

Text: Phil.4:10-13

Target audience: Christians

Topic: joy

Theme: Gratitude produces contentment, the envy of the world. And Gratitude + Contentment = joy.

My purpose for this message: To show believers that contentment is found in Jesus Christ, not circumstances.

Delivered: June 26, 2005 @ KEFC

## Recipe for Joy (#2)

### PRAY.

The recent movie *The Aviator* paid tribute to the life and exploits of Howard Hughes. By the time Hughes died in 1976 he'd become one of the 10 most successful businessmen in American history. Made a billion dollars in his lifetime, a nearly unimaginable sum for the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet it never bought him what may well be humanity's greatest luxury: contentment. Getting more only led to wanting more. When millionaire John D. Rockefeller was asked how much money would be enough for him, he said, "Just a little bit more."

We started talking last week about a recipe for joy. I said gratitude was the main ingredient. I want to add the other main ingredient today, contentment. Are you content? If not, what would make you so? And if you are only occasionally content, what makes you content, then?

Howard Hughes' final years were the life of a recluse, a wealthy man paranoid of other people, and terrified of germs. But discontentment is hardly a "class" disease restricted to the well-to-do. The poor, the middle class, they famous and the anonymous, the young but the older too, people from every ethnic group, walk of life, every neighborhood, are discontent. This is a human dis-ease, but one God has the cure for. Find Phil.4:10-13. This is the apostle Paul speaking. READ.

### 1. Background

Paul began writing this as a thank you note for money. Like most missionaries, he lived off the gifts of others. His stay in Ephesus was the exception, there supporting himself by sewing and selling tents (Acts 18:3; 20:34-35). But usually it was generous Christians who met his travel expenses, food, clothing and other necessities. Especially the Philippian Christians. Generous... They sent Paul offerings twice when he was in Thessalonica, and once after he'd left.

And then they lost track of where he was for a while. But once they heard he was in Rome in custody, they collected money and sent a gift along with Epaphroditus. Paul was grateful as you can imagine. *More* than we can imagine because he knew these people well: while *some* could afford to give, others barely could (2 Cor.8:1-3).

Well into his thank you, at v.11 Paul realized he could be misunderstood and the shepherd, the Bible teacher in him, shifted gears. "I appreciate your gift, but I do not depend on such things to be content. I've learned the secret of contentment no matter *what* my economic condition."

### 2. Teaching about Contentment

REREAD vv.11-13. Explaining that he could be content with or without their gifts, Paul may well have risked losing their support, "Well, I guess he doesn't need our money then." But then, getting paid never *was* Paul's biggest objective. He said in 1 Cor.9:12 & 15 that while he had a *right* to financial support, he would never let it interfere with ministry. If the gifts came, fine, but his contentment had nothing to do with silver or bread. V.13, it was in *Jesus Christ* that he was content.

You say, “How can that be? I’m a Christian but I wouldn’t say I’m content.” The dictionary says to be content is to be satisfied. Needing nothing else. Glad about what you have, undisturbed about what you don’t. Sounds very liberating doesn’t it?

The Greek word for content here is *αυταρκηφ* which means “self-sufficient;” sounds unchristian, doesn’t it? It’s history in classic Greek, *was*. For example, have you ever said to someone going through a difficult time: “Hang in there...!”? I have and later thought, “What was I *saying!* That’s stoicism, and Stoics were certainly not Christians.” They taught that *αυταρκηφ* was a person’s ability to remain indifferent to life’s hardships. One of their philosophers urged followers to train this way:

*“Begin with a cup or a household utensil, if it breaks say, ‘I don’t care.’ Go on to a horse or a pet dog, if anything happens to it say, ‘I don’t care.’ Go on to yourself and if you’re hurt or injured in any way say, ‘I don’t care.’ And if you go on long enough and if you try hard enough you’ll come to a state when you can watch your nearest and dearest suffer and die and say, ‘I don’t care.’”*

Kill your emotions. One critic said “The Stoics made of the heart a desert and called it peace.”

Paul was not saying he just sucks it up, *endures* it when he doesn’t have food to eat; that’s stoicism. Christian contentment is shifting our affections away from what’s *unreliable* (like food) to who *is*—reliable: Jesus Christ.

But what exactly does that look like? What does it mean to be content in Christ? Let’s look at v. 13 again: this is one of the most abused verses in the whole Bible. It doesn’t mean that 90 lb weaklings can do superhuman feats. Or, that you can pass a test just by praying, even though you didn’t bother studying. It doesn’t mean the Christian who barely passed algebra, can teach a college level calc class. An awful lot of weight gets hung on this verse that it can’t withstand.

Being able to do all things through Christ means my value pyramid is quite different from a person who’s not a Christian. The psychologists tell us that all people place highest value on basics like food, shelter and clothing; until those needs are met. Then their values are placed on things like safety and security; until those needs are met. Then people start getting concerned about belonging somewhere, about being loved, until those needs are met. Each level is valued, until the *needs* at each level are consistently met, at which time we begin valuing the next level.

Paul says that on *his* Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Jesus comes before any of it. Because He has Jesus living in him in the person of the HS, he has something that can keep him satisfied even if his stomach’s growling at the moment. Jesus warned his audience that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt.4:4). He warned the Samaritan woman that drinking H2O would not quench her thirst very long, but the eternal water *He* offered, would (Jn.4:13-14)

God meant things like possessions and money to supply us; instead they seduce us. Who—or what—has our affections? John Piper’s classic saying: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him,” could have been composed out of these 2 verses.

Paul introduced his contentment speech way back in Phil. 4:4: Rejoice in the *Lord* always! *He* is the source of contentment. Friends, if that’s not true of us, what is the source of *ours*?

Christian, if Christ does not bring you contentment, nothing will. On the other hand, if *He* does, you will be a man of joy, a woman of joy, and a missionary. For as we're going to see next week, joy is a gospel language most in the world, can understand.

### 3. Learning Contentment

So, how do we become content in Christ? Paul had "learned" the secret of being content, not by taking notes or studying books. *Μαθητῶν* means he learned from life experience.

I took shop in jr. high and was clueless. My father didn't know much about tools so I was—scared of them actually. The shop teacher gave us some lectures, assigned some reading, then he showed us how to use the tools and machinery. I was a fish out of water and without the help of others—including the teachers, I would have never completed my projects.

A year and a half out of high school, a local cabinetmaker hired me. Day in and day out, by picking up tools and using them over and over, I learned by experience, how to do woodworking. Eventually I learned well enough to make most of the furniture that's in our home. Experience, constant use taught me what the classroom couldn't.

And that's how God will educate you to be content in Jesus. Some education will be difficult. Ask Paul. In 2 Cor.12 he asked God to heal him from some physical ailment. God said, "No, my power is made perfect in your weakness. When you're strong, people just see you; but when you're driven to weakness, my strength and power shines through like a glittering diamond. My strength is sufficient for you." And in vv.9-10 Paul went on to say...(READ).

#### Concl:

4 years ago when we got our first computer that was email capable, I chose as my address "imcontent." Not because I am to this extent, but I want to be. It's led to some interesting phone conversations when I give my address. Because people crave contentment. Someone could make a mint writing a book using Paul's words for the title, "The Secret of Contentment!" Because behind the great romance, the six-figure job, making the team, a new pickup or new house, a bulging stock portfolio, admiration by peers, people are really after contentment. Funny thing is, once they get what they're chasing, they're too soon discontent.

Tim Stafford said he's learned contentment is a state of the heart, not a state of affairs. It's not wanting something we don't have, it's wanting Who we *do* have. Jesus saved me; Jesus provides for me; Jesus sustains me; Jesus delights me. And He is enough for me. Is he enough for you? Know Him better and He can be.