

Park Road Baptist Church 19th September 2021
Order of service and Sermon

Song All my days (Beautiful Saviour)

Song Come now is the time to worship

Spaghetti challenge

What does content mean? What does covet mean?

Bible reading: Philippians 4 verses 1 – 13 (Rupert Bobrowicz)

Receive the offering

Prayer

Song Give thanks with a grateful heart

Prayer

Song Father I place into your hands

Sermon 'Living a life of contentment'

(1) If you met someone who was a stranger and they said to you, '*I have learned to be content in any and every situation*' - I wonder how you would respond?

At the very least we would probably be caution or maybe even skeptical. And even if we did happen to believe them, we would probably conclude that they don't have the pressures that you and I have, they don't have my pain, they obviously don't have my job or my children or my marriage - you don't have my impairments or my concerns.

So even if we believed them, we would conclude that life has been rather kind to them, or they have been wrapped in cotton wool all their lives and been protected from the harsh realities of life. And yet that is exactly what Paul wrote. Read verse 12, '*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.*'

Remember, Paul isn't sat under some palm tree on some Mediterranean beach as he writes this letter - he is in prison in Rome - day and night he is chained to a Roman guard. And for 5 years or so he has been denied his freedom despite being an innocent man.

And it is under those circumstances that he says, '*rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice.*' And it's under those circumstances that he says, '*I have learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance.*'

Nothing seems to worry Paul. In fact, in v6 he says, '*do not be anxious about anything.*'

But isn't Paul being rather idealistic?

(2) I mean, come on Paul, what about if I can't pay the bills? What about my difficult

situation at work? What if I can't even get a job? What about the tensions at home or the frustrations in the church? What if I go to the doctor and I am given some bad news that threatens my life expectancy? What if my marriage is falling apart?

How could Paul say, 'do not be anxious about anything?'

The answer of course lies in the very next word, but. Alan Redpath once famously said to a group of students, *'the word 'but' is the biggest little word in the Bible.'* And then he went on to say, *'the difference between victory and failure is where you put your but.'* Which a lot of students thought was very funny.

What he meant was, we can either say, *'God I've got all these problems, but I know you can help me (so, I won't worry).'* Or we can say, *'God, I know you love me and care for me, but I've got all these problems (and that's why I'm anxious).'*

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'

Paul isn't denying our fears and our worries and our anxieties - but what he is saying is we need to present them to God in prayer with an attitude of thanksgiving.

It's interesting that Paul doesn't simply say we are to talk to God about our anxieties, but he says we are to present our requests to God. (3) We are to hand our anxieties over to God and leave them with him. It's possible to talk to God about our anxieties without actually presenting them to God.

If I presented you with a gift - you wouldn't expect me to take it from you again. And so, when we present our requests to God, we need to take our hands off them and leave them with God.

The story goes of a father who was woken in the middle of the night by the hysterical screams of his daughter. And so, he went through to see what the matter was. And she shouted there was someone in the cupboard. He said there wasn't as it wasn't big enough for someone to get inside it. And he told her she must have had a bad dream and encouraged her to go back to sleep as she had nothing to worry about. And then he heard a noise coming from the cupboard. He said, *'your right, there is someone in the cupboard.'* And he went over to take a look and when he opened the door there was the pet cat.

After putting the cat out of the room, he went over to his daughter and tucked her in and kissed her goodnight. But she didn't want her dad to go. When he asked why not, she said, *'because what frightens me doesn't frighten you.'* And so, he stayed with her, and she soon fell asleep.

Isn't that what Paul says:

- The things that frighten you, don't frighten God
- The things that are too big for you, are not too big for God

- The things that threaten you, don't threaten God
- The things that overwhelm you, don't overwhelm God

That's why he says, - *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'* And the key word is 'present'. And when we do that, we receive the peace of God which passes all understanding.

By the way, peace isn't the absence of trouble and conflict - but peace is discovered in the midst of trouble and conflict.

Some years ago, there was a painting competition, and the challenge was to try and capture the quality of peace.

And there were two paintings that were being considered for the first prize.

(4) The first painting was of a scene in the Lake District with a mountain in the background and a lake in the foreground. The sun was shining and there wasn't even a breath of wind and the sky was a beautiful blue colour and you could see the reflection of the mountain in the lake. And close-up you could see a mother duck with her young chicks following behind her on the calm water. It was the sort of picture that made you think - I wish I were there.

And this painting got second prize.

(5) The other painting that was being considered for first prize was painted at Cornwall and it was a picture of a storm. There was a huge cliff face that went into the Atlantic and with a gale force wind, the waves were lashing against the cliffs. The sky was dark, the rain was beating down, and there was a streak of lightening across the night sky. On top of the cliff, there was an overhanging tree that had been ripped out of the ground by the gales.

And as you looked at this painting, you probably thought to yourself, 'I'm glad I'm not there - I'm glad indoors.'

But if you looked closely at the painting, you would see a nest in a cleft of the rock about three quarters of the way up the cliff face. And in the nest was a seagull, and under the wings of the seagull were some little chicks.

And it was this painting that won first prize for capturing the quality of peace on canvas.

The peace of God is never the tranquility of the Lake District - God never promises a life free from stress and anxiety. But God's peace is always found in the storms of life.

Perhaps you know these words written by Annie Flint:

(6) God has not promised skies always blue
Flower strewn pathways all our lives through;
God has not promised sun without rain
joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

(7) But God has promised strength for today
rest for the labour, light for the way.
Grace for the trials, help from above
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

And so, Paul says, *'Don't be anxious about anything.'* Of course, there are lots of things that make us anxious and overwhelm us - but they don't overwhelm God - and so when we present our anxieties to God and leave them with him, we discover his peace in our lives.

(8) Let's read now from verse 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. 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.'*

Paul says he has learnt to be content whatever the circumstances and he makes a reference to some of those circumstances. He talks about being in want, he talks about being in need and being hungry – even if there is no food on the table, Paul is content.

What an incredible thing to say.

By the way, it's interesting to note that Paul says, *'he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances.'* In other words, it's not intuitive, it doesn't just happen naturally - it's something that Paul has learned over the years.

So, what was the secret of Paul's contentment? The answer comes in v13, *'I can do all this through him who gives me strength.'* Paul knew about a strength that wasn't his own, a strength that is only found in the person and life of Jesus Christ.

By the way, that is why I think we should be careful about asking God to take us out of our circumstances, but we should always pray that God would give us strength in our circumstances.

Remember, Paul isn't walking around some remote, ivory tower with a long flowing robe and writing some theoretical paper. Paul knew all about hardship and pain and misunderstanding and rejection. He knew all about going without food and sleep. Paul hasn't been wrapped up in cotton wool. And it's in the midst of the storms that he learned about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ living in him.

(9) An old Bible teacher by the name of Dr John Hunter coined this simple little phrase, *'for this I have Jesus.'*

Towards the end of his life he suffered two minor strokes and his speech became so slurred you could hardly make out what he was saying. On top of this, his co-ordination began to deteriorate to the point where walking across the room was a major achievement. And an old friend rang him up to express how sorry he was that he was so unwell, to which he replied, *'for this I have Jesus.'*

I don't know if Graham Kendrick ever met John Hunter, but he has set those same sentiments to music.

Song For the joys and for the sorrows (Graham Kendrick)

Prayer