

HALLELUJAH!

Celebrate God Provides Enough

Philippians 4:10-23

I have a confession to make. I hate the ice cream man. When I was a kid, I never had the money to buy anything from the ice cream man, and my parents grew up in the Depression. They were tight with their money. My mom would buy ice cream bars in the box from the grocery store – on sale. And she'd get about 12 ice cream bars for the price of one from the ice cream truck. But they just weren't as cool as buying one from the ice cream truck. I wanted to buy one from the ice cream man – every day! (Well, not *every* day ... *TWICE* a day!)

When I became a parent myself, I did the same thing my parents did to me – even worse. We told our kids it was the “music truck” that went through the neighborhoods. We never told them that it had ... you-know-what.

Ice Cream trucks sell discontentment. I hate the ice cream man because he takes a nice content moment and turns it into cravings for something we don't need and can't afford. He turns contentment into discontentment.

But there's an awful lot of ice cream trucks out there, aren't there? They don't all go around with children's music blasting out of their speakers – but they can make us feel discontent no matter what we have.

For me they are things like “For sale” signs on boats, and looking at RVs . Right now, there are a lot of bargains out there! But, I can't afford them, and don't need them. Maybe for you your ice cream truck is shopping at the mall, the department store, or clicking through Amazon. You can find discontentment arising within you driving down the road, you turn your head and suddenly see the home of your dreams. Maybe for you the ice cream truck is the lure of an exquisite dinner, in a beautiful place.

During this pandemic, most people are spending more time at home. That can bring to our minds pictures of peace and tranquility, enjoying the simple things of life at home. ... Or maybe NOT. Maybe right now you're just tolerating simple things. You're not experiencing contentment. It's like, we're going through this tough economic time, and there's a lot of stuff we used to and used to be able to afford that we can't do or afford them anymore. Our attitude can end up being more like: “Just put up with this 2nd class stuff, until the pandemic is over and the economy turns around and you can get back to enjoying the *real* things you like.” That's not contentment – not celebrating the simple things God has given. At best it's just being a PATIENT greedy person, and nothing more.

What is the ice cream truck for you? What raises up feelings of discontentment in you? There's probably something.

To be a joy-FULL person, somehow you'll have to find a way to have contentment in your present situation.

Want some good news?

No matter what is happening in your life, you can know contentment. You can know contentment NOW. God tells us how to do it. In today's New testament reading from Philippians 4 we discover the secret to contentment.

CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN YOU...

1. Rely upon Christ for the power to overcome your circumstances. (Phil. 4:10-13)

Phil. 4:10-13

10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed,

you have been 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 everything through him who gives me strength.

God guided Paul to write this. He's writing to Christ-followers in a city called Philippi. Paul is saying "thanks" to them for the gifts they sent to help meet his needs. As he'll say a little later in this passage, he has, for the moment, enough. But that is not where his contentment comes from. In fact, he says just the opposite – there is a secret to being content when you're experiencing plenty, just as there is a secret to being content when you're in want.

Actor Alan Alda said, **"It isn't necessary to be rich and famous to be happy. It's only necessary to be rich."**

That's funny, but it's wrong. The secret to contentment is NOT getting everything you want! Fact is, the amount of money you have doesn't seem to have a lot to do with the level of contentment people experience.

About 20 years ago, there was a story in U.S. News and World Report. Some of the information in this story is probably just as relevant today, ten years later, as it was then.

The story was about the so-called "American Dream." I guess that would include owning your own home, and having all your needs met for sure, but also having enough to do all the things you really wanted to do, and have all the things you really wanted to have.

The story said that for Americans with household incomes of under \$25,000, polls showed these people believed it would take \$54,000 to fulfill the American dream in their lives. The same survey also showed that for those who make \$100,000, they'd like to make about \$192,000 for their version of the American dream.

In other words, most people believe the American Dream is usually TWICE the amount they already have. People aren't content with what they have ... no matter how much they have.

So the secret to being content is not in getting more, not in amassing personal wealth, or getting everything you want. Then, how can we ever be content?

What was Paul's secret of being content? It comes in verse 13 where he says ***"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."***

Another version puts it (NLT) ***"For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."***

Basically, here's the truth. Whether you got A LOT, or little, plenty or want in your life right now – the secret to being content is staying connected to Jesus. It is HIS strength that will provide the contentment you need. It is HIS power that will help you find hope even when the cupboards are bare.

When you are spending time on a regular basis praying to Jesus, studying God's word, and surrendering your life to the power of the Holy Spirit, you're going to find that no matter what else is going on in your life – you will feel more content.

Why? Because when you're living your life connected to Jesus Christ, you'll begin to understand that (1) nothing happens to your life without His knowledge. (2) Nothing that happens, either good or bad, can take you away from God's love.

(3) And when you're connected to Jesus your focus shifts. You aren't looking at NOW as being permanent. What you have here – or don't have here – isn't final. This world isn't going to last forever, and your life is going to whiz by faster than you know. But heaven's a-comin'! And that's what REALLY counts. And when you are connected to Jesus, your focus shifts there, and you find yourself amazingly, supernaturally, content with what you have going on here.

Paul had experienced troubles that make our worst days seem easy. He was beaten, stoned, jailed, shipwrecked; he went through hunger, desertion, misunderstanding – you name

it. But he says, with the confidence that only hard experience can provide, ***“I can do everything through Him who strengthens me.”*** In other words, “As long as I’m connected to the power and the strength that Jesus Christ gives – I will be content with whatever circumstances come upon me.”

Contentment comes from living a life where you understand your priorities. When you know Jesus, He becomes the #1 priority in your life. He becomes #1 because (1) He made you. (2) He promises to provide for you. (3) He’s been through it Himself so He understands. (4) He has power to help.

And (5) His love is so amazing that you know you owe Him your everything! He went to the cross and gave His life for you to pay for all your wrongs. He lived a perfect life and gives His perfect record to you. That means you’re forgiven. Your life doesn’t have to be as it is, and it doesn’t have to be much, much worse for all eternity. You have hope – hope that’s real and you can count on it. And all this – not because you earned it or deserved it. All this is given to you by a gift of Jesus’ amazing love! THAT’S why Jesus becomes the #1 priority when you know Him. (And, ... incidentally, if He isn’t the #1 priority in your life, then it’s time that REALLY get to know Jesus and His love.)

So, here’s the deal how contentment fits into this picture: When Jesus is the #1 priority in your life, all of a sudden having the best STUFF and having MORE STUFF, and needing to receive everything you desire in life, become so much less important.

If you will live your life relying upon the power that God provides – you will find that your daily circumstances will have less and less control over your state of mind – and contentment will begin to be the norm of your life.

Before I go on I think it’s important to say something. Materialism is a sin. Searching for contentment in your life through having stuff is idolatry – it’s putting things in the place where God should be. I think materialism is the main idol worship of Americans. Instead of relying upon God’s strength and living our life with the strength He provides, we buy into the lie that if I had a nicer home, car, bike, TV, you name it – we will be happy. We then go after those things no matter the cost, racking up large debt along the way. If you can’t say “I can be content in all circumstances,” then it’s time to admit that sin to God, and ask His forgiveness.

The Bible says (Heb. 13:5) ***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”***

Want to be free from the love of money? Want to be free from the Monster of More? Then commit to giving to God first – and then make a regular practice of praying a simple prayer whenever you are about to buy something. “Lord, should I make this purchase?”

The first secret to finding contentment, then, is to rely upon Christ for the power to overcome your circumstances.

But there’s more. In the next few verses Paul will continue that thought and teach us that if you want to find contentment in life ...

2. TRUST IN GOD’S POWER AND LOVE TO PROVIDE FOR ALL YOUR NEEDS.

Phil. 4:14-20

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 again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; 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 his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul here thanks his friends in Philippi for their financial help and support. He knows their giving has been a real sacrifice for them. He knows that they are probably going without some of the things they might have had if they hadn't given so generously to his needs.

And so he says with deep confidence: ***“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”***

Another version puts it this way: Phil. 4:19 (The Message) ***You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus.***

Friends, I know you've got needs in your life. Relational needs. Emotional needs. Financial needs. Spiritual needs. You might be wondering if God is there. You might be tempted to lash out at God or to simply give up hope.

I want you to hear these words of Paul. He wrote from house arrest. Chained to a soldier. Unable to leave his home. Awaiting a trial that could end with his execution. Hear his words: MY GOD WILL MEET ALL YOUR NEEDS.

Another time he wrote to a different group of friends saying: 2 Cor. 9:8 ***And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.***

You can trust God to take care of you. Whether you're rich or poor, or in-between, you know God loves you. He gave Jesus for you. You know God is FOR you, desiring the best for you. He's planning to take you to heaven, with Him, forever. HE WILL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS.

So if you have food, clothes, friends, family, sunshine, and life itself – PRAISE GOD! Thank Him for these simple things. They are ENOUGH!

If you feel your life is always chasing after your personal ice cream trucks, let me invite you to pray a simple prayer with me.

“Lord teach me the secret of contentment regarding...”