

## You Can Be Content

Thankfulness and contentment go hand-in-hand, don't they? For how can we be thankful when we aren't content? It is interesting to watch children at this time of year. This is the time of year when all the toy companies pour out their ads and commercials. This is the time of year when the children run up to their parents, telling them that they *have* to have this toy or that gadget. They *have* to have it. When you ask them why, they can't tell you. And when you remind them of all of the toys they already have, they get angry at you. Now, imagine that when they asked you for that new toy, you told them to be thankful for what they already had. How would they respond? You see, there is no thankfulness when there is no contentment. In the words we look at this evening, Paul talks to the Christians in the church at Philippi about contentment. He tells them that he knows the secret of being content: *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

Paul was content. He let the Philippians know that there were times that he had an abundance. He had an abundance of friends, family, food and drink. But this was not one of those times. Paul was in prison. This was a time when he did not have—he did not have enough heat, shelter, friends, family, food. And yet, he could say with a clear conscience that he was content. Picture Paul there in prison. Prisons in the Roman empire were not a cushy place. When a person was put in prison, it was not the government's job to keep that person fed, clothed and heated. It was the job of the people who knew that inmate and were close to him. And if that person didn't have any friends or family to help them, he or she would die. And, to the Romans, that wasn't that bad of a conclusion. After all, then they wouldn't have to worry about overcrowding their prisons. Picture Paul in *that* sort of environment. He is very often cold. He is very often without enough food. He is very often without friends or companionship. And yet, Paul clearly tells the Philippians, and through them, us that he is content.

Who of us can say that? We feel like our lives are falling apart when our car breaks down. We feel like our lives are crushed when we lose our jobs or when we get sick. It is impossible for us to be content because we are sinful. When we lose things in our lives: our friends, our family, our jobs, our possessions we panic. And what does that show us? It shows us that we do not trust that our God will take care of us. We do not trust that he knows what he is doing. He is not smart enough or wise enough. No, he needs *us* to tell him what to do. And, even if we got everything we asked for and he did everything we told him to, would we be any more content? No. We are not content for one reason: we are sinful.

But, Paul said that he had learned the secret to being content. What is his secret? He was a sinner, just like we are. How did he learn the secret to being content—and being content in *any* and *all* circumstances? Paul tells the Philippians: *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

Literally, Paul says: *"I have strength in every situation because [God] gives me his power"*. When Paul was alone, Jesus was there to give his strength to him. When he was cold, he comforted Paul with the hope of a place where there will be no scorching sun or cold of night. When he felt oppressed and depressed about his many sins, the Holy Spirit was there to remind him that Jesus rose from the dead. As a result, all of his sins are forgiven. Through his powerful word, the LORD reminded Paul that even if he loses everything, he still has the one thing needful. He still has his Savior, Jesus.

It is hard for us to put ourselves in Paul's shoes, isn't it? Our challenge very often isn't having too little. Our challenge is having too much. Everyone of you sitting here is filthy rich by the standards of the rest of the world. But, do all the things that we have make us thankful? No. One would think that, the more we have, the more we would be thankful. But we know the truth. We know that the opposite is true. The more we have, the more we forget who gave us what we have. We are not thankful because we are not content.

But, just as our Savior was faithful to Paul and reminded him that his sins were forgiven, he does the same to us. Jesus showed Paul that the lack of things would not tear Christ's love for him away from him. And today, Christ tells us much the same. He promises that our abundance of things will not tear God's love from us. That

new car, tv, computer will never take away your sins. So, Jesus reminds us that he is the one who did this. All the friends and family we know and hang around will never take away our guilt before God and the crushing feelings. But, Jesus promises to do that. He says *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”*. And when you are alone (and there will be a time when you are all alone), then the words that Paul speaks will give you peace and contentment.

And so, you can be content. You have strength when you are alone. But, in these words we see much more. We see that we can have contentment not just when we are alone. We can also have contentment when we are together. Paul tells the Philippians: *“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need”*

Paul was reminding them of a great gift the Holy Spirit had given to them. That gift was to be content to bear and share in the sufferings of others. Paul told them that it was good to share in his troubles. The word Paul uses here (θλιψις) means to press down, to crush. And that’s what Paul was going through. He was lonely. He was depressed. He could not see what God’s word was going to do in the future. He did not have friends to come by and visit him day by day to lift him up. The Philippians knew this. And they were content. This is the great gift the Holy Spirit gave to them: to be content amid Paul’s suffering, to be content as they, in their prayers and with their gifts, suffered along with him.

This is yet another thing the Holy Spirit teaches us too. Just like the Philippians, he teaches us to be content and even rejoice in other people’s sufferings. Why do families put their parents and grandparents into nursing homes? There can be good, godly reasons for doing this. When they need more than we can give to them, then the nursing home can be a good option. But, I have met many people who are shuffled off into assisted living and nursing homes, not because they needed to be there, but because their families didn’t like to be around pain. They didn’t want to be around people who were suffering.

And in us there is that same attitude. It is tough to see the pain in their faces. It is tough to hear the pain in their complaining. It is tough to see someone who once was strong now weak and needy. But, the Holy Spirit promises to give to us what the Philippians had. He promises to give to us contentment and even joy as we suffer-along-with our fellow Christians. And after all, that’s what sympathy means, right, ‘to suffer along with’?

The Holy Spirit gives us so many great and wonderful gifts as we pray for and suffer with those who are weak, frail, and in pain. He teaches us that this world is not our home. Heaven is. He teaches us that he will never abandon us, even if we are sick, even if we are filled with pain—he will never leave us or forsake us. He teaches us to be content. And finally, he teaches us to be thankful.

And so, my brothers and sisters, be content. For when you are alone, Christ will give to you his strength. And when you are strong and healthy, he will give you contentment in another way. He will lead you to suffer with those around you. May that promise fill you with contentment and thankfulness. Amen.