

Contentment is Found in Christ Alone

Jesse Barrington | 2017 Fellowship Conference

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It is a privilege to be among the redeemed of God. Thank you, Mack, last night, for that sermon brother. It was so edifying. I know that, for all of us, we don't want to be just hearers of that. We want to be doers. And I pray that each of us takes that responsibility that we saw we have in maintaining the unity in the local church. Mack loves the local church because Mack loves Jesus Christ. If we love Jesus Christ, we love the local church.

Let's open our Bibles to Philippians 4. It's a privilege to be here, to share in fellowship, to meet new brother and sisters literally from all over the world, to hear encouraging testimonies. We've already heard some. Let's pray for God's grace upon the Word and over that warning here.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we come. God, we dare not come in any other name. We do not come on our own righteousness, but His. Thank You, Father. Thank You for grace towards us. God, I thought earlier today, where would I be on a Friday afternoon apart from Your grace? Praise You, Father. Help us now. Do grant to us the Spirit of revelation and wisdom in the knowledge of Him. Open up Your Word to us. We ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

I'm going to read verses 10-20, and we'll focus on verse 11-13. *"I rejoice 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. Not that I'm speaking of being in need. For I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound in any and every circumstance. I've learned the secret of facing plenty, and hunger, and abundance, and need. I can do all things through Christ - through Him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share in my trouble. 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, and once 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 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."*

Paul's closing his letter to the church at Philippi. He's thanking them for their gift, for standing with him. He let's them know he's not asking for more. In fact, he lets them know he does not need more. And then he uses the opportunity to teach them something that Paul obviously believes is very important. He wants to teach them about contentment. And that will be our focus this morning. I say it's important to Paul, not only because he teaches it here, but he teaches it in his other letters as well. I'm sure we're all familiar when he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6 about the false teachers who looked to godliness as a means for gain; for personal profit. And he says, "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

Also the church of Corinth in 2 Corinthians 12 as well. After praying for the thorn to be removed, he

speaks and says, "My grace is sufficient for you." Speaking of the Lord. "For my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul says, "therefore, I boast all the more gladly in my weakness, so the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities, for when I am weak, then I am strong."

It's an important subject to Paul. And we know Paul, being under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this is an important subject to our Lord. Our contentment is important to the Lord.

So what is contentment? Contentment is being fully satisfied in our soul. It is an idea of complete sufficiency. It's used in reference to God and His self-sufficiency, needing nothing. You could say it's coming to a state of being that is independent of external circumstances.

In other words, it's being unmoved by external circumstances and situations because of the soul satisfaction in us. A state of soul satisfaction and sufficiency that circumstances - neither positive nor negative - can impact.

Beloved, everyone in here is seeking contentment. And so I'm going to ask right now, are you content? Are you content? We said that our contentment's important to the Lord. You may think at first, well, that sounds kind of man-centered, doesn't it? And if Paul or the Lord were speaking about contentment in and of itself, as an end to itself, that would be man-centered.

So we have to ask, where is Paul pointing us to for contentment? Because that's the critical piece. Everyone in here is seeking contentment even right now. The question we have to ask is what is our source, or what is the object of our contentment. And that's really the question we'll be asking through the text today. I went back through the whole book of Philippians as I studied through this. I just noted key passages in various chapters. Let me read them to you and see if you can come to a common theme where Paul is pointing the church of Philippi and us today for our all-sufficiency and contentment. Where is Paul pointing us for soul satisfaction?

Just listen to these verses. Chapter 1:21 "To live is Christ. To die is gain." Life for Paul is Christ. And death is gain because it's more of Christ. Chapter 1:27 "Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ." In other words, live in light of the Gospel of Christ and live your life, church, in such a way that you magnify Jesus Christ. Chapter 1:29 Listen to this. "For it has been granted to you..." A grace given to you. "...that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in Him, but also suffer for Him." Look at the kindness of God, Paul is saying. You get to suffer for Christ. Paul is so captivated at the worth of Jesus Christ that he sees it might be encouragement and compelling to the church to say, you've been graced to suffer for His name's sake. And maybe the ultimate text of Philippians where Paul points us to where our contentment should lie is chapter 3:7-8. "Whatever gain I had, I count it as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count all things as loss." Why? "Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Chapter 3:14 He says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." What's Paul's goal? Christlikeness. What's the treasure? What's the prize at the end? Christ. Finally in chapter 3:20. "Our citizenship is in heaven. And from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." What is life to Paul? What is his treasure? What is his goal? What is his prize? What is his identity? What is he looking to? What has he found that makes him count all things as loss? What is Paul's sufficiency? What is Paul's contentment? It's Jesus. And here's the heavier part, I think, for all of us. It's Jesus alone. Listen, if you're born again, and I say Jesus Christ is life, you go, "Amen!" Amen. We agree with that. Jesus Christ is contentment; all sufficiency. You

say amen, but is He really? Practically? Day in and day out?

As we look at contentment today, we're going to be looking at the object of contentment. What is the object of contentment? So when we talk about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ in our contentment, I don't want you to hear, OK, Jesus Christ is sufficient. He's the object. So, I've got Jesus, now I just kind of sit back and relax, because I've got Jesus and He's the source of all contentment. But rather, there's a fight for us. And here's the fight. The fight is to make sure Jesus Christ alone is truly the object of your contentment. The fight is to make sure that you don't allow Jesus Christ plus something else. I think this is where it's going to get us. Plus something else to be the source of our contentment. And then it's the diligent pursuit of Christ. Because once you come to the realization, Jesus Christ alone is the source of my contentment, once you learn that secret like Paul does, then you just keep going deeper and deeper and deeper into Christ, and you become more content and more content and more content. And I'm going to show you how God's glorified through that. Paul has come to learn sufficiency and contentment and soul satisfaction are found in Jesus Christ alone.

How has Paul learned in that whatever situation he was in to be content? Because, beloved, contentment - being fully satisfied in your soul - is not found in any situation or circumstance. It's found in a Person. It's found in Christ alone. Jesus is more than our Savior from sin and the wrath we deserve because of sin. Not minimizing that. But Jesus is more than a Savior from sin or the wrath we deserve because of sin; Jesus is a Savior unto Himself and He is the daily, practical Savior, every moment of every day. So let me ask again, are you content? Are you living in contentment? And if the answer is no, and you're a Christian this morning, I can tell you this, it's because you're not looking to Jesus alone for your contentment. If you're a Christian, and you say yes, I need Jesus, but the issue is sufficiency. Not sufficiency to save us from the penalty of sin. We affirm that. We stand for that. We defend that. It's sufficiency for contentment, for soul satisfaction, in every moment of every day, and in every single circumstance. Paul thought he had everything, and then he was awakened to Jesus. And he said my own morality, my personal piety, all my achievements, all my success, all my heritage - it's rubbish. It's empty. It can't save him, and it can't satisfy him.

I mentioned to you before that our contentment is important to the Lord, and let me show you why it's so important. Where we each look daily, where we look daily, moment by moment, for our contentment - wherever we are looking begins to be magnified through our life and glorified. It is made much of. We ought to all know when Dr. Piper says, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. That's what he's saying. Where you look for soul satisfaction inevitably, you begin to make much of and you begin to glorify by the life that you live and by what you say in light of that. Contentment in Christ alone is important to God for each of us, because when we are contented and satisfied in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, day by day, moment by moment, then Jesus Christ is magnified and glorified through our lives. Your lives actually begin to preach sermons when you are rested and contented and joyful in Jesus Christ alone. Verse 11. "Not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am, to be content." Whatever situation is, Paul says he's learned to be content. Jeremiah Burroughs in his book "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment," says we learn this in the school of Christ. Whatever... in other words, there's no situation where we should not be soul satisfied in Jesus. If any of us are tempted to say, listen preacher, you don't know my situation, and if you did, you would not hold contentment right now out in front of me; soul satisfaction; you wouldn't hold that out in front of me, if you knew the situation

that was going on in my life. You would not put that out there. But let me remind you who's writing this to us. Have you read 2 Corinthians 11? This man is saying, whatever the situation is, I've learned to be content. Don't think your situation's unique, and don't think that contentment found in Jesus Christ alone, can't allow you to have true joy and contentment in the midst of the circumstance. Here's why Paul learned it. If contentment is in Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone is sufficient, and we're looking to Him for contentment, then we are an unmoved people by circumstances and situations. So here's a tell - you ready? If you're moved in contentment - soul satisfaction, joy - by circumstances, then you're not looking to Jesus Christ alone for contentment.

Here's another sign. Do you murmur? Do you complain? Murmuring and complaining is just the fruit of a discontented heart. You say you don't know my circumstance. But circumstances don't determine contentment, Jesus Christ does. So what are we doing when we're murmuring and complaining? We're revealing, OK, I'm looking to Jesus for contentment, plus this. And because I don't have this, I begin to murmur. And what you're saying when you do that - here's where the glory of God is robbed - what you're saying when you do that is: Jesus, You alone are not sufficient. Yes, I need You, but I need this too. And then I have contentment. Jesus is magnified or glorified on the negative situation not impacting our contentment, and He's magnified and glorified in the positive situations not impacting our contentment. Look at verse 12. Paul knows how to be brought low. He says, "I know how to be brought low."

And I would point back to 2 Corinthians 11 again. All that Paul endured, he was brought low in. So for us, when the floor drops out from underneath us, does our contentment just slide with it? Think of the things he wrote in there. Three times lost at sea. Can you get a picture with me? Literally, what Paul is telling us, is as he's floating at night in the sea not knowing if he's going to go under for the last time, he's saying, I can be content in that very circumstance right there. Why could he be content there? Because contentment is not a circumstantial or situational thing for Paul. It's in a Person. And if he goes under, and takes the last breath, he's just getting more of what already has his heart. How many of us have believed the lie that, well, I can't really have true contentment right now because of the circumstance. Do you think after the fifth time of being beaten with rods, and Paul says right there, I had contentment. Did it hurt? Yes. Did he weep? I would imagine so. Was he content? Yeah. Although we may not verbalize this. What we're really saying when we look to circumstances for contentment again is that Jesus Christ is not sufficient.

So let's search our hearts together right now. What is the brought low in my life that I thought if God would just remove this low, my soul would be satisfied? Maybe it's your health. Chronic sickness. We have a number in our assembly that have chronic sickness. Maybe we've thought, if the sickness would just go away, then I'd be content. If God would just remove this, I'd be content.

Let me translate that for you, what that really says: Jesus Christ plus good health equals contentment. That's not true. That's not true. There's a lady in our assembly who has stage 4 cancer. She will die very soon unless God sovereignly heals her. And I'll go visit her and talk with her, and correspond back and forth with her. And I pray before I go, God, just give me something to encourage her from Your Word. And I'll go meet with this lady who is now experiencing the pain of the cancer; struggling to eat, struggling to breathe, struggling to walk. And I'll sit with her and begin to talk with her. And you know what comes out of her voice? Joy. Utter joy. Now, she's hurting. She's struggling. She's thinking about her husband. She's not in the assembly - she hasn't been in months now.

And as I look at her, here's an example of someone whose circumstance is calling for discontentment in every area. And when I go meet with her, I leave those meetings every single time so encouraged, so built up, because here's an example before me of someone who is in great pain, many circumstantial and situational struggles, but she's demonstrating what we're learning right here. Contentment is not found in circumstance or situation, it is found in a Person: Jesus Christ. It is so encouraging to go over there. And beloved, it's not a mask she puts on. It's not as though she's saying, you know what? I know I'm supposed to be joyful right now, so let me put on a smile and pretend like everything's OK. It's not that. It's in the midst of pain and grimacing in the face and hurt that she speaks of her Savior. Paul says I know how to abound. So not only is Jesus Christ glorified when we are brought low, and yet we are still satisfied in Him, but when we are abounding and our contentment remains in Him.

I was in sales for about 15 years in real estate, and it was an extremely competitive environment. And the Lord graced me in it in that I did very well. And there were moments when winning the award each month, or cashing your check each month, became the source of joy. And I can distinctly remember, when the Lord dealt with me in regards to my contentment when I was abounding, not being in those things, but in Jesus Christ alone. And when He turned my heart away from those things to Jesus. I can remember getting checks that were bigger than any check I'd ever received in my life, and I couldn't even care less. It meant nothing to me anymore. I would just set it aside. I didn't even care at all. We would get an award for selling things, and it just meant nothing. It was so empty to me. Why? There was something greater than these things could offer.

Next Paul says, "In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." In any and every circumstance, Paul had learned the secret of contentment. Beloved, there is no circumstance in which the Christian looking to Christ can't be content in Him alone. So I thought now, we should stop and say, OK, what plus Jesus have I put in my equation for contentment? And I'll just think about some of the things I speak with some of the saints in the assembly about.

Here's a good way to ask it in your own heart. Everything would be OK if... what? What comes to your mind in that? Everything would be OK. I'd have soul satisfaction - I've got Jesus, but everything would be OK, if... This. Everything would be OK if I was married. Or if you are married, everything would be OK if my husband would just lead me like those other men lead their wives. Everything with be OK with me if my wife would just be submissive like some of those other wives. How about this? We spoke about unity in our church. Everything would be OK if Charles Leiter was my pastor. It'd be great. Or if the people in my congregation were like those people at the Fellowship Conference. Just so zealous for the Lord. Everything would be OK in my life if I could just have a fellowship like that. You know what all of those say? Jesus isn't enough. Beloved, it is not wrong to want to be married. Next month, I'll be married for twenty years, and I'm so thankful for my wife. It's not wrong for you to want your spouse to grow, become more Christlike. It's not wrong for you to want to have health. That's not wrong. It's not wrong for you to want your church to grow. It's not wrong for you to want your pastors to grow. You should enjoy those things. But let me tell you this, Christ is the full substance of only what those things can point to. Do you realize that?

You say, I love coming to the Fellowship Conference! It's like heaven on earth. Let me tell you this. Christ is better. I want to be married. I want to enjoy companionship. Amen. That's a blessing from the Lord. But I want you to know this: Christ is better than that. I want health. I want this body to be restored. Let me tell you this: Christ is

better. Those things should be enjoyed. Health should be enjoyed. Marriage or singleness should be enjoyed. The fellowship of the church, your pastors should be enjoyed. But those things all point you to something greater. It's the Giver of all of those things. It's the fulfillment of what all those things could never be. It's Jesus Christ. I'm convinced most of us are miserable if we're honest. And it's because we're looking to something that can never give you what you're looking for. You're looking horizontally for what can only be found vertically in Jesus Christ. It's not wrong to want those things. But it's wrong to not be content if you don't have them. Because it says, "Jesus, You're not enough for me." Can I tell you what else happens when you add something else to your contentment equation with Jesus? I'm just convicted here, because I've done this. When you add something else to soul satisfaction as Jesus plus - and you put something else in there. Not that we think we do that, we just do it by living.

Here's what you do, and I want you to see why it's not only robbing God of His glory, why it's the reason that you're miserable today maybe. But I want you to see how it impacts other people too. You ready? Let's take the single thing, ok? I'm single and I want to be married. That's a good desire. And I say I love Jesus. He's the source of my joy. But in all honestly, practically lived out, it's really Jesus plus marriage is what's going to make me content. Let me show you what we do in that. You put unrealistic expectations on those things. Because you ask of them what they can never deliver. Here's what you're doing in that. You're asking that future husband or future wife to be your Savior. You ask your church to be your Savior. Your pastor to be your Savior. Your health to be your Savior. Money to be your Savior. You're asking them to bring you contentment, and beloved, only Christ brings contentment. Whenever I preach, one of the things I ask of the Lord every time is I say Lord, I want understanding of the text, but I want you to do a work in my heart with this text before I preach it. I don't want it to be for them. I want it to be for me. So if I can be transparent, where I was looking for contentment is in pastoral ministry. And it's very easy for me to justify that because it seems godly. But what I began to realize is this: I'm not content unless things in the church are going well. I'm not content unless I preach a good sermon. And what I do in that is I begin to put unrealistic expectations on ministry because I begin to look at pastoral ministry for the source of contentment and joy. And then I begin to pursue it, at such a violent pace, because we're all seeking contentment. So I'm pursuing ministry for my contentment, which is only found in Christ, but in doing so, I'm pushing so hard into it, I begin to ignore the other responsibilities around me. Like my wife and my kids. And when it doesn't deliver, I become upset. You know what the sign for me in that was? I'm losing my joy in pastoral ministry. So I've repented of that, or let me say this, I'm repenting of that. Because you see I can't approach pastoral ministry right until my contentment is in the right place. And once my contentment is in the right place, it doesn't mean I'm indifferent towards the church; it means now, I'm so sufficiently satisfied in Jesus, I can come without expectation for me in any of these things anymore. Contentment in Jesus is so liberating. It's glorious. We all want contentment. So whatever you're looking to for it, you begin to chase it. And again, you can hurt others around you as you put unrealistic expectations on them that they can never deliver. And most importantly, beloved, we rob God of glory when we do these things. I began to ask myself this question. What is my identity really? Is my identity a pastor? Or Jesus? You say aren't you called to be a pastor? I am called to be a pastor. But my identity is Jesus. And unless my identity is Jesus, I won't be a good pastor. I'll be seeking from ministry, what can only be found in Jesus Christ. So when Christ is our contentment, and we realize it's not found in anything but Him, then you can boast in things like weaknesses. You can boast in insults and hardships. Like when hardships come in the church, it's not that I'm indifferent, but

if my contentment is found in Christ, I won't go down with the hardships. I'll weep over them. I'll pray over them. But if I'm sufficient in Jesus, then I don't go down with the ship, with the insults, with the hardships.

We want God to be glorified. So you may ask, OK, I want God to be glorified. I see that practically, on a real daily basis, I'm putting so many other things in this equation for contentment besides Jesus. How do I not do that? How do I live in this world which is daily thrusting everything at me as a source of my contentment? Telling me that Christ alone is not it? How do I glorify God in this? How do I find that joy that Jesus wants me to have? How do I not put these unrealistic expectations and create idols out of everything around me as I seek them for the source of contentment rather than Jesus alone? And here's the greatest news in the world: Jesus Christ is not only the source of our contentment. He is the means of being contented. And that's what verse 13 tells us. "I can do all things through Christ - through Him who strengthens me." Jesus Christ is the source alone of soul satisfying contentment, but not only that, He is the means of that, because He strengthens me to see Him and view Him for the sufficient Savior that He is. How do I face plenty, hunger, and abundance, and need and still find contentment in Christ alone? Through Christ's power working in me. You say well, what does that look like? How does He do this? Well, this is a faith issue isn't it? I think doctrinally, if I pushed out a statement right now and said Jesus Christ is contentment; is all sufficient for contentment, we'd all sign the doctrinal statement. Yeah, He is, but this is a practical, moment by moment faith issue. That when something else is put before you that's not innately wrong, can be a gift of the Lord, but is not to be the source of your contentment, we are tempted to not believe in the sufficiency of Jesus and begin to look to this other thing.

How does He help us in that? How does He strengthen me in the middle of that? He does it through providence. Where you begin to put all of your hope in something and in love, he removes that. Because He's drawing you unto Himself. He does it through the building up of faith. By helping you learn that Jesus Christ is the all-sufficient Savior and the source of all true contentment. How though? He does that through the ministry of the Word and by the power of the Spirit. He grants to us the Spirit of revelation and wisdom in the knowledge of Him. He shows us the emptiness of temporal things being the source of our contentment. Because they fade away, and they actually point to Him. And He shows us that in Him is this eternal, sufficient contentment. And that's where it's to be found. He shows us who He is. He shows us what He accomplished. And He shows us what we are in Him. That in Jesus Christ, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places - now. He does that through the Word, through the Spirit. What hope do you and I have in a world that's constantly vying for our hearts? Continually telling us we can't find contentment without this or that? We have an all-sufficient Savior, Who is the source, the object of our contentment, and more than that, He provides the power to keep our eyes fixated upon Him as the source of our contentment alone.

My prayer for all of us and especially me is that the Lord would expose in my heart anything I'm looking to for contentment other than Him. That the Lord may draw us into deeper communion with Him and greater revelation, that He is the all-sufficient Savior. Yes, from sin and the wrath of God. But daily, practically in our lives, for soul satisfaction. That He would bring us to this place where we would realize this: If I have everything except Jesus, I have nothing. And if I have nothing but Jesus, I've got everything. Beloved, that's what He's bringing us to. Because when you're satisfied in Jesus Christ alone as the all-sufficient source of your contentment, He is glorified in you and through you. Let's pray to that end.

Father, I thank You in the name of Jesus that You deal with us in grace. God, the idolatry in our hearts is unbelievable. Thank You for forgiveness of sin through confession in Jesus. Thank You for deliverance from the power of sin. Thank You that we have seen and tasted, Lord. God, our desire is Your glory. And Your glory is magnified when we are satisfied in Jesus. So Lord, bring us to that place, of Christ alone contentment, and weed out everything that we are looking to other than Jesus. That we would truly find the fullness of joy and You would receive the glory You are due. We ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.