

1st November, 2020
The Secret of Contentment
Philippians 4:10-20

The first Sunday in the month is our Missions Sunday, and usually in November we participate in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted church. Millions of Christians around the world today are facing persecution for their faith in Jesus. They experience violence, imprisonment, discrimination, and even death.

International Day of Prayer (IDOP) is our chance to stand with persecuted Christians around the world, and lift up prayers to God on their behalf. This year, IDOP runs from either 1st - 7th or 6th - 13th November, and Open Doors is calling The Church in Australia to engage in the spiritual battle; to take hold of the 'divine power' we have been given in Christ.

As we stand in prayer, the Body of Christ living in the free world, with the Body of Christ living under persecution, the church will be strengthened, the gospel will advance, and light will shine in the midst of great darkness. It is in unity, and in prayer, that we can withstand the powers of darkness.

A video on the Voice of the Martyrs website introduces Jeanette from the Central African Republic. She shares how some 30,000 people have been driven from their homes. Churches and homes of Christians burned by Islamist attackers. More information for prayer is available from these websites: info@vcm.com.au or www.opendoors.org.au & bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org

The words of a Keith & Kirsty Getty song entitled, "Christ our hope in life and death" says it all for our brothers and sisters suffering because of their allegiance to Jesus.

*What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone
What is our only confidence?
That our souls to Him belong*

*Who holds our days within His hand?
What comes, apart from His command?
And what will keep us to the end?
The love of Christ, in which we stand.*

Thank you so much for generous support of our 143rd Anniversary Thanksgiving Day offering. There is a report in Update and the opportunity to participate is open until the end of November. Praise The Lord!

A deacon once said to his pastor: "*We Christians are either thermometers or thermostats*". A thermometer doesn't change anything around it. It just tells the temperature. It's always going up and down. But a thermostat regulates the room or building it is in. When you turn up the thermostat, the heater comes on and the room gets warmer.

The apostle Paul was a thermostat. Instead of having spiritual ups and downs as his situation changed, Paul went right on, doing his work and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Here in Philippians 4:10-20, Paul gives the reasons for his contentment, and gives the glory to God.

Contentment can be an elusive pursuit. We go after what we think will make us happy only to find that it didn't work; in fact, we were happier before we started the quest. It's like the story of two teardrops floating down the river of life. One teardrop said to the other, "Who are you?" "I'm a teardrop from a girl who loved a man and lost him. Who are you?" "I'm a teardrop from the girl who got him."

The lack of contentment that marks our nation is reflected in many ways. We see it in our high rate of consumer debt. We aren't content to live within our means, so we go into debt to live just a bit better than we can afford, but then we suffer anxiety from the pressure of paying all our bills.

Our discontent is reflected in our high rate of mobility. People rarely stay at the same job for more than five years. We're always on the move, looking for a better house, a better job, a better place to live and raise a family. Some of the moves are demanded by the need of a certain jobs. But some of it is fuelled by a gnawing discontent that we think will be satisfied when we find the right living situation. But we never quite get there.

Our discontent rears its head in our high divorce rate. We can't find happiness in our marriages, so we trade our mates in, only to find that the same problems reoccur.

Contentment is the state of being happy and satisfied. It isn't an excited kind of happy, it's more like a peaceful ease of mind. It's being satisfied with what you have. In this context Paul would describe it as being: "*An inner sense of rest or peace that comes from being right with God and knowing that He is in control of all that happens to us*".

It means having our focus on the kingdom of God and serving Him, not on the love of money and things. If God grants us material comforts, we can thankfully enjoy them, knowing that it all comes from His loving hand. But, also, we seek to use it for His purpose by being generous. If He takes our riches, our joy remains steady, because we are fixed on Him (see 1 Tim. 6:6-10, "Godliness with contentment is great gain...v17-19).

V10-13 Content in all Circumstances

Here is a man sitting in prison because of corrupt officials awaiting possible execution over false charges tells us how to find contentment. The answer lies buried in the midst of a thank-you note. The Philippian church had sent a financial gift to Paul the prisoner. He wants to express his heartfelt thanks, but at the same time he doesn't want to give the impression that the Lord was not sufficient for his every need. Even though he had been in a very difficult situation (4:14, "*many troubles*"), he doesn't want his donors to think that he had been discontented before the gift arrived; but he does want them to know that their generosity was truly appreciated. So, he combines his thanks with this valuable lesson on the secret for contentment.

Sometimes God supplied abundantly, and so Paul had learned how-to live-in prosperity. Most of us would like to learn that lesson! But sometimes God withheld support, and so Paul had to learn to get along with humble means. At those times, he did not grumble or panic, but submitted to the sovereign hand of God, trusting that God knew what was best for him and that He always cared for His children (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

But notice, Paul learned to be content in all conditions. It didn't come naturally to him, and it wasn't an instantaneous transformation. It is a process, something that we learn from walking with God each day. Key to this process is understanding that everything, major and minor, is under God's sovereignty. He uses all our circumstances to train us in

godliness if we submit to Him and trust Him. Our attitude in trials and our deliberate submission to His sovereignty in the trial is crucial. This is the first secret to contentment that we learn.

As a new follower of Jesus one of my favourite verses was v13 *“I can do all this/things through Christ who strengthens me”*. By “all this/things,” Paul means that he can do everything that God has called him to do in his service for His kingdom. He can obey God, he can live in holiness in thought, word, and deed. He can ask for the provisions needed to carry out the work and expect God to answer. This points to that vital, personal union with Christ that we have seen repeatedly throughout Philippians. Paul is saying that because of his living relationship of union with the living, all-sufficient Christ, he can do whatever the Lord calls him to do for His kingdom.

Take a few moments to think about how you have grown in godliness over this pandemic lockdown period. Has your prayer life increased? Or have you taken advantage of down time to read God’s Word, instead of busy, busy, busy? We still have time, this will make a huge difference in personal spiritual sensitivity, but also for our community as we focus on Jesus as Sovereign, as Saviour, and as the All Sufficient One.

v14-18 Content in Partnership

In this text there is a partnership in “Giving and receiving” This partnership has been a theme throughout the entire letter. Paul is giving in preaching the Gospel, leading churches, inspiring faithfulness, exhorting, providing an example what a disciple looks like, these are all “intangible” things, but the Philippians have received them to their benefit and growth.

The Philippians have given prayer, encouragement, continued in faithfulness AND they have given (on several occasions) financial support to sustain Paul’s ministry, while also sending him Epaphroditus to come and help him. Paul has received this partnership to his benefit and contentment. They have supported him substantially to the point he can freely say “I have received ‘full payment’ and then some! I am well supplied.” The Philippian church has actually stepped up above and beyond what any of the other churches have done. They have been consistent partners in this ministry.

Paul has, and could again be a tent maker to supply his needs but they know it’s better and more effective if he be released from that work, being supplied/supported, at a level to dedicate full time labour to and for the Gospel. Paul is thankful for their support obviously, but he is explicitly desirous of something greater than merely his provision. He cares about the growth of the church in Philippi. Not just their numeric growth but in their maturity and faithfulness in serving the cause of the Kingdom.

In about 1490 in a family of eighteen, two brothers, Albrecht & Albert Durer were struggling to become artists. They were very poor and a lot of training was involved. So, they decided that one would work and support both while the other pursued art classes. They tossed a coin and Albert won. Before leaving, Albrecht assured Albert that on his return he would help him, so that he could develop his talent. He did come back, but to his surprise Albrecht discovered the enormous price his brother paid. Hard labour had caused his slender, sensitive fingers to become stiff and twisted. They would never be able to perform the delicate brush strokes necessary in fine painting. On one occasion Albrecht found Albert kneeling, his gnarled hands folded as he prayed for his brother. Quickly the great artist sketched that scene, and from it he produced his masterpiece, “The Praying Hands”. The world is richer because of Albrecht Durer, but much credit must also go to his faithful brother and partner.

The point is, if you live for yourself and your own pleasure, you will not know God's contentment. But if you follow Paul in living to serve the Saviour, you will be content, whether you have little or much. The truth is, you will know contentment when you give generously to the Lord's work, whether to world missions, to the local church, or to meeting the needs of the poor through Christian ministries.

v19-20 Content in God's Supply

God's promise to provide for our needs covers the little things as well as the big ones. The same God who helped Elisha retrieve the borrowed axe head in II Kings 6, and who supplied flour and oil for a faithful widow in I Kings 17, will meet all our needs as well, not only the physical needs, but also the emotional, social, and spiritual needs. We worship a God who is greater than any of our problems.

"My God will supply"..... every fleeting desire? No, but He provides every need of mine and yours... These needs are spiritual and these needs are temporal. God is the one who fills our needs, because what we need most IS God. Connection with Him, life from Him. We are in need.

We have sin, we need salvation. We have shame, we need honour. We have brokenness, we need healing. We have defilement, we need to be clean. We have death looming; we need life everlasting. We have weakness, we need strength. We have complacency, we need comfort. We have anxiousness, we need peace. We have fear, we need hope. We have discontentment, we need joy. HE GIVES US ALL THIS!

How does he do this? because of His riches. Where are these riches displayed? In Christ Jesus, it says. Life with Jesus, is a life of contentment in all circumstances and in every gospel partnership because we've been given what we truly need through our life with Christ.

Conclusion

Legend has it that a wealthy merchant during Paul's day had heard about the apostle and had become so fascinated that he determined to visit him. So, when passing through Rome, he got in touch with Timothy and arranged an interview with Paul the prisoner. Stepping inside his cell, the merchant was surprised to find the apostle looking rather old and physically frail, but he felt at once the strength, the serenity, and the magnetism of this man who relied on Christ as his all in all. They talked for some time, and finally the merchant left. Outside the cell, he asked Timothy, "What's the secret of this man's power? I've never seen anything like it before." "Did you not guess?" replied Timothy. "Paul is in love." The merchant looked puzzled. "In love?" he asked. "Yes," said Timothy, "Paul is in love with Jesus Christ." The merchant looked even more bewildered. "Is that all?" he asked. Timothy smiled and replied, "That is everything." (Adapted from Leonard Griffith, "This is Living" [Abingdon], p. 149.)

That's the secret of contentment--to be captivated by Christ--as the Sovereign to whom I submit; as the Saviour whom I serve; as the Sufficient One whom I trust in every situation.

Prayer