



## Week Two: The Secret

### Intro

Paul encountered many circumstances that would have caused him to feel unhappy. So we know that perfect circumstances are not a realistic solution to us being content, we need something deeper. Paul commanded us to be happy, because he knew that it was something that could be learned. If he was able to learn to be happy in the Lord, then we can too.

The secret to 'rejoicing in the Lord' lies in learning to be content.

### Sermon Points:

#### 1. Content in Christ's Provision

- Read Philippians 4:10-13 & 1 Timothy 5:6-10

When Paul was referring to contentment, he was talking about living without much financial means. He had learned to be content, even if he was hungry or had other real needs. We tend to think about contentment in terms of being *comfortable*. This is far from what Paul was talking about. We are to learn to be content in our abundance, in our comfort, and even when finances are uncomfortably low. We learn to do that when we fully realise where our provision actually comes from – The Lord.

- So whether or not we have a high-paying job or a low-paying job, the job is the means by which God has given us his provision, and what he has apportioned us, is what he has chosen to give us.
- We do not need to begrudge our small earnings or feel guilty for our large earnings, but we can find peace and joy in his provision.
- When we grasp this, we realise how in giving God the first portion of our provision makes total sense. We are able to joyfully give to him from what has given to us. It is a continual reminder of our dependence on him to provide, and also keeps us humble and grateful. Giving back to God then becomes a delight, and brings us joy, rather than only giving from a reluctant heart, which gives out of a sense of duty.
- Knowing that our provision comes from God also makes us more responsible with our spending. It makes us realise that we are stewards and not owners, and therefore we should be disciplined to save for the future and faithfully provide for our families out of the measure he has given us.
- Finally, our understanding of provision also reminds us to be open at all times for God to lead us to give or provide for the needs of others. Giving to others then becomes the hugest blessing, as we realise that we are just the distributors of God's funds, which leads to real joy.



- ❖ Q: At what level of financial provision are you content, and when do you start becoming discontent? What emotions cause this shift in attitude? (E.g. the discomfort of having a measure of independence taken away – so one can no longer afford a nice car, or to live in a posh area, or to go out for dinner on the weekends etc. At what level of strain do you become discontent?)
- ❖ Q: If you were to lose your job and only be able to get by with food, shelter and clothing, do you genuinely think you would be content? Explain your answer.
- ❖ Q: Why does our discontentment with our finances reveal a lack of belief in who our true provider really is?
- ❖ Q: Why is our sense of entitlement (*this does not apply to all of us, but certainly to many of us*) to a certain standard of living also an indicator of our lack of understanding of God's sovereignty and provision for his people?
- ❖ Q: Why does a true grasp of God's provision for us free us from being discontent with our level of financial freedom, while also allowing us to find contentment where he has placed us, and not constantly worry about how to get where the rich are?

## 2. Content in Christ's Righteousness

- [Read Philippians 3:4-14](#)

Paul had not only grasped God's provision in the day-to-day financial hurdles he faced, but also for his spiritual condition. He understood that even though he had once been very religious, that all of his efforts were futile, because the only way he was able to meet God's standards, was by Christ meeting them himself, and then receiving it as though it was his own. He grasped at a heart level how impossible it was to attain righteousness in any other way. When he did, it allowed him to stop trying so hard, and to actually celebrate God's amazing kindness to him.

In Paul's time, there were Jews telling the church that they needed Christ's righteousness, as well as circumcision, in order to be secure in their salvation. This was spiritual robbery concealed in religious piety. Though we are so far removed from the temptation to add Judaism to our conditions for God's acceptance of us, we are still tempted in many other ways to add to Christ's gift of righteousness, in order that we can play a part in it, which actually makes us "self-righteous".

The temptation towards self-righteousness is less obvious in our context, and perhaps looks different in the varied church environments. For us, we may be tempted to want to try and live a morally perfect life so that we feel we are doing our best to earn our righteousness, or at least contribute our bit. We all know that we fall short of God's standards, and yet we keep trying and failing, and then we feel the need to hide some of our failures and sins, and pretend to be more "holy" than we are. This makes us hypocrites. Living this sort of Christian life is exhausting, makes us miserable and it completely bypasses the gospel and all Christ died to give us. His righteousness alone is enough.

Grasping this does not then invite us to live a continuously sinful life. Instead, it allows us the freedom to walk in the righteousness God has gifted to us. It means that when I am tempted to sin, I am also reminded that I am free not to sin, and I have the power not to sin. But it also means that if I do sin, it does not remove my cloak of righteousness.

- ❖ Q: Why do our attempts to earn God's favour make us miserable?
- ❖ Q: How does our understanding of God's gift of righteousness free us to joyfully live our lives for him?



### 3. Content in Christ's Plan

- [Read Philippians 4: 4-7](#)

Paul's life and circumstance were very turbulent after he came to Christ, but he was able to persevere because he learned how to manage his responses to the craziness: he learned to trust God in his difficulties, and gave us some steps to help us do the same:

- Rejoice in the Lord.
  - Choose not to be anxious.
  - Pray and thank God who hears and weighs up all of our requests, and knows what is best for us.
  - As we do that we experience God's peace, which is totally opposite to what the world experiences when circumstances around them are crazy and unmanageable.
- ❖ Q: Why is it impossible to remain anxious when we trust God?
  - ❖ Q: Why do you think it is important to rejoice in the Lord before we can choose not to be anxious?

#### Personal Reflection Q:

- ❖ Do you tend to get anxious, and go down that whole train of thought before praying?
- ❖ Do you still remain anxious after praying? Why do you think this is?
- ❖ What do you find most difficult about trusting God to deal with your difficulties, and then in being content with his answers?

### 4. Content in Christ's Power

- [Read Philippians 4:13](#)

Paul was able to handle any circumstance that God put him in because he was content no matter which way it went. He learned to trust God and to be content in good and bad circumstances. It did not mean that every circumstance would flourish and produce the outcome he hoped for. His learned contentment is something we can learn as well.

- ❖ Q: Why is it important to see this verse in its context of contentment?
- ❖ Q: What are some circumstances that you fear being in because you feel you would never cope or remain content? Explain.
- ❖ Q: Why is it helpful to know that Paul learned this contentment rather than just having it from the start?

### 5. Content in Christ's Promise

- [Read Philippians 4:13](#)

The reality of Christ's return was real to Paul and made him realise how much reward still awaited him, and so he was able to let go of the things that once consumed him. Our identity and worth are not determined by our life on earth but on what awaits us when Christ returns. This is a reality we need to focus on more and more, and in doing so it will radically shift our perspective.