**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 11-5-2023
Contemplating Contentment**

I have been so blessed over this last month as I have slowly opened the many cards and gifts and words of appreciation during pastor’s appreciation month last month. I still have a couple cards to do actually, as I followed Blain’s directive and only opened one card a day. And in fact, there was several days that I was swept into other things and neglected to open any cards.

Truly, each of these cards have touched my heart in a very deep way. I felt your love towards my family and me. And I thanked God many times for His grace in leading me here, to Chestnut Grove Church. I am eternally grateful.

Truly, there is great joy in both giving and in receiving gifts, isn’t there? Maybe you can think of certain gifts that you have given over the years and how meaningful they were to the person who received them. That brings joy to the soul.

And then, you can probably remember various gifts that you have received over the years and the joy that came as you received them.

In this section of Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi, that is exactly what he is doing. He is saying thank you to the Philippians for their gift. Paul has received a monetary gift from this generous church whom Paul helped years earlier to plant. This gift from the Philippians is one of the ways that they were showing their sincere love and appreciation to Paul for his ministry among them.

Let us turn to God’s Word now and hear of Paul’s letter in chapter 4, verses 10-13.

**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.** **12I 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.**

Paul states ‘I rejoiced greatly.’ His actual words in the original language speak of immense rejoicing. He was overjoyed. And he is rejoicing in the Lord.

Truly, every good and perfect gift comes from God. Paul was rejoicing in the fact that God’s goodness was blossoming in the hearts of this church in Philippi to such a degree that it led to this action of generosity.

Paul writes, **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.**

It appears that for one reason or another, it was difficult for the Philippian church to communicate with Paul. Communication was much harder at that time than it is today. Today we have email and phones and social media to make communication nearly instant. In fact, if someone takes more than a day or two to get back to a message, people can think something is wrong.

But in the 1st century, communication was very difficult. Messages had to be hand delivered and roads were dangerous to travel. Think about that for a moment. No phones. No internet. No postal service. No cars. No trains.

Additionally, with Paul being on the move as much as he was, I can understand why the church in Philippi may have had a difficult time knowing exactly where to find him.

But now of course, Paul is under house arrest in Rome, so his location was clear. And all roads lead to Rome, as they say. But, Rome was over 4,600 miles away from Philippi. Think again of Epaphroditus and the arduous journey to see Paul and to bring the gift from the Philippians. It took a toll on his body. That would be like traveling across the entire continental United States to deliver a message.

But what Paul writes in verse 11 is very fascinating. He states:

**11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.**

Paul’s rejoicing is not primarily because he had a need that was met, although I have no doubt that he was very happy about God’s provisions for him. Instead, his rejoicing was first and foremost over the fact that the gospel message has so transformed the church in Philippi that the fruit of radical generosity was being evidenced by these Christians. And Paul was excited about that, just as a teacher or a parent is excited when they see their student or their child following Jesus and growing as a Christian.

Verse 11 is so profound. Paul shares that he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

**\* In other words, Paul’s contentment is not found in his circumstances. It is in something else.**

John D. Rockefeller, a famous American industrialist in the 20th century, was once asked, "How much money is enough money?" He replied, "Just a little bit more."

If contentment was measured in money, Rockefeller would never have said this.

Contentment is not found in accumulating stuff, as much as commercials and magazines may try to tell people. None of those things will result in contentment.

I was listening on the radio this week to some sports talk and they were speaking about the Texas Rangers. If you are not aware, the Rangers won the World Series earlier this week. It was their first World Series victory in 60 or so years of existence.

And the announcers were speaking about how there would have been this moment of extreme happiness for a few minutes, but then what? After a short time, all that is left is to get ready for next year to try to win it again.

That is not to say that there is anything wrong with competing in sports, but if that is all one is focused on, no measure of success will result in contentment.

And has often been said, “money does not buy happiness.” I think about how many miserable wealthy people there are out there.

So what is the answer to a contented, satisfied life?

Paul continues:

**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.**

Paul has been through a lot at this point in his life. He had experienced times of having plenty and had experienced times of being in need (going hungry and being imprisoned and beaten and chased out of town). He had learned that life has its ups and down.

Does that ring true for any of you? It rings true for me. There are good days and there are bad days. There are times of plenty and times of lack, there are times of sickness and times of health, there are times of sadness and times of celebration. BUT THROUGH IT ALL, PAUL HAS LEARNED TO FIND CONTENTMENT.

And his contentment, his satisfaction, was not found in stuff.

So where is it found? ***It is found in his relationship with Jesus Christ***.

One of the most famous verses in the entire Bible is verse 14. Here Paul writes, **“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”**

But what most people do not realize is that Paul is speaking of finding contentment and joy and satisfaction in life through Jesus Christ. He is saying that no matter if he has a lot or a little or if things are going easily or if they are quite a struggle – the secret to contentment is not on these things, but in knowing and following Jesus.

The Lord offers His people contentment in all circumstances and situations. Amen! This is what Paul so wanted for the Christians in Philippi.

This verse is often misunderstood to say that with enough effort people can accomplish anything that they set out to do. It is not saying that if I work hard enough, I can be a professional ball player or opera singer.

While there are people that are called to do these things and working hard can help some people to became a professional athlete or an opera singer, that is not what Paul is actually saying here.

Again, he is speaking about contentment. He is contemplating contentment and sharing the source of where it can be found. Namely, it is in Jesus.

HE IS SAYING THAT IT IS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST HE HAS FOUND CONTENTMENT, THAT HE HAS FOUND LASTING SATISFACTION IN LIFE, NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WOULD COME HIS WAY! These verses should have encouraged the Philippians to not look to anything or anyone else but the Lord Jesus Himself to give them true contentment, true rest and satisfaction for the soul.

Now friends, what is the main takeaway from this passage for our lives today?

And I believe that it is this. We are to remember that contentment and satisfaction and fulfillment in life is not found in stuff, but in knowing and following Jesus.

Life can be a roller coaster ride at times, filled with twists and turns. Like a roller coaster, sometimes life can be exhilarating and fun, but also like a roller coaster, sometimes life may you sick, physically, emotionally, mentally.

Truly, we do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. But as we choose to abide close to Jesus and to come to Him each day for strength and peace and love and joy, we can, by His grace, live in contentment no matter the circumstances.

In conclusion, as you probably know, I love the Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis. According to Lewis, each of the 7 books are about Christ.

One of those books is called *The Silver Chair.* As we contemplate contentment together today, I would like to share a brief story from the book that vividly shows how contentment and satisfaction can only be found in coming to Jesus and following after Him.

In the story, one of the characters is terribly thirsty and there is a stream of water in sight ahead. But Aslan, the Christ figure, who this character did not know yet, was standing right in front of the stream. And Aslan is a Lion.

- I want to share an excerpt from this scene:

“If I run away, it’ll be after me in a moment,” thought Jill. “And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth.” Anyway, she couldn’t have moved if she had tried, and she couldn’t take her eyes off it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

“If you’re thirsty, you may drink.”

They were the first words she had heard since Scrubb had spoken to her on the edge of the cliff. For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, “If you are thirsty, come and drink,” and of course she remembered what Scrubb had said about animals talking in the other world, and realized that it was the lion speaking. Anyways, she had seen its lips move this time, and the voice was not like a man’s. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her any less frightened than she had been before, but it made her frightened in rather a different way.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the lion.

“I’m *dying* of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the lion.

“May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to – do anything to me, if I do come? said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. “

“*Do* you eat girls? She said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion – no one who had seen his stern face could do that – and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted. You didn’t need to drink much of it, for it quenched her thirst at once. Before she tasted it she had been intending to make a dash away from the Lion the moment she had finished. Now, she realized that this would be on the whole the most dangerous thing of all. She got up and stood there with her lips still wet from drinking.

“Come here,” said the Lion. And she had to. She was almost between its front paws now, looking straight into its face.

(We’ll stop there and leave you on a cliffhanger for you to read on your own).

But like Paul, we must remember that contentment and satisfaction and spiritual rest and the quenching of our thirst is found, not through our circumstances, but through coming to Christ each day remembering that in Him we have everything that we need.

Truly, we can do all this through Him who gives us strength. So no matter what tomorrow holds, may we walk with the One who holds tomorrow in His hands and who alone can make us content and truly satisfied. Amen.

Let us pray...

Resources: WORD BIBLICAL COMMENTARY 43: PHILIPPIANS

<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_D._Rockefeller>

<https://distancebetween2.com/philippi/rome>

The Chronicles of Narnia – The Silver Chair