

Philippians 4:10–23 (NKJV)

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Do you ever look at your spouse and think, that person is not providing me with what I need? Do you look at your parents and think, they are not providing me with what I need? Do you ever look at your church leaders or church members and think, they are not providing me what I need?

Paul is going to teach us this morning how to **refigure** all of this.

And not too shockingly, we will see that viewing life properly always comes back to our **theology**. It comes back to **what we believe about God**.

Now if someone you **trusted** to provide for you, who had some **obligation** to provide for you, did not provide you with enough resources to eat, how would you regard that person? This is real. How would you think? How would you react? How would you respond the next time you saw them?

This text this morning is a very challenging one. It factors the **sovereignty of God** into all of our difficulties. Paul teaches us how to treat hardship that is created because of people's inability or unwillingness to provide that which we feel like we need.

How many times have you felt you had a **right** to provision and that you were going to claim it? I get a kick sometimes at church advertising that emphasizes

that their sermons are relevant. "Relevant preaching" they say. I find that it is very difficult to pick a passage in the Bible that does not have relevant truth. We certainly have some this morning.

Let's look at our text.

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

Look how Paul starts. But I rejoiced. Ok, Paul has been talking about dealing with anxiety. He is talking about when **hard things** come at us. How do we handle it? What should we think and do?

But here Paul inserts a "but".

And what is the "but" for? I think he is saying that what he just experienced from the Philippians, this gift he received, was **the opposite** of those things that cause anxiety. It was a **contrast** from something negative or worrisome. What he experienced is something that, all by itself, initiates happiness. It initiates rejoicing. It is like when someone says or does something that is very **encouraging** to us. There is no need to fight anxiety at that moment.

We will see later that Paul's focus is not on the gift itself, but what the gift meant **about the people who sent it**. It was **them** he was most encouraged about, not primarily about the fact that he will have funds so he **can eat**.

So Paul adds the "but" and says he rejoiced, not **contrary** to his situation but **due** to his situation. This was a very good situation.

Isn't it so good of God to provide us those **times in our lives** where our joy is the **result** of the **pleasant pleasures** that God gives us? We don't need to shy away from that. Paul didn't. You could make Paul happy. He was not impossible to please. Paul was not too spiritual to enjoy the gesture of fellowship that the Philippians sent him. It is **ok to be happy** when someone **gives you something good** because **they love you**. It is not a sin or unspiritual to **enjoy it**.

Right off the bat we have 2 good examples to follow. We have Paul's example and we have the Philippians example.

Now from all we can tell the Philippians had supported Paul very early on at various locations. But, for whatever reason, they had not sent him a penny for 10 years. Now they have.

So for the Philippians, we see that they were willing to **put their money where their mouth is** regarding Paul. It is one thing to say we are emotionally warm regarding someone's mission. We can be very much for it. Sentimentally. We can intend them to do well.

But until we pray for them, or give money or effort to them, we really have done them little good. It is like in James 2 where it says this:

[Jas 2:15-16 NKJV] 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what [does it] profit?

Do you want to measure how important someone's ministry or well being really is to you. Do you want to know how much a ministry is really worth to you? Do not weigh it by your **sentiments**. Do not measure it by the **warmth** and **sincerity** of your intentions. That is not how scripture measures it. Measure it by your **prayer**, your **effort**, and your **money**. That will weave its way down to the heart of the matter. If you are not doing something to meet the need, it really is not that important to you. To the degree that you actually do something that meets the need, that is love. That is the kind of commitment that makes a difference. And it is ok that **not everything** is important to us. But just let's not fool ourselves. We **do something** about that which **we most care about**.

There are very few things that are more deceptive to a Christian than his own intentions. We tend to give our intentions a great deal more importance than scripture does. Pure and good intentions are **necessary**. But if that is all we have, our ministry to others is spiritually bankrupt. Good intentions must be the **beginning** of an act of service, but they cannot be **the end** of it. Believe what you **do**, not what you **feel**. Our **actions** will best prove what is true about us. Do we do the work to educate ourselves on the mission? Do we pray accordingly? Do we give accordingly?

If you really want to support someone's ministry, do what the Philippians did. They sent their hard earned funds. I am sure they were also praying and it is clear they were working alongside of Paul when they could be. We may not always be able to do **all** of these things, but we can always do at least **one** of them.

So the Philippians were an excellent example of how you **support** a ministry you **believe in**. And Paul deeply appreciated their comradery.

Now let's look at Paul's example.

Paul thought the best of the Philippians. Maybe he knew the inside scoop from Epaphroditus that the people were just **looking for a chance to give** but they **could not**. Or maybe Paul just granted them the benefit of the doubt. We do not know for sure. What we do know for sure is that Paul is **thankful** for what he is receiving right now. And he believes that if they had been able to give to his ministry, they would have.

Now think about this a little.

Paul will next say:

I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Then later he calls them **necessities** that he was lacking.

We need to get this because it sets up what he says next. This is not like Paul was going **to McDonalds** instead of **Olive Garden**. It is not like he was eating **beans** instead of **steak**. Paul was temporarily starving.

We need to really **see this**. We need to put it in the real life terms in which **we** experience life. Paul is pouring out his life for the ministry. He has started churches all over the place by the sweat of his brow. He asked for very little. He was doing this ministry because he believed in what he was doing. Christ was worthy of every sacrifice.

But how in the world could Paul have ever faced his hardship without factoring in what other people were **not doing** for him. OK. We see that Paul can give the Philippians a pass because he believes they wanted to give but for whatever reason they could not.

Ok. But what about the **other churches** where he ministered? He mentions their contributions. Zero. Nada.

Now imagine this. Here you are, having poured out your **blood, sweat and tears** to minister to all these people, and they are not so much as lifting a finger to help Paul financially. And the Laodiceans were wealthy. We don't know the details of all this, but we can see at a glance what it looked like. And I doubt we have to think very long to imagine how **we** might respond to this. In fact, we can probably remember how we **have** responded to this kind of thing.

How do you respond when you think someone could be meeting your needs and we regard that person as failing because we still feel like **we need** something from them?

We started off the sermon by asking these kinds of questions.

Would we not find it easy to be **bitter**? Would we not find it easy to **blame them** for our **hardships**, blame them for **how we feel**? Would we not find it easy to **pity ourselves**? Maybe I ask these questions because it takes one to know one.

But, while even I may be able to find some things that I might call **needs** that were **unmet**, I was never left on my own **starving** by those I had been providing for. In fact, I have **never** been starving. I have only ever been **very hungry**.

Take the hardship that you have faced where you have evaluated that your needs were not being met by those who should be meeting them. Do you have that

imagined? Or remembered? Take that situation you were so upset about and multiply it ten times. That is where Paul is. How does he approach it? How does he handle it? Now we are **ready to hear** what Paul has to say. This is really the situation Paul had to face. This is Paul's school yard.

He says this next:

11 Not that I speak in regard to need

WHAT? You were **starving**. Your necessities of food, clothing and shelter were not met. What do you mean you aren't going to talk about **your need** and the **failure of others to meet it**? We will see that Paul was looking at this from a very different point of view than many would have. It isn't about the **gift** as much as the **givers of the gift**. It wasn't as much what the **resources** meant to Paul as what the **people** meant to Paul.

What would we do if that was **us**? What would we do if that was **our** need? Could we really be less than **resentful**, less than **angry**, less than **bitter** in a situation like that? Wouldn't **need** be the first thing on our discussion list? Now we are fully prepared to hear what our friend Paul has to tell us.

For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content

I have **learned**.

There is the secret to Paul's success.

Paul has gone to Paul's school for anxiety.

When he was in need he practiced his own advice. This was not a spiritual state that was **zapped** on him. He **learned** this.

When Paul did not have the things that are truly necessities, he went back to the school of the Holy Spirit to learn how to handle it.

[Phi 4:6-8 NKJV] 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things [are] noble, whatever things [are] just, whatever things [are] pure, whatever things [are] lovely, whatever things [are] of good report, if [there is] any virtue and if [there is] anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

That is how Paul could think about his situation accurately. Instead of tracing it back to **people** being the cause, he took it straight to God.

The assumption in verse 6 is that we are in the situation that we are in by **the hand of God**. We are here because God has a plan bigger than ours for our good and for the good of every believer. So while Paul may have suffered due to

believers not loving him as they should have. (That was likely a reality.) Paul did not factor that in as the **final cause**. It all happened according to the sovereignty of God. If it was to be **solved**, Paul would ask **God** to solve it. And as you work out the reasoning, if God continues to allow the situation, there is a reason that God ordained it.

Paul **learned** this. And that reality allowed him to face his circumstances, circumstances that were surely affected by **fellow humans**, without holding them ultimately responsible for his circumstances. **God's** effect is always further reaching than **man's** effect. Nothing happens to us that does not pass through the sieve of God, sorting out everything that is not for our good.

And look what he learned.

To be content.

Now what is contentment?

Oddly enough this was a word used by Stoic philosophers. It means strong enough or possessing enough to need no aid or support. That would be an odd thing to say when you have been given a gift. Thanks a lot but I really don't need the gift you sent me.

But remember, Paul's focus is on his relationship to the **givers**, not his demand for **the gift**, and this is how he gets around to it.

But still, Paul says he is content in situations where his basic resources are lacking. What is contentment?

This is a tricky concept? Is contentment the **lack of desire to change your situation**? Is it an **acceptance** of your situation that chooses no course of action to **change** your situation? So if you are in a dead end job you dislike, does this mean you should just be content, you should just accept it and plan to make no changes? If you do not like how you are treated, do you just refuse to address it? Does contentment mean you make no effort to improve your situation?

I do not think we can assume that is what contentment means. When others did not provide for Paul, Paul did not **just accept** that. He started earning money in the secular workplace so he could meet the needs he had and those of his team.

So we cannot assume contentment means **inactivity** and complete acceptance of our situation **forever**. So what is it? What is contentment?

William Barclay says A contented Christian is the one who best knows God's sovereignty and rests in it.

The following is my current definition of contentment.

Contentment is seeing my current situation **as a result of**, and in **light of**, God's Sovereign Plan. It is trusting that the situation **I am in** at this moment is His **will**

for my life at this moment. I can fully accept this situation at this time without needing to **distrust** or find God's actions **offensive**, nor **fixate on blame** to those who contributed to my condition. While contentment does not mean that the events that led up to this situation don't require **action** on my part, nor does it mean my current situation will require no **future actions**, it does mean that I can fully trust that **in this moment** the situation I am in is **exactly** what is needed for God's purposes in my life and **I can accept it in that light**. I can have peace knowing that the **peace of God** and the **God of peace** are active in my life. We have talked often that knowing the right biblical word is good, but the ability to **define it** is necessary. We can only think clearly if we can clearly define the words we use. We have a tendency to think we understand in vague terms, but we really need to think about these core words. Can we **define** them? We could get the idea that contentment is an inactive acceptance of our life's situations. And that is not true. Contentment is seeing our current reality **in light of the sovereignty of God**. It has little to do with that which we will do next. What we will do next has to do with **the rest** of God's Word. I don't think we can confuse those two things.

While Paul was content, he also described his life passion in a way that was anything but content. He was **always** pressing on. He was **never** content where He was with Christ. He always wanted **more**. He was always running to the goal. And we also see Paul was very proactive in implementing **changes** and **corrections** to those who were under his charge. Contentment is not some **Buddhist concept** where we fatalistically accept everything in our lives. Paul's contentment never restricted his **next** faithful action. But it did restrict how he viewed **all of life's circumstances**.

And Paul **learned** that. We can bet, as driven of a person as Paul was, that this learning did not **come easy** for him. Paul's personality seems to be the kind that gets stuff done no matter what the difficulty or obstacle. Contentment would not come naturally to a type A leader like Paul. He had to **learn it** in the school of Christ. And so he did.

Note that what Paul is content in is **in his state**, his **condition**, his **situation**. And then he defines what he means. He does not say He is content when he is living in sin. He does not say he is content when he is living in rebellion. He is talking about circumstances.

Let's close with considering this:

I CAN BE CONTENT IN MY SITUATION TODAY.

Do you believe that?

I CAN BE CONTENT IN MY SITUATION TODAY.

Why don't we believe it when we don't?

I CAN BE CONTENT IN MY SITUATION TODAY.

What is worse in your situation than was in Paul's?

Do you have food, clothing and shelter? Well you are already one up on Paul's school.

There is the refrigerator quote for today. And it is true. Paul tested it for us. And look what he says. He says "I have learned".

I CAN BE CONTENT IN MY SITUATION TODAY.