

Sermon thanksgiving

17th November 2013

“All our needs” - Philippians 4:8-20; Job 1:6-22

Imagine you need a new pair of shoes. You go to the shoe shop. You ask the shop assistant to try on some shoes. And they say to you: “No. You don’t need a new pair of shoes. That pair should last you another 3 months.”

Imagine you go out for dinner. You order a steak. The waiter says: “No. You don’t need the steak. You just need soup. I’ll bring you some soup. And you won’t be having any desert either.”

Most of us probably wouldn’t like those situations, because we like to have choices. We don’t like people telling us what we should or shouldn’t have. We don’t like being told. We don’t like decisions being made for us. We don’t like being controlled.

Are you content?

Are you content with what you have? Are you content with what you **don’t** have? What is “contentment”?

The apostle Paul is a guy who has had times when he’s had plenty, and times when he’s had nothing. He’s been well fed and he’s been hungry. He’s telling the Philippian church this because he wants to thank them for being there in the difficult times. He wants to thank them for sharing with him when times were tough. They were concerned about him. But he wants them to know this:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances... I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...”

He wants them to know, that through all the ups and downs of his life, he has learned contentment. This is his testimony to them: Life has been good. And life has been tough. But he has LEARNED to be content in every situation. He has LEARNED it.

You see, contentment doesn’t really come naturally! Paul has learned it. And he’s saying that contentment has nothing to do with having plenty or being in need. You can be poor and content. Or rich and content. And you can be poor or rich and still feel **dis**contentment with your life. Contentment is something Paul has learned and he has learned that it does not depend on what he has or doesn’t have. Because he has learned that, no matter what, verse 13:

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

Contentment for Paul comes from knowing that his strength for ALL things comes through God. **That** is contentment and **that** is something worth learning. And quite often we don’t learn it in the easy times. Sometimes it takes the difficult times to learn

that we need God's strength – that his strength is enough. It can be hard to let go of our own control over our life when things are working well.

But in difficult times, there are, as we've heard today, times to thank God. Those 4 testimonies were not from strong people. But from weak people. People who, I know, rely on God's strength, and we've heard how they've done that in the difficult times.

Because it's in those difficult times that we can come to a deeper understanding of our need for God's strength in our life. And we thank God not for what we do or don't have, but for contentment. For the contentment we have in knowing that he is strong in our weakness, that we can rely on him, that we can depend on him. Let me suggest this: **Contentment is Peace**. It's the peace that comes from knowing God and his strength in our lives.

This is what Job understood. He lost everything. His family, his home, his wealth. He lost everything and he responded humanly – he tore his clothes and shaved his head. He was angry and he mourned. And then he fell down and worshipped God:
"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

Praise you God, he says. Praise you that you gave me life. That you brought me into this world and you will take me out of this world. Praise you that you give me everything I have and you are the one who takes things away from me. Praise your name because YOU are the one in control. You are the one who is powerful in my life. And because of that, I have **peace**.

Even under the greatest of tests, Job could praise God because he knew that he was in God's hands.

What a terrible place we would be in if we faced difficult times in our lives and we were NOT in the hands of God. Where would we go? Who would we turn to? Where would we find strength? Where would our future be? What peace would we have?

Contentment, peace, comes from knowing that our strength is in God.

This week we heard of the Typhoons in the Philippines. Over 4,000 people dead. Whole communities completely wiped out. One of the most powerful storms ever recorded on land. People killed by buildings collapsing on them. Waves sweeping across the islands drowning people.

When you hear about these things happening, as a Christian, are you content?

What about with your financial situation – are you content?

What about the issue of homelessness in this area – are you content?

Are you content with the issue of poverty?

What if you were to lose your job, or lose your family, or lose your spouse, or lose your integrity, lose your friends, lose your hope...

Would you be content?

Because contentment is not bound up in these things! As Job found out, and Paul learned, contentment is about being at peace with God's strength, no matter what the situation. We can be uncomfortable, we can be upset, or angry or disappointed like Job was. We can be in need like Paul was. But through all of that we can also be content, if we **know** God's strength in that situation, and if we **trust** his strength. Contentment doesn't mean we don't DO anything. It just means we are trusting God's control and are at peace with that.

But it can be a real challenge, a real struggle, to be content with God's plans when they seem so strange to us, and when he takes us on paths in our lives that are so painful and uncertain.

But he also calls on us to be content in him when things are good. To not find our contentment in the things of this world - in our possessions, in our work, in our relationships, in our self image. If we find our contentment in these things, what happens if we lose them?

But if we find contentment in God and his strength in all things, we have found contentment in something, someone, we will never lose.

The Rolling stones wrote that well known song: "I can't get no satisfaction" – and it resonates so much today. People are dissatisfied. Searching not for something that will make them happy, but something that will fill them, satisfy them, even in the worst of times. People are seeking satisfaction.

But it's unattainable. Are we ever satisfied in this world? But contentment, peace with God, IS possible. But often difficult.

And that's why I think Paul's words are a good place for us to start. Paul **LEARNED** to be content. It takes time to **LEARN** to trust God's power. It takes time to **LEARN** to stop pleasing ourselves by earning more money and buying more things. It takes time to **LEARN** that all we have belongs to God. It takes time to **LEARN** generosity. It takes time to **LEARN** humility. It takes time to **LEARN** holiness in our life.

Let me read to you this letter I received last week from a little girl at a local Public School. She's in year 1. It's a letter of thanks. And I think this is one really content little girl. But there's a sad twist in this letter.

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Content. Thankful. Learned at an early age.

Learning contentment takes time. It takes time to shift our trust from ourselves to God. So here's the challenge – do you need to shift your trust? Are you finding contentment in 'things'? What things? How can you shift that contentment, that trust, over to God, today? How do we find our contentment, our peace, in Christ alone?

(1475)

(Song – In Christ Alone)

Philippians 4:8-20

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

10 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. 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 all this through him who gives me strength.** 14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 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; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. 17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 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. 19 **And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.** 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Job 1:6-22

6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. 7 The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?”

Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

8 Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

9 “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. 10 “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

12 The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

13 One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

16 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

18 While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

20 **At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship**

21 **and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”**

22 **In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.**