

When was the last time you saw a commercial that told you: what you have right now is good enough? I’m going to guess probably never. Most advertising is built on creating discontent. It wants to convince you that what you have, eh, it’s OK, but what you really need is this product, and then finally, at long last, the search will be over and you’ll finally be happy. On balance, how has that worked for you? Does getting stuff keep you happy? No? Then this message is for you.

One of the quiet values of the Bible is contentment. Contentment is simply being grateful for what you have. It also means not being controlled by the urge to go get more. The problem is, there is emptiness in our souls that we are trying to fill, and on the surface, being content does not seem to help us fill up.

How can we be content in a world where things don’t always go the way we want them to; a world where we have to deal with all kinds of challenges and obstacles?” In Philippians chapter four, verses ten through thirteen, Paul is saying, “I know the secret! I have learned how to be content!”

Now, if anyone has good reason not to be content, it’s the apostle Paul. He’s writing this letter to the Philippians as a Roman prisoner. He’s chained to a guard 24 hours a day. You couldn’t blame him for not being happy. He could say, “Lord, this is not fair! I’ve been your faithful servant for over 25 years! Why are you letting this happen to me? Why can’t I be out there on the front lines helping the churches?” But Paul had a different attitude. In Philippians 1, he says “Even though I am in custody because of my religious beliefs, I rejoice that the gospel of Christ is still being preached.” And in Philippians 2:17, he says, “Even though I am being poured out like a drink offering, I rejoice that you are working out your salvation with fear and trembling.” And in Philippians 4:4, Paul says, “No matter what you’re going through, no matter what your life is like, no matter what your circumstances are, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!” Instead of being the grumpiest man on earth, Paul is the most joyful, because He locates joy in Jesus and not in circumstances.

Then in verse ten, Paul says “I rejoice greatly that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.” We know from verse 15 that the Philippian church was the only congregation that was sending Paul financial support. In the past, they weren’t able

to do this. But now they can. But notice that Paul is not rejoicing because he has a few extra dollars in his pocket. He's rejoicing that these people care about him and support his mission.

He goes on to say in verse eleven, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Notice that being content is something that Paul had to learn. That's a good point. Because contentment does not come naturally. We get antsy when we don't get what we want. As a good teacher, Paul talks about how he got to that point in his life. Verse 12 says "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. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength!"

And when Paul says this, he is reflecting on his own personal history. In the book of 2 Corinthians, he tells the church about all the bad things that have happened to him in the province of Asia, and he says "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." In other words, God deliberately puts us in challenging situations so that we might rely on Him rather than ourselves. He allows us to go through good times and bad times, so that we can say with conviction, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength!"

Having said that, let me be clear. When Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength, he's not saying "I can be the best basketball player in the world if I just involve Jesus in it somehow." This is not a recipe for God as our divine vending machine, or genie in a bottle. The apostle is telling you and me, this is how you make it through the hard times without being crushed. And this is how you make it through the good times without falling in love with the gifts instead of the Giver.

The secret of being content in every situation is the strength of Christ. How do you access this strength? The secret is to do what Paul has been doing all along: to make a conscious decision to locate joy in Jesus and not in circumstances. This is something that we pray our way into. It is a learned behavior as we have seen in the example of Paul himself. And this kind of strong resolve comes from Jesus. It starts with Him. Think of the strength it took for Jesus to complete His mission.

When Jesus went to the cross, He wasn't happy in any traditional sense of the word. He was sweating drops of blood in the garden. On the cross he moaned and

cried out. But at the same time, Hebrews 12:2 says “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” On the cross, Jesus could not possibly have rejoiced in his circumstances, yet Scripture says there was joy set before Him. What was it? It was the joy of gaining you through his sacrifice. It was the joy of doing what he set out to do and returning to His Father. It wasn’t the circumstances of nails and wood and whip and thorns. The joy was flowing from another source, rooted in His Father’s heart. There was a love he was returning to and releasing into the world, all at once.

There is a story about the millionaire William Randolph Hearst. He invested a fortune in collecting art treasures from around the world. One day he heard about a valuable artifact. So he sent his agent abroad to look for it. After months of searching, the agent finally found the treasure. To the surprise of Hearst, the priceless masterpiece was stored right in his own warehouse. He had been searching all over the world for a treasure he already possessed.

It is quite possible for you and me to search all over for things that will give us contentment and peace of mind, forgetting that there is treasure right under our noses. That treasure is a joyful reliance on Jesus. There is a very real love that you can experience right now that can overpower all your hurt, all your pain, all your discontent, flowing from a crucified and risen man who is also God. You are his joy. Is he yours?