



Sermon – 09/24/2023
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered

Philippians 4:10 - 13

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to spend our time this morning in Philippians 4. Philippians 4, beginning in verse 10. And wasn't it special to get to celebrate all those baptisms today? I just loved that moment. And what was amazing about that is since COVID has taken place, we've never had the opportunity to do more baptisms than the eleven that we've done this Sunday. And it's just so fitting that we get to watch each one of them make that public commitment to their faith as we get to gather together today for this big moment in the life of our church. To, on our Get in the Game commitment Sunday for the NEXT Initiative. And what I'm so excited about today is just to see how God works in us and through us in this time. And I have to be honest with you, this is personal for me as your pastor and here's the reason why. When I was a student at Texas A&M 20 years ago and God had brought me to Central. We were right in the middle of a generosity initiative just like this to take us from Coulter Drive to this location. And our church, through the generosity of people just like you, pledged commitments just like what we'll do today that changed my life forever. I'm where I am today in part because of the faithfulness of our people in that generation. In investing in this church in a way that poured into me, that shaped me my call to ministry, that ready me for the Gospel, that welcomed me to the team in the College ministry. That sent me out to train and now has brought me back here. And you know what I can't help but think about? How many stories just like that are we going to get to write today for the generations ahead? Think about the the way that we will grow food in that garden to feed the hungry. The way that we'll raise up missionaries to send them out. The way that lives will be trained through our Training Program, our student ministry built up, our college students equipped, marriages saved, lives rescued, people that come to know Jesus all because of the faithfulness of our people and God working through that by His spirit in this moment. So, at the end of this message, during our response song, we're going to invite you to take the commitment card that you might have filled out in your home this week, and if not, you can grab one in the seat back in front of you. And we're going to encourage you to place that in an envelope. and we've got baskets all along the front here. And during the response time, we're going to take time and bring those down and lay them before the Lord. We talked last week about the life of faith. That we bring the jars and He fills the oil. And we're trusting that God is going to do this right now in this moment.

And what you know, if you've been with us over the last few weeks is we've been spending our time in a sermon series called the Seven Marks of a Next Generation Christian. And this morning, the fifth mark is that of contentment. So, contentment is an easy word to, to know but it's a hard word to understand, to truly get it. If we're just thinking about what does contentment mean, contentment is sustained satisfaction. It's sustained satisfaction that's secured and shaped by our Savior and not our circumstances. And what we're going to find this morning as we work our way through Philippians chapter 4, is Paul is going to show us the secret to contentment. Now, you and I know we live in a world that's constantly pulling us towards discontentment, towards discouragement, towards the disappointment that often emerges between the gap of our lofty expectations and our difficult realities. And what Paul is going to show us here is what it looks like to navigate that in light of the Gospel. So, let's look now at Philippians 4, beginning in verse 10. He says this,

¹⁰I rejoiced in the Lord greatly though now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹²I 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. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Let's remember what's happening when Paul writes this letter to the Philippians. He's writing to them from a Roman prison. Enslaved for living out his faith, enslaved for sharing the Gospel. And he is in danger of his own survival. And he is engaged with the Philippian church and he's invited them. He's asked of them to raise up a special offering over and above their normal giving in order to send to him, not only to sustain him in prison, but to the stage for taking the Gospel to the next generation of believers in that area. So, we find the Philippians in a moment very similar to ours. Standing on the precipice of a commitment in a generosity in order to take the Gospel to the next generation. So, why is it that we would talk about contentment on a Sunday like this where we're making commitments? It's because Gospel contentment fuels Gospel commitment. In other words, when we're satisfied in Jesus, we sacrifice for Jesus. And what we're going to notice as we work our way through this passage, Paul's going to show us three keys that unlock the secret to contentment. And what we're going to find today is that our commitment in Christ fuels our commitment for Christ. So, notice the first that we see here in verse 10. He calls us to look to Jesus. You know, if anybody had reason to not be content, it would be the apostle Paul. He's there in chains. He has no means of survival on his own. He's just seeking to make it from day to day in this prison. And you can imagine the hardship day in and day out in his suffering. And yet, we find him not in a moment where he's struggling with contentment but he's challenging the Philippian church to not struggle with contentment themselves. How could it be that a man in such difficult circumstances could still find a deep contentment in that moment? And it's because he was looking to Jesus. And what we're going to find is that he shows us when we look to Jesus, it changes us in several ways. We'll see in verse 10 how when we look to Jesus, it fills us with contentment. That's what we find in verse 10 in the first half of it. He says,

¹⁰I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You see, the world around us tells us that if we want more contentment, contentment comes from more. More stuff. More significance. More success. But Paul is reminding us that true

contentment doesn't come from more stuff. It comes from more of Christ. That it's not about what we possess but who possesses us. And in this moment, he is saying that when we look to Jesus, we're filled with contentment. When we fix our gaze on Him, it brings a satisfaction in what God for has done for us in the Gospel. And notice way that he speaks about it here in the middle of verse 10. He uses that word revive. Do you see it there? Circle it if you like to mark up your Bible. That word revived in the original language means to to grow or bear fruit. It's an agricultural image. It's much like what will happen in that Central Garden that we plant in the days ahead. After a summer of heat like this, those plants will revive. They'll begin to grow. They'll begin to bear fruit. And he speaks of their concern for him, their financial commitment to them in this type of language. That their investment is bearing fruit. That their spiritual contentment is showing up for him in a financial commitment. See, when we look to Jesus, it helps to steady our hearts in a deep contentment on Him.

But that's not the only effect that it has. When we look to Jesus, it also fuels our commitment. So, look at the end of the verse. He says,

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

So, Paul describes this chance, this this this circumstance where they're giving. Not as an obligation that they must fulfill, but as an opportunity that they desire to fill. Why? Because that Gospel contentment is pushing them forward in a Gospel commitment. They want their impact to be felt not just in their city, not just in their church, but through the ministry of Paul all the way to the next generation. They weren't looking to themselves. They weren't looking to their own desires. They weren't looking to their own circumstances. They were looking to their Savior. And when we fix our eyes on the Savior, it changes us. So, one of the things I enjoy as a pastor is opportunities to conduct a wedding. And one of the special moments you can imagine in any wedding ceremony is when those doors at the back of the church open up and we see the bride for the first time. And you know that moment, she comes walking down the aisle. Everybody stands up around her. And you've got a stately grandparents that are there excited. You've got restless kids that parents are just trying to keep calm in the moment. There could be chaos all around the bride as she walks down that aisle but there's only one place where she's fixed her eyes. At her best, she's looking straight forward towards the front of that sanctuary. And she's not looking at me, the minister, and I'm not offended by that. Instead, she has her eyes fixed on her bridegroom. The circumstances fade and the satisfaction comes when she beholds her bridegroom. And what Paul is showing us here in Philippians 4 is the same thing is for us. That that where we fix our eyes shapes where we fix our hearts. And where we fix our hearts shapes where we find contentment. So, the question we should be wrestling with this morning is where you've been fixing your eyes. Have you been spending your life looking at your circumstances? More concerned about what other people have that you don't. What you thought would be true, then what is actually true. See, when we fix our eyes on our circumstances rather than our Savior, it pulls our heart away from the kind of contentment that Paul speaks up here. But instead, he is pushing us to look to Jesus, the only one that can satisfy us in a way that brings lasting contentment.

But there's a second key that unlocks the the secret to contentment in this text. It starts down in verse 11. It's not just to look to Jesus, it's second to learn from Jesus. We need to learn from Jesus. See, here's the reality. In a fallen world is that none of us have to be trained on how to be dissatisfied, how to be discontent? I was at the A&M football game against Auburn yesterday.

How about those Aggies? Whoop. And I know that they have these concourse areas where they've got air conditioning concessions. They call em the Cool Zones. And I think yesterday in that heat, they should have been renamed the War Zone. Because you walked in there and it was absolute chaos. Kids in desperation, in deep need. None of them had to be schooled on what it looks like to complain when they're hot and hangry. It just comes natural. And we don't age out of that as we go. So, if that's the case, if discontent comes naturally in a broken world, how do we find lasting contentment? Well, what this text is showing us is it's something that we learn. It's not just a new perspective as we look to Jesus. It's a new process as we learn from Jesus. And Paul shows us that there's two things we have to learn if we want to find contentment and the first one is that we must learn to be content in any circumstance. So, he says there in verse 11,

¹¹Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

What Paul knows is that comparison kills contentment. Comparison kills contentment. He says in any circumstance, I've learned to be content because he's not comparing, instead, he's learning. Do you see that word in verse 11? If you do, circle it. You'll see it again in just a moment in verse 12. Circle it again. This idea of learning that God is shaping us through our circumstances and our suffering so that we might be more like Jesus. We don't need to just learn contentment in any circumstance. We also see from verse 12 that we need to learn contentment in our current circumstance. So, look at the way he talks about it down in verse 12. He says,

¹²I 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.

So, Paul has these contrasts here. Three different ones about being low and high, about having plenty and poverty, about having abundance and absence. In other words, he knows what it's like to be eating Ramen Noodles again in your dorm room and he knows what it's like to go back to for seconds at grandma's house on Thanksgiving. He knows all of life in the lived experience that we have. And he says, no matter your current circumstance if you're learning from Jesus, you can find satisfaction. You can find contentment. You see, we tend to think that either one or the other, either our good moments or our hard moments, make it more difficult for us to be content. And for some of you that's true. You find yourself in a difficult season right now. Maybe because of that unexpected breakup or that rejection letter you got from that campus organization or that job interview or that, that discouraging health diagnosis or the way that you seem to see everybody else driving around you except yourself. And the danger in the low moments is that we would turn inward in covetousness rather than upward in contentment. But there's a similar danger when it comes to the other end of the spectrum. Not when we're low but when we're high. So you finally close that business deal that you were hoping for. Maybe you got that promotion you always wanted. Maybe you saw success or a breakthrough in your children. Hey maybe you find yourself financially more well off than you've ever been before and you're riding high. And the danger in those moments is that the higher we ride, we respond with comparison instead of contentment. We look down on others. We condemn them. We judge them. We thank ourselves better than them. But Paul puts before us that our circumstances should not be the source of our contentment but they should be the school of our contentment. They're the training ground that God is using to prepare our hearts today to find contentment in Christ alone and preparing for us an eternity in heaven. Where He is seated at God's right hand, ruling and reigning so that no matter what

situation you're in right now, your contentment can respond to that by saying, Jesus is enough. Is He enough for you this morning?

If you grew up around Aggie football over the last decade and we all know the name Johnny Manziel and there's many y'all that grew up as younger kids and looking up to him or wanting to play like him. Or maybe your grandkids or your children did. And and I'm not sure if you saw it, but there is a new documentary that came out on Netflix telling his story. I haven't seen it. I'm not recommending you watch it. It sounds like it's fairly vulgar and I'm not sure it's the best fit for you. I haven't seen it myself, but I have come across one quote that me in my tracks. Because Manziel is talking about a moment just like what Paul is speaking to. One of these high moments as he finishes his time at A&M and he heads off into the NFL. And listen to what he says in that documentary. He says, "I had every single thing I could have ever wanted. You have money, you have fame, you have a first-round draft pick battling for a starting quarterback position." And listen to this, "And when I got everything I wanted, I think I was the most empty that I ever felt." The most empty he ever felt. Can't you just hear the discontentment? Can't you just feel the emptiness? And for some of you, you're saying, I don't just hear that in him, I feel that in myself. I keep chasing after something and I never seem to find it. I keep longing for purpose and I never seem to figure it out. I keep longing to be filled but I always seem empty. And the reason for that, You've been searching in the wrong place. You've been trying to find that fulfillment, that contentment in your circumstances. And if they just get a little bit better or you look inward, at yourself and you say, if I just get a little bit stronger. But what Paul is showing us here is that lasting contentment is learned contentment. It's not something that comes from yourself or your circumstances, but from your Savior. And unless you give your life over to Jesus and surrender, you'll never find the contentment been looking for.

There's one last piece of this that I don't want you to miss down in verse 13. That the last key that unlocks the secret of contentment, Paul tells us, is to lean on Jesus. To lean on Jesus. Here's what Philippians 4:13 says.

¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

So, in this sermon series, we've had one of the most highlighted Bible verses in Philippians 4:6. Do not be anxious. We've had one of the most crocheted Bible verses from Joshua 24. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And what about this one? This is, this is the one that shows up on the most high school leather jackets in our day and age. And what we do is we think that this is a free pass, a guarantee to all the success we need. Whether that's in Friday Night Lights or Friday afternoon's algebra test. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. But it's missing the essence of what Paul is communicating in this moment. When he speaks this word this is not a blanket guarantee of God's provision for whatever you think you need most in your life. Instead, it is an invitation to you and me to lean on Jesus. Wherever we find ourselves, whatever we think we need most, we're turning toward Him, leaning on Him, trusting for Him to do what's best. And the way that we lean on Jesus is to remember that He's given us both His promise and His power. So, think about the promise here in the first half of this verse. I can do all things. That's the promise that Paul is reminding us of. That God's strength is the foundation for our strength. That whatever He's called us to, He will see it through. He's made a way for us to do what we can't do on our own and we can trust that. Why? Because we've already seen what He's done for us in Jesus. The way that He made a way for us when there was no way at all. He

calls us to lean on the promise of Jesus. But in the second half of that verse he also calls us to lean on the presence of Jesus and His power. It says there at the end of verse 13,

through him who strengthens me.

If you want to put this verse in a more simple way, the essence of Paul is saying is, I am able because He is able. I can do all things because He has already done all things for me in Christ. That's the picture. That's the promise. That's the power. And that's why we can find contentment. Because when we find ourselves in difficult moments, we have a choice. We're either going to lean on our own understanding or we're going to lean on Jesus, but we can't do both. Where are you going to find your strength when it seems like everything's failing? Where are you going to find your hope when everything's hard? What Paul is showing us here is that it can only happen in one place. And where is that place? Well look back at the middle of the verse at a small phrase you might have overlooked. It's the phrase in our English Bibles that says, through Him. And if you were to look in the original language, more literally, it is would be translated in Him, in Jesus, in Christ. Paul is giving this picture of our union with Christ. Do you remember what that is? That in the moment when you finally come to the end of yourself, you finally lay before God that you can't make your way to heaven. That you can't make your way right with Him and instead you surrender to Christ. You put your faith in Him as your only hope of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of washing away the guilt and the shame in your life. When that moment takes place, here's what happens. That now, when you put your trust in Jesus, what is true of Him becomes true of you. So, God no longer sees you as the failure that you are in your sins. He sees you as a son or daughter who's been covered by the blood of Christ. Washed clean. Set free. And the way that that happens is Jesus becomes emptied so that we may be filled. Jesus suffers in weakness on the cross so that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. He lays it all down so that we can be lifted up even in our low moments. This isn't some message of self-empowerment; it's a message of surrender. It's a message of hope. It's a message of commitment.

I just think about the birth of our church. We started in 1925 with 81 people in the Brazos County Courthouse. And I can't help but wonder if part of what God is doing through this NEXT Initiative as we get ready to bring these pledge cards forward and to place them in these baskets is that we might be getting the next generation of our church ready to go back to the courthouse. We started in a courthouse filled with worship. But in a culture that is increasingly hostile to our beliefs, you can imagine a future where the reason that followers of Jesus right here at Central Church are heading back to courthouses just like that is not for worship, but for a trial. Living out their faith for the sake of the Gospel in prison just like Paul was in this moment. Will God find us faithful today to get them ready for tomorrow? I've been combing the history of our church over these last few months and right as our church was meeting in that courthouse, we launched our first generosity initiative just like this one where we asked our people to pledge about \$12,000 to build our first building. And there's no record of any commitment cards from the people in our church. In fact, there's there were about 120 families that committed in this young church to giving faithfully. But in the records, what we do have is an unexpected letter from an unexpectedly generous giver to that first generosity initiative to build our first building. It was a lady by the name of Mabel Zimmerman. And Mabel was not a member of our church. In fact, she was a part of First Methodist in Bryan. But she happened to come to our church's Commitment Sunday for that first generosity initiative. She came with friends. And she was so inspired by what God was doing that she felt led of God to invest in what He was readying to do next in and through our

church. And I want you to see on the screen. You won't be able to read her words, but I've got up there a picture of the letter that she wrote afterwards to our pastor, Roy Holloman. And I just want to read to you a paraphrase of what she said in that letter. She said, "I've earnestly watched the organization growth and development of your church. I've viewed it from a commendable standpoint. I marveled at the the splendid spirit of cooperation. I've seen God help your every effort so that you could reach every goal. So, it is my desire to make this small contribution so that you may add it to the funds you are raising. And then at the end, she says, as I left the door of the church to leave this morning, I remarked to several of your members, I rejoice with you. So, I say, I rejoice \$5 worth so that you may know that I mean it. How amazing is that? 100 years ago we get a window into the heart of a woman who gave \$5. That's nearly \$100 in today's standards. And what's amazing about this letter from Mabel Zimmerman is not the size of her gift but the size of her heart. She saw the opportunity to invest in the next generation and she didn't want to miss it. Could you imagine a hundred years from now as Central is getting ready, if God tarries to celebrate its 100th anniversary? Imagine if one of those future saints, maybe through their AI technology or some holographic capability, we don't know what they'll be able to do, comes across your commitment card from today just like we see her commitment from then. How might the seed that you're sowing today set us up for that next century. Or to put it more simply, what can we do today that's going to still make a difference just like her gift in a century from now. That's the opportunity before us. So, in order to ready our hearts to respond in worship and to bring forward our commitment cards, I want to invite our worship team back up here. And in just a minute, if you haven't yet had a chance to fill out your commitment card, they're going to give us some time for you to fill that out quietly at your seat. Maybe you didn't come in today knowing exactly what to give or not sure if you were going to give. But just like Mable, you see the moment and you don't want to miss it. We want to invite you into this. Some of you have already filled out these cards at home. And if that's you, then, as the band plays in just a minute, instrumentally, you can just take some time to pray over this card and pray over its impact. And then, once we are done with that, I will pray over all of us. And during the response song, I'm going to invite you to stand and to sing. But also to come as families and make your way to these baskets that are down here on the steps. Now, there are lots of us and there are lots of baskets and so I want to encourage you to maybe to make your way down here through some of these center aisles and then maybe go back towards your seat to the outer aisles just so we don't have a Kyle Field level traffic jam like we did yesterday on the way here. But here's what I know. This moment is between you and God and He's calling every one of us to decide in our hearts what He is leading us to do. And I just can't wait to see the way that our church steps up so that we can make a difference for the next generation. So, as the band plays quietly, I want to invite you to take some time and finish filling out that card. If you wrap it up, just take some time praying quietly. And in just a minute, I will pray over us. We'll stand and respond as the Spirit leads us. And as we do that, if you want to take a next step towards membership or want to know about following Jesus and salvation, our team will be up here at the front ready to share with you what that looks like. You take a moment now quietly and I'll pray over us in just a moment.

Father, in this time, we come, we come with one heart and one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel. And we come to You, God, knowing that You're a God who multiplies. We saw the way last week that You multiplied the widow's oil when she brought the jars. We saw the way that Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fishes when the disciples brought them to Him and He fed the 5,000. And we're praying that even now God, that You would multiply these commitments. Multiply these offerings. And I'm lifting up our people to You in this time, God, as they prepare

to bring these commitment cards and their first fruits offerings and bring these envelopes forward and place them in the basket. I pray that this would be a turning point moment in the journey of generosity that You've called each of us to. Lord, I pray for those in here that have never made a commitment like this before, who aren't even sure if they should, Lord, but You confirm in them, in their heart, what You would have them to do. And Lord, for the people in this room who are, are sacrificing deeply, they're not just walking by sight, they're walking by faith, saying, God, unless You show up, we can't do what You think, we think You're leading us to do. I pray that You would meet them in that faith and that You would show them Your power is made perfect in their weakness. But more than anything, God, as we prepare our hearts to respond to Your word and Your truth, we're lift, lifting up the people. In the years and in the generations ahead of us, who may not even know Jesus yet. They might not even be born but because of what's happening here this week and in this season, in the life of our church, You're going to reach them and change their lives forever. And even now God, we rejoice in advance for what You're doing in us and through us and what You'll do in the future. Lord, we lay this all on Your feet. This is not about us, it's about You. So, we're praying now that You get the glory. As we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.