



Philippians 4:10-20

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I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be

brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

“Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” I would venture to guess that some of you have heard those famous words before. They were spoken by the great, Yankees first baseman Lou Gehrig during his retirement ceremony. He *had been* baseball’s iron man, playing 2,130 straight games all in the Yankee pinstripes, and yet, he was forced into retirement shortly into the 1939 MLB season due to his diagnosis of ALS, also now commonly referred to as “Lou Gehrig’s Disease.” He would die only two years later, and everyone knew that day was coming soon, yet he still said, “Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.”

It's rather shocking to hear those words coming from his mouth when you know what he was going through. I'm not sure how he summoned the strength to say those words. Maybe he was just *saying* them, I don't know. I *do* know, however, of another man who gave a very similar testimony after suffering other many terrible things. That was the Apostle Paul.

Paul wrote the book we call Philippians as a letter to the Church at Philippi, a letter which has been called “The Letter of Joy.” The recurring theme throughout the book is also found in the first verse of our text: “Rejoice in the Lord!” Perhaps it’s a bit surprising then to learn that Paul wrote this letter, overflowing with joy as it is, while under house arrest in Rome. He’d been imprisoned there for about two years by the time of writing, chained to a Roman guard the entire time, which ought to leave us asking, “How?” How did he summon the strength to write *these* words? Was *he* just saying them? Did he really *mean* them? I know the answer, and you do too. Paul was able to rejoice, even in chains, because he knew **The Secret to Contentedness.**

Paul had done nothing wrong. He was imprisoned and awaiting trial simply for proclaiming the love that God has for sinners in Christ Jesus. For *that* he’s unable to leave his house, he’s locked in chains, he’s under *constant* watch by Roman soldiers, and he has to *pay rent* for his own house arrest! And yet he writes, ***“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*** How can he say that? How can he be so content as his world crumbles around him? What is Paul’s secret?

One tactic that people use in trying to find contentedness is to think of somebody who's worse off than they are. I think every parent has utilized that approach when dealing with a child who doesn't want to eat their food. "There are starving children around the world who would love to eat your dinner." Do you think that's what Paul did? "You know, it could always be worse, I could be in an *actual* prison cell, at least I'm only under house arrest." Do you think *that* was his secret?

No, the real **Secret to Contentedness** is what Paul found, even in His chains. *True* contentedness is centered on the cross of Jesus Christ. *It is the cross that Paul is pointing to when He says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."*

That's a favorite Bible passage for so many Christians. You frequently see athletes writing it on their eye-black, writing it on their shoes, quoting it in interviews. "***I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.***" But Paul wrote this verse not in the context of athletics or feats of strength or endurance or anything like that. He wrote these words in the context of finding true contentment *regardless* of the situation. He can be content in any situation *because of* Christ Jesus.

Would you say that describes you? Content *because of* Christ? Regardless of what's going on in your life—plenty or hunger, abundance or need—are you content? Personally, I have to say, "No." When things are rough, when the work is piling up, when the bank account is running low, when sickness is running through the house, or when physical pain strikes, I'm not feeling very content at all. And, honestly, even when the opposite is true and things *are going* my way, I still find that I'm always looking towards the next thing, not truly content, or at least not for very long.

Paul, however, was different. He had found **The Secret to Contentedness**. And it was all focused on Jesus. Notice that even in his receiving gifts from the Philippian congregation, he's not rejoicing because he finally has some more *stuff*, but rather that this group of Christians was moved by their Savior's love to support Paul's ministry. Listen to what he says: "***And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.***"

And did you notice how he describes the gift they'd sent? He said, "***I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied.***" Which, again, is just so shocking when you consider where he's writing from. "Paul! Well supplied? Full payment? You're locked up! You don't have anything!" And yet Paul rejoices, because he knows what Christ has done for him. It's just like Noah, when Noah finally stepped off the ark onto a world that had been forever changed, destruction being seen everywhere he looked. And yet, what is the first thing he did? He made a sacrifice to the Lord and sang praises to God. Even in those circumstances, he could not deny that the Lord had shown him steadfast love.

We ought to remember the same in our day. Because we also see destruction everywhere we look in a quickly changing world. It's depressing to watch the news and discouraging to keep up with current events. The more you find out about what's going on, the easier it is to find despair rather than contentment. But when we see these things, we *can* also say, "I've read the last chapter of the book

already, and the ending is that God won!" And that victory is ours too in Christ Jesus our Savior. This is where true joy is found. Joy comes from knowing that no matter the circumstance—sickness, disease, poverty, hunger, you name it—yet we know who stands *with* us.

Think of all of the times God promises to be with us. For instance, Jesus said, ***"Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am among them."*** (Matthew 18:20) Meaning, He's right here with us now this morning. Jesus also promises, ***"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*** (Matthew 28:20) He promises the Holy Spirit is with us as well, through our baptisms: ***"According to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior."*** (Titus 3:5-6) And when we receive the Lord's Supper, Jesus also promises He is there as He says, ***"Take, eat; this is my body. . . Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*** (Matthew 26:26-28) So no matter your personal circumstances, as devastating as they may *seem*, you have the joy of knowing that the God who has written the end of the story—He is with you. And He's working *for* you.

And that's why Paul concludes our text with the reminder: ***"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."*** Now, there are those who take those words and use it to preach what we call "the prosperity gospel." It's this idea that if you give away everything you have (particularly to the preacher as is often the message) then God is going to *richly* supply you with everything you want. We know that's not what Paul's saying here when we consider that he is not rich at all. He's not very well-supplied in terms of earthly needs. He's in jail; it's as if God has *taken* everything he wants away.

But what we have to remember in this promise that ***"God will supply every need of yours,"*** is that our *opinion* of what we need and God's *knowledge* of what we need aren't always the same. It's like that song, "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, well, you might find you get what you need." The one who is with you, who is working for you, who died to forgive you, the one who has written the ending—He *always* knows what you need.

And so, we ought to receive *everything* as a gift from God. And I really mean *everything*. That's often a difficult mindset to have when you're in the midst of one of those *difficult* gifts from God. When a loved one is struck with cancer, when something horrible happens in the family, when God takes away—how can you receive those things as *gifts*? How can you be content when dealing with *that* sort of thing?

We can do so when we look at those things which *seem* like true evils and remember that we know that ***"for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*** (Romans 8:28) God can use those difficult gifts, He can take even those things that people use as evil against you, take them up in His hands, and, looking at them, He says, "I can work with that. I can do something with this."

And how many of us can look back over the course of our lives now and see those times when pure evil *looked* like it had entered into our world, and yet the Lord was able to work good from it. He brought us through and brought us closer to Himself. Even though it may be something that you'd

never wish to go through again or never wish on anyone else, yet you can recognize that “God’s plan for me was good.” Eternal good. Even when some evil may be so devastating that it’s difficult to see any good at all or understand what the point is, God is able not only to see the good and understand His plan, He’s also able to act. He alone can bring evil to good.

And we see that no where so clearly as at the foot of the cross. There, as the innocent Son of God hung on that cruel execution device, we see the greatest evil the world has ever participated in. And of course, we also see there the greatest good. There the Son of God pays for your sins and mine, He forgives us; there He *guarantees* that we have peace with God and that we have life with God after we depart this world of sorrow. He promises that we have a seat at the table. *That* is God’s plan for you. And He’s accomplished it.

So really, we see then, that it does not matter what’s going on. We’ve read the end of the story. We know where we end up. We know we will join our Savior at that eternal feast in heaven. And through every moment here, we have Jesus alongside of us working for us, supplying our every *need*. So that no matter our circumstances, we *could* say, “Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.”

Except, that it isn’t luck at all. No, it’s the love of God for a sinner like yourself, a love which He will never take away from you. Holding onto these facts, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we can find contentment too. So may God keep our focus on the cross where we will find **The Secret to Contentedness**. In Jesus’ saving name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.