Sermon Preparation – Philippians 4:11-13

Jesus Christ is More Than Enough

1) In this passage, Paul is writing to the Philippians about his thankfulness for the gift that they sent to him. Reread verse 10. Other than for the gift itself, why was Paul rejoicing?

2) Reread verse 11. In this verse, Paul says that he “learned” to be content. What does the word “learned” in this verse indicate?

3) In verse 12, Paul says that he has, “learned the secret of being content in any and every situation…” Why do you think Paul refers to this contentment as a secret?

4) Why does Paul tell the Philippians about his ability to be content? Is Paul trying to say thank you to the Philippians while also making it clear that he is not asking for another gift, or is Paul telling the Philippians that they too should be content in all circumstances? Could it be a combination of both? Explain your answer.

5) Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-13 then reread Philippians 4:10-13. How was Paul able to be content even through the many difficult circumstances he endured?
6) Philippians 4:13 is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, but it is often used out of context. From what context should this verse be read?

7) Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10. From this passage, what sticks out to you about contentment?

8) Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, focusing especially on verse 10. In this passage, Paul says that he “delights in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties.” Does Paul seem crazy to you after reading this passage? What is his reason for delighting in these things? What does this have to do with his ability to be content in all circumstances?

Others’ Thoughts

Excerpt from The Practice of Godliness by Jerry Bridges

“Contentment is one of the most distinguishing traits of the godly person, because a godly person has his heart focused on God rather than on possession or position or power. As William Hendriksen has observed so well, ‘The truly godly person is not interested in becoming rich. He possesses inner resources which furnish riches far beyond that which earth can offer.’

The words that are rendered as ‘content’ or ‘contentment’ in our English Bibles actually mean ‘sufficiency.’ The same word translated ‘contentment’ in 1 Timothy 6:6 is rendered ‘all that you need’ or ‘all sufficiency’ in 2 Corinthians 9:8. When God said to Paul, ‘My grace is sufficient for you’ (2 Corinthians 12:9), He used the same word translated elsewhere as ‘be content’ (See Luke 3:14, 1 Timothy 6:8, Hebrews 13:5).

The contented person experiences the sufficiency of God’s provision for his needs and the sufficiency of God’s grace for his circumstances. He believes God will indeed meet all his material needs and that He will work in all his circumstances for his good. That is why Paul could say, ‘Godliness with
contentment is great gain.’ The godly person has found what the greedy or envious or discontented person always searches for but never finds. He has found satisfaction and rest in his soul.

The idea of contentment in the Bible is most often associated with possession or money, but there are other areas of life in which we need to be content. After possessions, probably the most common need is to learn contentment with our place in society or in the body of Christ. Still a third area that demands our practice of contentment is the providence of God in such varied circumstances as physical limitations and afflictions, privations, unpleasant neighbors or living situations, trials and even persecutions. These circumstances often cause the natural man to murmur and complain and to question the goodness of God in his life.

The very first temptation in the history of mankind was the temptation to be discontent. God had provided for Adam and Eve far beyond all they needed. Genesis states, ‘God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. ‘God withheld only one tree from Adam and Eve as a test of their obedience to Him. And Satan used that one tree to tempt Eve by sowing seeds of discontent in her heart. He questioned the goodness of God to Eve, and that is exactly what discontent is—a questioning of the goodness of God.

Satan tried the same strategy with Jesus in the wilderness. He sought to make Jesus discontent over His lack of food and covetous for position and power over the kingdoms of the world. If Isaiah 14:13-15 is a veiled reference to Satan, as many scholars believe, then we can conclude that Satan’s own downfall was occasioned by his discontent—his unwillingness to accept his God-ordained position in the hierarchy of angelic beings.

We should note these incidents carefully. Discontent is one of the most satanic of all sins, and to indulge in it is to rebel against God just as Satan did.”

Excerpt from When Life Is Hard by James MacDonald

“Be Content in Your Thorn to Experience Christ’s Purpose.”

“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Now, that does not mean that I like the thorn; that I want it; or that I enjoy it. Don’t accept that kind of pressure from people who twist platitudes from Scripture. But I accept it. I submit to it. And I embrace it. By God’s grace, I rest in it. I’m not putting my life on hold. I’m not counting the seconds until the thorn is removed. I’m not getting by and refusing to enjoy anything else. God help me. I’m living my life with the thorn. The choice may not be easy, but the alternatives are all much harder in the long run!

“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses” (v. 10). The NKJV translates weaknesses as ‘infirmities,’ meaning, I am content with thorns
that are physical trials. But Paul went beyond, as if knowing how much help we would need, and listed off various kinds of thorns for which he was willing to be content.

I am content with thorns that are ‘insults’ (v. 10) or ‘reproaches’ (NKJV). Those are relational thorns, the intentional and unintentional barbs that others inflict on us.

I am content with thorns that are ‘hardships’ (v.10). These are lasting trials dealing with financial and material matters. The NKJV uses the term necessities for these material thorns—bankruptcy, foreclosure, even poverty.

I am content with thorns that are ‘persecutions’ (v.10) I am content with personal attacks. These are spiritual thorns—suffering for the name of Christ.

I am content with thorns that are “calamities” (v. 10). That means literally distresses. Emotional thorns—fear, anxiety, and personal disasters.

How Paul? How are you content with these things? How could he speak that way of insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities?

His answer is right at the beginning of verse 10: ‘For the sake of Christ.’ Why can we be content during hardships and calamities? Because we love Christ so much. Because we know He is the purpose of our existence, the reason we are here. It’s His glory and His fame that we’re living for.

He’s in control of the details. And He has allowed this thorn to come into our lives and He says to you and to me as He said to the apostle Paul, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power {my presence} is made perfect in weakness’ (v.9).

So let’s boast in the thorn to experience Christ’s power. Let’s be content with the thorn to experience Christ’s purpose.

“Changed by The Thorn”

Does anybody remember their childhood sweetheart? My wife is so amazing. Apart from salvation, she’s God’s greatest gift to me. But I have to tell the truth. Kathy was not my first love…

I was in first grade and her name was Wendy. She went to our church. She had two brothers and every week we used to carpool together to Boys Brigade Club. And every week I hoped Wendy would be in the car.

I would follow her around at Sunday School and peek behind the curtains that portioned off all of the classrooms to catch a look at her. I don’t ever remember talking to her, I just remember thinking she was so cute.

I also remember that she got very sick with cancer. I was in first grade and didn’t really understand all that was happening. Eventually she was in the car every time we’d be going back-and-forth-to Brigade.

I’m sure her mother needed the relief, so she would ride with her father. I remember when she lost her hair. I had never told anyone about my crush, but I would sit in the backseat and I would see her and think about her. I was puzzled by all of it.
She got sicker and then sadly, Wendy died. I remember her funeral. I remember not getting it at all and being afraid to be around people who were experiencing such grief and not having any idea what it was all about.

Wendy’s mother’s name was Bernice. She used to sing in a trio at our church. I can remember that after a few months, she began singing again. For years after, whenever I saw her mother sing, I would always think of Wendy.

Bernice was changed by this thorn. Before Wendy’s sickness and death, Bernice had become estranged from her non-believing family. For years, she hadn’t even talked to them. But I’m sure it was her grief over losing Wendy that changed all of that. That loss was her thorn. She began to reach out to her parents and to her brothers.

She reached out to one brother specifically. She invited him to come to church on a Sunday night and hear her sing. She would have never done that before her thorn—never! But she did it now. And he came. And he brought his teenage daughter with him and she started to attend our youth group on a regular basis. Eventually that niece gave her life to Christ.

I know that whole story, of course, because Bernice’s niece—the daughter who came and got saved—is my wife, Kathy.

Now I’m not saying for a moment that God gave Wendy cancer, and least of all, so Kathy could get saved. I don’t understand it all. I just know that God promises that ‘all things work together for good to those who love God’ (Romans 8:28 NKJV). And that His grace is sufficient for you and me and His strength is made perfect in weakness.

**Prayer of Commitment**

Father, I realize now that just because I know that thorns last and that You want to bring great good out of my thorn doesn’t mean that my thorn will now be removed. I want to accept the fact that this may be the first in many lessons You want me to ‘get’ from this thorn. But for now, I need Your grace desperately not to be a quitter. I need to remember that Your grace, not my strength will carry me through.

Father, You can receive glory by my crowns and also by my thorns. Either way, Lord, be glorified in my life. Let me count even the painful lessons as blessings from Your hands. Lord, I realize that elevating my prayer life and deepening my time in Your Word are two sides of the same conversation. Help me hear You speak in such a way that I am drawn to You. I know You want Your Word to have that effect in my life. And about that thorn, Lord. You allowed it for Your purposes and I long to see Your purposes fulfilled in my life. In Jesus’ name, Who is my sufficient grace, Amen.”