

Place: Lurgan Baptist 24:5:2015

## THE JOURNEY TO JOY

Reading: Philippians 4:10-23

### 17. CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

An airplane pilot was flying over the Tennessee mountain's in the U.S.A. and pointed out a lake to his co-pilot. " *See that little lake ?*" he said. " *When I was a kid I used to sit in a rowing boat down there, fishing. Every time a plane would fly overhead, I'd look up and wish I was flying it. Now I look down and wish I was in a rowboat, fishing.*" 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.*" In a cemetery somewhere in rural England there was a grave marker with the inscription. " *She died for want of things.*" Adjacent to that marker is another which reads, " *He died trying to give them to her.*"

The lack of contentment that marks our country is seen in many ways. We see it in **the debt** that people accrue. We aren't content to live within our means, so we go into debt to better than we can afford and then we suffer anxiety from the pressure of paying of all our

bills. Our discontent is reflected in the high rate of **mobility**. People rarely stay at the same address for more than five years. We are always on the move. So many think if they move upmarket to a better house, they would be content. If they could just go to another church which caters for the needs of their family, they would be content. If they could get a new job with better prospects they would be content. Our discontent reflects its head in the **divorce rate**. We can't find happiness in our marriages, so we trade our spouses for a different model only to find that the same problems reoccur. In his book Simple Faith, Charles Swindoll cites a poem which expresses the discontent so prevalent in our society.

**It was spring  
But it was summer I wanted,  
The warm days,  
And the great outdoors**

**It was summer,  
But it was fall I wanted,  
The colourful leaves,  
And the cool, dry air**

**It was fall,  
But it was winter I wanted,  
The beautiful snow,  
And the joy of the holiday season**

**It was winter,  
But it was spring I wanted,**

**The warmth  
And the blossoming of nature**

**I was a child,  
But it was adulthood I wanted.  
The freedom,  
And the respect**

**I was 20,  
But it was 30 I wanted,  
To be mature,  
And sophisticated**

**I was middle-aged,  
But it was 20 I wanted,  
The youth,  
And the free spirit**

**I was retired,  
But it was middle age I wanted,  
The presence of mind,  
Without limitations**

**My life was over.  
But I never got what I wanted**

Does that poem describe us ? Always searching for contentment but never finding it. Always unhappy in the quest, and always affecting someone with gloom and dreariness along the way. Yet how is it, that a man imprisoned facing possible execution can say “ *I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.*” ( 4:11 ) Paul’s personal references at the

close of this letter indicate that Paul was not the victim of circumstances but the victor over circumstances. He says, “ *I can accept all things,*” ( 4:11 ) “ *I can do all things,*” ( 4:13 ) “ *I have all things,*” ( 4:18 ) Paul did not have to be pampered to be content, rather he found his contentment in the spiritual resources provided by Christ. My ... contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance. The complacent believer is unconcerned about others, while the contented Christian wants to share his blessings. Contentment is not escape from the battle, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in the midst of the battle. Do you see what Paul says, “ *I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.*” ( 4:11 ) The word “ *learned,*” means “ *learned by experience.*” Paul’s spiritual contentment was not something he had immediately after he was saved. No. Rather bit by bit, test by test, circumstance by circumstance, through the difficult experiences of life Paul learned how to be content. The word “ *content,*” actually means “ *contained,*” it’s a description of a man whose resources are within him so that he does not have to depend on substitutes without.

The Greek word means “ *self-sufficient,*” and was a favourite word of the stoic philosophers, who taught self-sufficiency. But the Christian is not sufficient in himself, he is sufficient in Christ. Because Christ lives within us we are adequate for the demands of life. In the New Testament, the Greek word for “ *contentment,*” is also translated “ *satisfied, adequate, competent, or sufficient.*” It is the word used in ( 2 Cor 12:9 ) when God told Paul, “ *My grace is*

*sufficient for thee.*” Charles Kelley defines contentment this way, “***Christian contentment is the God-given ability to be satisfied with the loving provision of God in any and every situation.***” What an amazing man Paul was. Whatever his circumstances were, Paul was content. When he was hailed enthusiastically upon his return to churches he had planted, Paul was content. When he was chained to an unsympathetic Roman soldier, Paul was content. When he was preaching to scholars in the intellectual capital of the world, Paul was content. When he was leading a runaway slave to Christ, Paul was content. When he was preaching to a king, Paul was content. When he was writing a theological masterpiece, Paul was content. When he was waiting to appear before a court that could sentence him to death, Paul was content. Paul had learned to live in complete detachment from his circumstances. Since his circumstances were all ordered by the Lord, all was well. ( Rom 8:28 ) “ *I have learned in whatsoever state I am .... content.*” Now in the closing verses of this chapter, Paul gives us three wonderful resources that make us adequate and give us contentment. The first of these resources are,

### **(1) THE PEOPLE OF GOD AROUND US**

Paul had a sufficiency because other believers contributed to his needs and he was glad to acknowledge his indebtedness to them. ( 4:10, 14, 15, 16, 18 ) Indeed one of the purposes of writing this letter was to thank them for their generosity to him. You see, Paul enunciates a principle here. The sufficiency of one Christian is related to the

generosity of another. Or the Lord uses Christian generosity to meet believer’s needs. ( 2 Cor 8:1-5 ) Now as we look at the saints at Philippi we notice that they had two outstanding traits.

#### **(a) *THEY WERE A CARING CHURCH:***

Do you see what Paul says in ( 4:10 ) ? In Paul's day people under arrest were not cared for by the state. It was up to the prisoners themselves to see that their physical needs were met. Paul had no visible means of support. He was cast wholly on the Lord and hence on the Lord’s people. The Christians in Philippi cared for Paul continually. Now it would appear that it was not always easy for this church to communicate with Paul or to care for him as they desired. Paul might have been in some inaccessible place or the Philippian church might not have had the resources at some given time, or there may have been no messenger to convey the “ *gift.*” For some unknown reason opportunity to send a “ *gift,*” had been lacking but now the situation has changed. An opportunity has opened up and this church are on their toes to grasp it. The word “ *flourished,*” means “ *to sprout, to blossom again,*” the picture is that of spring time with the buds blossoming, and the tree’s putting forth their shoots.

You see, their care for Paul has blossomed forth again. They were a caring church. But where were all the other churches during Paul’s time of need. Where were all the other Christians ? You see, here was a church that remembered. The church at Rome, were remembered for their conspicuous faith. ( Rom 1:8 )

Ephesus was remembered for its lack of love for the Saviour. ( Rev 2:4 ) Corinth was remembered for its division and moral slackness. ( 1 Cor 1:11 5:1 ) Philadelphia will be remembered for its fidelity, Laodicea for its lukewarmness. But Philippi will be remembered for its care of the Lord's servants. This church will ever be remembered for its .... ? What ?

Are we a caring church ? Are we continually mindful of the needs of God's servants ? Can they go forth from this place to serve Christ at home and abroad knowing that we'll care for them ? What about our care for those in physical need ? Do you minister to such ?

### ***(b) THEY WERE A SHARING CHURCH:***

Look in you will at ( 4:14 ) Or as another translation put's it, " *But it was right and commendable and noble of you to contribute for my needs and to share my difficulties with me.*" Will you notice,

#### **1. They shared PRACTICALLY:**

Paul talks in ( 4:18 ) about " *the things which were sent from you.*" What were these " *things,*"? Was it money to cover expenses ? Reading material ? Clothes ? Food ? ( 2 Tim 4:13 ) Whatever it was, it was practical and material.

#### **2. They shared CONTINUALLY:**

The Philippians never forgot Paul. Once he left their city, they continually gave to meet his needs as he travelled in his missionary journeys. He says in ( 4:16 ) Why does Paul say " *even in Thessalonica ?*" He's emphasising the generosity of the Philippians. How ?

Thessalonica was a wealthier city than Philippi. Nevertheless, the Philippians continued to send gift's. more than once. They did it continually.

#### **3. They shared SPIRITUALLY:**

Paul is thinking of the spiritual implications of their gift when he says, ( 4:17 ) or " *I desire the interest that is accruing to your credit.*" Paul looked upon this gift as an investment that would pay them rich spiritual dividends. For a church that is practical in its outlook will be prosperous in its living. Do you recall what the book of Proverbs says, " *The liberal soul shall be made fat.*" ( 11:25 ) Paul says, " *He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*" ( 2 Cor 9:6 ) Through this gift they were laying up treasure in heaven. One preacher used to say, " *If you want to have treasure in heaven, you'd better give some money to someone who going's there.*"

#### **4. They shared ACCEPTABLY:**

For Paul says, the things they sent were " *an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God*" ( 4:18 ) J. B. Philips, renders it like this, " *Now I have everything I want .... in fact I am rich .... such generosity is like a lovely fragrance, a sacrifice that pleases the very heart of God.*" Paul, looked on their gift as a spiritual sacrifice, laid on the altar to the glory of God. ( 1 Pet 2:5 Rom 12:1-2 Heb 13:15 Mal 1:6 )

#### **5. They shared GENEROUSLY:**

For Paul says, " *I have all and abound, I am full.*" ( 4:18 ) Now this church was poor and yet they gave

generously. ( 2 Cor 8:2 ) My .... what about your stewardship ? What about your giving ? Do you give generously or niggardly ? Cheerfully or grudgingly ? Acceptably or unacceptably ? You see, if you are lagging in your giving you are lacking in grace. Now are we a sharing church ? The story is told of a farmer renown for his generous giving. His friends could never understand how he gave so much and remained so prosperous. One day one of his friends asked, “ *we cannot understand how you give far more than any of the rest of us and yet you always seem to have plenty to give.*” “ *It’s easy to explain said the farmer, I keep shovelling into God’s bin, and God keeps shovelling back into mine and God has the bigger shovel.*” (1)

## (2) THE POWER OF GOD WITHIN US

You know, life for Paul was a roller coaster experience. At any given time he might riding along in humble means and in the next ascending to heights of prosperity, then plunging down into hunger, curving back up into being filled, diving into suffering need, shooting up into having abundance. Makes you dizzy. How did Paul do it ? The secret, he said, **is Christ**. Contentment can never be found in a safe deposit box. It can be only found in the Lord. He alone is the basis for real contentment. It was Christ who strengthened Paul. He had learned how to handle all of life’s ups and downs not in his own strength, but in Christ’s strength. He says, “ *I can do all things .... me.*” ( 4:13 ) Or “ *I have strength for all things in Christ who empowers me.*” In the days of Bloody Mary in 1553 a believer was condemned to be burned alive at the stake. When

that Christian came in sight of the stake he cried out, “ *I cannot burn, I cannot burn.*” Those who heard him thought that he intended to recant, but they misunderstood him, he felt that he needed more strength to bear the terrible ordeal that he was facing. Ho he called to God in earnest prayer and as result of this he cried out triumphantly, “ *Now I can burn, now I can burn.*” Look at old Ignatius as he is brought into the Roman circus and after facing the taunts of the Emperor and the jeers of the multitude, the lions are let loose upon him. Watch that old man as he thrusts his arm into the lion’s mouth and as his bones are cracking he says, “ **Now I begin to be a Christian.**” How was he able to face that trying situation ? Through Christ. Christ, living His life in Paul, made all the difference. My .... isn’t so east to find Christians who say “ ***I can’t,***” .... control my temper, quit those jealous thoughts, tithing my income, take on that responsibility, do that little service for the Lord. Isn’t it refreshing to meet a man who says, “ ***I can,***” .... face all situations, meet all circumstances, fulfil all responsibilities, through Christ who infuses strength into me. You see, down through the ages, God’s people have found it to be true, that there is nothing that God cannot do through His servants.

### (a) **THINK OF MOSES:**

The Lord looked down upon a nation of some two and a half million people, slaves in Egypt. He called Moses aside to reveal His glory to him at the burning bush. God said “ *Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring forth my people*

*the children of Israel out of Egypt.” ( Exod 3:10 ) For Moses **The Enemy Seemed Invincible**. Who was he to persuade Pharaoh to let Israel go ? So the excuses began to tumble forth. Do you know what it’s like ? I mean we have made them. “ *Who am I ? Lord, I have no authority, I can't speak, I am not eloquent, I can't do it.*” Do you know what the Lord said ? “ *I didn't say you were going to do it Moses, I said I was going to do it, but you will be my instrument to bring about the redemption of Israel.*” ( Exod 3:8 ) Moses was God’s instrument he could now say, “ *I can do all things .....*” My .... does the enemy seem invincible ? Has the enemy been thwarting your plans, hindering your projects, and disturbing your peace ? Don’t fear for the power of God is within you and you can overcome.*

### **(b) THINK OF JOSHUA:**

For when Moses was taken home the mantle of responsibility fell on Joshua. God told Joshua to take Jericho, what a task. For Joshua **The City Seemed Impregnable**. Joshua might said, “ *Lord I can't do it, I can't take that city.*” Do you know what God said ? “ *I didn't ask you to do it, let Me do it my way, through you.*” What happened ? Jericho was taken and Joshua could say, “ *I can do all things .....*” Are you facing a situation to which there seems no solution ? A problem to which there seems no answer ? A difficulty to which there seems no resolution. Don't fear the power of God is within you, you can do all things.

### **(c) THINK OF JEREMIAH:**

A man God separated unto Himself, to be His “ *mouthpiece,*” to a godless generation. The Lord said Jeremiah “ *I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*” ( Jer 1:5 ) But do you know what Jeremiah said, “ *Ah, Lord God ! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.*” ( Jer 1:6 ) For Jeremiah, **the Timidity he Felt Seemed Incurable**. He said, “ *Lord I can't do it.*” Do you know what the Lord said ? “ *Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee saith the Lord.*” ( Jer 1:8 ) God didn’t say to Jeremiah, “ *You do it.*” God said to Jeremiah, “ *You let Me do it through you.*” So Jeremiah could say, “ *I can do all things .....*” My .... has the Word of the Lord come to you ? Has the Lord been exercising your heart about being His servant ? How have you responded ? Have you said, “ *Not me Lord, I've no qualifications, I'm timid and reticent.*” My .... the Lord does not want you to do it. He says, “ *You let Me do it through you.*” What makes us adequate and gives us contentment. Well, we have the (1) around us and the (2) within us. But look again we have

### **(3) THE PROVISION OF GOD BEFORE US**

This promise is often taken out of context. It was given to encourage those who were sacrificial in their response to the needs of God's work. It's as if Paul is saying, “ *You have met my need and God is going to meet your need, you gave me out of your poverty, but God will supply your needs out of His glorious riches, you have filled full another's need, God will fill full your need.*” ( 4:18-19 2 Cor 9:8 ) Hudson Taylor often said, “ *When God's work is done in God's way,*

for God's glory, it will not lack for God's supply.” David Jeremiah says His promise to them was **Personal:** “ My God,” It was **Positive:** “ shall supply.” It was **Pointed:** “ all your need.” It was **Plentiful:** “ according to His riches in glory,” It was **Powerful:** “ By Christ Jesus.”

**(a) “YOUR NEED,” HOW NEEDFUL WE ARE:**

Now we shall be saved from disappointment if we see that this promise relates to our need, not our greed.

“ Your need,” my .... from the cradle to the grave we are simply a bundle of needs. We have Material Needs: for food and clothing ( Matt 6:32 ) Physical Needs: for health and strength ( Lk 9:11 ) Personal Needs: for the Word and Prayer ( Lk 10:1 ) Moral Needs for pardon and cleansing ( Jn 13:10 ) Social Needs: for friends and fellowship ( 1 Cor 12:21 ) Intellectual Needs: for discernment and wisdom. ( James 1:5 ) Needs known and unknown, now and hereafter crowd in upon us in a thousand different ways. Who is sufficient for them ?

**(b) “MY GOD,” HOW FAITHFUL HE CARES:**

Hudson Taylor’s life-story is a thrilling testimony to the faithfulness of God. Hudson Taylor had a deep experience with God that taught him not to trust in himself. He wrote to a friend, “ *It is not a striving to have faith, but looking off to the Faithful One is all we need.*” My .... there will be times when our resources may be exhausted by life's demands, but we serve One whose strength is never exhausted and whose cupboard is never bare. (a) (b)

**(c) “SHALL SUPPLY,” HOW WONDERFUL THAT IS:**

Do you see the **CERTAINTY** of this Supply: “ My God shall .... ,” Spurgeon says, “ God's supplies are surer than the Bank of England.” Do you see the **ADEQUACY** of this Supply: “ According to His glorious riches ....,” Is it possible to reckon the riches of God ? It seems that God has more than account. Well, there is (1) The Riches of His **Goodness:** ( Rom 2:4 ) (2) The Riches of His **Wisdom:** ( Rom 11:33 ) (3) The Riches of His **Grace:** ( Eph 1:7 ) (4) The Riches of His **Glory:** ( Eph 1:18 ) and He will meet our need in a manner that befits His wealth. Do you see the **RELIABILITY** of this Supply: For its “ by or in Christ Jesus.” My .... God has given us this signed cheque to provide for every genuine need that arises in our lives.

Paul says, “ I have learned in whatever so state I am therewith to be content.” ( 4:11 ) A missionary couple, who once worked on a lonely station on the border of Tibet, made these comments, “ *We do not want a radio, we are content in our far-off field, and do not need any earthly thing to help or make it possible to go on with the work, contentment is our portion.*” Are you a contented Christian ? You can be, for contentment comes from adequate resources. *You've got the People of God Around you: the Power of God Within you: the Provision of God Before you therefore be content.*

