

House Church Message Notes June 7th, 2020 – In Lockdown (8 Weeks in Philippians)

Week 8: Contentment in Lockdown (Philippians 4:10-23)

• Introduction

- *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 this through him who gives me strength.* (Philippians 4:12-13)
- So begins the final passage of our journey through the book of Philippians *in lockdown*. And now that Paul, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has brought us through this unique journey of understanding who Jesus is and what the Gospel is and how it should affect the ways we live together, he gives us a personal window into his life again. Remember that multiple times he has exhorted the believers to look at his example of living for the Gospel (and the examples of others like Timothy and Epaphroditus). Well, now we should really pay attention because, at the end here, he talks about “the secret” he has learned to this powerful Gospel lifestyle.
- It feels just a little like one of those moments so common in Superhero stories: the hero, so awe-inspiring and mysterious in their power, makes him or herself vulnerable, taking a trusted person “behind the curtain” to understand the basis of their superpowers. Batman let’s someone into the Bat Cave. Superman shares his origins on another planet and the source of his power. Spiderman reveals the radioactive-spider-bite. Wonder woman describes her Amazonian identity. And as an audience we get to see why these heroes are so powerful, through their stories as characters and their sources of superhuman abilities.
- Paul, this man who seems almost superhuman, or more accurately, *supernatural*, in his ability to live for the Gospel, reveals *the secret to his power*. And the beautiful thing about this superhero story is that this secret is available to anyone and everyone—all of us can partake in this power, through the truth of the Gospel.
- The secret is this: “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” The secret is Jesus. It’s as simple (and as challenging) as that! So, let’s study deeper and work through this final passage together. Open your Bibles to Philippians 4:10-13

• Philippians 4:10-13

- *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. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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.*
- I want to spend most of our time taking a deeper dive into this passage before finishing out the whole book, because I think there are several really important things for us here. First, here is a hard question to ask: Take a long, deep look within right now. *Are you content?* Are you content within yourself? Are you content in your life?
- There’s a famous story about John D. Rockefeller, who became immensely wealthy through the oil industry in the 19th-20th centuries. He was asked, “How much is enough?” His reply was, “one more dollar.”
- How much is enough for you? How do you know how much more you need to be satisfied and when you will know that you have enough? When will you know that you can truly be content?
- C.S. Lewis rephrased the idea of this passage in his famous “Weight of Glory” sermons when he said, “*The person who has God and everything else has no more than the person who has God only.*”
- This is the perspective of someone who chooses to become a student of Jesus, who surrenders their life to the Kingdom of God and to learning what it means to live the Gospel of Christ. We who follow Jesus overtime will come to learn and share in this same “secret” of Paul’s power, which is really the power of God.

- N.T. Wright, who we've been consulting often as a guide through Philippians, writes: *"There is no doubt that Paul would have struck many people as something of a human dynamo. He achieved more in a comparatively short time—his main public ministry, including the letters, probably lasted not much more than ten years at the most—than most people achieve in a long life. He suffered hardships and faced dangers that most people then, and most today, can't even imagine. But his testimony in the middle of it all rings down through history to our own day: 'I have strength for everything through the one who gives me power.'...we gain here [another] window on Paul as a very human Christian, facing difficulties and troubles, and having to learn the hard way how to cope with them. No instant or easy solutions for him. No casual 'leave-it-all-to-God' approach, ignoring the real problems of Christian living and ministry. No: the steady schoolwork God had set him, of finding out the secret of having plenty or having nothing. And this is the secret, as with everything else for Paul: the God he knew in Jesus the Messiah enabled him to face everything with a strength that came from outside. That's a promise for anyone and everyone who is prepared to go to the same school and learn the same lesson,"* (*Philippians for Everyone*, © 2004 Westminster John Knox Press).
- Would you like to be schooled in this way, too?
- Author and blogger Morgan Snyder reflects on this God-infused lifestyle in Paul's example with these remarkable words; really listen to this: *"What might it be like, deep in our own...soul, to live in an atmosphere of abundance? To live with an abiding expectation of goodness now, and goodness just around the corner? To know a profound sense of robust well-being, a sense of being provided for, protected, and well-fed? To experience a union with God that nothing could dissolve? What would it be like to be so restored as a [child of God] that we could become our true self, to become the kind of [person] like Paul, who over time, was able to live energetically rooted in God, even in the midst of hunger, shipwreck, and torture? To become the kind of [person] who could say, 'Now that I have been so immersed in the true nature of God and his Kingdom, now that I have thoroughly put to death the self-sufficiency, the self-preservation of the self-life, now that I've been resurrected and restored to my true self...now that I have trained and become practiced in living a life of experiential union with God Himself, now that it is no longer the separate 'I' who lives, but the very breath and strength and life of God with me who lives in me, I am ready for anything. Anywhere. Imagine what it would be like to receive that validation from the Father, to have that reservoir from which to drink daily, moment by moment...to live in ever-increasing union with God...we would become unstoppable,"* (*Becoming a King*, © 2020 Thomas Nelson).
- Pause for a moment, and let all of that sink in. And ask yourself again, do you want to be trained in this way too? This life *is available to us*. A life of abundance and contentment is available to us in Christ. This is the secret. *He* is the secret to living, really living.
 - This secret is a beautiful paradox of the Gospel: when you look at the original language in Greek, it's speaking here of an inward sufficiency that comes from total reliance on someone else: *Jesus Christ*. It's being satisfied because of living in God's fullness. "For all things I have strength in the one who is strengthening me." For this moment, whatever my struggles, whatever my needs, whatever my hurts, whatever my trials and tragedies, I have strength through the One who is strengthening me. Let that minister to you in this difficult season.
- Now, before we move on, I want to take this passage in another direction for a moment. We cannot, at this time in our society, talk about "contentment" without addressing the "discontent" that is in our world, our nation, right now. When God's word speaks of being "content" in any circumstance here, it's about an *inward contentment that comes from the indwelling fullness of God*. It's about learning to draw more and more from our living relationship with Jesus to find strength and sustenance for any and every situation.
 - But this *does not* in any way imply that we should simply be content "with the way things are" around us, outside of us.
 - The Philippians were not content to leave Paul rotting away in prison with no word of his condition. They were moved to action to give him a gift to supply his needs and demonstrate Christ-like love. Paul was not content to resign himself to dying in jail, but actively pursued the heart of God, preaching to his oppressors and writing to encourage the churches he had planted. Jesus was not content to watch the religious elite use religion as an opportunity to

control and oppress people for their personal gain; he was not content to allow the temple of God to become a “den of thieves,” taking advantage of the poor—he flipped those tables! The Good Samaritan was not content to pass by a broken man on the side of the road to protect his own well-being. God was not content to allow a world mired in sin and darkness to be lost forever, but gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

- It was from the inner wholeness and satisfaction of knowing Jesus that Paul could find the resources to address the discontent of the broken world around him—to advance the Kingdom of God. And *that* is the true example of a Gospel lifestyle.
- I’ve been content in the wrong ways for too long. I’ve enjoyed the privilege of not having to worry about the color of my skin or my children’s skin, and far too often remained silent or ignorant of the plight and the pain of those who are different from me, who live in different places from me, yet are part of the same nation as me—and who are made in the image of God like me. This isn’t about partisan politics, I’m not going there. This is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ that brings good news for *everyone*, right now, and compels us to *love*.
 - I don’t have all the answers, I don’t have all the wisdom, *but I know that I can do better at loving my neighbors*, particularly my black neighbors and neighbors of ethnic minority. And I refuse to be content with the way things are. I know that if I am going to do anything good at all without doing more harm, it’s going to be through relying on the strength of Him who dwells within me, who gives me power to do all things through Christ. And I want to hope and pray, church, that you’ll do that with me.
 - Let’s finish the book from here to the end.
- **Philippians 4:14-19**
 - *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*
 - Share in the troubles of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Be aware of what’s happening in the global body of Christ. Love with the love of Christ, because we are *one in Christ*. When you’re confronted with information that challenges you, that troubles you, that angers you, that you may disagree with, make sure that you are seeking to “have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus” in all things.
 - And know that *God provides*. If we submit ourselves to learn from Him and walk with Him, God will provide *all your needs—all that you need* to live the life He has called you to live. Because now, more than ever, we need the glory of Christ, the grace of Christ, the love of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ to fill us. May it be so. Amen.