

# True Contentment

Jason Abbott

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is an ambitious and tyrannical king who rules with an iron-fist. He plays many tricks to garner more and more power for himself, and this eventually gets him into trouble with the emperor of the Greek Pantheon—the mythological deity, Zeus.

Now, in order to punish the evil king—for all his arrogance and his treachery and his greed—Zeus decrees that Sisyphus must roll a huge bolder up a giant hill; however, in a malicious trick of his own, Zeus places an enchantment on that bolder so that, just as Sisyphus reaches the top of the hill, the rock escapes from his grasp and rolls right back down to the bottom. So, Sisyphus must go after the bolder again and again and again. He's never content—always discontent. He's never at peace. This is his punishment for eternity!

And, we might laugh it off, if it were just a myth. It isn't just a myth, however. There is sadly a Sisyphus in each and every one of us—tirelessly trying to find peace, endlessly struggling to find contentment. Yet, never realizing that goal!

- **Relationships**—We all know individuals (some of whom are we) who go from relationship to relationship hoping someone will make them happy. *Romance isn't the source of peace!*
- **Riches**—When John D. Rockefeller, the abundantly wealthy industrialist, was asked by a reporter: “How much money is enough?” He answered: “Just a little bit more.”<sup>1</sup> *Wealth isn't the source of contentment!*
- **Fame**—Jim Carrey put it this way: “I think everybody should get... famous and do everything they ever dreamed, so they see that it's not the answer.”<sup>2</sup> *Acclaim isn't the source of happiness!*

This morning, as we finish-up our study in Philipians, Paul wants to teach us about true contentment. No matter what we encounter in this fallen, sinful world—

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<sup>1</sup> See [this](#) article from the *Shreveport Times*.

<sup>2</sup> Carrey has espoused this view in numerous interviews. A quick *Google* search will substantiate the quote.

whether good or bad, whether joy or pain—Paul wants us to trust in the only source of true peace, of true happiness, of true contentment.

Let's read this passage together, then we'll pray for the Lord God to teach us about the source of ultimate contentment.

### **Philippians 4:10-23**

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

<sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>21</sup> Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. <sup>22</sup> All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

<sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

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In order to open-up this passage, we're going to ask two questions of the text. (1<sup>st</sup>) We're going to ask—**What is contentment** according to Paul? There's a bunch we can learn here about what true contentment *is* and what true contentment *isn't*.

(2<sup>nd</sup>) We're going to ask—**What does contentment look like** in the lives of those who've found it? We want to see some examples of true contentment.

Well, let's get started.

### **1. What is contentment (vv. 10-13)?**

Notice, friends, that contentment, according to Paul, is a learned secret (v. 12). In fact, the Greek word for “learned” is the same word from which we get instructed or disciplined. So, contentment must be disciplined into us. That's what Paul is talking about in the context of his own life. Part of his discipleship in Christ Jesus is learning, in all circumstances, to find peace.

Now, let's think about this together. How do we learn? What does it look like for us to learn something? How do we learn contentment?

Well, I think, it's fair to say that it doesn't happen overnight. And also, I think, it's fair to say that it doesn't happen alone. (I mean, we might have romantic visions of some inherently gifted child being seated before a piano and playing like Chopin or being brought to a soccer pitch and dribbling like Pelé; but, if we're being honest, we know that's not how it works.) Learning will take time and will take instruction. It's a process. And, it takes input and discipline from a knowledgeable teacher.

Friends, if you're a believer, this lifetime is your classroom, and Jesus Christ (thru the work of his Holy Spirit and thru the fellowship of his people in the church) is your master instructor. And, trusting in him throughout this often painful process, is the secret to finding contentment “in any and every situation” (v. 12).

**(I'll come back to this idea at the end of our time together.)**

I want you to notice something else here. Notice the extent of the challenge when it comes to finding contentment. It's no small challenge. Listen to the language Paul uses to describe it. He's learned to be content...

- “...whatever the circumstances” (v. 11)
- “...in any and every situation” (v. 12)
- “...whether well fed or hungry” (v. 12)
- “...whether living in plenty or in want” (v. 12)

- "...[Paul] can do all this" (v. 13)

Why am I highlighting this? Why is the *extent* of this challenge so important? Well, it's important because it pushes against our normal vision or view of things when it comes to contentment.

Normally we don't think we would need to work too hard to learn contentment when we're "well fed" and "living in plenty" (v. 12). We typically just think we need to learn to be at peace during the "hungry...in want" times (v. 12). That, however, isn't what Paul says about his contentment. In fact, paradoxically—I would argue—the most difficult times to learn *true* contentment is when we have all that we think we could ever want or need. *A false contentment is most dangerous!*

Jesus tells us a story about a rich farmer who brings in the harvest of a lifetime, so much that he must build bigger barns to hold it all. And, when he sees his harvest, the farmer imagines he's made it. He says to himself: *I have enough grain for years. I'm going to take life easy. I'm going to eat and drink and be happy* (Luke 12:19). The farmer believes he's found contentment in prosperity. Jesus, however, warns us against taking such a view. He tells us that, even that night, the man was confronted with his mortality and the foolishness of his thinking about peace.

Our Lord teaches us that this is what's in store for those who seek contentment in the possessions and pleasures of this life...but *not* in the Lord God (Luke 12:21). Jesus warns that finding a false contentment is a most dangerous thing.

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Before we move on, I want to take a few moments to address a common error that's made all too often when it comes to verse thirteen of today's passage.

You've doubtlessly been on *Pinterest* or in someone's office or near a fridge in someone's home and seen Philippians 4:13 scrolled across some poster or magnet: ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*** It may be the most quoted of all Bible verses today—or, maybe I should say the most *misquoted* of all passages. You see, it's rarely kept in its context. (And, any text without its context is a pretext to say whatever it is you want to say!)

And, if we keep verse thirteen in its context, what it most certainly isn't saying is that you can do anything in Christ—you aren't always going to succeed in Christ. Rather, what the verse is saying is that you can be always content or always satisfied in Christ...*most especially when you don't succeed or can't do anything!*

Instead of being a verse we share with friends and family to encourage them that, no matter the odds, they can be victorious, we should be sharing it with them whenever they lose. You can be contented when you fail because Jesus loves you. You can be at peace when you're being attacked because the Lord of the universe is on your side. That's what the "all things" means here.

*In all contexts and in all situations, you can find satisfaction and contentment and peace in Jesus Christ.* That's the message. That's good news.

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Well, we need to move now to our second question.

## **2. What does contentment look like (vv. 14-20)?**

Look again at the last section of today's text. Paul says this to the congregation of believers at Philippi.

*Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 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; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen (vv. 14-20).*

Here, the apostle is commending these believers for how they've treated him in the past—how they've been generous towards him. They've given to support him, and they're now giving more to support the apostle. They're a most generous people.

Moreover, by giving like this, Paul tells us that they're sharing his troubles (v. 14). They're bearing his cross with him.

But, from where does such generosity come? What makes someone capable of sharing someone's burden or walking into his or her difficulty?

The answer is the contentment or peace of Christ Jesus.

Friends, when Jesus is our all and all, our Lord is of the utmost value to us, we'll freely give our finances and our time and our talents without the least concern. When Christ is our treasure, we will want to give our lives generously to serve him. The Philippians are an example of this.

And, friends, when Christ is our Savior King, when we see him as the Rescuer, then we'll want to support and love others whom we find in very desperate situations. We'll not be content to watch others shoulder a burden alone, but we'll eagerly enter into their suffering and pain to help. Again, the Philippians are an example of this. They aren't seeking the pleasures of this life for contentment.

Brothers and sisters, the secret of contentment is Christ—finding our all in all in him and being satisfied in him—*his grace is sufficient!* You could lose everything and suffer and die and still be confident and contented, because *his grace is enough* for you and for me!

This is the secret of contentment, and the church is to be the prime example. You and I are to be the witnesses to this in a very discontented and dissatisfied world. That's our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

But, how do we do this “in any and every situation”? I told you I'd come-back to this question at the end, and here we are.

Look, friends, this has been a sermon series on developing the mind of Christ. We've been attempting to cultivate a Christlike way of seeing and valuing the world over the last number weeks. And so, I think it's appropriate that we'd end our study by considering our worldview when it comes to this question.

What are your expectations for this life? To usually be satisfied and content? To live-out the American dream? To live long and prosper through your entire life—*complete with a happy ending?* Who taught you this was possible?

If the Bible is true, then this line of thinking is certain to completely frustrate and discourage you. We follow a Savior who lived his entire life with the expectation of shame, persecution, and death before him. Despite what prosperity preachers say, I can't think of a single man or woman in Scripture who was even normally happy and healthy during the course of his or her life.

Are you discontent? Well, maybe your expectations aren't biblical.

Do you want contentment "in any and every situation"? Then, stop looking and hoping for contentment from the situations or the circumstances of this lifetime. You're aliens here. You're travelers here. This place is not your home. Set your sites on what's to come—a new heaven, a new earth, a new you...*in Christ*.

If, friends, you want contentment, then fix your "...eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of [your] faith. [Who for]...the joy set before him...endured the cross, scorning its shame, and [is now seated] at the right hand...of God" (Hebrews 12:2). He reigns in unspeakable glory.

And, when Jesus comes to you, there will be peace and joy and contentment—for you and for creation—without end. Amen.