

READ Philippians 4:4-7

We are quickly coming into one of the most joyous times of year...the great holiday season that is highlighted by Thanksgiving and Christmas! While I have always appreciated the season of the holidays, I must admit I have always found it somewhat curious that Thanksgiving precedes Christmas. I find this curious because it seems as if the latter almost negates the former. What I mean by this is we take time to stress our appreciation for the incredible blessings we all enjoy as citizens of this country of prosperity, but then we turn around a month later and only add to the incredible wealth that we already enjoy. It almost seems that we are only offering lip service to the idea of thankfulness for our blessings because we are turning around the next day or even Thanksgiving night and already planning out all of the newest and greatest things that we want and desire. We say we are thankful, but we never truly seem to be satisfied.

And yet, this doesn't seem to be anything new to our day and time. In fact, in 1965 the Rolling Stones released their first number one hit in the USA with the song *Satisfaction*. If you are unfamiliar with that song then here is the gist of it...the singer can't get no satisfaction. Some fifteen or so times, the singer expresses that he simply can't get no satisfaction. Whether it is in regards to the material consumeristic mindset that was even present at the time of this release or the age old struggle with finding romantic and sexual satisfaction, Mick Jagger simply couldn't find no satisfaction or contentment.

This song is a musical expression of common feelings found within men and women of all time and all places. This holiday season, we might receive a shiny new gift only to realize that the person down the road actually got the latest and greatest model that is available. This realization can easily cause us to be anything but joyous & thankful and actually lead to feelings of greed, jealousy, unhappiness, ingratitude, and even hatred for those who have received that which we want and desire. Instead of being joyous, thankful, and content with what we have, we begin to stew within ourselves and have ugly feelings towards that person who has what we want or the person who wasn't willing or able to get us that latest and greatest thing.

These feelings can also be experienced when we see the successes and achievements of others and begin to think that we ought to be the one in those positions. Or maybe we are simply unhappy where things stand in our lives from a financial or socioeconomic standpoint and we begin to become jealous and bitter people. None of these possibilities ought to surprise us since Scripture often speaks of greed, the love of material things, being constantly unsatisfied with what we have, and lack contentment in our lives as being bad practice.

"A greedy person stirs up conflict, but whoever trusts in the Lord will prosper." (Proverbs 28:25)

"The one who loves silver is never satisfied with silver, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. This too is futile." (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

"He then told them, "Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence." (Matthew 23:25)

"Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No...greedy people...will inherit God's kingdom." (I Corinthians 6:9,10)

"But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (I Timothy 6:9,10)

It should be quite obvious from this sampling of inspired texts that God expects for His people to be a people who have put greed, discontentment, and dissatisfaction with material things away from us in order to live lives that are governed and ruled by contentment with the blessings we have in this life. This is true even as we live in a world that continually shows itself as being dissatisfied in so many respects. One of the clearest texts that shows what this life is to look like is that of **Philippians 4:10-13**. We began this lesson by considering **Philippians 4:4-7** which speaks of joy, and it logically makes sense that Paul would then speak of his own contentment which allows himself to live with joy regardless of the circumstances that he might find himself in.

It is almost ironic the emphasis that Paul puts on joy and contentment in this particular letter. Based upon what is written in the text, it is almost universally agreed that Paul is suffering through an imprisonment awaiting trial during the writing of this letter. I will only speak for myself when I say that joy and contentment would probably be the last things on my mind if I were in a position where my freedoms have been taken away and the outcome of the upcoming trial could easily result in my death. And yet, here we have Paul speaking to his great attitude of contentment. How is he able to possess such an attitude? How can he be happy, joyous, and content when he is without so many of the things that, when we are without them, we often find ourselves discontent and dissatisfied? Let's explore that question together this morning, and I'll give you a little hint that it all comes back to Jesus...which really shouldn't surprise us at all if we know the Apostle Paul. Let's consider from within this letter some keys to Paul's contentment so that we too might grow in our own contentment in this constantly unsatisfied world we live in.

5 Keys To Paul's Contentment

A. His Appreciation For The Saints (1:3-11)

1. So often discontentment and dissatisfaction can be boiled down to things that self-centered in nature. I haven't gotten what I want or things didn't go my way. One of the best ways to get out of that mindset is to simply take our focus off of ourselves and think upon others. Paul does that very thing extremely early on in this letter. Instead of opening this letter by speaking of his current poor circumstances, Paul immediately shifts the focus towards his brothers and sisters and how much they mean to him. *"I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer..."*
2. Does Paul remember and appreciate them so much simply because they are friends and connect well with him, or is that joy founded upon something deeper? Let me suggest that the text makes it abundantly clear that these brothers and sisters were so dear to the heart of Paul because of the partnership they had with Paul in the Gospel. This had been a continual partnership since the very beginning of the church in Philippi as we can read of it in **Acts 17**. In fact, they were the only church that seemed to offer aid to Paul during various hardships he had experienced. **(4:15)** Paul even speaks of them wanting to aid him even when he had no need for aid. They truly loved the Apostle and sought to support his work in any way they could. That continued partnership and support created a deep appreciation within the heart of Paul that allowed for him to think upon their love for him even in a moment of distress within his own life in which he could have wallowed in discontentment.
3. Instead, Paul expresses his deep and abiding appreciation, love, and joy towards these brothers and sisters, and he even goes so far as to speak of the constant prayer that he offers for them of their growth in Christ Jesus. I'm so incredibly impressed with Paul's great mindset of finding contentment in his current circumstances, and I attribute much of that to him taking his mind off of his own struggles and thinking upon the great love, support, and partnership that he has with the beloved Philippians.

B. His Focus On The Cause Of Christ (1:12-20)

1. Following the expression of the appreciation that he has for his Philippian brothers and sisters, Paul then shifts to focus on the good that has come about from the difficulties he is currently experiencing. Again, it can be so easy to allow ourselves to become focused on that which is lacking and the negativity and allow it to lead to discontentment, but here we have Paul simply looking at the bright side of the situation. That bright side is the fact that there is Gospel progress being made in what is taking place in his imprisonment. *"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the gospel..." (1:12)*
2. The first place of progress centers around the opportunities that Paul has had to make it known to the imperial guard that he was only in this predicament because of his faith in Christ. History tells us more than likely Paul was under house arrest in Rome. He probably had a rented house he was living in, but he was under continual guard while awaiting his opportunity to stand before Caesar. This means there would have been a continual rotation of men who stood watch over Paul. We all know that this would have been more than enough of an opportunity for Paul to share Jesus with his "captive audience."

3. Additionally, Paul says his imprisonment has actually given most of the brothers in Rome the opportunity to grow in their confidence in the Lord to the point that they ***"dare even more to speak the word fearlessly."*** (1:14) Surely this confidence was a result of the example they saw in Paul as they watched him handle his difficult circumstances with such grace. Grace certainly was something Paul was able to give as he then speaks of those who were speaking of Christ from places of envy and rivalry. Paul certainly could have been upset and caused a stink over people having these poor attitudes and feelings towards him, but notice that Paul once again sees the good in an otherwise bad situation. He was simply happy that the message of Christ was being proclaimed even if it was done in a way that was meant to be harmful to him.

C. His Desire To Know Christ More Fully (3:7-14)

1. So far we have seen that Paul has learned to be content through putting his focus on his brothers and sisters and the causes of His Lord, but I want us to see that Paul really doesn't seem to have any extra time and effort to put into being discontent based upon what he writes in **3:7-14**. Directly following the laying out of his pedigree as a follower of Judaism as a Jew, Paul speaks of everything he had accomplished up to that point as being worthless...even dung. He counted all things as loss for Christ, and saw the far surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as His Lord.
2. What does it mean for him to desire to know Christ? He goes on to clarify this a bit in **3:10** when he writes, ***"My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death..."*** Instead of Paul focusing on the difficult situations and circumstances he has found himself in which could lead to discontentment, we find the Apostle focusing on his desire to grow closer and closer to Jesus. He desires to know Him in the sense of imitating Jesus's resurrection through his own resurrection from sin to new life. He desires to experience Jesus's sufferings through himself persevering through the struggles of this life. He desires to be conformed to His death in order that he might be resurrected to eternal life in the end.
3. These desires were not simply passing emotions, but these were Paul's rock solid goals in his life. He was going to make ***"every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus."*** Instead of focusing on the circumstances, Paul was going to forget what was behind and reach forward to achieving the goal and obtaining the prize made possible by God in Christ Jesus.

D. His Valuing Of His Heavenly Citizenship (3:18-21)

1. Paul had the ability to enjoy a blessing that so many of his brothers and sisters did not enjoy which was Roman citizenship. However, Paul makes it abundantly clear the citizenship he truly cherished and valued was his citizenship in heaven. Paul gets to this point by addressing the fact that there were people who were living as true enemies of the cross of Christ. Let's note that these enemies of the cross are actually defined by their discontentment and dissatisfaction. ***"Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things..."***
2. Therein lies the exact problem we are trying to avoid this morning. These enemies of the cross are focused entirely on things of this world and they can't seem to get enough of any of it. They are unsatisfied and only desire more and more to try to feed their appetite. This contrasts completely with what Paul says ought to be the mindset of disciples of Jesus. We are not focused on earthly things, but we are focused on our heavenly citizenship and eagerly wait for that time when Jesus returns, and our bodies are transformed immortally to reign with Him forever! Even though Paul had that Roman citizenship that made him one of the most privileged people in the world at that time...it mattered little to him because he was focused on that which granted eternal and not just temporary blessings.

E. Jesus Strengthening Him (4:13)

1. Going back to our foundational texts for this morning of **Philippians 4:10-13**, we must recognize that Paul gives us the root cause for why he was able to live contently in any and every circumstance... Christ. It was through the strength that Christ provided him that he knew he could endure and be successful in his divinely appointed missions and goals. He knew that his Savior would not set him out on a path and then abandon him to walk it all along. He was with him all along the way!

2. He was with him through the partnership of his brothers and sisters. He was with him as He continually brought the increase of the Gospel even in tough spots. He was with him as Paul sought to keep his head down and continually work towards that eternal goal and prize. He was with him as Paul focused on the valued citizenship that had been stamped by the shed blood of Jesus. Every single thing that Paul looked to outside of the difficult circumstances he experienced in this life could trace its way back to Jesus. We might be tempted to think the strength Jesus provides is only some sort of supernatural strength, but what if the strength He provides is actually found in these things that bring us joy, hope, and that help us to persevere? I am convinced this ought to be our understanding for He truly does strengthen us to do all things He has called us to do as His people.

Am I living a life of contentment?

A. What am I focused on in this life?

1. Where is my focus in this life? Am I one of those people who would actually fit in better with those described as enemies of the cross? Is it on the things of this life to the point that all of my time, energy, and resources are thrown into temporary things? Do I worry and fret because I'm dissatisfied and discontent with my circumstances in this life? If this is where I find myself at this moment then I need to recognize that I am living according to the world and my end will be destruction just as surely as those Paul speaks of in this text.
2. I might be in need of a serious reevaluation in my life. I might need to take a step back and get my focus where it ought to be, on the blessings that are found in Christ that keep us from being constantly discontent and dissatisfied with the shortcomings this world offers us. My focus will dictate my way of life. If I can get my focus where it needs to be then I have taken the first step in the right direction.

B. Am I willing to be content and satisfied with what Jesus offers or do I demand more?

1. That focus must be upon Jesus and what He has to offer, and what He has to offer is far beyond anything that this world has to offer. This world will only ever leave us disappointed because the evil one is bent on our destruction and not our success. Therefore, we should not be surprised when life apart from Christ constantly leaves us wanting more living constantly with feelings of discontentment.
2. Yet with Christ, we are able to live with a hope realizing even though this world leaves much to be desired...we have something promised to us far beyond our joyous comprehension. We do wait for a day when the body of our humble condition is transformed into the likeness of His glorious body. We look forward to life eternal with Jesus when we will no longer be left desiring more because we will have everything we could ever possibly need by being in the presence of our God. Friends, we must take away our focus from this dissatisfying world and find the contentment and satisfaction that Jesus graciously came to this earth to give us through faith and trust in Him.

Main Point/Conclusion: In a world never satisfied, we can find real contentment in Christ through His people, His causes, & His promises.

Let's be real, folks...this world presents itself as having so much to offer, but it is only quicksand in reality. By the world's standards nothing will ever be enough. We'll only continually desire, want, and obtain more and more, but none of it will ever be enough. Yet, in Christ...He and every blessing He gives us is more than enough to sustain us until the end when He returns. May God bless and strengthen each and every one of us in Christ to find contentment in Him when the world offers us none. May we stand out as shining lights in this dark world and draw the dissatisfied and hurting into His gracious and loving presence.