

Contentment in Christ

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here on this beautiful fall day. I was out raking leaves with my kids yesterday, so my back is sore, but my spirits are good.

So, you know, we've been this fall looking at the book of Philippians and Paul's letter to this church and I want to begin to, as we wrap up our sermon series this week, I want to remind you a little bit about the context in which the book was written.

Paul was writing, probably later in his ministry, he was writing, if you remember, from Rome. We see that at the very end of chapter 4. He's writing in a context where he is in prison.

Chapter 1, we are reminded that he is writing in chains and that he is also not only facing that imprisonment, that persecution for preaching the gospel, but also he was facing opponents who wished that he would continue to suffer while they preached the gospel for selfish gain. He was suffering and in a difficult place.

And in this context, he's writing to a church that has been his friends and supporters for a long time. The context of this was actually the church in Philippi had sent Epaphroditus with a gift to bless and to support and to help provide financially for Paul while he was in prison.

[1 : 28] And Paul was using the opportunity of Epaphroditus' return to Philippi to write a letter to them, to encourage them, to encourage them, and to thank them. And he's writing to say thank you.

But he spends a lot of time encouraging them to stand fast, to stand firm in the gospel, as we heard last week as Pastor Nick talked about the beginning of chapter 4.

And here at the end, he focuses again on his relationship with them. He focuses in on his thanksgiving for them. But he takes this as an opportunity. The pastor, one last time, saying to his friends something about contentment, something about how as gospel citizens, he wants to share about the contentment that he has experienced in the midst of his trials and that he hopes they would know as well.

Contentment, according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, is, quote, the quality or state of being characterized by feeling or showing satisfaction with one's possessions, status, or situation. Now, I don't know about you, but it strikes me that our world today is not particularly characterized by contentment. COVID-19 has disrupted our everyday lives in major and minor ways, and we chafe under it.

[2 : 58] Our political culture is marred by deep division, violent words, attacking those who we disagree with. And our social media world, it has been exposed, thanks to Facebook, as knowingly creating a culture of comparison and competition among teens that does great damage and produces fundamental insecurity.

Contentment is not in rich supply in our culture today. But, of course, we can't just look out there and think about contentment of what other people are going through.

It's in our hearts as well, isn't it? The struggle for contentment. We seek fulfillment and meaning in our work, whether it be in a career or whether it be our work at home, but we find that even in success, there is an emptiness to it.

We seek connection through friendships, and yet we find ourselves longing for deeper connection, more intimacy. Some of us have ample financial and material situations.

Others do not. But I would say most of us would say, sure be nice to have just a little bit more. So discontentment is something that I think we can all agree is a part of our lives.

[4 : 20] Now, look, we need to recognize that discontent isn't always bad. There is a place for Christians to look at the world and to be rightly discontent because the world is not as it's supposed to be.

The world does not reflect God's goodness and God's plan perfectly. And so in a fallen world, we see all sorts of things that we can be discontent with as we see how far short the world falls of God's intended purpose.

And there can be a right longing for the fullness of God's kingdom and for the making right of wrongs in this world. So there is a healthy discontent, a godly discontent that we ought to recognize.

That would be a whole other sermon to think about how do we live that out. That's not what Paul's talking about today. So we're going to focus on contentment, but want to recognize that there is a healthy contentment out there.

And yet, often we are mired in an unhealthy discontent, rooted in our expectations that this world will satisfy us perfectly.

[5 : 22] That we ought to and deserve to be pleased by this world. That our circumstances in this world ought to match our desires and ought to produce all things that are good.

Did you notice the Webster's Dictionary? Everything in it is based on circumstances. We have this experience of joy based on what? Our status, our situation, and our possessions.

If this is what is going to be the base of our contentment or discontent in a fallen world, friends, we are always going to be unhealthily discontent. And it produces ugly fruit in us, doesn't it?

I don't know about you, but when I feel discontent, how easy it is for me to become critical in my spirit towards others and towards my circumstances. How easy is it for me to grumble at the stove delivery guys who had this really broken system that had to come two different times and they didn't take the stuff away.

And it took forever to just get a little appliance delivered. And I grumbled and complained. And sometimes it's even more than that.

[6 : 38] We become despairing and bitter towards the world we live in. And sometimes our discontent drives us to be driven people, seeking to achieve, to obtain, to overcome our lack in a never-ending pursuit of satisfaction.

This discontent sits and eats at our soul. We have a never-enough bug. And even when our longings are good, they can be the enemy of contentment.

So what does God have to say to us today? In our proclivity to be discontent, what does God have to say to us about contentment today?

So turn with me with that introduction to Philippians chapter 4. We're going to be looking at verses 10 through 20 this morning. Philippians chapter 4, 10 through 20.

That's page 923 if you're in the Pew Bibles. The Apostle Paul writes this. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

[7 : 52] 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 in hunger, abundance in need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. 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 gifts for my need 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.

[8 : 57] 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. Let's pray. Lord, we ask you this morning that you would help us. Lord, as we sit under your word this morning, we pray that you would help us to receive it.

Lord, we pray for your Holy Spirit, Lord, to speak to our hearts. Lord, that you would teach us about your goodness and your character this morning. Lord, I pray that you would be my help, that you would help me to speak words as I ought.

Lord, and that through me, Lord, we would together sit under your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So what does Paul have to teach us about contentment this morning?

I think this passage breaks down into three different sections. In verses 10 through 13, we will see the secret of contentment. In verses 14 through 17, we'll see the fruit of contentment.

[10:06] And verses 18 through 20, we will see the confidence of contentment. So with that, let's dive in and take a look at this passage.

First, in verses 10 through 13, the secret of contentment. In verse 11, Paul says, I have learned the secret of being content. But before he gives us this secret, he expands on his context, on his circumstance.

He says, I know how to do this, how to be brought low, and how to abound in every and any circumstance. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

Friends, that is a striking sentence. When we think about how it applies to our lives, we think, could I say something like that? We know of what Paul was facing. Paul was in prison.

Paul was facing persecution and opposition. It says that he knew what it was like to be brought low, which if we've been reading the book, if you'd been reading in the original language, he would remember this is the same word used back in chapter 2, verse 8, for Jesus, when Jesus humbled himself, made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant and going to the cross.

[11:20] Paul says, I know how hard it's been. Paul also says, I've known great provision. When I arrived at Philippi, there was this woman, Lydia, who provided and welcomed me in the house, who provided all that we needed for ministry.

There were these great, amazing provisions of God through an earthquake. There was a jailer who welcomed me into his home after I was freed from prison.

So Paul has said, I've seen the extremes of really good and really bad. Paul says, this is the context in which I have learned to be content.

Now friends, isn't it interesting that Paul says, not just the hard things, but the good things. This is a little bit of the passage in Deuteronomy 8 that we learned, that we read earlier.

Moses warning Israel as about, about their, how they handle their circumstances. The danger, as Moses reminded us, was that they're both in trials and in abundance.

[12:30] In trials, we tend to grumble and complain to blame God and turn away from him. In abundance, we become complacent, ungrateful, forgetting God's provision. When circumstances dictate or control our contentment, we end up being those who grasp for things that we don't have and the things that we do, we find to be empty and insufficient to satisfy our souls.

But Paul had found a secret. This is a verse that is well known. It's used all over the, in many, many different places. I can do, verse 13, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Now, first, we need to clear off some of the chaff. What does this not mean? It does not mean that you can run faster than a speeding bullet, that you are more powerful than a locomotive, or able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.

Some of you may be too young to know what that's about. Superman. It's about Superman. Superman. All right? In Christ, we are not able to do things, to do all human achievements.

Right? It also doesn't mean that I can do all things, which means that I can't weep or lament about things that are sad, that I can't pray to God for changing my circumstances, that I can't ask help from friends.

[13:53] It doesn't mean any of those things. But what it does mean is all things, in all my circumstances, in all of my situations, whether abundance or want, I am able to be content in Christ.

Even in prison, I'm able to be content in Christ. Why can he say this? Well, of course, the translation in the ESV is, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

The through him makes it sound like Christ is an empowering help that comes alongside. But I think perhaps a better translation be, I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

Which brings us back to some of the things we've been looking at in Philippians, that when we are in Christ, when we by faith are joined to Christ, Christ who was humiliated and exalted in great ways, this is the one in whom we find the ability to be content.

Why is that? Because of who Christ is. Because Christ, if you remember at the end of chapter three, Christ will return. And when he returns, he will raise up all who are joined with him by faith to a new and eternal life.

[15:21] And the suffering that we experience in this life is just a blip compared to an eternity of renewed life with Christ. Or remember that being in Christ means that we are joined with him who in chapter two, verses 10 and 11, the one that God has greatly exalted and given a name that is

above every name so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We are connected to him who will rule forever in eternity. So Paul is saying, in Christ, we have a greater treasure than anything that we could have or want in this world.

So with his eyes set on Jesus, he says, what we already have in Christ, our salvation, our relationship with God, becoming a part of the people of God, the household of God, the citizenship, the country of God's kingdom, this is what we have now and what we have to come with this glory of a final resurrection, the freedom from all suffering, the triumph over evil and the glory that he will raise us up to be a part of.

Paul says, because I have the life of Christ now and the triumph of Christ later, this is why in him, I can do all things.

That is, I can be content in all circumstances. So if in these verses, Paul tells us about the secret of contentment, verses 14 through 17 goes on and we see a little bit of the fruit of contentment in Paul's life, in his love for the Philippians.

[17:10] He returns in verse 14. It's probably not a good paragraph break. It probably is all just one thought. The yet is not a strong adversative. It's more of a like, you know, now returning to this, I want you to know how thankful I am, right?

He said in verse, sorry, verse 11, he started off by saying, hey, not that I'm talking about need. This isn't about my need. So he wanted to come back and say, but I'm really thankful for you.

I'm thankful for your gift. I'm thankful for the ways that God has used you to provide for me. And he's so thankful for this. He's thankful not only for their gift, but for their partnership.

The way that they had entered into the gospel life and ministry as he had. The way that they suffered along with him. Paul is being explicit.

You supported me even right away, right when I moved from Philippi on to Thessalonica, which is sort of the next major city and the next place that Paul went on his second missionary journey.

[18:14] You were there and you were supplying. And then when we left Macedonia altogether, you continued to supply me for a while. And then we learned in verse 10, then there was a season where there was an opportunity, but now you've revived that for me.

And Paul says, I'm so thankful for your gift and for the way you've been a partner. And it brings to mind what Paul writes about the Philippians in 2 Corinthians 8, 1 through 5.

I'm gonna read a part of that just to give you a sense of what, how Paul saw their partnership and their giving to him. He describes them, in a test of severe, in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. This was in the context of Paul gathering a collection to go back to the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering persecution at the time.

[19:33] He says, the church in Macedonia did this. They gave abundantly beyond what they could and they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us.

What a beautiful picture. And yet Paul's focus here in Philippians in 4 through 17 is not specifically on the gift, though he's thankful for it. He goes on, he says, not that I'm focused on what you did for me, but what I'm really focused on is you and the blessings that you have.

That your gift would be credited to your account. That your gift would be seen in the courtroom, in the accounting room of heaven. And that God would look on this and be pleased.

And that you would know God's pleasure. You see, Paul's relationship with the Philippians was not a transactional one. I come preach the gospel, you support me, and then we're all doing.

His eyes have always had a triangular relationship. I'm here because of Christ for you. My desire is for you to mostly know Christ through me if at all possible.

[20:42] And as you support me, what I really want is for you to know Christ more. I want you to be pleased with this. Friends, I wonder how often we allow our relationships to become transactional.

Whether it's literal, physical, or material help. Whether it's the kind of friendship that makes us happy or laugh or it's easy to do.

I wonder how easily we view our relationships as what can I get out of this? And even when we're thankful for people, it's because they have given us things.

The fruit of contentment, the fruit of a contented spirit is that we are freed from grasping to take from others.

And we are free from complaining when they don't give it to us. And we are able to focus instead on them. To celebrate them, to rejoice in them, to invest in them, to have this deep sense of partnership as gospel citizens.

[21 : 50] This is what the community of the gospel content in Christ can be. And friends, I hope and I pray regularly that this would be true at Trinity.

And as we have an opportunity to celebrate Thanksgiving this week, I pray that we would consider how we are practicing a kind of thankfulness that is not self-centered, but ultimately is God-centered.

Can we be thankful for God's work in other people? Can we be thankful for the way we've seen God provide for one another in beautiful ways? Can we have a radically Christ-focused approach to our own needs even in this season?

And this brings us to the last part of our passage. For Paul has shown us the secret of contentment, being in Christ, the fruit of contentment, a love for one another.

Then finally, in verses 18 through 20, Paul exhibits a confidence of contentment that is truly striking.

[22 : 56] Let's look at it. Let's read these verses again. It's been a few minutes since we looked at it. Verse 18. 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. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. See, friends, it is Paul's confidence in God's capacity and his character that give him contentment.

So he makes this striking statement in verse 18. I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied. Again, remember, he's in prison and yet he's saying, you know what?

I have all I need. Your gift has blessed me and I have all that I need. And he sees the gifts as being not just given to him but he sees them as they truly are as actually offerings to God.

[24 : 06] He uses language here of the temple. Do you see that in verse 18? He uses language of a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

These would be words that would resound in a New Testament believer of the Old Testament translation in Greek that would describe how people would bring offerings to the temple.

An offering that would be burned and provide a fragrant offering to the Lord. An acceptable sacrifice is one that would be without blemishes. They're bringing atoning sacrifices and sin sacrifices for all sorts of different things.

And Paul says, I have seen what you have done. I've been fully supplied and what you've been doing is worshiping God. And then he turns from his own confidence.

God has provided everything I need to try to pass this confidence along to them as well. In verse 19, my God will supply all your needs. Paul personalizes God at this point.

[25 : 17] My God. He's not doing that to relativize it like, well, my God provides for me. How about your God? Does your God provide for you? That's not ways. He's doing that to personalize. I have seen it and experienced it in my own life.

I have been in plenty and want. As you look through the rest of the New Testament, you see what Paul suffered. persecution, hardships, shipwrecks, hunger, want, all sorts of things.

And yet he says, God has met me in all of those circumstances. God has provided exactly what is needed. And even as he talked about in chapter one, he's now probably facing trial and he's like, and I might die.

I might be killed. But my God is able to be with me and provide for me all that he needs to give me, all that I need from him.

So he says, this is what I've experienced. He says, my God is able to provide for you and provide for you all that you need, supply all your needs according to what?

[26 : 21] According to all the riches of Christ. This word, riches of crisis, would be the typical Roman word for wealth. And that would be measured by slaves and property and money and influence and power.

Paul says, we know the one who has all the riches. More than anything. God has so much more than the riches of the world.

And his riches are both spiritual and practical. He's not lacking on any front in his ability to give. Gordon Fee in his commentary on Philippians has a great list.

And I'm just going to read through this so that you can see how even in the book of Philippians, we've seen God providing what is needed. So in the midst of their poverty, he supplied material needs.

In the midst of their present suffering in the face of opposition, he supplied what is needed to endure it. That is, steadfastness, joy, and encouragement.

[27 : 29] In their need to advance the faith with one mindset, he supplied the grace and humility of Christ for them to live in. In the place of grumbling and anxiety, God surprised the reality of his own presence with them as the God of peace.

And of course, above all those things, God has provided Christ. And I don't know if you have seen it, but as we've walked through the book of Philippians, more and more and more, Nick and I have talked every week as we've prepared for sermons on how Philippians 2, 6 through 11, is the centerpiece of this book.

It is the theological high point. And I want you to go back and look at it to see what it is that God has given us in Christ. Philippians 2, verse 6, Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing.

Taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[29 : 10] God has given us a Savior who humbled himself, took on servants, a form of a servant, suffered, and died for us.

This is the love of a Savior for us. This is the power not of a triumphalistic Savior, but of one who is willing to lay down his life in order to be our Redeemer.

And this is the Savior who is vindicated in all that he did by being raised to new life and being exalted by God to his right hand with the knowledge that one day the work of redemption that he has begun through his life and death and resurrection will finally be applied in its fullness in the day that is yet to come.

And Paul says, my God is that God and he has done everything that you need and he is able to supply all of your needs according to the riches that he has in Christ Jesus.

Christ who is our pattern for humble living and serving. Christ in whom we find the power for steadfastness in the face of trials. Christ who's coming again is our hope and our promise.

[30 : 31] and because of Christ we can be content. Not because our circumstances are good or not because our circumstances are not good but because in every circumstance we are able to say our contentment is fixed on him.

And so Paul ends this book verse 20 with a note of praise a note of doxology a note of thanksgiving to our God and Father be glory forever and ever amen.

Do you notice how my God in verse 19 became our God in verse 20? If we know this God the contentment that we have overflows with praise and worship and this is what God calls us to this is what Paul exhorts us to that we would learn the secret of contentment by knowing God as fully as he did and by applying it to the circumstances of our lives so that we might live with this kind of contentment.

Let's pray. Lord we thank you for this word Lord we thank you for the encouragement and the challenge that it is to our hearts.

We do confess how often we are discontent with our world with ourselves those around us O God we pray teach us the secret of contentment teach us to know the riches that we have in you teach us to know your empowering presence with us teach us to know Lord so that we might learn to be content in all circumstances with love for others and confidence in you and Lord we pray that this contentment Lord would overflow in thanksgiving and praise that we would glorify you we pray these things in Jesus name Amen