

November 24, 2019
Thanksgiving
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Always Content

Philippians 4:10–13 (NIV84)

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² 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.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Do you know anyone whose personality changes based on what is happening in their life? If good things are happening, they are a joy to be around. They are cheerful and positive. But if something negative has happened, you just want to stay out of their way because they are grumpy and not at all fun to be around. Might it be that the person who reacts to outward situations in life like this is the one you see when you look in the mirror?

Being content is difficult in this world. But Paul found the secret of always being content. It is not much of a secret. It is the Sunday School answer. Jesus is the secret to being always content.

However, in this world it is difficult to be content. A big shopping day is happening soon. Unless you are cut off from radio, television, the internet and every form of communication, you know that Black Friday is coming. And the retailers have some deals for you. They have things to sell you that you did not even know existed. They have things to sell you that you didn't think you needed. But in the ad were lots of happy people with their new cell phone. In the ad was a driver clearly enjoying the driving experience in his new car as it hugged the curves on a mountain road. In the ad were the beautiful models with the new clothing. And suddenly the human brain figures it out. I'm missing out on the fun, the excitement the beauty. I am not content but I will be when I upgrade my phone. My car is boring but I'll be content when I get a new one. My clothing is outdated but people will notice me when I update my wardrobe. Then I'll be happy with life. Then I'll be content.

But contentment based on material things never lasts. Clothes go out of style. Cars wear out. Phones break. If our contentment is based on the stuff we have, we will be trapped in a vicious cycle of always needing something more or something different to be content. That is not true contentment.

Think back to Genesis 3. Adam and Eve had everything. They lacked nothing. God had provided food from the fruits of the garden. He provided them with a perfect home in Eden. He provided them with safety since the animals would not attack and there was no disease or death in the world. He provided Adam with a perfect wife and Eve with a perfect husband. But in that perfect home with all of their needs perfectly met, Satan acted like an evil advertiser.

Satan told them that they were missing out on something good, that there was something better for them than what God had provided. Listen to the exchange between the serpent and Eve. Satan said, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and

evil.' When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." (Genesis 3:5-6).

God told them that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would lead to death. Satan tells her that it will lead to wisdom. Eve believes Satan and desires wisdom. She was not content with all God had provided. She (and Adam) wanted more, more than perfection! Their unbelief and rejection of God's clear command in pursuit of something more brought sin and death to all people.

What are we telling our God when we complain about our lives? Maybe we complain about the food our parents buy and serve or complain that our friends have better toys, games or clothes than we do. When a child complains about what their parents provide, you are really telling God that he is doing a bad job. Or maybe we complain about our spouse or our family and therefore tell God that he has given us the wrong family. He messed up. Maybe we complain about our health and tell God that he is not doing such a great job. When we are not content we are really telling the Creator of all things that he has done a bad job of taking care of us. We are really rejecting him and turning to someone or something else to provide for us. A lack of contentment can destroy faith.

However, we have a Savior who forgives us and gives us the strength to see through the devil's lies and remain always content. Paul writes:

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 writes this letter to the Philippians from prison. He is not living in plenty. He is not well fed. He does not have freedom. He does not have a comfortable place to sleep. His quality of life is really bad. But he is content because he has Christ to strengthen him. Before Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul had everything in life. He was a Jew who had Roman citizenship. That gave him privileges in society that many other Jews did not have. Paul was a rising member of the Pharisees. These were the religious stars of the day. Other Jews revered them for their knowledge of the Law of Moses and their dedication to following every law. Paul had the respect of the people and of his own peers. He had it all.

But when we compare the Paul without Christ to the Paul who is in prison with Christ we see that the Paul without Christ had nothing. Paul in prison had everything he needed. Before the Holy Spirit brought Paul to faith in Christ, Paul was heading toward hell, the eternal prison where he would lack all good things. But with faith in Christ, Paul was assured of heaven where he will lack nothing good. Paul sat in prison with the assurance that he had been redeemed by the blood of Christ, that all of his sins had been forgiven. Paul had it all and was therefore content with any situation he found himself in this life. For Christ would strengthen him to endure it until eternal life.

The Holy Spirit has called us by the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, sanctified and will keep us in the true faith. In Christ, we have all we truly need for he has forgiven all our ingratitude, our complaining and every sin. In Christ we are part of God's family looking forward to our eternal home where the only things we will be lacking is sin, death and all evil. Instead we will have all good things in the presence of Christ. Since he is always with us, he continues to give us strength to endure all things in this world until that day. We are content with Christ.

This kind of spiritual contentment leads to thankfulness. Think of a child's prayer of thanks. They thank God for everything, for the dandelions in the yard, the butterflies, the snow, the sun, their stuffed animal, the dog, their little brother or sister, their teacher, their socks, and on and on. When we truly appreciate

what Christ has done for us, we can be content and thank the Lord for everything too. Instead of seeing what we don't have in this world, we thank the Lord for whatever he is pleased to give us because we already have all we need in Christ.

When you look at the person in the mirror each day, that person who is sometimes happy and sometimes not, sometimes thankful and sometimes not, remember what God sees when he looks at you. He sees you as his precious child. He sees you and because he is well pleased with Jesus, he is well pleased with you. He sees you and is more than content to have you in his family. He loves you with an everlasting love. He will never leave or forsake you. He is our God and we are the people of his pasture. Remind yourself of who you are in Christ and you too will have the secret of being content in any and every situation. Thanks be to our God for Christ Jesus.

Amen.