

"Learn to Be Content"
(Philippians 4:10-13)

Introduction: One of the major problems in our world today is that people are just not content with what they have. We have talked a lot about how the devil communicates his ideas over the television and through the other avenues of communication. The one idea that comes across more than any other is that you should not, indeed you cannot be content with what you have; you must have something better you must have something more, and you must have it now. This is not a new idea which he has concocted for our age. We only need think about how Adam and Eve were tempted into wanting more knowledge so that they could be more like God, and how it led to their Fall; how Cain was not content with God's declaration that his sacrifice was not acceptable, but that Abel, his brother's, was, so he killed him; how Dathan, Abiram and On were not satisfied with what the Lord had given them to do in His service but wanted to intrude into the priestly office, and were destroyed; how Achan, after being warned by God not to take anything from Jericho, lusted after a bar of gold and a robe and brought God's judgment down upon his head and the heads of his whole family; or how David was not satisfied with the wives which the Lord had given him and how he lusted after the wife of another man, so that the Lord brought the sword upon his house, which never departed. Not being content with what you have is one of the key footholds that the devil has in the hearts of men. It is something that you will have to face again and again in this life, and it is something that you need to learn to deal with if you are to come through these temptations victoriously.

Paul, in our text this morning, now expresses his thankfulness and rejoicing to the Philippians because they had just sent to him a financial gift from the hand of Epaphroditus (v. 18). Paul does not in any way scold them for delaying their gift, for it was not their fault. They were concerned about Paul, and had again and again given to meet his needs when no one else would (v. 15). The problem was that they did not have the opportunity to show their love to Paul in this way. But Paul wants them to understand that whether he has their gift or not doesn't really matter that much, for he had learned an important lesson: he had learned the secret of being content with whatever his gracious Lord should bring into his life. This is what Paul is telling us about this morning, and we would all do well to learn what that secret was. So what I want you to see from this passage is,

You can learn how to be content in every circumstance when you learn to find your satisfaction in Christ.

First, I want you to see what Paul was able to endure in this life with the greatest contentment; and secondly, what the secret of that contentment was.

- I. **Paul Had Learned to Be Content in Whatever Circumstances He Had to Face.**
 - A. **Paul Assured The Philippians that He Did Not Speak to Them in this Way Because He Was Suffering from Some Lack.**
 - 1. **There was no need that the apostle was facing.**
 - a. **He said that he was not speaking to them because he**

was in want or in poverty.

- b. He was not chastising them because they had not met his needs.
 - c. It is true that they did have the obligation to meet his needs, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:14, "SO ALSO THE LORD DIRECTED THOSE WHO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL TO GET THEIR LIVING FROM THE GOSPEL."
 - d. Paul had preached the gospel among them and had the right to their support. But as he also said in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, "FOR YOU RECALL, BRETHREN, OUR LABOR AND HARDSHIP, HOW WORKING NIGHT AND DAY SO AS NOT TO BE A BURDEN TO ANY OF YOU, WE PROCLAIMED TO YOU THE GOSPEL OF GOD." It was a right that he was willing to forgo in order not to be a burden to them and to offer the gospel without charge.
2. Paul, when he did accept money, was not merely looking for others to meet his needs. Rather, he was looking to benefit them.
 - a. When you contribute to the needs of those whose labor is in the Gospel, you are helping them to fulfill their labor and are thus entitled to a part of their reward.
 - b. Paul says to them in verse 17, "NOT THAT I SEEK THE GIFT ITSELF, BUT I SEEK FOR THE PROFIT WHICH INCREASES TO YOUR ACCOUNT."
 - c. The Bible tells us that there are rewards in heaven, and that when you give here to help advance the work of the kingdom, you become sharers in the rewards of others.

B. But What I Want You to See Is that Whether He Received Their Money Or Not, Paul's Contentment Did Not Depend on His Circumstances, for He Had Learned the Secret of Contentment in Any Situation.

1. He knew how to get along with humble means.
 - a. He knew what it was like to get along without food for a while and to suffer hunger, and yet be content.
 - b. He knew what it was like to be impoverished, to be without daily necessities without grumbling.
 - c. He said in 2 Corinthians 11:27, "I HAVE BEEN IN LABOR AND HARDSHIP, THROUGH MANY SLEEPLESS NIGHTS, IN HUNGER AND THIRST, OFTEN WITHOUT FOOD, IN COLD AND EXPOSURE."
 - d. Many of us grumble when we don't get our regular meals on time, but Paul, in his labor in bringing the gospel to those in darkness, was content when he was without them.
2. He knew how to live in prosperity.
 - a. When he had plenty to eat, he could be content as well.
 - b. And when things were abounding to him in all areas, he wanted no more.
 - c. He was not as some today who even when all their needs are met and they have some left over, that they are still not happy, because it is yet possible

to have more.

- d. Some strive their whole lives to amass riches and wealth to themselves, but their end will be as the rich farmer who wanted to tear down his barns to build bigger ones because of the size of his crops. "GOD SAID TO HIM, 'YOU FOOL! THIS VERY NIGHT YOUR SOUL IS REQUIRED OF YOU; AND NOW WHO WILL OWN WHAT YOU HAVE PREPARED? SO IS THE MAN WHO LAYS UP TREASURE FOR HIMSELF, AND IS NOT RICH TOWARD GOD" (Luke 12:20).
- e. This farmer was foolish to spend his whole life trying to accumulate to himself something that he couldn't take with him. All that he earned would be enjoyed by someone else.
- f. He was also foolish because he was laying up treasure for himself and was yet a pauper before God. All of his wealth could never buy his way out of the hell to which he was headed.
- g. Paul knew that prosperity was a gift from God, but he also understood that his contentment was not dependent upon any earthly treasure.

- 3. In any and every circumstance, Paul had learned the secret of contentment, because it did not depend on his circumstances.
 - a. As we can see from what he has said, it did not depend on his outward prosperity, nor did it depend upon the absence of hunger pains.
 - b. Just as Paul told us that we may always have joy apart from the best of situations, so also we may be content in the worst of situations.

II. His Contentment Did Not Depend On His Relationship to The Things Around Him, Rather, It Depended on His Relationship with Christ.

- A. Paul Professed to Have a Source of Power Which Made Him Able to Bear All Things with Strength.
 - 1. He says, "I am strong in all things."
 - 2. There is nothing that he faced or would face which he would not be able to cope with.
 - 3. He was not just barely making it; he was not moaning and groaning, and grinning and bearing it; but he was experiencing an overwhelming victory even in the worst of situations.
- B. But This Strength Did Not Come From Himself, It Only Came From His Being United with the Source of that Strength, Who Is Christ. "I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME." Literally, "I AM STRONG IN ALL THINGS IN THE ONE WHO STRENGTHENS ME."
 - 1. It was not that Paul became so selfless that he no longer cared whether somebody treated him well or kicked him around.
 - a. There is no one who is truly selfless.
 - b. The Bible says, "FOR NO ONE EVER HATED HIS OWN FLESH, BUT NOURISHES AND CHERISHES IT, JUST AS CHRIST DOES THE CHURCH" (Eph. 5:29-30).

- c. All of us care about what happens in our lives, even when we are making the ultimate sacrifice of giving our lives for someone or something, we want to know that that sacrifice is not in vain.
 - d. It was not that Paul no longer considered his life worthless for no reason.
2. Rather, Paul's reason for living was now tied up in the One in whom is life itself.
- a. It was not because he esteemed himself and his comfort so low that he had the strength to endure all things with the utmost contentment, but that he had the hidden manna to feed on which gave him that strength.
 - b. His strength came from the same source as all of his spiritual blessings, namely, Christ.
 - c. Knowing this, Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus. He said, may the Father "GRANT YOU, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY, TO BE STRENGTHENED WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT IN THE INNER MAN; SO THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT YOU, BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE, MAY BE ABLE TO COMPREHEND WITH ALL THE SAINTS WHAT IS THE BREADTH AND LENGTH AND HEIGHT AND DEPTH, AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST WHICH SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE, THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED UP TO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DO EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANTLY BEYOND ALL THAT WE ASK OR THING, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKS WITHIN US, TO HIM BE THE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS TO ALL GENERATIONS FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN" (Eph. 3:16-21).
 - d. In Christ there is measureless power. In Christ there is fullness of love. In Christ there is lack of nothing.
 - e. Paul's contentment did not depend upon outward things such as food and wealth, for Christ was his food and all his gain. Christ was his wealth and all that he needed to satisfy himself. If he had Christ, he had the true riches, those which wouldn't fade away.
 - f. No, Paul was no masochist. He did not enjoy pain and suffering, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure, poverty and want. He was, however, able to bear up under them with contentment, because he knew that nothing that happened to him in this world could ever shake him free from the One who gave him all that he could ever want or need.
 - g. Paul found that what Christ said was true in its spiritual sense, His body is true food and His blood is true drink. In Christ, he was satisfied.

III. Uses.

- A. Have You Learned to Be Content in All of Your Circumstances?
 - 1. Many people today are not content when they are well fed and have all the money they need.

- a. There is a difference between needs and wants, and most people are not satisfied to have only their needs met.
 - b. Have you ever met one of those individuals who seems to have it all? They have the nice houses, they have the fancy cars, they have whatever they want, but it is not enough.
 - c. And yet they continue to pursue happiness in riches, and although at each successive level they don't obtain any more happiness or contentment, they still think that it is just over the next financial hurdle.
 - d. Are you content this morning with what the Lord has provided for you?
 - e. Are you children satisfied with what the Lord has provided for you through your parents? This is the way that the Lord meets your needs. If you didn't have them, you might not have anything. They give you food and clothing and a house to live in, as well as all the love and care that you need. Are you satisfied with what the Lord has given to you, or do you moan and groan all the time because it isn't exactly how you would like it?
 - f. Are the rest of you content with what you have?
 - g. Are you discontent unless you can have what you want when you want it?
2. But are you also content when in God's providence you suffer hunger and do not have enough money to meet even your daily needs?
- a. Some of you here may at one time or another had to suffer from the lack of something.
 - b. My parents tell me that during the depression there were a lot of people who did not have enough to eat.
 - c. My mother's parents often went without food so that they could feed their children all that they needed.
 - d. If you were to experience that, would you be content to not have enough?
 - e. If you had to go without food or without some other of the necessities of life, would you be able to endure it patiently?
- B. You Will Never Be Content if You Think Like the World Thinks.
1. As long as you allow the world to teach you what to think and what to be satisfied with, you will never be content.
 - a. Madison Avenue techniques are geared to make you always unhappy and unsatisfied with who you are and what you have.
 - b. They know that if they can make you feel like you're missing something, then you will spend all of your money trying to get it.
 - c. Many of you have never gotten down to the business of sorting out what motivates you, what drives you on.

- d. You have adopted wholesale the world's bill of goods, and you are often going just as fast and furious towards the same goals that the world seeks after.
 - e. But remember, if you think like the world, you will never find satisfaction.
 - f. No one in the world has ever been able to say as the apostle, "FOR I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT IN WHATEVER CIRCUMSTANCES I AM," and mean it from their heart.
 - g. Paul's contentment was so settled that he was even able to write this from a Roman prison, incarcerated for preaching the gospel.
2. And when you recognize that the real joys and pleasures are not of this world, as Paul did, but only such as Christ supplies, then you also will discover the secret manna, that meat which Jesus told His disciples that He had to eat which they knew not of.
- a. Real contentment comes from knowing the love of Christ in intimate communion with Him. It comes from being in union in Him by grace through faith.
 - b. Paul said, "BUT WHATEVER THINGS WERE GAIN TO ME, THOSE THINGS I HAVE COUNTED AS LOSS FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST. MORE THAN THAT, I COUNT ALL THINGS TO BE LOSS IN VIEW OF THE SURPASSING VALUE OF KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD, FOR WHOM I HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS, AND COUNT THEM BUT RUBBISH IN ORDER THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST" (Eph. 3:7-8).
 - c. Paul didn't mind losing everything to gain Christ. He was willing to give up everything if in doing so he would be closer to his Lord.
 - d. Have you discovered that secret of contentment that Paul knew about?
 - e. Do you find Christ to be worth more than all of the trials and tribulations that you have had to face and will ever have to face on earth?
 - f. Is Christ your pearl of great price that you have parted with all of your earthly treasures to obtain?
 - g. If He is, then you know what Paul is talking about. You have experienced the depths of His love and know that it is worth more than all the riches of the universe. You know that there is nothing in this world which will ever compare to it. And you know that the strength which this relationship brings will always be satisfying, no matter what it costs you personally.
 - h. But if you have not found Christ to be your greatest treasure this morning, if He is not what you live for and that for which you would die for, then call out to Him this morning to give you the grace to come to Him.
 - i. You cannot change your own heart. You cannot bring yourself to love that which you have no desire for. But Christ can change your heart of stone and give

to you a heart of flesh.

- j. Come to Christ and experience real fulfillment,
beyond all that the worthless treasures of this earth
could ever bring.
- k. And then you too will know real contentment that
transcends any of the things that you once thought
to be necessary for your happiness. Come to Christ
today and live. Amen.