth before thy people face and when through the great wilderness thy glorious marching voice then at god's presence shook the earth then drops from heaven fell this sign i shook before the lord the god of israel o god the who do thy heritage should send a plenteous rain whereby the wrennage weary walls didst it refresh again thy my congregation then did make their habitation there of thine own goodness for the food o god thou didst prepare the lord himself did give the word the word abroad did spread great was the company of them the same who publishes let's turn once again this evening to the epistle to the philippians paul's letter to the philippians it's some time since we had our last study in philippians chapter 4 and we're going to continue tonight chapter 4 verse 10 and looking at verses 10 to 13 that's philippians chapter 4 and reading from verse 10 i rejoiced in the lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me you were indeed concerned for me but you had no opportunity not that i'm speaking of being in need for i have learned in whatever situation i am to be content i know how to be brought low i know how to abound in everything in every in any and every circumstance i have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need i can do all things through him who strengthens me well we're living as you know in very challenging times challenging times not only in a way that the gospel is being challenged but challenging too in a more ordinary sense if you like challenging times with regard to prices increasing in the aftermath of the covid situation and the worldwide effects of that challenges regarding inflation and the increasing inflation that we're hearing about and that we know about in the prices themselves as you see that in your shops challenging times with regard to closures of businesses challenges for those who have lost their work and are now unemployed and some who find difficulty in seeking alternative employment this is an environment for much anxiety an environment in which some find a degree of hopelessness and feeling just sidelined an environment in which we find an increase in

substance abuse and alcoholism and those sort of excesses how can anyone be content in circumstances like these where do you find the secret of contentment what the apostle is calling here the secret of contentment that he has learned how can anyone be content surrounded by and affected by sometimes affected directly as most of us are by these issues that prove so challenging for our day well Paul is dealing here with what we're calling the contented life because that's essentially what these verses are about and not only are we facing challenges we're facing this challenge as well to live a contented life irrespective of what our circumstances may be because it's not just in times of difficulty times of challenges such as we mentioned that living a contented life is important it is important at all times to seek to live a life of contentment to have a contented heart to have a contented mind to have a mind that is well and truly content with our circumstances with our situation with our relationship with God whatever it is you're thinking about and this was important to the apostle not just in writing to the

[24 : 10] Philippians it was important to the apostle not just for his own life as well and those of the Philippians it was important pastorally for the apostle as we read in chapter 6 of 1st Timothy you can see there in verses 6 to 10 how important it was for the apostle to commend contentment and how one comes about to be content in his preaching it's something obviously built into his preaching it's something obviously that should be important to us in our preaching of the gospel where does a person get contentment from how does a person come to be content in their lives in the world in which we are placed and you look at the verses 17 to 19 of that chapter where he talks there about the danger of seeking to follow riches for their own sake he says for the rich in this present age as for them charge them not to be haughty or set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on

God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy there to be good to be rich in good works you see the way Paul plays on the word rich and riches throughout that passage there they are not to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches but rather to look to God who richly gives good works and is therefore able to give the contentment that we require and that's really what you have in the Philippians passage as well what is a contented life how do you experience contentment where does it come from what are the elements of contentment for yourself for myself tonight if you ask yourself the question how can I have a contented heart if I'm surrounded by challenges and uncertainties if I know of changes in my life if I know of things that I'm struggling with where can I find contentment how can I possibly have contentment true contentment in that situation well Paul gives us here three main elements to it

I'm going to take these in turn he talks first of all about thankfulness you can see that from verse 8 onwards and especially in verse 10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me you are indeed concerned for me but you had no opportunity you can see how he is later on in the passage that follows talking about the gift that they have sent to him verse 18 I have received full payment and more I am well supplied having received from Epaphroditus the gifts that you said so he is thankful to the Philippians thankful of course to God most of all but he's thankful that the Philippians have shown themselves in their kindness to him by sending gifts we're not told what they were but Epaphroditus came with this gift to Paul and he is truly thankful for it now that's an essential element of a contented life you and I will never have a contented life if we are not thankful to God if we are not thankful even for the least of his mercies because thankfulness is such an important ingredient in a life that's in tune with God and in tune with God's providence and God's wisdom so thankfulness is the first element in a contented life and then secondly you find verses 11 to 12 or 11 to 13 the second element is dependence Paul says he's thankful for the gift but he's saying not that I really was in dire need of it because I've learned in whatsoever situation I am to be content I know how to be brought low I know how to abound in every and any circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need I can do all things through him who strengthens me in other words he's saying my contentment actually comes as he's speaking to the Philippians and setting these things forth for them to follow and to apply in their own lives his contentment is not just something that involves thankfulness to God it involves dependence upon Christ dependence on God he looks for his sufficiency in Jesus himself in God himself there's thankfulness there's dependence and thirdly there is strengthening because ultimately his contentment comes from Jesus himself comes from God as you see in verse 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me so it doesn't matter whether Paul is experiencing what he calls being brought low or

what he calls abounding whether it's really something in which he lacks certain things physically or financially or whether he is actually full of as much as possible he could have in this life he's saying I can do all things through him who fills me with strength that's what he means who strengthens me his contentment comes from the supply that Jesus gives him on a daily basis and that too is in many ways the key to contentment for ourselves the contented life is the life that comes to be supplied by Jesus on a daily basis with the grace with the ability with the mindset with everything that is to do with contentment

[30 : 02] I can do all things through him who strengthens me and he lies content in the supply that Jesus brings because it's not just a matter of those who are facing deprivation that have a challenge of being content those who are facing poverty for example in Paul's day and he very much is aware of that as he writes his letters it's a challenge how to be content if we're on the breadline if we're facing though many of us aren't of course nevertheless those in the world that's a difficulty for them but it's equally so for those who are millionaires where does a millionaire find contentment because they will tell you themselves mostly that although their millions bring them a luxurious lifetime a comfortable lifetime it does not guarantee contentment contentment is not the same thing as comfort contentment in the apostles terms is being thankful to God being dependent on God being strengthened by Christ let's look at these briefly in turn here is Paul saying to the

Philippians here in verse 18 I have received full payment I didn't seek this 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 gift you sent a fragrant offering a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God he uses very strong terms to show the extent of his thankful now he is treading a very fine line here and it is a line that many of us actually know for ourselves he doesn't want in any way to appear ungrateful and so he is thankful for the gifts the Philippians have sent him but at the same time on the other side of things he doesn't want to make it appear that he's being covetous that he really wanted such things for himself and that is something that he would seek from them in the future it's that fine line between being thankful for what they've sent and yet at the same time saying not that I'm speaking of being in need

I didn't seek this I don't necessarily want any more but I'm thankful for what you've sent and if we speak personally I know this is something that we find ourselves in in ministry we are so dependent in many ways on the church's givings we're paid out of the contributions in our stipends from your givings and believe me we're grateful for that I know our thankfulness ultimately is to God who supplies all things for us but that's where we are placed as preachers of the gospel and it's that fine line between saying we're really grateful to you but we're not seeking we're not covetous we're not actually living so that you will keep on giving to us it's that line that he's following here where he wants them to be truly aware of his thankfulness and yet he is not at all saying that he is being covetous in regard to it now thankfulness therefore is something that's so crucial to our contentment if we're going to be content with what we have it doesn't mean that you don't improve life it doesn't mean it's wrong to seek an increase in your wealth or things like that just to have something in hand by which you're able to have more comfort or be more assured and so on doesn't mean that that's wrong but it is and but thankfulness and contentment is the enemy of covetousness or you can put it the other way covetousness is the enemy of contentment if we have a coveting heart if we have a heart that really reaches out and wants for its own sake more of the things of this world whether it's material issues other than finance or whether it's money itself or whatever or the applause of human beings everything to do with this world and its worldiness is something that we could covet and sometimes do covet covetousness is the enemy of contentment if you and

I are coveting something for its own sake even if it's good in itself that covetousness that drive of our hearts which is there naturally will actually be at odds with our contentment the contentment for example that the people of Israel it's very interesting comparison let me just refer to first of all Exodus chapter 17 and verse 7 especially remember that incident very well it's the waters of Meribah where the people murmured against and complained about their situation complaining against Moses but ultimately complaining against God where in Exodus chapter 17 and verse 7 he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarreling of the people of Israel and because they tested the Lord by saying is the Lord among us or not you see their situation where they couldn't find water not that long after leaving Egypt and their hearts were really hankering back after the things of Egypt and this is what they were really saying complaining against Moses and ultimately against God why did you bring us out

of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst and this is what the name was called Meribah because of that they were really quarreling with the Lord ultimately discontentment with their lot discontentment with the providence of God for them discontentment and impatience which also very often is along with discontentment seeking that they would actually go back to Egypt would not be better but what's interesting it's saying there that they tested the Lord they put the Lord to the test quarreling with him but when you go to the book of Psalms you find another angle on this in Psalm 81 and in Psalm 81 the same incident is referred to giving that other angle on it if you read

[36 : 43] Psalm 81 and verse 7 God is here speaking to the people in distress you called and I delivered you I answered you in I tested you at the waters of Meribah hear O my people while I admonish you O Israel if you would but listen to me there shall be no strange God among you you shall not bow down to a foreign God and there he would have fed them with the finest of the wheat with honey from the rock I would satisfy you know you see the change the subtle change there in Exodus 17 the emphasis is on them testing God them putting God to the test them complaining about God and God is actually saying Psalm 81 actually it was the other way about though they didn't see it it was they who were being tested in the situation God brought about whether they would be true to him or not whether they would believe in him not whether they would accept his wisdom that was the test that was going on they were being tested and they were found out because they were discontent with

God's arrangement thankfulness was missing from their program and thankfulness for you and for me tonight is such an important ingredient in being content are we thankful tonight with our lot are we thankful that God is in charge of our lives are we thankful that he's not left us to ourselves to our own wisdom are we thankful for the things that he's given us in his providence even though others may have many more things even though others may have more of the things that we have from day to day are we thankful for certainly it seems to me in times gone by that people in our own situation in our own locality had more thankfulness for what they had than we tend to have today friends we live in a world that has so little thankfulness that hardly ever stops to thank God how many people say grace before they eat how many people think of who has actually ultimately provided for them the resources that they have whether they're small or great whether they compare with others acceptably or not tonight one of the things that should characterize us from day to day is thankful be thankful to God every morning you wake be thankful that he's kept you through the night be thankful as you take your breakfast be thankful that you have that to put on your table be thankful if you have work that God has given you a way of earning income for your family be thankful if you've been seen through work successfully if you're retired if you've come to enjoy the benefits of retirement even though you might not have a massive retirement pot like you might see others have shouldn't we be content if we have food and clothing as we read in 1st Timothy with these let's be content thankfulness to God remember back in Philippians we saw how in verse 6 of this same chapter rejoice in the Lord always again I say rejoice you see that's the same alongside of thankfulness you have the rejoicing in the Lord the provision of the Lord himself but he went on to say don't be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God if I were to come before God and plead with him to give me certain things to me, or for my family, or for whatever else. But if I do that without a word of thankfulness, God is saying, do you really think that you're praying as you should be?

Because if I'm missing out to thankfulness, then I'm being selfish. And if I'm being selfish, I will never be content in the contentment that God commends to me here in the gospel.

[41 : 23] So there's the first thing, thankfulness. We could elaborate on that in many ways, but let's move on secondly to dependence. Here he is in verse 11, not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I've learned in whatsoever situation I am to be content. And he goes on, as we saw through, to saying I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Now the first thing of interest here is that he's saying, I have learned to be content. And that shows you that this contentment, the contented heart, is not something that comes all at once. It's something that Paul himself had to work at. We mustn't think that somebody like the Apostle Paul from the day that he was converted just lived a completely contented life, that he didn't have to work at any of the things that he's actually saying to others when he's writing these epistles to them. No, he's saying, I learned in whatsoever situation I am to be content. And in verses 11 to 12, he tells us, I know how to be

brought low.

I know how to abound in any and every circumstance. I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. You see, he's saying it again. I have learned. I have learned. Contentment. It's something that he himself came by process of experience to learn and to increase and to grow in. And where do you learn contentment? Well, he's telling us here it's in the things of providence from day to day in our daily lives. I have learned in whatsoever my circumstances are, whether it is indeed being brought low or abounding, I have learned therein to be content. Friends, tonight, providence, as we call it, the way that God has arranged our life, which will be so different one person from another in many respects, but providence, that arrangement that God has of our lives is our school. It's our college. It's our university. It's where we learn the things of God himself. And it's where we learn contentment. That's where our contentment is learned. Just as you learn so much else that's true of a Christian life, that's where it's actually learned. That's where it's tested. That's where it's practiced. That's where everything to do with the life of a Christian is really worked out. It's not in the privacy of your own home, though it is there as well, but it is in the public sphere. It's where people see you. It's where you interact with them. It's where you work. It's where you go to school. It's all of those things on an everyday basis.

I have learned to be content. And indeed, he uses here in verse 12, he says, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger. Now, it's interesting that he uses that word because scholars tell us that this was a word that was used by the philosophers in the Greek world in the mystery religions of the time. Certain philosophies that, like the Stoics, for example, they were a prime example of this, and their approach to life was, well, here are your difficulties. Here are your challenges. Here are all the different aspects of your experiences day by day. And when you're really facing a time of challenge and difficulty, steal yourself against it. Close it off from your mind. Close your mind away from it. Look into yourself and just build yourself up against these things as if they're not there. Well, that's not what the apostle is saying, but he is using a word probably deliberately just by way of contrasting the Christian approach. I have learned the secret of being content. But the secret of being content for the apostle is not to steal himself against or firm up himself against the things that are happening in his life, his experiences, as if they are just closed out and he doesn't want to know about them or deal with them and just try and move on and build himself up. No, he says, I accept them.

[45 : 31] And I accept them as God-given. And I accept them as God-arranged. And I accept them as the wisdom of God has arranged for me. Whatever I may think of them, whatever I may make of them, however I may complain about them, however they may hurt me, however the challenges of these come my way, saying, I have learned the secret of facing hunger and abundance and need. Because I'm not looking to my own resources, to my own abilities. He's looking to Jesus. He's looking to himself. So, well, Paul, it's a deliberate contrast. You see the things that come in your providence day by day.

As we say, that's the school where you're set in order to learn contentment, where you learn the wisdom of God in arranging your life the way it is. But it's where you learn dependence upon God as well. And in order to be content, you need to be dependent. You need to rely on Christ himself. You need to find him in all the different changes of life as being your sufficiency at all times. I'm sure you all know the story, the true story of Horatius Spafford. I think I've mentioned this before. The man who wrote the hymn, It Is Well With My Soul. Well, in 1871, Stafford's four-year-old son died. And that same year, there was a great fire in Chicago in the USA that seriously affected his property, his business, and devalued so much of what was left of his business after the fire. And he sent his wife and four daughters across the Atlantic to England. And he was going to join him after he had seen to some of the business interests that he had to deal with. And they went across on a ship called the SS Ville du Havre in 1873. And in the middle of the Atlantic, that ship collided with another ship called the Loch Erne and sank very soon afterwards with a great loss of life. And Spafford received a very sad telegram from his wife, Anna. And all it said on the telegraph was, Saved alone. Their four daughters had been drowned in that tragedy. Saved alone. And he set off to cross the Atlantic to join his wife and to try and bring her home. And on the way across, Stafford was summoned up to the bridge by the captain. And the captain said to him, as far as we can reckon, this is exactly the location or the place where the Ville du Havre went down, where his daughters were lost. So he returned to the cabin. And later that night, he wrote these words, which became the hymn, It is well with my soul. When peace like a river attendeth my way,

when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul.

[49 : 27] It is well, it is well with my soul, with my soul. It is well, it is well with my soul. Can you and I say that tonight? The variety of circumstances in this church tonight is significant.

Nobody may even share the experience that you're going through right now. The providences that God has given you may be significantly different to anyone else's, and it may be the same for me. But can I say and can you say, are we glad to be able to say, whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

I have learned, he said. Paul said, the secret of contentment. The key to it is Christ himself.

And that's the third point. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. The things that he mentions here in verse 13, I can do all things, are obviously the things that are specifically mentioned in verse 12. The ways in which he's brought low, the way in which he's abounding, whatever actually may have been involved in that, these were his circumstances, generally speaking. But this is the key to his contentment more than anything else.

Yes, the contented life involves thankfulness. The contented life involves dependence upon God.

But the contented life itself is not something which rests on these. They are but the expressions of a contented life or the means towards being content. But contentment itself comes from the filling that Christ fills our souls with, who fills me with strength. I can do all things through him or in him who fills me with strength. What is the cause? What is the ground of Paul's contentment? Where does he find the key to his contentment? It's not in his own thankfulness.

[51 : 42] It's not in his own dependence. So that's part of the whole package. The key to it is what Jesus is, who Jesus is, what Jesus is doing in his life. And the word strengthens is an important verb. It's what grammarians call a causative verb. It's something in which there is a source involved.

And he's talking here about God or about Jesus. I can do all things through him who strengthens, who causes me to be strengthened, who fills me with strength. That's his daily experience. That's his daily desire. That's his daily walk after contentment, looking for contentment. The secret, the key to his contentment is that Christ fills his soul with strength. How can you face the challenges of today? How can you face the challenges of this present time? How can you actually live a contented life amongst the things we mentioned at the beginning of our study tonight? Well, this is the key to it. This is the key that opens the way to a contentment and a contented life. I can do all things through him who fills me with strength. Christ pouring his power into the apostle's life.

Is that where you're looking for your contentment? As you listen to the world, as you listen to the voices of the world, as you listen to the philosophies of the world and the religions of the world, as you face all of these alternatives to Jesus and to the gospel, here's the question for me tonight.

Here's the question for you. What am I seeking contentment from? Where is my contented life to be based? How can I reach more contentment than I have? Well, not in the things of the world.

Not in the things Paul mentioned in his letter to Timothy, as we read. Your contentment must surely come from knowing Christ, from Christ filling your life with his strength. From being able to say with the apostle in 2 Corinthians 12, my grace is sufficient for you, God said to him, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Much more then, said Paul, will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ, the strength of Christ may rest upon me. For when I am weak, then I am strong. You hand your life over to Jesus. And when you hand your life over to Jesus in faith and in trust, what happens? It means that you're not relying on your own strength. It means that you're not seeking contentment from the things you're able to produce yourself. It means that your contentment doesn't come from your own ability to create contentment. It doesn't come from the things of the world. It doesn't come from anything other than from Jesus himself. I can do all things through him who fills me with strength.

[54 : 48] The thankfulness is important. The dependence is important. But the source of all things, the key to the contentment is really Jesus himself. When you find a ship in rough seas, obviously plowing its way through a rough sea, that ship needs a captain. That ship needs a knowledgeable crew, officers that will actually take their own place in what needs to be done. They all have an important work. But whatever you say about the captain, and it may be the most skilled captain in the world, and it may be the best crew a ship could ever have. And they have their own work to do, but they are not the cause, the actual cause, the physical cause of the ship's progress through the rough seas.

The cause is in those engines down below. These are the engines that drive the ship. The engines need the engineer. The ship needs the captain. But it's the working of the engines that empowers the vessel and drives it through the waves. And it is too with a Christian life.

We need prayer. We need thankfulness. We need dependence. We need fellowship. We need all of these things and more. But our progress and our contentment is the energy of Jesus himself. That is the key to a contented life. And if we have that in place, then we can follow the words of the psalmist in Psalm 4. You remember these wonderful words, though we're not going to sing them tonight, but these words where David is saying in his dealings with God, Lord, there are some who say, who will show us some good? There's the question that's in everybody's minds. Who's going to show us any? Where does my contentment come from? Where can I find that which is truly good? You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound?

The joys of the harvest, the contentment of seeing the harvest safely home. But he said, you have given me more joy than even they have at the height of their harvest joy. So he says, in peace, I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

That's your contented life. The life that lies willingly in the hands of God. Let's pray. Almighty God, we give thanks for your strength. O, we confess, Lord, our own weakness, our inability.

[57 : 53] We confess our unworthiness. Confess that we are not deserving that you should show us any comfort or mercy day by day. But we thank you that there is forgiveness with you.

We thank you for all that flows into the lives of those who live by faith, of those who trust in you and have given their life over to you. We thank you for the enabling grace. We thank you for the daily grace that enables us, Lord, to look for contentment in yourself alone. We ask that our lives may be lives that are truly content. We ask that our witness to the world may be a witness that we are content with our God, that we are content to be his people and to live by faith and dependence and in thankfulness to him. And so receive us now, we pray. Receive our worship. Cleanse all that is of sin.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to sing now in conclusion this evening in Psalm 28. Psalm 28 in the Sing Psalms version on page 33.

Psalm 28 verses 6 to 9. Praise to the Lord for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made. He is my strength. He is my shield.

I trust in him who sends me aid. My heart uplifted leaps for joy. My thanks to him I gladly sing. The Lord God is his people's strength, a saving fortress for his king.

[59 : 34] O Lord, save your people, your own flock. Be pleased your heritage to bless. Be their good shepherd. Carry them forever in your faithfulness.

Verses 6 to 9, page 33. Praise to the Lord. Praise to the Lord for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made.

He is my strength. He is my strength. He is my shield. I trust in him who sends me.

My heart uplifted leaps for joy. My heart uplifted leaps for joy.

My thanks to him I gladly sing. The Lord God is his people's strength, a saving fortress for his king.

[61 : 06] Lord, save your people, your own flock. Be pleased your heritage to bless.

Be their good shepherd. Be their good shepherd. Carry them forever in your faithfulness.

Now I went to the main door last week so I'll go to the door to my right here this evening. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.