~ Joy Through Contentment ~

Text: Phil 4:10-23

Theme: We can be content in Christ, no matter the circumstances we face.

Intro:

1. Verses 1-9 of the chapter contain Paul's closing challenges to the Philippians regarding the character and focus of a godly Christian.
2. Verse 10-22 contain a note a gratitude from Paul because of the financial aid sent by the Philippian Christians, along with an exhortation to be content with whatever lot God gives us, and finally Paul's closing salutation in verses 21-22.
3. These are the two subdivisions we will follow as we close out our study of this chapter.
   I. Living in Contentment (Vs 10-13)
   II. Giving and Contentment (Vs 14-23)

Main:

I. Living in Contentment (Vs 10-13)

A. Paul's Contentment in the Brethren's Care (Vs 10)

1. The Church at Philippi had sent Paul a financial gift.
   a. The Apostle Paul, as a prisoner in Rome, would likely have had no way of earning the money he needed to purchase the things he required.
      i. Although Paul was under house arrest rather than in a prison cell, he wasn't allowed to go out into the streets and ply his trade as a tent maker. This likely meant that his only source of "income" came from the generosity of the brethren.
      ii. Throughout Paul's ministry there were times when he was at least able to pay his own way through the labour of his hands, but now he finds himself totally dependent on the generosity of God's people.
         - For the missionary on the field who is unable to work a trade as well as carry out the work of the ministry, they are totally dependent on the support they receive from the churches back home.
         - This means that they have to continue in the work by faith, trusting that God will continue to supply their needs through the financial support of his people.

b. Paul rejoiced in the Lord because of the financial gift he received from the brethren at Philippi.
    i. Although it was the local church that gave Paul the money, Paul saw it as ultimately coming from the hand of God.
    ii. "The favour which Paul had received, and for which he felt so much gratitude, had been received of the Philippians; but he regarded "the Lord" as the source of it, and rejoiced in it as the expression of his kindness. The effect was to lead his heart with cheerfulness and joy up to God.[1]"

2. The church at Philippi was a giving church
    a. Paul testified that their care for him had "flourished <u>again</u>" and that they were "<u>careful</u>" in their giving.
        i. Very clearly, the church at Philippi had been giving to support Paul's ministry in the past, but something had hindered them for a time, and so their support for his work had waned.
        ii. In the end of the verse Paul makes it clear that their heart was in the right place in their desire to support him but the opportunity to do so had not arisen until now.
    b. Giving ought to be at the heart of every local church.
        i. When you look at the early church in the time of the Apostles you find that the brethren held personal possessions in very low regard. They were far more interested in giving to the work of the Lord than in accumulating wealth for themselves.
        ii. The local church is the backbone of missions work around the country and around the world.
            - If God's people don't have a heart to give to the work, then the work of God will lack supply, and the missionary will eventually come home from the field because he can't live off an empty cupboard.

B. Paul's Contentment in Christ's Strengthening (Vs 11-13)
    1. Paul had learned to be content, regardless of the circumstances.
        a. The theme we have been tracing through the book of Philippians is the theme of joy in everything, and Paul now includes the need for contentment in everything.
            i. *"Content"* comes from the Greek *autarkēs* (ow-tar'-kace) and means, "self-complacent, that is, contented.)"

[1] Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 217.

ii. I have a fairly lengthy quote here from Richar Hesters book, “New Testament Bible History Illustrated Handbook” which I believe will help you understand the cultural significance of the contentment that Paul is describing.

iii. Contentment: “It was the highest aim of Stoic ethics which they attempted to attain by destroying desire and feeling, and rooting out love and caring. The Stoics believed that this concept of contentment was reached when you had come to the point of total indifference to anything.

One ancient writer, Epictetus said, “Begin with a cup or a household utensil, if it breaks say, ‘I don’t care.’ Go on to a horse or a pet dog, if anything happens to it say, ‘I don’t care.’ Go on to yourself and if you’re injured in any way say, ‘I don’t care.’ And if you go on long enough and if you try hard enough you’ll come to a state when you can watch your nearest and dearest suffer and die and say, ‘I don’t care.’”

The Stoics magnified the contentment of indifference and extinguished feeling and emotion. Glover said, “The Stoics made of the heart a desert and called it peace.” Paul says contentment is independent of any outward circumstances, but that it only exists by a relationship of trust with Christ who would strengthen him and provide his every need.”[2]

b. For the Stoic, the way to be unmoved by circumstances, and thereby remain content, was to suppress all feelings including love and joy.

i. Paul teaches us that the way to be unmoved by my circumstances and remain content in all things is to place my confidence in someone who is, himself, unchanging. The circumstances may change, but Jesus never changes.

ii. True contentment is not found in blind, pitiless indifference. True contentment is found in the confidence that, regardless of the circumstances, I am confident that God is in control, that God will never allow anything to happen to me that isn’t for my good, and that God works all things together for the good of those who love him and are living according to his will and purposes.

2. Paul knew how to be content in both want and in abundance.

[2] New Testament Bible History Illustrated Handbook; Richard Hester; Pg 187 & 189.

a. Paul rejoiced in their giving, not because he was discontented with his circumstances, but because he saw the providential hand of God in it.
   i. Paul had been through imprisonments, beatings, stoning, poverty or abundance, and he says that he had learned in which ever state he found himself he had learned to be content.
   ii. The word “instructed” in verse 12 means “to initiate, teach, or instruct.” It means that he was being taught by the Holy Spirit through each of his circumstances.
      - When he was stoned for Christ, he learned to be content in that situation.
      - When he was imprisoned for Christ, he learned to be content in his imprisonment.
      - When he was living in comfort and good fellowship with God’s people, he was learning contentment.
   iii. Every situation he found himself in taught him more of what it was to find contentment in Christ.
b. The conclusion that he draws from this lesson in contentment is that, with Christ, he can do anything; endure anything.
   i. I can do all things, not through my own strength, not through my own effort. If my circumstances have taught me anything it is that my own strength isn’t sufficient.
   ii. The Lord Jesus Christ had taught him contentment and dependence upon Christ were the keys to true success in every situation. I can do all the things, and endure all these hardships, through Christ which strengtheneth me.

II. Giving and Contentment (Vs 14-23)

A. Paul rejoiced in the Giving of God’s People (Vs 14-18)
   1. Paul thanked the church for communicating with his affliction.
      a. Paul was encouraged by the gift they sent to him and the aid he received from Epaphroditus.
         i. The word “communicate” means, “to share company in, co-participate, that is to be a partaker of.”
            - Paul was saying that, by sending financial aid to Paul, along with Epaphroditus, the Philippian Christians were joining themselves to him and be partakers with him in his suffering.
            - When you provide help to another Christian, you first identify yourself with their struggle, and then you take the burden of responsibility for helping them in their

struggle upon yourself, and then you supply their needs as God enables. That is what it means to communicate with another person's needs.

ii. As a local church that seeks to support the work of missions it is important that we seek to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit when our missionaries have specific needs.
- When one of our missionaries says, "Our car is broken and needs to be replaced and it is going to cost us $10,000, that is an opportunity for us as supporters of the missionary to be led by the Spirit and to say, "We have $10,000 we would like to give so you can buy a new car."
- We need to be prepared to communicate with the needs of our missionaries.
- I'm thankful that the people of this church have a giving mindset. When we had excess funds in the missions account everyone voted to send it to the missionaries right away and they all received about $6,000 effectively as a Christmas gift. But we need to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading and let him increase our giving where he wants to, to meet specific needs.

iii. Just as an aside to that, we should be willing to give in the local church as well.
- I find it strange when someone buys a $10 item to meet a need in the church and immediately wants to be reimbursed. I know that money can be tight at times, but I have generally made it my practice that when I buy things for church ministries, I pay for it out of my pocket as a gift to the church.
- Now, that doesn't always have to be the case, but it is a good practice, and it is another way I can give to meet a need in the church beyond my tithe.

2. The Philippian church was alone in their giving.
   a. Paul states in verse 15 that no other churches reached out to support Paul through their giving during his missionary journey.
      i. This is typically the condition of churches today, they are not active in giving to support the work of missions, they are focused solely on their group.
         - W. L. Smith is a global evangelist who has spent over 50 years in the ministry, and he said that when a church begins to go contemporary, they soon drop their missions support.

- That is the state of most modern churches, they have dropped missionary support and their money is all spent on themselves, on their sound systems and their audio-visual systems, on their new carpark and their building renovations, on their in-church cafeteria and their gym for youth activities, and on anything but the actual proclamation of the gospel.

ii. Paul said that the Philippians even sent him financial aid while he was in another city, ministering to other people. That means they were doing missions support work!

3. The reason Paul rejoiced in their giving was because he knew that it would result in fruit abounding to their account.
   a. This is the scriptural principle of sowing a reaping.
      i. When you give of your finances to support a missionary and that missionary is winning souls to Christ, you share in the fruit of his labours because you communicated with his needs and became a co-participant in his work.
      ii. Paul then described their giving a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and well-pleasing to God.
         - You may have noticed in the Old Testament the patriarchs would offer a sacrifice to God on an altar, and it was a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God. Paul describes our giving as being our version of a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God.
         - When we give to the work of God, our giving rises into the presence of God and he is pleased with our sacrifice.
   b. It has been said that there is no difference between love and sacrifice.
      i. If you truly love someone then you will make sacrifices for them.
      ii. As a Christian, we demonstrate our love to God by the sacrifices we make through our giving to the work of God, whether the giving of finances, time, or talents.

B. Paul encouraged contentment in God's supply (Vs 19-22)
   1. Paul encouraged the Christians through his confidence that God would supply all their needs as they continued to faithfully support the work of God.
      a. Paul was confident that, just a God had supplied his needs through the financial giving of the Philippians, God would now supply the material needs of the Philippians also.
         i. The Lord always looks after his people and meets their needs according to his will and his purposes. God's work,

done in God's way and for God's glory, will never lack God's supply.

b. Understand that Paul isn't preaching prosperity gospel here.
   i. He isn't saying that, if you give to the work of God, God will make you rich. That is what the modern prosperity gospel preachers teach and the only people who get rich from that are the preachers themselves.
   ii. What Paul is saying is that, if you give to the work of God, God will meet your needs, but not necessarily your wants.
c. This supply comes out of the abundant riches of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory.
   i. That is a supply that can never fail, it is never exhausted, it is an infinite supply to meet every need.

2. Finally, Paul closes out the chapter with a typical Paulinian salutation.
   a. Paul gives glory to God the Father forever and ever.
      i. In everything, Paul had learned to rejoice and be content, and in everything Paul desired God the Father would be glorified forever.
   b. Next, Paul lists those who send their greetings to the Philippian Christians along with Paul.
      i. It is interesting to note that some of the brethren who sent greetings to the Philippians Christians were members of Ceasar Nero's household.
      ii. Even as persecution stemmed from Nero's seat of power in Rome, there were members of his own household who were Christians.
   c. Lastly, Paul gives his typical blessing, *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen."*

Conclusion:

1. Godliness with contentment is great gain. Every circumstance we face is an opportunity for us to learn how to find contentment in Christ, despite our circumstances.
2. Giving to the work of God is extremely rewarding. Not only is there an eternal reward for those who help to win souls to the Saviour, but the promise of God's supply for all our needs is a great reward for the here and now.