

# The secret of 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: 21 January 2024

Preacher: John Lowrie

[ 0 : 00 ] chapter 4. This is the penultimate sermon in this series. We'll finish this series next week. So, we're looking at a few verses, and once again, there's a big verse. We've been looking at big verses about not being anxious about anything, but everything with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, and we were encouraged to think in what's positive and so forth, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard our hearts and minds.

We're looking at another verse. I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances. That's a verse that if that was the rule of your life, boy, it would be another life-changing verse.

So, let's set it in its context. I want us to read from verse 4 through to verse 14. Yeah, 4 to 14. This is Paul's closing remarks as he draws this letter to a close. He says, Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all.

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put into practice, and the God of peace will be with you. And these are our verses for tonight, verse 10 to 14. Paul says, I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. 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. I can do all things through Christ, through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. We'll end our reading at the end of verse 14, and we'll consider this together in a moment. But let's stand the moments that remain to us. We'll look at this passage together. As I said, we'll finish this next week, one more sermon, finishing this off. And you know that the series title that we gave here was

Shine Like Stars, based on Philippians 2, 16 and 17, I think it was or 15 and 16. Shine Like Stars in the Universe as you hold out the Word of Life. This is a good church, unlike some of the churches in the Bible that we read of. Paul didn't really have any gripes with this church, unlike the Galatian churches. This was a church that was formed in a very short time in Paul's second missionary journey. And then he was put in prison, and then he was separate from them. But they bound themselves to Paul, really loved him, loved his ministry. Paul mentioned, we'll look at this, where they had sent a gift and so forth to Paul. But we've looked at many things in this passage, where Paul wants to encourage them to shine like stars, to know something of the joy and peace of God as a Christian. And this would still be the Lord's desire for us, that we're not just saved, but we are those impressive Christians that don't go about dull in character or whatever, but the Lord really shines through us. And we are more than conquerors. So, we've looked at many things, how to pray for others, that the gospel advances despite chains, living a life to serve the

[ 4 : 21 ] Lord, and dying is gain, those big verses, living a life worthy of the gospel, standing firm, the importance of Christian unity, being united together, doing things without arguing or complaining, following godly examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus, pressing on towards the goal, forgetting what's behind, resolving disagreements, two women were mentioned especially, and so forth. Quite a few things.

Over recent weeks, we've looked at life-changing, life-governing verses, big verses that we have in our fridge, magnets we have in posters, we have them in key rings or whatever, that people really like, that Christians love, and they think, I want to live my life like that. And one of them was to do with prayer, verses 6 and 7 of the end of this letter. Be anxious, do not be anxious about anything, but everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving. Present your request to God, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And then, last week, we looked at the importance of thinking and doing. If we are to know not only the peace of God, but the God of peace, if we are to know Him walking with us, then this will also involve not just prayer, but thinking aright and doing aright. And that's what we looked at last time, verses 8 and 9. Whatever is true, whatever is noble, and we have that list there. Think about such things. The battle is often lost in our mind. Once we lose it there, we become downcast, worried, afraid, anxious. And whatever we learned and received from Paul, he says, put into practice and the God of peace. We'll be with you. In these closing verses, Paul basically wants us to live a worry-free, stress-free life. He knows that life is hard. And he says, if you would know the peace of God and not be worried and fretting and so forth, these are things that give yourself to prayer, right thinking, and right doing. And we looked at that over the past few weeks.

But before Paul finishes, he's not bringing another command to them. He's not giving another imperative. He is saying, do this, don't do that. He has just said in verse 9, he's used himself as an example. That was the last verse we looked at the last time. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put that into practice. So, in other words, he says, look at me, finally, look at me, see the things I have done. Quite a bold thing, isn't it? How many of us would say, look at me, follow my example? Paul was confident to say that. And as he's saying this, it's almost as if he's writing this, and he thinks about something specific that it would be good for them to have. Something that he has that he would, he's thinking, if they had this, your life would be so much different, like these other big verses. And it's to do with the whole area of being content, contentment. And that's why he says in verse 12, I know what it is to be in need. 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, or whether living in plenty or in want. To go through life content is one of the best things you can ever have. If you had one quality, one characteristic that would keep you sane, it's content. If you, if the Lord says, I'm going to make you content from January through to December of 2024, your life would be so different. I made a point this week of just going into Google images, and I quite like that, because usually it tells you what people think, or, or, so I put the word discontent in, and this was the image that you get up. That's quite a common image. The word discontent, it shows somebody either in cartoon form, or cliparty, or this. I was amazed at how they, not just one company, but various folk had this, a ball and chain. And when you think about being discontent, it really drags you down. It really slows you from, from having a springing your step to life being light.

Suddenly you're discontent. Something isn't quite right. It distracts you from other things that you could give yourself to, to develop yourself. It not only distracts you, it can discourage you, and even depress you. Lord, this thing is not quite right. If only this was a bit better, then I would be content. But I'm discontent with my health, with my family, with the weather. It can be anything.

And it is very, very discouraging. We simply don't function well. Discontentment is like a big ball and chain that we drag around. Maybe you're sitting here tonight, and you're discontent about Monday or Tuesday, not just about the weather. But maybe you've been, you've been feeling like this for a long time. You love the Lord, but there's this big aspect of your life where you're discontent.

[ 9 : 42 ] It may even be a small thing, but it feels like a ball and chain that you're just dragging around with you. I don't think we need to look far into our life. I think within seconds you can put your finger on it and say, Lord, I'm discontent. I'm discontent with this thing. The dictionary definition of discontent is this, a lack of satisfaction with one's possessions, status, or situation. You just don't like your situation. You don't like various things. Your lack of satisfaction. A sense of grievance or loss, which reminds me, on Wednesday we will look at the subject of grief. It's a very good topic, and it's not just talking about grieving at death. Grief is a sense of loss. You map out a life for yourself. When something cuts across that, then you know grief.

And that's the right proper definition of grief. It's not, we often associate it just with the death of a loved one. That very much includes that, but it's trying to cope with change. And sometimes when things happen to us that we don't plan, it causes us grief. It causes us discontent. We don't like it.

Another definition of discontent is a restless aspiration for improvement. You're restless, Lord, and need this thing to be better or for it to go away. And if you know anything of your life, you know that we can be discontent. We don't get what we want. We become discontent. Somebody upsets us, we become discontent. Things aren't working the way we would like them to. We become discontent.

We're not treated as well as we should be. We're discontent. Things don't go smoothly. People, things no longer satisfy us. We become discontent. The train is late. The movie isn't as good as we hoped for. The food isn't as tasty. We become discontent. The weather's not to our liking.

The clothes don't fit or look as good as they once did. We become discontent. It doesn't take much, does it? The small areas of our life, Lord, I was doing okay, but this thing is dragging us down.

[ 11 : 56 ] It doesn't take very much. And therefore, discontent comes to us probably many times a day. It may be a few things or whatever. And we might be in need, whatever, not just physical need, but there's a lack of satisfaction. There's an aspiration for improvement, and we don't have this.

That is why here is a book, a well-known book by Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. It's a well-known book, one of the Puritans. And because even for Christians, it's like a rare jewel that we rejoice in our salvation. But we go through life, and in many ways, we are still discontent, even the best of Christians. And Paul alludes to this in the verse that we're looking at. He's had to learn what it means to be discontent. You don't become content the day in which you're saved. It's a lifelong process. It's sanctification, where God puts us through various things, and we have to learn that God can be trusted. So that's what we're going to look at just now. Paul is writing this verse, and if you remember, he has every reason, reason to be discontent. He's not writing this in the Waldorf Astoria. I walked past that yesterday, and I thought, wow, is that the name of that hotel? The Waldorf Astoria. What a great name, eh?

And I thought, he's not writing from there. He's writing from prison. He's been banged up in prison. And not only that, other Christians are trying to make life difficult for him, and they're thinking the gospel is suffering, and yet Paul is in prison. And a church really cared for him, and they weren't able to help as much as they could. And Paul even writes to them, and he says, yes, I finally got your gift. Verse 10, I greatly rejoice at last. You renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. We remember we looked at Epaphroditus. The gift was sent to Paul through Epaphroditus. But Paul, what Paul wants to do right at the end, he'd mention in their gift, and before he finishes and puts a full stop to the letter, he wants to communicate one thing to them, and it's this. Although you were concerned, I finally got your gift. I really didn't need your gift.

If the gift came, I would be content. If the gift never came, I would still be content. The gift, I mean, he does mention in verse 14, it was good of you to share in my troubles. But he says, verse 11, I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Paul wants them to know that I'm not needy. It was great. It could almost come across as unappreciative of the gift. Your treasurer comes up and says, I hear you're having it hard.

There's a gift. And you go, I'll take it. But I didn't really need the gift. Everything's fine. And treasurer's thinking, I wish I'd never given you this in the first place. And this is the way it could come across. But Paul wants to communicate to them that whether he got the gift or whether he didn't, whether he's plenty, whether he's little, he is content in whatever circumstance.

[ 15 : 15 ] It's a great jewel to have in life. I wish if the Lord said to me, John, what would you want? I would want contentment. If I've got contentment in 2024, not worried about the future, not worried about the here and now, that would be a great thing. So let's look at this. Let's look at the subject of contentment, the secret of contentment. And I want us to note three things in this passage. The first point is this. Contentment, Paul says, does not depend on circumstances. So that's the first point.

Contentment, Paul says, right at the very end of this letter, it's a rare jewel. Have this. I have it. I've learned this. And it doesn't depend on circumstances. Paul's in prison. He's of every right to feel annoyed and frustrated. He could have been so bitter. Christian's giving him a hard time. He's banged up and he doesn't deserve to be there. He's done nothing to be in prison. You could justify that for. But he's not fretting, even in these very difficult situations. And that's worth noting that it's possible, Paul says, whatever your circumstance, to be content. That's what he says in verse 11. I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. For example, he says, I know what it is to be in need. I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in everything. Whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want, Paul says, it doesn't matter. The circumstances don't matter. Now, that's amazing because circumstances often affect us.

And Paul had many circumstances throughout his life, certainly since he became a Christian, as he served the Lord. He had to face many. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 23, he gives us that list, doesn't he? I have been in prison more frequent, been flogged more severely, exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea, constantly on the move, being in danger from rivers, bandits, my own countrymen, dangers from Gentiles in the city, in the country, at sea, from false brothers. I have labored and toiled, often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst, gone without food. I have been cold and naked. Beside everything I face daily, the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Paul had every right to be discontent. If there's ever anybody, a Christian, you could say, well, I don't blame you for being a bit bitter, a bit frustrated, a bit annoyed. But Paul says, I have learned to be content. Whether he was content when these things happened, we do not know. But when he's writing Philippians, certainly he's able to say that. And he communicates this to these young Christians. Contentment doesn't depend on circumstances. Here's a quote by Martin Lloyd-Jones. I quite like this quote, dealing with contentment.

He says this, the apostle here says that he is not mastered or controlled by circumstances. If you can improve your circumstances in fair and legitimate means, by all means do so. But if you cannot, and if you have to remain in a trying and difficult position, do not be mastered by it.

Do not let it get you down. Do not let it control you. Do not let it determine your misery or your joy. You, says the apostle, must come into the state in which whatever your condition, you are not controlled by them. That's quite a statement, isn't it? That if you are attempting to get down and so forth, whatever the circumstances, if you can better yourself, do that. The Lord would expect you to do that. But if you can't, and through no fault of your own, you have to remain in a difficult circumstance, you cannot let that circumstance dictate to you how you should feel. You cannot let it master you as a Christian. And that's basically what Paul is saying here. Our circumstances should not dictate our contentment. That's a big thing. So secondly, if that is the case, how are we to be content? If it's not based on our circumstances, we think it is. Lord, if only you would solve this circumstance, I will be content. That's what we tell ourselves. But Paul is saying, if you've got loads, you won't be content if you've got less. If you're healthy, you will not be content. It doesn't depend on our circumstance. And it's worth buying into that, to affirm that. Our circumstances alone is not the source of our contentment. So how can we be content? Secondly, contentment can only be found in Christ. That's what Paul wants to really drive this home. And before we look at that, let me just drive home what contentment is not. It's not being some sort of stoic. Well, I'm just going to grin and bear it. Honestly, I'm content. When really you're not content, but you're trying to paint a smile on your face. You're trying to tell yourself you're content when really you're discontent. That's not what this is. It's not just being a stoic, just pressing on and getting on with it and so forth. It's also not comparing yourself to others and saying, well, it's not great for me, but they're worse than me, and so therefore I'm just going to be content because I'm not as bad as some folk. That is not what this is.

[ 21 : 11 ] It's also not a product of an easy, natural, easygoing temperament. Well, I'm just the type of person that I'm a doormat. It doesn't matter what happens. Everything can come my way, and I'm just going to be content. Paul's not just saying, see if you can get that temperament. That's a good temperament to have. The contentment that Paul is speaking of here is a supernatural contentment.

It is not given to the natural man. It is not something that comes easy. It is supernatural. It really is something, and it can only be found in Jesus. That is why he says after this in verse 13, I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Contentment is found in a person.

It is found not in your circumstances, but it's found in Jesus Christ. It's only when we know Jesus through conversion, through God's Word, through the experiences of life, through his personal strength, his leading, his guiding, his empowerment, that we can know contentment. We know the Lord, we walk with the Lord, and we begin to trust him more and love him more. It is in that situation, when he empowers us, that we have all that we need. We trust him. We walk with him. There is no contentment outside of knowing and loving Jesus. They last for a bit. You might be content in one situation or another. Lucille and I have bought a pizza oven, and we're still experimenting with pizzas.

And I just sat there last night, and I thought, Bible of practice. We've suddenly got the pizza oven to produce nice pizzas. And I just sat there. There was jazz playing on the radio. Life was good.

And then Sunday morning, life is not good. But for that wee moment, you're content all as well with the world. Your pizza is cooked nicely, and so forth. It doesn't take much to cheer us up. But your contentment isn't circumstances, but our contentment always comes from the Lord. And that's what Paul is really getting here. I've been thinking about the wee verse, because maybe I'm thinking of grief and so forth. For me to live, to die is Christ. To die is gain. Death is only gain if you live for Christ.

[ 23 : 33 ] If you live for pizzas, if you live for something else, when these things are not there, to die is not gain. If you're living for something else, and those things appear to satisfy, when you die, you miss them, and therefore death is not gain. But when you live for Christ, when your whole being is given to Him, to love Him, to walk with Him, to cultivate your relationship with Him, then death is gain. You go to meet Him. And so, unless you will not die well if you do not live well, and that's what it means to live for Christ. As we live well, as we live for the Lord, we will die well. And therefore, that's what Paul is wanting to emphasize here. The importance is Christ. I remember hearing a sermon on this a number of years ago, and the preacher mentioned a philosopher, and the philosopher says this, give a man everything he wants, and at that moment everything will not be everything. I like that.

Give a man everything he wants, and at that very moment everything won't be everything. Everything cannot satisfy us. Only Jesus can meet his utter deep personal needs. Now, you know that from experience.

You know there have been times of difficulty in your own life, and when there's nothing at human level to rejoice in, the Lord has given you a peace that passes understanding. And the only joy that you've had is because you know He is there, and that's what gives you the contentment. Lord, I would like this situation to change, but I'm content in you. I rest in you. It means what it, that's what it means to rest in Jesus. I'm the type of person, I must confess, if only, we have been working in the flat, and the radiator's developed a wee leak. We're a brand new radiator, and every time I see it, because I can't be bothered to fix it. I hate plumbing. I can do everything, but plumbing's just the bane of my life. So I see this wee drip, and it only drips maybe once every half an hour. And I have this wee paper towel, and every time I see it, my heart sinks. I just go, I'll need to fix that. I'm going to have to drain the system. I'm going to have to get the pliers out, and put the tape on it, and do whatever. And it just, it just, so I go, if only. Lord, if only that radiator wasn't, my life would be a lot better. Paul didn't live his life with if only. You never get the impression reading Paul's letters that he lived, if only. If only this was, I would be great. And no one, surprise you, I'm miserable. Paul rises above this through the experiences of life, and because he had Jesus, he knew Jesus. It was all about him. I mean, if anything made Paul discontent, if there was one thing, and we had a sample of this, even in this letter, if there was one thing it made Paul discontent, that he didn't know the Lord enough. You remember in Philippians 3, 7, and 8, whatever was to my prophet, I consider loss for the sake of Christ. I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. I consider everything rubbish that I might gain Christ. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and fellowship of his sufferings. That is the only thing that made Paul discontent, you could say, that he didn't know the Lord enough. He wanted to know more about him, more about his power, more about fellowship of his sufferings. He's come to know the secret of contentment, and that is simply walking with Jesus. That's why he's learned this. He's, remember he had a thorn,

Lord, I besought the Lord three times. He would have said, perhaps at that time, Lord, I'm discontent. Take this away. And the Lord comes and says, my grace is sufficient for you. And in that situation, he would have learned something of the grace of God. So as you go through life, we should be learning more and more to be content. A difficulty comes. It's an opportunity for God to prove himself, to come alongside of you, to strengthen you, to lead, to guide. And in the end, the result of that, you become more content when that situation arises again, because you have proved the Lord. You know his strength. It's not just a verse, a fridge magnet. You have learned to be content. So, it doesn't depend on circumstances, but depends in knowing Jesus and walking with him.

There's no shortcut to this. It's not a magic thing. You won't get it on one Sunday coming to church. It is a life, it's lifelong learning. And it's as big as that. But how has Paul come to do this?

[ 28 : 26 ] Thirdly, because contentment can be learned. He didn't arrive at this period of contentment on the road to Damascus. He didn't say, I met Jesus, and after that, I became content. He's had to learn this.

Verse 11. He mentions it twice, in two verses, 11 and 12. I'm not saying this because of need. I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Verse 12. I have learned the secret of being content in every situation. It's so encouraging that it can be learned. You might sit here tonight and think, well, I'm not content. If I'm honest, pastor, it's just not there. You have to learn it. And the fact that it can be learned through the experience of life should fill you with encouragement. That you don't think, like, faith, I don't have enough faith, and that's just it. You might say, I don't, I'm not as content as I should be. But you can learn this. And you learn it, as I said, through the experience of life. Here are things that, how Paul learned this. He learned in 2 Corinthians 1, where he tells us, that God is greater than his circumstances. We mentioned this in point one. It doesn't depend on this. Because Paul in 2 Corinthians 1, right at the very start of this letter, he says, I don't want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia.

Province of Asia, we were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life. That's the situation. I don't know if you've been in that situation. Indeed, we felt the sentence of death, but this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. Paul would have learned that through the hardships of life, through despair, and in realizing that God delivers. He has delivered. He will deliver.

So he's learned that it doesn't depend on his circumstances. The Lord is able to save. Secondly, under this heading, he's learned that the Lord's grace is sufficient for all his needs.

I mentioned the thorn three times. He pleaded with the Lord, take it away. And he said, my grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, Paul says, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

[ 30 : 58 ] That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses. Note that, for Christ's sake. For the Lord's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardship, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. So when Paul is placed in a situation where he feels his weakness, he doesn't say, Lord, I'm discontent. He says, he reminds himself that when he's weak, he is strong.

And that's what makes him content. These are the big verses of life. And so he knew that the law's grace was sufficient. He also knew that his grace, strength, and so forth was perfect for every situation. Remember when Paul was, they were trying to kill Paul and so forth. A dispute was so violent.

The commander was afraid they would be torn to pieces. And he orders the troops to come, and they take him into the barracks. The following night, the Lord stood by Paul and said, take courage. Take courage. He's experienced this from the Lord. During all the difficulties, the Lord's strength made perfect in his weakness, the Lord's physical help, practical help, the Lord's standing by him. And you've known this as well, a quiet time, when you're down, when you're worried, when you're anxious, the Lord draws close through the Holy Spirit. A verse lights up. You know the joy again. And where you were discontent, you become more content. Lord, I'm trusting. I'm trusting in you. The Lord was working through all of Paul's circumstances.

We see this in 2 Corinthians 6. More that other list about beatings and so forth, and what have you. Sorrowful, he says, yet always rejoicing. Poor, yet making many rich, having nothing, and yet possessing everything. He knew this. He also knew that contentment was linked to godliness. He writes to Timothy, godliness with contentment is great gain.

It's not just contentment itself. I don't think you'll ever be content in life if you're not godly, and you're running after material things, and you're giving people grief all around about you. You will never be content. But with godliness, and this is what we'll come back to, walking with the Lord, knowing his presence. It is that. That's why he says in that same passage, 1 Timothy 6, you, man of God, flee all of this. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. In other words, pursue these things, and then the contentment will come. If you reject these things and live an ungodly life, you will not know what contentment is. So it comes from that.



[ 33 : 47 ] It also comes from serving the Lord. Paul says in Acts 20, I consider my life worth nothing to me. If only I may finish the race, complete the task the Lord has given me, the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. I refer back to the verse I mentioned earlier, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain. When you live for Christ, that is how you will know contentment. When you live for yourself, and you're driven by your own agenda, it involves materialism, revenge, jealousy, various things that come to us, we will never be content. But a life that's given over to live for the glory of God is a life of contentment. I remember a number of years ago, we had students working with us when I was at Nidre, and they were from Faith Mission. And I remember going to one of the graduation services there. And the preacher at the time, I can't remember who it was, quoted from the Methodist Covenant Service. This was John Wesley, and the Methodists, the workers there, they would covenant each year. And I noticed this service where he quotes from was on the 25th of December, note that date, Christmas Day, 1747. They had a service, and at the start or the end of the year, the Methodists would covenant before God. And this was some of the wording. It says, Christ has many services to be done. Some are easy, others are difficult. Some bring honor, others bring reproach. Some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both. In some we may please

Christ and please ourselves, in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given us in Christ who strengthens us. In other words, it says, there'll be things he'll do in life that will be easy, and some will be hard. Some you will have to die to yourself.

And that is quite something that they had to acknowledge as they go through another life, another year, that life would be hard. And that's what Paul wants to communicate to them, the importance of following Christ, the importance of loving him, of following him. Where that is the case, then we will know something of contentment. We won't have our own agenda. And that's what Paul wants them to know, the secret of contentment. I want to just finish by mentioning to you this woman. I remember at the time when I prepared this sermon, this was a woman, and our son was Anthony Walker. I don't know if you remember this. This was a racial killing in Liverpool.

And him, I think it was his cousin and his girlfriend were standing at a bus, and there's a bunch of guys come up from the pub, and they started giving this guy racial abuse. And they walked to another bus stop, and then Anthony Walker's girlfriend ran to get help. But while she was away, they took an ice axe, and they attacked him with this, and he killed him. And there was an unplanned candlelit procession around about that time. And G. Walker, his mother, she was a special needs teacher.

They were just this candlelit vigil, and she decided to address the people. She says, you young people, don't let this happen again. Don't let my son's life be in vain. And she recalled how her son, a devout Christian, used to say to her, he would say to me, mum, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. So when you are weak, remember that, he would say to her. So she says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and that is where I get my strength from. And there's a big rapturous applause, and she just turns around and says, God bless you. That's quite something, isn't it? For this woman whose son's been ice axe to death, a committed Christian, a devout Christian, who used to say to her, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. She says, that's where I get my strength from.

[ 38 : 12 ] I think it's when Christ is at the center of our life, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. So contentment doesn't depend on circumstances. It's only found in a person, Christ, as we walk, as we learn from him. And it can be learned as we walk with him day by day.

Let me close by the last few words of the Methodist covenant service. At the end of that service, they stand, and this is what they say. This is what they have to recite. And if you can say this in your own heart, and mean this, and go through life with this, you will know what it means to be content. They say this, I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will. Rank me with whom you will. Put me to doing. Put me to suffering. Let me be employed for you, or lay the side for you. Exalted for you, or brought low for you. Let me be full. Let me be empty. Let me have all things. Let me have nothing. I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, your mind and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. That's quite a statement, isn't it? We welcome people into membership too easy when you read things like that.

To be able to stand and to say that. When we can say that, even tonight, whether it rains, whether it's sun, whatever comes our way, Lord, help me to serve you and mean that. Then we will know something of what it means to be content. Let's stand and we'll sing our closing song, in Christ alone.

Thank you.

This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm to the peace of strut and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace, where fears are still when striving cease.

[ 40 : 51 ] My comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand. In Christ alone, who took our flesh, for us of God in helpless faith.

This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to see. Till on my cross that Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.

For every sin of him was laid, here in the death of Christ I live. There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain.

And mercy forth in glorious day, up from the grave he rose again. And as he stands in victory, since Christ has lost its grip on me.

For I am his, and he is mine. Walk with the precious blood of Christ. Who is in life, who fear in death.

[ 42 : 25 ] This is the power of Christ in me. No place first cry, to find the bread. Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of him, I seem a man. And ever pluck me from his hand. Till he returns, our host behold.

Here in the power of Christ I stand. Here in the power of Christ I stand. Amen. Let's just close in prayer.

Our loving Father, we thank you, Lord, for our salvation. Lord, we thank you that our salvation is secure. That Christ fought well for us and really saved us. And the best for us is yet to be.

But Father, we pray, Lord, that we would know something of what it means to walk humbly and with a sure step, Lord, as we go through life. Not just thinking of heaven, but how we might please you and walk with you.

[ 43 : 29 ] That we might know something of contentment, Lord, through the experiences of life. So, Father, help us to walk humbly with you, even into this coming week. We do not know what lies ahead of us.

But, Father, may we find our all in all in Christ Jesus. Not in circumstances or people or anything else. But, Father, help us to surrender our life into your hands. We ask these things in Jesus' name and for his glory.

Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks. Amen.