

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Content with Much or Little.*"

On Sunday mornings we're in a series on covetousness and contentment.

In our last sermon we concluded one of the two main NT passages discussing contentment, and that's **1 Tim 6:6-10**. This morning we're going to look at the other main passage: **Phil 4:10-13**.

But first, we need to discuss God's providence, b/c we're going to see a good example of it.

The word providence comes from two Latin words:

1. Pro – meaning "before"
2. Video – meaning "to see"

God's providence is His ability to see events beforehand, and bring about the purposes He desires:

- Life is not a series of accidents or coincidences.
- Instead, God's providence rules over our affairs.

God does this through ordinary, natural circumstances...and this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: LOOK FOR GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN THE ORDINARY.

Let me give you two examples from Scripture...

Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, so they sold him into slavery when he was seventeen. He was taken to Egypt, and when he was there God used him to save the known world from famine. After twenty years of separation, Joseph's brothers visited Egypt, learned he was still alive, and were grieved over how they had treated him.

Joseph encouraged them by telling them about God's providence...

Gen 45:5 Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE LIFE (this refers to God using Joseph to save the known world from the famine).

The interesting thing is...

Joseph's brothers thought they sold Joseph into slavery, but Joseph said God sent him to Egypt.

Listen to what else he said...

Gen 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Joseph let his brothers know that even though they had done something terrible to him, God used it for good.

Not only did his brothers mistreat him, so did:

- Potiphar's wife who falsely accused him, and got him thrown in prison
- The cupbearer he met in prison who was supposed to remember him when he was released...but he didn't, which left Joseph in prison longer
- Many people mistreated Joseph
- He experienced difficult trials

But God worked all of it out for good.

In the New Testament Paul explained it like this...

Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

This is the providence of God: His hand ruling the affairs of our lives to bring about the ends He knows are best.

Here's another example...

David fled from Saul and went to live w/ the Philistines, specifically w/ Achish, the grandson of the king of Gath, one of the Philistine's chief cities. He deceived Achish so well that when the Philistines lined up to fight against Israel in battle, Achish brought David w/ him!

David found himself in an impossible situation, and one I'm sure he didn't expect when he first fled to live in Philistia. He's the anointed king of Israel, but he's lined up w/ the Philistines to fight God's people!

So what is he going to do?

- Is he going to fight against Israel...the people he's later supposed to rule over?
- Or is he going to reveal himself as a traitor...and probably get himself and all of his men and their families killed?

We don't know what David would've done, b/c of God's providence!

God had some Philistine commanders recognize David and his men and say, "What are these Hebrews doing here? Get them out of here, before they betray us in the middle of the battle!"

So David and his men were sent home.

You heard an example of God's providence in Pastor Nathan's sermon last Sunday. If you haven't heard it, I'd encourage you to listen.

He talked about a time in their family when they were in a desperate situation financially. They didn't have the money they needed for a number of bills, including the rent, which was due before

Nathan was paid again. While he praying about the situation, Jill got the mail and received a surprise check for the money they needed.

One thing I want you to notice about these examples – and there are plenty more I could give you – is God worked through very ordinary circumstances:

- There's nothing extraordinary about Joseph's brothers mistreating him, Potiphar's wife falsely accusing him, and the cupbearer forgetting him
- There's nothing miraculous about Philistine commanders recognizing David
- There's nothing supernatural about getting a check in the mailbox

But God was working in these ordinary details to bring about the ends He desired...and that's His providence.

You might be wondering why I'm stressing that God's providence doesn't involve the supernatural...

The reason is that God works through the natural, ordinary circumstances of our lives, so if you only look for God's providence in the supernatural, you'll miss the ways He's working in your life!

For example, if you're only looking for the miraculous:

- When that person calls you at the right time to give you the encouragement you need, you're not going to recognize that as God's providence
- When you didn't get that job you applied for so God could give you a different job, you're not going to see God's providence
- When you go through that trial and:
 - You learn a lot...
 - You grow a lot...
 - You use what you learned to encourage others...
 - You're not going to see God's providence

So my encouragement would be to trust God working through the ordinary, circumstances of your life.

Let me show you another example of God's providence, but first, here's the background for it...

The Apostle Paul is in prison in Rome for two years:

- He's probably incarcerated in some small apartment, that would be more like a cell
- **Acts 28:16** says a soldier was guarding him
- **Acts 28:30** says he could receive visitors, but otherwise he was isolated b/c he couldn't move around or socialize
- He lost the freedom to work and minister at the capacity that he did previously.
- He's living on very little
- He's anticipating a trial before Nero, which could result in his execution

- FB Meyer wrote, “*Deprived of every comfort, and cast as a lonely man on the shores of the great strange metropolis with every movement of his hand clanking a [chain] and nothing before him but the lion’s mouth or the sword.*”

But in the middle of this difficult season, God’s providence was at work!

The Philippians heard of Paul’s imprisonment, so they helped meet his needs. Just like Pastor Nathan received a gift at the right time, Paul received a gift too.

Look at **verse 10**...

Phil 4:10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Based on **verses 15-16** we know the Philippians had helped earlier when he was in Thessalonica...

Phil 4:15 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. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

So they helped him earlier, but they’d been unable to do so again...they **had no opportunity**.

They were concerned for Paul and wanted to help, but they couldn’t help until God opened the door for them. This is how His providence works.

Paul expresses his joy and gratitude toward them b/c of their generous gift and concern for him...but he does something else too. Look at **verse 11**...

Phil 4:11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 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 and hunger, abundance and need.

Paul wanted to communicate two things:

1. First, he wanted to communicate his appreciation for their gift and concern.
2. But he also wanted to let them know he didn’t need it!
 - It’s not that he wasn’t needy. He was!
 - It’s just that he had learned to be content.

So Paul wasn’t rejoicing b/c he was so miserable and if they didn’t come to his rescue, he wouldn’t have made it:

- His rejoicing isn’t caused by feelings of relief: “Oh, now I can finally live better!”
- Instead, he was rejoicing b/c of their love for him.

So he says...

“Thank you so much. Your gift means the world to me. I rejoice over it and over your love for me...but I would’ve been okay without it, **for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.**”

This isn’t how people typically respond to gifts!

Imagine saying this the next time you get something nice from someone 😊.

So why did Paul respond this way?

He wanted them to know his contentment didn’t depend on their gift!

In **verse 12** notice the words **in any and every circumstance**.

These words describe Paul’s contentment no matter what happened in his life, whether:

- He had a lot or a little
- He experienced poverty or prosperity

Notice Paul used a lot of words to say he can be content whether things are good or bad:

- To describe when things are good, he used the words **abound, plenty, and abundance**.
- To describe when things are bad, he used the words **being in need, brought low, hunger, and need** (again).

He’s content whether things are good or bad...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: WE MISTAKENLY ASSOCIATE CONTENTMENT WITH (PART 1) HAPPINESS.

This is important to understand, b/c I think sometimes when we think of contentment, we associate it w/ happiness.

For example, imagine people:

- Are sitting on a beach...
- Or they get a promotion at work...
- Or they have a child...
- Or they see a long-lost friend...
- Or they receive encouraging medical test results...

And they say, “I’m so content right now.”

What they really mean is, “I’m so happy right now,” b/c happiness does depend on circumstances.

They’re happy **BECAUSE**:

- They’re on a beach...
- They received a promotion...

- They had a child...
- They saw a friend...
- The test results are good...

If they weren't experiencing these things, they wouldn't be happy.

Contentment is practically the opposite of this!

It means regardless of whether:

- You're on a beach
- You receive a promotion
- You have a child
- You see a friend
- You receive encouraging test results

You're content.

The other mistake we often make w/ contentment...

LESSON 2: WE MISTAKENLY ASSOCIATE CONTENTMENT WITH (PART II) THE ABSENCE OF TRIALS.

The other mistake is we think contentment means not suffering.

The problem w/ this is if contentment means the absence of suffering, nobody can ever be content, b/c:

- We live in a fallen world
- Trials and tribulations are part of this life
- We will never be completely free from problems and pain.

So now imagine something else...

- You're not on a beach...you're in a hot, stuffy car and the air-conditioning isn't working...
- You didn't get the promotion...you lost your job...
- You didn't have a child...you experienced a miscarriage...
- You didn't get blessed by a friend...a friend betrayed you...
- The test results weren't encouraging...they were terrifying...

You wouldn't say, "Oh, I'm so happy right now."

But here's the thing...

You don't have to say, "I'm so happy right now."

The bible doesn't command us to be happy.

But what does it command?

It commands us to be content...which brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: CONTENTMENT IS A CHOICE.

Unfortunately:

- We think of contentment as a feeling or emotion, sort of like we think of happiness and sorrow.
- But Scripture presents contentment—like it presents love—as a choice.
- We choose to be content:
 - Just like husbands choose to love their wives
 - Just like wives choose to respect their husbands
 - Just like children choose to honor their parents

A few years ago I shared w/ you about Horatio Spafford...

He was a devout Christian who lived from 1828 to 1888. He was a wealthy Chicago lawyer with a thriving legal practice, a beautiful home, a wife, four daughters and a son. At the height of his financial and professional success, He and his wife lost their son to pneumonia. Later that same year the Great Chicago Fire destroyed almost every real estate investment Horatio had.

Two years later he wanted to give his wife, daughters, and himself a time to recover following the tragedies they experienced. So he decided they would take a vacation in England where he could visit his friend D.L. Moody and listen to him preach.

Horatio was delayed because of business, so he sent his wife and four young daughters ahead, letting them know he would take a different ship and join them later.

A few days later, on November 22, 1873, Horatio received the news that the ship his wife and daughters were on was struck by another vessel and 226 of the people aboard lost their lives, including Horatio's daughters. Only his wife survived.

He sailed to England to see his grieving wife, and as he made the trip – including traveling over the location where his daughters drowned – he wrote the hymn, “It Is Well with My Soul.”

Let me tell you two things he couldn't say:

- He couldn't say he was happy
- He couldn't say his life was absent of trials...

But...

He could say he was content...

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;*

WHATEVER MY LOT (which mean **in any and every circumstance**), *Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.*

The words, “whatever my lot,” are a good way to describe contentment. It means, “*Whatever is happening in my life, whether good or bad, whether abasing or abounding, I can be content.*”

You could say...

“But doesn’t the Bible tell us to have joy during trials? Doesn’t that mean being happy?”

No it doesn’t. Listen to the way the verse is worded...

Jam 1:2 COUNT IT ALL JOY, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

This doesn’t mean we should feel happy during trials – or when we’re **in need, brought low, or hungry** – b/c that’s the opposite of how we feel when we’re suffering.

Instead it says **count** – or some translations **consider** or **reckon** – **it all joy** b/c we must view trials the opposite of the way they make us feel:

- They make us feel sorrow and sadness, so we can’t go by the way we feel.
- We must choose to view them with joy, b/c we trust God wants to do good through them.

The word for **count** or **reckon** is *hēgeomai* (pr: hay-gay-uh-mi), and it means, “*to lead, go before, rule, command, have authority over.*”

Here are a few places it’s used:

- **Matt 2:6 Bethlehem...out of you shall come a Ruler** (this is *hēgeomai*) **Who will shepherd My people Israel.**
- **Acts 7:10 [Pharaoh] made [Moses] governor** (this is *hēgeomai*) **over Egypt.**
- **Heb 13:17 Obey those who rule** (this is *hēgeomai*) **over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.**

I know it sounds odd for the word for **count** or **reckon** to be translated as **ruler, governor, or rule**, but it’s b/c:

- We must be in charge when it comes to trials
- It doesn’t mean we can change them, but we can be in charge of the way we view them.

Horatio couldn’t control:

- His son dying from pneumonia
- His business burning down
- His daughters drowning

But he could control how he viewed these trials...and he chose to say, “It is well w/ my soul.”

And I mention al. this, b/c it’s the same w/ contentment;

- Just like we choose to view trials w/ joy
- We choose to be content...or we choose to be discontent.

There's one part of these verses that might seem odd to you – I know it seemed odd to me – and it's when Paul talks about learning to be content...when things are going well for him:

- We expect him to say he learned to be content when things were bad – when he's **brought low** and facing **hunger and need** – b/c that's when all of us must learn to be content.
- But he also said he learned to be content when things were good: when he [**abounded**] and when he [**faced**] **plenty and [there was] abundance**.
 - Who has to learn to be content when they're prospering?
 - Why would Paul have to learn to be content when things are good?

The answer brings us to Lesson 4...

LESSON 4: WE MUST REMAIN CONTENT IN CHRIST WHEN PROSPERING.

Let me briefly remind you what contentment is...

The Greek word for **content** is *autarkeia* (pr: ows-tark-eye-uh), and it means, “A *condition of life in which no aid or support is needed; sufficient.*”

You've heard me mention this word before, b/c:

- It's the word for content in **Phil 4:11** when Paul says he's **learned to be content**.
- It's the word for contentment in **1 Tim 6:6** when Paul says **godliness with contentment is great gain**.

It's also used in **2 Cor 9:8**, which we looked at a couple weeks ago...

2 Cor 9:8 God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency (this is *autarkeia*; the ESV has a footnote that it also means “contentment”) **in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.**

The reason **contentment** and **sufficiency** are translated w/ the same word is they're synonyms...

If you're content or sufficient

- You have what you need
- You don't need anything else

A good way to think about this is we're content b/c we're sufficient in Christ.

Listen to the way the Amplified words it...

Phil 4:11 Not that I speak from [any personal] need, for I have learned to be content [and SELF-SUFFICIENT THROUGH CHRIST, satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or uneasy] regardless of my circumstances.

In other words, if you have Christ:

- You're sufficient
- You have what you need to be content

But here's the danger...

When we're prospering, or when we're **[abounding], facing plenty and [there's] abundance:**

- We forget that we need Christ!
- We feel sufficient WITHOUT Him.

Our contentment and sufficiency are misplaced...

We place it in:

- What we have
- How we feel
- Or in our health
- Or in our finances

Instead of placing it in who we are in Christ.

The times when people suffer are often the most religious times in their lives.

- People might never have prayed, but when things get bad enough even the most unspiritual people become spiritual.
- They say there are no atheists in foxholes.

It's easy to be spiritual in the valleys. The hilltops is when it's dangerous.

Warren Wiersbe said, "*Prosperity (or abounding) has done more damage to believers than adversity.*"

Let me give you some Scriptural examples of this...

Arguably, one of the two best churches in the NT was the Thessalonian church. I say that, b/c Paul had no criticisms of them. If there's any NT church we want to be like, it's this one.

Listen to what Paul says...

2 Thes 1:3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Paul applauds them for having faith and love that's growing and abounding.

And he says why that's the case in the next verse...

2 Thes 1:4 Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in ALL YOUR PERSECUTIONS AND IN THE AFFLICTIONS THAT YOU ARE ENDURING.

The suffering they experienced produced this growth, and pressed them into Christ. They were content and sufficient w/ Him...b/c they didn't have much else!

Corrie Ten Boom famously said...

"You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have."

If the Thessalonian church is the church we want to be like, the Laodicean church is the church we don't want to be like.

Listen to what Jesus said they said about themselves...

Rev 3:17a For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,

They were [**prospering**]. They had everything. They needed **nothing**. Sadly, not even Christ.

Rev 3:17b not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

This is what they were like spiritually, which reveals how far they were from the Lord.

Let me show you some verses in **Pro 30**. We won't turn back to Phil.

Pro 30:7 Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:

Pretty straightforward: the author is making two requests. First...

Pro 30:8a Remove far from me falsehood and lying;

We say, *"Yup, make sense, he wants falsehood and lying taken from him."*

Then he says...

Pro 30:8b give me neither poverty

Again, we say, *"Yup, makes sense, he doesn't want to be poor."*

But then he also says...

Pro 30:8c nor riches;

He also asked to have **riches** taken from him! What is that all about? Who doesn't want riches?

I'll tell you who doesn't want riches: people who think riches will lead them away from the Lord!

Listen to this...

Pro 30:8d feed me with the food that is needful for me,

In other words, *“Give me just what I need. No more, no less. Give me my daily bread. Not too much, not too little.”*

And this is why...

Pro 30:9 lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

The danger of having too little is obvious:

- You might steal to get what you want
- You might get upset w/ God b/c He hasn't given you more

But he also listed the problem w/ having too much:

- You might forget the Lord
- You might feel content or sufficient w/o Him

This is why we need to learn to be content when we're prospering – we need to find our sufficiency in Him – b/c that's when we're most likely to think we don't need Him.

Contrast this man in Proverbs w/ the Apostle Paul:

- This man says, “If I have much or little there could be problems.”
- Paul says, “Whether I have much or little I've learned to be content...there won't be a problem either way.”

Next week we'll talk about HOW Paul learned to be content, and how we can learn to be content, but let me close by asking...

Which guy do you want to be?

- The guy whose contentment depends on how much or little he has?
- Or the Apostle Paul whose contentment didn't depend on his circumstances?

We don't want our contentment depending on our circumstances, b/c they change constantly. We want our contentment depending on something – or Someone – unchanging, and that's Christ, who according **Heb 13:8 is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

Let's pray.