

August 13, 2006
Philippians 4:10-13

Alright good morning! I'm glad you are here today. Get your Bibles out and open them to Philippians chapter 4 verses 10-13. This morning we look at one of the most well known verses in all the Bible as well as one of the most misused and misunderstood verses in all the Bible.

And in the midst of it is one of the most challenging truths for our society that we've looked at – in fact this morning – my hunch is whoever you are, this will not be an easy sermon for you if you are serious about applying God's Word to your life. But if you will – the reward is the most sought after state of existence in all the world.

Open your Bibles to Philippians 4:10-13 and watch this clip.

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been 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 everything through him who gives me strength.

One thing that becomes very clear in Paul's statement is that contentment cannot be found in circumstances. Now that really goes against the grain of our nature. Because just like this supposedly young Tom Hanks in the movie big – all of us at one time or another have thought if we had this or that we would then be content. The truth that we will see unfold before us is that all situations and circumstances will breed discontent without the having the true secret of contentment. I want to say that again, **EVERY circumstance will breed discontent without the secret of contentment.**

People who have great riches can find in those riches a million reasons for being discontent. America is full of stories of people that had great wealth and were fueled toward great misery by increasing discontent with plenty. Having more stuff has never answered the cry of the heart of greediness. Our stuff, our circumstances, will never bring us contentment.

People who have very little can find reason upon reason to be discontent as well. It is our fallen human nature to want what someone else has. To want more than you have. It doesn't matter how little a person has, discontentment comes in all sizes.

Students – you will remember – and some of you adults might as well – a song by Good Charlotte that got serious airplay a few years ago that talked about both sides of this coin. The "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" song – the chorus went like this:

Lifestyles of the rich and the famous
They're always complaining
Always complaining
If money is such a problem
Well they got mansions
I think we should rob them

While I can't condone the solution they came up with in the song, they did a good job of showing how those with much complain and want more and those with less want what those with more already have.

We need to be very clear. **The lack of contentment is nothing other than COVETING.** And coveting is not fitting for a believer in Jesus Christ. The idea that we can discover contentment

through any financial circumstance, prosperity or lacking, is put to a dead halt with the command of God to stop coveting.

Obviously there is normal coveting – wanting what someone else has – their job, salary, benefits, perks, girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, wife, kids, house, car, happiness, security, ease, freedom, whatever it might be.

Then there is also what I will call, hidden coveting. What I mean by hidden coveting is using someone else's less to make you feel better about what you do have. All that does is satisfy the coveting heart. Since I can't have the more that I want and since I don't have the less that I don't want I will tell my greedy, coveting desires to be satisfied. It could be a whole lot worse. This is just a silent form of coveting that masks itself as humility and contentment, but is neither. Pride finds comfort in being better off than others. Contentment is not found through what you have or don't have.

Contentment is also not indifference. The Stoics of Paul's day defined contentment as total indifference – the absence of feeling or emotion. No matter what happened, the response was "I don't care." – good or bad – I don't care. But Paul was deeply emotional – compassionate – even sorrowful at times – so even when he uses the same Greek word the Stoics use, they are talking about different things.

So let me give you from this passage in Philippians the **3 strands that make up the fabric of contentment.**

The first one is CONFIDENCE in God's PROVIDENCE. Look at verse 10, "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it."

Let me give you a little background. Ten years have passed since the last Philippian gift was sent to him. Ten years since he arrived in Philippi, preached the gospel there, and all that happened while he was there. He was the founder of their church, they had a love bond but for ten years there had been no support.

That was all right with Paul. He understood that. And he says I know it wasn't because you weren't concerned, it was because you lacked...what?...opportunity, the end of the verse. You just didn't have the opportunity. The word is *kairos*, it means the season. You never had a time, an opportunity, not chronological time. You never had that moment when it could happen. We don't know why that is true, we don't know why they hadn't done it. We don't know whether it was their poverty, or whether it was the fact that they didn't know what Paul's needs were or couldn't locate Paul. But for some reason they had not sent to him any support for well nigh ten years and he simply says to them...you didn't have an opportunity to do that. I don't hold that against you.

He says, "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me." That's a beautiful word, that word "renewed," it's a horticultural term that means to bloom again. Your love has flowered again. Your love has bloomed again. It's always been there but it just didn't have an opportunity to bloom because blooms are seasonal and you haven't had the season.

You say, "What's the point?" The point is this, the Apostle Paul had a patient confidence in God's sovereign providence.

The reason this man was content was because **he knew that the times and the seasons and the opportunities of life were controlled by a SOVEREIGN God.** And until you learn that you will never be content, until you come to the place in your life where you understand that God is sovereign and is ordering everything for His own holy purposes, and is working all things after the counsel of His own

will and is making all things work together for good, until you understand that you will always be discontent because you will take on the responsibility to organize and order your own life and you will frustrate yourself if you can't control everything.

If I believe that God is sovereign, and He is, if I believe that God orders all circumstances to accomplish His own holy purpose, and He does, then I can be content in anything because everything is under control. **Discontent comes when we want to CONTROL everything.** That usually is a direct result of a failure to understand that everything is already under control and somebody better than you is running it. God. See, Paul was fully confident that God was in charge and would order the events to meet his needs.

I'm using the word providence – but that's a church word – so do me a favor and turn to someone next to you & tell them what the word providence means to you.

Usually it means – God provides. But it really means more than that, it means that **He orchestrates EVERYTHING to accomplish HIS purpose.** Now let me show you what it means by contrast. There are two ways that God can act in the world. One is by miracle, two is by providence. What is a miracle? Here you have the flow of natural life, the natural course of things, God just walls up both sides, stops the flow and injects a miracle. It has no natural explanation. It has nothing to do with what is normal. He raises someone from the dead. He heals someone. God can intervene in history, stop the flow of normal history, do a miracle. And then set the flow back in motion. He stops the natural course of things, injects what is supernatural, and then let's the flow go again. That's a miracle, an invasion of the natural that causes the natural to cease and be invaded by the supernatural.

Providence, secondly, the way God acts is to take all of the diverse elements of the normal and orchestrate them to accomplish His own purpose. Now which would seem to you to be the most difficult? Personally I believe that providence is a bigger miracle than a miracle. It must be easy for God to just say, "Hold it, I want to do this," and do it. Much easier than to say, "Let's see, I've got 50 billion circumstances that I've got to orchestrate to accomplish this one thing." That's providence. But when you come to understand that a sovereign God is not only sovereign by supernatural intervention, but He is sovereign by natural orchestration, you have confidence and you have contentment. The contented person is the person who knows that God is ordering everything for His own holy purpose. You're content.

It's not fatalism. It's a confidence in providence. Read the story of Joseph. One of the great stories of God's providential orchestration of circumstances to effect His own purpose. Read the story of Esther, another evidence of God's providence. Read the story of Ruth, another evidence of God's providence. And Scripture is replete with such illustrations.

This is where contentment starts. You will never know a contented heart until you believe that a sovereign God is ordering everything for your good and His glory. **And that's the difference between fatalism and contentment – believing that God works first for His GLORY and then for your GOOD.** And once you come to that conclusion and it finds its way into how you live, you will experience contentment...not until.

Believing that not only what God appoints but what he permits is in the sphere of His will. It may be for you to be full today and empty tomorrow or to abound today and be abased tomorrow. He has a reason and though He may not tell it to you, because you know it satisfies Him, you may be content. Confidence in God's providence. **The 2nd strand of contentment is INDEPENDENCE from circumstances.** Look back at the text verses 11-12:

“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.”

Wow. He was never a victim of the circumstances. He had such faith in God's promises, he knew what Jesus said. You may have to weep now, remember this in Luke 6:21, but you'll laugh later. You may have to be hungry now but you'll be full later. His eye was in the right direction, he was looking for the future glory. He never let the circumstances of this life devastate him. He had suffered greatly in the physical, greatly. And by the way, he is the worst imaginable illustration of prosperity gospel. He is the worst. I never heard anybody who advocates that ever preach on Paul. You couldn't do it. I mean, he had a miserable life. I mean, if you were trying to sell Christianity on the physical experience of Paul, you wouldn't get many takers.

Just listen to 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

25 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,

26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.

27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

This guy didn't live out any fantasy. This guy lived out a nightmare. This man knew what it was to be in difficult circumstances but he lived above them. And that is essential to contentment. How can you live above them?

Well, I think one thing he's saying is: **contentment comes not because we have CONQUERED our circumstances, or we have learned how to CHANGE our circumstances, but we have learned how to LIVE with our circumstances.** A man on one occasion was justifiably proud about his garden, until one year he found a heavy crop of dandelions appearing all over the lawn. He tried everything he had ever heard of for getting rid of them but without any success. At last he wrote to a school of agriculture giving a list of the remedies he had tried, and he ended with this appeal: 'What shall I do now?'. In due course the reply came: 'We suggest that you learn to love them'. I'm not suggesting that you love maybe what's happening to you, I'm not suggesting that you even embrace it in love, but there is a joy and contentment that transcends life's circumstances to the extent that you can learn to live with the peace of God in your heart through these circumstances.

And **how** do we do that? He just told us – we've been looking at it for the past 4 weeks:

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, 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.

9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

He's saying: 'If you want to be a man or a woman who is happy don't look for more possessions. If you want to make a man happy don't give him possessions, take away his desires!'. What are your desires? This isn't a matter of possessions, or what you have, or what you can achieve, it's a matter of desire. Augustine put it like this: 'One man may have much money on him, but no greed in him; whereas another man may have no money on him, but much greed in him'. It's nothing to do with the possessions that you have, it's whether these possessions have you! **Contentment doesn't depend on what you have or where you are, but it depends primarily on WHO you are and who you're IN.** It's not an economic quality, it is a spiritual attainment,

What we're seeing Paul boil this down to is – **if you are not satisfied with CHRIST, then you'll never be satisfied with ANYTHING.** The 1st strand of contentment is confidence in God's providence. The 2nd strand is independence from circumstances. Guess what the 3rd one is? It's not hard to see the secret of Paul's contentment as we've gone through this book.

Chapter 1 verse 21: 'For to me to live is Christ' - you remember we paraphrased that: 'As far as I'm concerned, Jesus Christ is the sum total of my life. For me, Jesus Christ is the foundation of my life, Jesus Christ is the goal of life, Jesus Christ is the fullness of life, Jesus Christ is life'. In chapter 2 what's he saying? In humility we need to have the mind of Christ. In chapter 3 what's he been saying? 'That I might know Christ, that I might fellowship in His sufferings, that I might be made conformed to His death, that I might win Christ, that I may be found in Christ'. And now he says in this chapter, verse 13 - how can I live in contentment? Three guesses at the answer: 'I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.'

That's the third strand – **Paul was SUSTAINED by DIVINE power.**

Now I believe he is talking here about the material world when he says, "I can do all things." He could have said, "I can endure all things." He uses a Greek verb, *ischuros* that means to be strong, or to have strength. He is saying, "**I am STRONG enough to go through anything because of Him who infuses HIS strength into me.**" He does not mean that I could live forever with no food. He's not talking about a miraculous provision in that sense. He doesn't mean he becomes superhuman

somehow. And it has nothing to do with performing in athletics or overcoming fears per se. What he is simply saying is **in those extremities of life where I have no more HUMAN RESOURCES, I am infused with the strength of Christ.**

Perhaps the best illustration is in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** where Paul explains that evening the midst of all his discomfort & mistreatment & suffering – there was one thing in his life – a thorn in the flesh he called it – that he longed for God to change – to take away – to fix. In fact he says he prayed 3 times begging God to remove it and God said:

“My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness.”

The Lord sent him a very important message. You can be content because there is sufficient grace and sufficient power to take care of you in spite of this problem. In other words, the Lord is saying to him, "I will cast you on Me, you can't deal with this in your own strength, you'll have to depend on Me." So Paul responds in verse 9, "Therefore I will rather boast about my weakness." Why? "That the power of Christ may dwell in me." Verse 10, "Therefore I am well...what?...content." What are you content with? "Weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak then I am strong."

You ever know anybody who had a pacemaker? It only kicks in when their heart doesn't work right? It's a sustaining power. As long as the heart functions properly, they don't need the pacemaker. If it doesn't function properly, the pacemaker takes over.

There's a sense in which we have this resource, this reservoir of spiritual power that moves into action when we have come to the end of our own resources. So he says, "I have the ability physically, materially to overcome anything because I am so infused with spiritual strength that I can do what I couldn't imagine I could do."

Boy, what a great promise...what a great promise. And that's the promise to every believer that if you will experience contentment, you will learn it when you come to the extremity of your life and learn that when you need that divine power, it's there.

Paul lays it out for us – the secret to contentment – the secret to the most sought after state of existence today – is right there –

- 1) Build your confidence in God's providence
- 2) Cultivate your independence from circumstances
- 3) Lean on the divine power that sustains you

No one is saying it is easy. But the reward is worth it. And let me tell you – listen to me – every one of you – listen to me – these truths today are some of the most crucial in all we've studied in Philippians. And I'll tell you why – actually – I'll let Jesus tell you why – look at John 16:33.

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

I am strong enough to go through anything because of Him who infuses me with His strength. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Let's pray.