

(Sermon 22)
Content in Christ
Philippians 4:10-13

Lord's Day, 6/25/17 * Christ Reformed Community Church * St. Johns, FL

Intro

- The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines contentment as *“freedom from worry or restlessness: peaceful satisfaction.”*¹

From this definition we learn that contentment is related to the concept of peace. It makes sense therefore that Paul would speak about the subject of Christian contentment in vs 10-13. He has already addressed how a Christian can experience the peace that passes all understanding in 4:7, and in 4:9 he spoke about the God of peace who is with us. One thought leads to another as Paul closes out his letter to the Philippians and the subject of the Christian's peace leads him to consider the related subject of the Christian's contentment.

- Gratitude goes hand in hand with the concept of contentment and that will also be a concept that begins to address in our passage this morning by thanking the Philippians for their financial gift sent to him during his imprisonment by way of Epaphroditus. An ungrateful heart is a discontented heart, but a heart full of gratitude will be a heart full of contentment.

This reminds me of the story of a pastor in England during the 1700's by the last name of Stonehouse who was passing through Salisbury Plain. As he walked along he noticed the sky appearing rather threatening. He came upon a shepherd

and asked him what sort of weather it would be the next day knowing that such a man would give a good weather report (this was before the weather channel). The shepherd answered, "It will be such weather which pleases me." Surprised at his answer the pastor asked how that could be. And the shepherd answered, "Because it will be such weather as shall please God, and whatever pleases him always pleases me."

- Since none of us own a shepherding business and most of us work indoors, this such a comment may not seem that big of a deal. But for a shepherd such a comment is huge. The weather determined the conditions of his workday. It greatly affected his own comfort as well as the comfort of the sheep who are skittish animals by nature. And yet he had contentment, a gratitude and peaceful satisfaction in whatever God determined the weather would be.

- Our comforts of today also cloud what Paul was up against as he writes these verses on contentment. Prison in his day was not like it is in ours. There were not 3 square meals and shelter provided. Paul had no means of income and yet was forced to pay rent for his own living quarters (cf. Acts 28:30). He was responsible for all he had including food. He had no privacy since he was chained to a Roman soldier 24-7. A man who was restless to get the gospel to the ends of the earth was confined. He couldn't go to church. The only interaction he had with other Christians was primarily through the letters he wrote them. He couldn't preach sermons except to those who

voluntarily came to visit him after receiving approval from the Emperor. To make matters even worse, the local pastors in Rome where he was imprisoned were advancing a smear campaign against him in order to protect their own skin from associating with a fellow preacher who had been incarcerated for the gospel. And on top of all of this, he is awaiting trial to receive the verdict from Caesar whether he will live or die. This went on for 2 full years. We would say that he was in dire straights. But astonishingly, Paul was content as he expresses in vss 10-13. Notice what he says:

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. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for 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.

- Paul is encouraged rather than discouraged. He is rejoicing rather than complaining. He is grateful to God rather than sorrowful because of his circumstances. And he is gracious toward his fellow saints rather and jealous of them.

- In these verses, we see Paul once again as a Christian model. He models before us what it looks like to live above our circumstances instead of under them. Like the shepherd who

knew a storm might come and yet was still content, Paul was “content” in the storm that God had ordained for him.

- Today every single person here has one of three things true about them. Either you are in the midst of a storm right now, or you are about to head into one, or you just stepped out of one. What you need is the Word of God to remind you this morning that the Lord is your portion. He is the Rock of Ages. He is your Shelter in the time of storm.

*The Lord's our rock, in Him we hide,
a shelter in the time of storm,
Secure whatever ill betide,
a shelter in the time of storm,
The raging storms may round us beat,
a shelter in the time of storm,
We'll never leave our safe retreat,
a shelter in the time of storm.ⁱⁱ*

Proposition: Verses 10-13 teach us that finding contentment for the Christian involves *4 requirements*.

Trans: Learning to be content as a Christian involves...

I. A Praise Expressed (10)

- Paul expresses praise to God for His providence and thanks to the saints all in the same breath in v10. Notice he begins v10 by saying: **I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.** Notice

carefully where his joy is placed. He is rejoicing *in the Lord*. His joy was not in circumstances. Happiness is found in circumstances, which change all the time. Happiness fluctuates, but joy is constant because it's placed in God who is unchangeable. True, the Philippians ministry to him was in some sense connected to his rejoicing since he says it triggered his expression of praise, as he says, that **now at length you have revived your concern for me**. Their **concern** showed itself in the generous gift sent to him by Epaphroditus who served as a courier for the Philippian congregation. But though Paul's joy *revealed* itself in the Philippians gift to him, his joy was not *rooted* in the gift itself but in God. He says that his rejoicing was *in the Lord*.

- He will describe the nature and history of this gift at length in vs 14-20. But to quickly review, Paul established the Philippian church 10 years prior. After leaving there he traveled to Athens and then Corinth. While ministering to those churches, Paul still received financial support from the Philippians (Acts 17:14-18:18). But after this for reasons we don't know, the Philippians support for Paul dried up. That's why he says to the Philippians in v10: **at length you have revived your concern for me**.

- The word **revived** (ἀναθάλλω) is a horticultural term used to describe a plant that had been blossoming, but appeared dead in the winter before sprouting up again in the Spring. The Philippians financial support of Paul went through a winter phase if you will perhaps due to their own poverty or maybe because they assumed another church began supporting him. But after hearing that he was imprisoned with no means to provide for himself their giving began to blossom anew. It was indeed **revived**.

- This is why Paul says what he does in the second half of v10: **You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity**. Again, perhaps due to their own poverty (2 Cor 8:12) or not knowing where Paul had traveled (no Facebook or Twitter back then) they lacked opportunity.

- Either way, Paul is not shaming them and clarifies that even though they hadn't given in a while, he knew they still were **concerned for** him. Paul is showing the utmost gratitude for their gift. They might not have been aware of it at this point, but Paul told the Corinthians that he had essentially robbed the Christians on the province of Macedonia (referring directly to the Philippians since their church was in this province) by receiving their money, though they were poor, in order to minister to the Corinthians needs.

- APP: All of this provides for us the first requirement every Christian must meet in order to find contentment. We learn from Paul that contentment is found in a willingness to express praise to God for His providential provisions. Paul was quick to see God's hand at work in his life through the ministry of the Philippians. At just the right time, though they hadn't given in a while, the Philippians came through when Paul was at the end of his rope.

- Paul's joy was in God, not his circumstances. He knew that though His circumstances had changed, God never would. And he was confident that God was causing all things to work together for his good (Rom 8:28). His trials were a surprise no doubt. After all, the Lord Jesus met him face to face on the Damascus Road and commissioned this up and coming Pharisee to be an ambassador for Christ. He was *the* Apostle Paul forging opportunities for the gospel all around the known world. And now he's in prison. Did he question God? Job did? David did at times? But if Paul did it was only for a passing moment. For he knew that though his circumstances had changed, God's eternal purposes had not. This sustained his contentment; his peaceful satisfaction.

- Where do you need to praise God? What is happening in your life that is so bad that you can't see God's good hand of

providence? He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you. He is your Rock of ages. He is your shelter in the time of storm. Be strengthened in the grace of the Lord. Instead of looking outward at your circumstances begin looking upward to His providential goodness and grace. There you will find joy and where you find joy in the Lord you will find contentment.

- Someone once said that providence is “the hand behind the headlines”. Whatever news springs up in your life, you can rest in the fact that God is writing the story. He’s writing the story of your life. And this is important to see for the 2nd requirement Paul mentions in this passage.

Trans: But if the 1st requirement for finding contentment for the Christian involves praise expressed as one sees God’s goodness in providentially always meeting our needs, the 2nd requirement to finding contentment for the Christian involves...

II. A Process Experienced (11)

- The great Apostle exposes his heart to us in v11 admitting something that is important for our own seeking of contentment. He says: **Not that I am speaking of being in**

need, for I have *learned* in whatever situation I am to be content.

- We tend (or at least I do) to read the verse so quickly that all we pick up from it is that Paul somehow found a way to be content in the midst of all his circumstances good or bad. But did this just happen? Was Paul just an exceptional Christian? Can you have this contentment? Can I experience this contentment? Yes. But notice what it takes. He says that he has ***learned in whatever situation I am to be content.*** Paul had to learn how to be content? That's right and so do you and I if we want contentment. There is a learning process that we must experience.

- To learn contentment is to calmly accept who you are and where God has placed you in life. Paul had to learn through the school of hard knocks that one's circumstances (good or bad) could never serve as his basis for joy and contentment. You may not struggle with being discontent regarding your money situation. But what about your position at work? Your status in society? Your looks? Your gifts? What Paul is teaching us here is that we must *learn* how to be content. Life is a whole process of learning that our true contentment and identity is in Christ, not in our wealth, good looks, or gifts and abilities. Once again, contentment has to do with God's

providence. Paul asks, “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” (I Cor 4:7). Everything comes from God. Your looks, wealth, station in life (or lack thereof) all comes from God. Contentment is largely based on recognizing God’s providence. And quite frankly, God has a way of reminding us that these things are largely not up to us. “*The mind of man plans his way*”, says the Psalmist, “*but the Lord directs his steps*” (Prov 16:9). When we begin to find temporary contentment in the inferior and worldly gifts from God instead of in Christ, He will begin to teach us. We may have to learn contentment by having these things removed from us, or sometimes He gives us more in order to show us that they can never ultimately satisfy above Christ.

- Paul will speak more about this in v12. But for now notice the word **content** in v10. The subject is contentment and now we finally come to the word being used in the passage. The word itself (αὐτάρκης) was used of a country that had everything it needed so that nothing was imported. This type of country had all the natural resources necessary to remain self-sufficient without aid from outside countries. That’s contentment for a country. True contentment for the Christian, Paul is saying, finds it’s resources not in self but in God. Nothing needs to be imported from outside of our life to make

it better. We have all we need when we see that our identity is Christ.

- This makes no situation too difficult. This makes a lack of wealth mean nothing since our riches are in Christ. This means that good looks don't mean as much because our identity is lost in the perfect, blameless, spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, in whom we are hidden (Col 3:3). It means that our failures, and lack of status and accomplishment are lost in the success and finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are God's children through Christ and privileged beyond belief.

- Now it feels good to say this and it feels good for you to hear it. But the reality that Paul is bringing to bear upon your soul this morning from v11 is that we have to *learn* this. As he admits himself: **I have *learned* in whatever situation I am to be content.** There is a learning process that we must experience in order to find contentment as Christians.

Trans: The 2nd requirement then of the Christian in order to find contentment involves a process experienced. The 1st requirement is found in v10, which we called a praise expressed- that is, seeing God's goodness in always providentially meeting our needs. That's a praise expressed. But v11 showed us a process experienced, that is, we must

learn by experience how to be content in God's providential dealings with us. But the requirements of a praise expressed and process experienced take us to the 3rd requirement for the Christian in order to find contentment which involves a...

III. A Path Expected (12)

- We saw in v11 that there is a learning process we must go through so that we know *how* to be content, but *what* does that process look like? Well, Paul lays out the path we should expect in v12. Speaking from his experience where he learned how to be content, he says: **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.**

- Paul had experienced both spectrums on his Christian path. He had experienced poverty and plenty; the ups and the downs. First he mentions the "downs". He says, **I know how to be brought low.** That's the poverty he found himself in. When difficult times came, Paul remained content simply because he was satisfied with so little. Then he says, **and I know how to abound.** That's the times of plenty that he experienced.

- The chief end of man is not to have his needs met, but to glorify God.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, he had learned to be content when he was **brought low**. This is the same Greek word (ταπεινώω) used to describe the humility of Christ in 2:8. This describes his present situation. But he was content. He practiced what he preached because he told Timothy, *“If we have food or covering, with these we shall be content”* (I Tim 6:8).

Paul expands on what he alluded to in the previous verse. The twice-repeated phrase [where he tells us that he has] learned by experience and spiritual maturity to live above his circumstances and not let them affect his contentment. That is an important lesson for believers to learn for it is the difficult circumstances in life that most frequently steal our contentment.^{iv}

- Most of Paul’s life would be characterized by the “downs” where he was **brought low** for various reasons. In Acts 9, he describes how his fellow countrymen (the Jews) were watching the gates of the city at night waiting for a good time to kill him when he tried to leave Damascus. There he had to escape by being lowered by a basket through an opening in the wall (Acts 9:22-25). Or there was that time on his first missionary journey when he was stoned after preaching the gospel, dragged out of the city left for dead (Acts 14:19). There was also that time when in Philippi the crowd rose up against him along with the chief magistrates who tore he and Silas’ robes off, beat them with rods, put them in prison, and fastened their feet in stocks (Acts 16:22-25). The Philippians knew firsthand that Paul’s contentment was real as he writes

this letter because the Philippian jailer himself witnessed his contentment sitting in prison at midnight praying with Silas and singing hymns to God while the prisoners listened. And this isn't to mention the other beatings, long voyages, suffering shipwreck, being bitten by a poisonous snake, and being mocked by the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill for believing in the God of Scripture. His life was lived on the run from both the Jews and Gentiles. And then there were those in the church who countered his pure teaching with false teaching. There were those who didn't like his preaching in Corinth and mocked him. There were church members who made false claims about him and people believed it because they were smart and convincing and knew how to manipulate people. He also had the constant concern of all the churches on his mind in the midst of this so that after listing many of the things he faced in 2 Corinthians 11, he concludes by saying, "And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches" (I Cor 11:28).

- Ministry was no cake walk for Paul. And in addition to all of that, it didn't pay well. And yet he admits through all of that he was content. He wrote the Corinthians in I Cor 9:14 that, "*The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel*", and yet there were times when he

didn't capitalize on receiving wages for his ministry. He was content during the times of poverty because he knew God would supply his needs. He worked hard and left the results to God. He was content with little because he knew He served a big God.

- After speaking about the times of poverty, he moves to speak about the times of plenty. After mentioning the “downs”, Paul next mentions the “ups”. He says, **and I know how to abound**. This means to be filled with abundance. Although never wealthy or well respected by virtually anyone, Paul sensed great moments of God filling him with great abundance. But he was only able to see that abundance as he walked down the path of both poverty and plenty. But even when Paul sat in the lap of luxury he didn't get wrapped up in it because his true contentment was in God.

- So he concludes v12 by saying: **In any and every circumstance**, that's both during times of poverty and plenty, the ups and the downs, **I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need**. Once again, Paul makes it clear that he learned to live above his circumstances instead of underneath them. He never allowed his circumstances to control him. He recognizes God was in

control and that kept him from having his emotions controlled by whether things were going good or bad.

- And once again he uses this word **learned**. He mentioned the learning process first in v11. Here he mentions it again. But notice he says he had **learned the secret** of contentment in times of **facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need**. Do you notice that phraseology?

- The word **secret** (*mueo*) is an interesting Greek word that Paul uses. I focus on this word because every word of Scripture is inspired. And this word helps us see how expecting this path of poverty and plenty, ups and downs, and pain and pleasure is helpful and finding contentment. The word **secret** means “to initiate”. The Greek word *musterion* (mystery) is derived from this word. It was used to describe the initiation into mysteries. Paul is in effect saying, “I have been let into a secret and initiated into the mysteries.” In Paul’s day, the so called “mystery religions” (paganism) claimed to have dark secrets only revealed to those who were initiated into their temples. They were not made available to the person on the street. Even some organizations today have initiations that then lead to secret after secret as you climb higher and higher in the organization. Paul seems to be using these mystery religions as an innocent analogy to say that God

has a secret to tell all Christians and its that all Christians can be learn contentment.

- Here's how it works: as we face the spectrums of life in the poverty and plenty, ups and downs, and pain and pleasure we come to realize on the one hand that no matter how bad things get Christ is always enough, and on the other hand no matter how good things get Christ is always better. Paul seems to be saying that this is learned. That means that contentment is something we learn.

- When you expect the path of life, which is the same for all Christians complete with poverty and plenty, ups and downs, pain and pleasure, your perspective becomes right. You begin to view things from heaven's perspective. You start to have the aerial view if you will. Then you will be able to say with Paul, *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison"* (2 Cor 4:17). You begin to compare your situation and circumstances in terms of the eternal instead of temporal. This is the key to contentment; it's **secret**. But we must learn contentment; it will not fall into our lap from the sky.

- No matter who you are and what you are facing today, you can have the confidence that God is teaching you through

whatever circumstances you find yourself in. Listen to Him. Lean on Him during this time, especially if it's a difficult time. Ask Him in prayer what He is teaching you? After all, when it comes to trials, James says, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to Him"* (Js 1:5). In another sense, you need not ask because every trial is an opportunity for God to teach us to find contentment in him instead of our circumstances.

- Discontentment is nothing more than not being satisfied with Jesus Christ. Jeremiah Burroughs, a Puritan preacher and author, said one time:

What a foolish thing is this, that because I have not got what I want, I will not enjoy the comfort of what I have! There is a great deal of folly in a discontented heart.

- True contentment is not found when you have everything, but when you don't want everything. And this goes without saying there is a certain type of contentment that's not healthy.

It reminds me of the rich businessman who was bothered by the fisherman sitting idly by his boat. So finally he asked the fisherman, "Why aren't you out there fishing?" He replied, "Because I've caught enough fish for the day." "Well, why don't you see if you can catch more fish?" asked the rich man. The fisherman said, "What would I do with them?" "You could earn more money and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could even buy more nets and catch more fish and thereby make more money. And

pretty soon you would have a fleet of boats and be rich like me.” “Then what would I do?” said the fishermen. The rich man, happy that he had finally seemed to convince him said, “Well, then you could sit down and enjoy life.” And the fisherman said, “What do you think I’m doing right now?”^v

- Contentment is not always indicative of a well spent life. The Christian shouldn’t be content in not pursuing godliness or not in faithfully serving the church. As Christians we should never be content in our understanding of God’s Word and application of it. But there is one area that we are to always learn contentment in. And that’s in accepting our circumstances and finding our true sense of joy in the Lord Jesus Christ with whom we’ve been united by God’s sovereign, free amazing grace!

Trans: But there are 4 requirements involved in the Christian finding contentment. Finding contentment for the Christian involves first of all a praise expressed where v10 showed us that seeing God’s goodness in always providentially meeting our needs is vital. That’s a praise expressed. Then we saw from v11 that there is a process experienced, that is, we must learn by experience how to be content in God’s providential dealings with us. Then third, we saw that finding contentment involves a path expected. We are not only know that we must learn how to be content, but we must yield ourselves to the path God lays before us with all of life’s ups and downs, for

that is the secret to finding contentment. So finding contentment involves a praise expressed, a process experienced, a path expected, and finally...

IV. A Power Exercised (13)

- The sermon could have started and ended at v13 because after telling you all of that, at the end of the day contentment is not something that can be grasped or manipulated to get. It has to be given to us by a sovereign God. Notice what Paul says in v13 (one of the most famous in all the Bible especially for athletes): **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**

- The power to experience contentment comes from the Christian's vital union with Christ. On another occasion, Paul said, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gal 2:20).

- This verse reveals another part of the secret of contentment. The more content you try to be, the less content you will be. Your focus should not be on how to find contentment in your circumstances, but on your Christ who is with you in those circumstances.

- The words **all things** is actually placed at the beginning of the Greek sentence in order to emphasize it. It's like putting things in bold or italics on your computer. Paul wants you and I to see that **all things** can be done by the Christian. This doesn't mean that if you have enough faith you can flap your arms and fly. Nor does it mean that if you have enough faith, God will give you whatever you ask (blab it and grab it). Nor does it mean that you can do whatever you want since you are saved and God doesn't care now how you live. Nor does it mean that you don't need preaching, or church, or the fellowship of the saints, or the Lord's Supper, or prayer because you have Jesus. **All things** must be interpreted in light of the context. It refers to the spectrum of life's circumstances that Paul mentioned in v12. From poverty to plenty and all points in between, the Christian can find contentment.

- In other words, it matters not what is being done to you by others, or just in general where God has providentially allowed you to be today, you **can do all things through Him who strengthens** you. The word **strengthens** (ἐνδυναμόω) is where we get our English word dynamite. It speaks of empowerment, enablement, and increased strength. God's grace and strength is sufficient for whatever you face today and whatever you face tomorrow. As Isaiah tells us:

He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men

stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary” (Is 40:29-31).

- If you are a Christian you are “*strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being*” (Eph 3:16). So instead of your eyes being on your circumstances, switch your gaze to your Savior. You will have all you ever need in Christ because He strengthens you. You will know what it’s like to be hungry and to be full, to live in poverty and plenty, to have ups and downs, to experience both pain and pleasure. God had only one son without sin, but He has no sons without sorrow. But praise God, His Son Jesus took our sorrows and bore the wrath we deserved. He was strong in his sinlessness so that we could be weak in our sinfulness and yet still be accepted through faith in His dear name.

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- Finding contentment is possible, but it involves a praise expressed. Do you see and thank God for all the ways He providentially cares for you? That’s a praise expressed. There’s also a process experienced. Do you see all of life as a classroom where God is teaching you to be content in Him? That’s a process experienced. Then there’s a path expected. What do you expect to get out of life? So many people confuse needs with wants. You will experience both poverty and plenty. Submit to God in those moments and all moments

in between to learn contentment. Finding contentment involves a praise expressed, a process learned a path expected and a power exercised. You have all you need in Christ, therefore you have the most important resource of all to strengthen you in your time of greatest need. You will always have enough in the Lord.

- Let me close with a verse. I Timothy 6:6 says, “*Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment.*” Joyful is the man who is content with being godly. Let godliness be your focus and your problems won’t seem so big.

- As I said at the beginning, you are in the midst of a storm right now, or you are about to head into one, or you just stepped out of one. What you need is the Word of God to remind you this morning that the Lord is your portion; the Lord is indeed your strength. You can do and make it thru all things thru God who is your strength.

ⁱ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/contentment>

ⁱⁱ “A Shelter in the Time of Storm”, *Trinity Hymnal*, 619

ⁱⁱⁱ MacArthur, 301.

^{iv} *Ibid*, 300.

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