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### **Philippians 4:10-23**

#### **Contentment in Christ as the Right Context for Giving and Receiving**

##### **Intro idea:**

As we all know, this past THursday was the day we celebrated **Thanksgiving**. I've always loved this holiday. It marks the beginning of the "Holiday Season." It's an opportunity to enjoy time with family and friends, to enjoy good food, and of course, to enjoy good football. And most of all, I enjoy that it is a time where we all slow down and remember how important it is to actually *give thanks* - we celebrate in order to express how *grateful we are* for the good things, the blessings and gifts, we have in our lives. How especially appropriate it is *for us*, then, as Christians, to celebrate and **give thanks** - for we know where all of these good gifts come from! We know *to whom* we should give thanks! *To the Lord*. Every good thing in our life is a *gift from God to us*. So it is absolutely appropriate for us, as Christians, of all people, to celebrate and give thanks to God, not only on THanksgiving, but every day of our lives.

And so, it is also appropriate, then, to recognize a couple of temptations we might fall into regarding the subject of "thanksgiving" or "**giving thanks.**"

The **first** is probably obvious: the *temptation to not give thanks*. We all know this is a problem. We often forget how much we have to be grateful for. We often forget to *give thanks to the Lord specifically*. As we saw addressed in last week's passage, this temptation especially comes when we are distracted by all of the worries and anxieties in our life.

But there is a **second** temptation here as well: sometimes, we give thanks for the wrong reasons. Sometimes, we are more *grateful for the gift* than we are *grateful to the giver of all good gifts*. Sometimes, what we *think* is gratitude turns out to really be an *unhealthy love for the things themselves*. Instead of flowing from a grateful heart overwhelmed by the gracious love of our Heavenly Father, sometimes the "thanks" that we give actually just hides what's *really going on in our hearts*: that we are basing our *joy, contentment, and satisfaction* on "how good" our lives are; how much money is in our bank; how successful our careers are going; the state of our health; the size or quality of our houses, cars, or possessions; whether or not our families match up to our ideal of how we think they should be.

When all is going *well*, we should of course give thanks to God! But we should also be vigilant to make sure that we are not just merely saying we are *content and happy because of how comfortable our lives are*. Conversely, when things are *not* going well, it reveals what we're rooting our joy and contentment in, doesn't it? Then is the true test of gratitude - whether we're still giving thanks to God, trusting in Him in the good and the bad; whether we're truly rooting our *joy and contentment not in the gifts, but the giver; not in how good or bad our lives seem to be going in our own eyes, but in the gracious love of Jesus Christ Himself that is our by faith in the gospel*.

That is the main message for us in this passage: **Phil. 4:10-23** - that every Christian knows **true contentment in Jesus Christ**.

In this passage, Paul is thanking the Philippian church for the financial gift they had recently sent to him through Epaphroditus. This was a financial gift out of their love for Paul and concern for his needs, as well as concern for the continuing mission of the gospel through him throughout the world. Paul begins thanking them for the gift in verse 10, though it might sound strange at first to our ears: he "rejoices" that they have "revived" their "concern for him" after a while of not supporting him in his life and ministry. This is by no means a rebuke to the church; he makes that clear in the rest of verse 10: he knows that their concern for Paul and for the advance of the gospel in his mission efforts never ceased; they remained concerned, they continued to support him, but they didn't have an opportunity to express that concern and partnership again until recently. Paul is giving thanks to them, even "rejoicing," but then, the passage takes a slightly odd turn for a "thank-you-note" - as he's expressing gratitude for their gift, he makes clear that he's **not** rejoicing *in the gift itself* - but rather, what it says about the Philippians, that they sacrificially gave it. He then goes on to qualify exactly what he means here.

So what does he mean here? Well, throughout this passage, Paul is doing two things: 1. First, **thanking** the Philippian church for a financial gift they had given, both commending them for their sacrificial gift and even emphasizing a true **Christian theology of giving**; and 2. Secondly, mixed in throughout, a *qualifier* that Paul keeps giving, reminding the Philippians, and us, that *Paul's joy and contentment*, furthermore, the *joy and contentment of every believer*, is not rooted in the gift they gave, or even whether life is going well or not - it is rooted firmly in **Jesus Christ alone**, in whom we find *true contentment* for our weary hearts and restless souls,

and in whom we also have *the sure promise of provision from our Heavenly Father that we rest in.*

So these two main ideas will be our two main points this morning. First, we will look at **being content in Christ alone.** Secondly, we will then turn to the **theology of Christian giving** laid out for us here.

So, then point number one...

## **I. True Christian Contentment (4:10-13, 19-20)**

In verses 11-13, Paul goes on to qualify how he views his own needs for provision in life. Indeed, more than that, he goes on to clarify how he views his contentment and satisfaction in *all of life.* In the first half of verses 11, he makes clear that his **joy** and **satisfaction** did not arise out of *receiving the gift itself,* because his **joy, satisfaction, and contentment are not rooted in the circumstances of life: whether he has an abundance or is in need.** As he says in 11-12: ***“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I 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.”*** Paul is saying that he is not first and foremost concerned about his own needs because *he has learned to be content no matter what the circumstances of his life are.*

He has known what it means to *lack* and to *abound.* At times, he had plenty of money, food, and essential provisions, even the comforts of this life. At other times, he has *suffered want,* and truly know what it means to be poor and go *without* money, food, shelter, and essential provisions, let alone comforts. His language here even goes *beyond* merely physical, material goods or financial needs; he knows what it means to *be brought low* - to be humbled - to have a low social standing, to be looked down upon, to not have praise from other people. Likewise, he knows what it means to *abound* in every way. But he doesn't just know what it means to experience *abundance and need* - he has learned **the secret of contentment in all of these things!** He knows what it means *to truly be content no matter the circumstances! No matter what life looks like!*

It's precisely at this point that all of us should have our ears wide open, isn't it? Each and every one of us faces worries and concerns. None of us likes to be without. All of us have needs, whether physical, financial, bodily, or emotional of some kind. We know the kinds of whirlwinds

that our hearts can be swept up into by the storms and circumstances of this life. And yet here we are told that *it doesn't have to be this way!* There is a way of life that *doesn't involve* getting tossed about by the winds and waves of circumstance! There is a foundation for life *that is stable*, no matter what comes our way! We would either be *fools* or *liars* to say that we don't want such **immovable contentment**, such **stability and satisfaction** in our lives.

So then, we ask, "What is it?" What is the **"secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need?"** What is the secret of being **content and satisfied**, no matter what our lives look like?

The **answer**: our true contentment can only be found in **Jesus Christ. True joy, true peace, true satisfaction in our hearts, true contentment in the depths of our soul - such contentment is possible, for you and me, for it is found in Jesus Christ! It is experienced by those who come to Him by faith!** This is what we are told in verse 13, where Paul gives the answer, the "secret" solution to contentment no matter what happens in life: **"I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (v. 13)**. The "him who strengthens" clearly refers to God, the source of all our power and strength in the Christian life. But I think it is right to say that this also specifically refers to the work of Jesus Christ in us, given the **context of verses 19 and 23**; we receive the "supply" from God **"in Christ Jesus;"** it is the very **"grace of the Lord Jesus Christ"** that is to be **"with"** our **"spirits."**

But what does it mean that we "can do all things" through Christ? What exactly does this passage say He will *"strengthen"* us to do in verse 13? Well, first, we need to note that this verse is often *wildly taken out of contexts*. You have probably seen this verse bandied about anywhere from Hallmark Cards to T-Shirts to Facebook posts; oftentimes, this verse is taken out of context and given a completely different meaning than intended by the author. Does this verse mean that we can do whatever we like, whatever we just "set our minds to," so long as we just have enough faith or something? No. Does this verse promise that true Christians, those who have enough faith, or pray enough, or give enough, or whatever else, will never fail, or get sick, or suffer want and hunger and poverty? That if we're really in Christ than the gospel promises *health, wealth, and prosperity? Success in all that we do? No, it doesn't*. Despite the way people often *misuse* and *missapply* this verse, *that is not at all* what this passage is telling us! After all, **Paul himself just told us** that he has indeed experienced *all of these things!* The ups and the downs of life! Prosperity and suffering! Abundance and need! Comfort as well as poverty! Being brought high

as well as being brought low! So no, this verse *is emphatically not promising us that we will overcome whatever adversities we face in life, or that true Christian faith and obedience is promised to lead to success and comfort, to health wealth and prosperity in this life.*

So then, what *is* this verse telling us? **It is revealing the “secret” of contentment in all circumstances of life.** It is telling us that Jesus Christ Himself *strengthens our hearts, minds, and souls* so that **we are content in Him no matter what we walk through in this life!** He strengthens us to root our joy, our peace, our contentment and satisfaction with life **not** on the shaky grounds of financial “stability” or instability; **not** on the fickle whims of our emotions or the praise and admiration of others; **not** on the pipedreams of success and prosperity we dream about; **not** on the fleeting, deeply unsatisfying pleasures and comforts of this world; not even on the security of knowing that we will always be able to put food on the table, pay the bills, fix the car, or even get out of bed in the morning. No, if we base our contentment on such things, *we will only be left empty.* **The basis of our contentment and joy reveals what we truly worship and believe in.** If we look to anything other than Christ as our security and contentment, *we turn them into idols, and these false gods will always let us down and rob us of all true joy and peace.*

But when we **root our contentment in Jesus Christ Himself, by leaning on Him in faith, truly resting and trusting in Him in all things** - then, we can know true contentment and satisfaction in our souls no matter what happens. Why? Because our contentment is *not based on our standing in this world - how much we have, or how comfortable our lives are* - it is based on *who we are in Christ.* AND we can be assured that such grounds for contentment are *immovable and sustainable* - that such a foundation is as rock-solid as bedrock - *because Christ Himself strengthens our souls to be content in Him despite the circumstances we face!*

We do this by *remembering the gospel, that our greatest need is met in Jesus; that our greatest hope can never be satisfied in this life, but it can and will be satisfied in the eternal life we have in Christ, dwelling with Him in glory, for all who are united to Christ by grace through faith.* We root our identity and our hope, our joy and our satisfaction, not in the things of this world, not in the health, wealth, and prosperity we do or do not have in this life - we root it firmly in who we are in Christ: **sinners saved by grace; spiritually poor and needy sinners who are now spiritually rich according to the very riches of GOD freely and graciously given to us, even now, in Christ Jesus! This is true of everyone who is in Christ by faith alone!** So once again, this is a call to reorient ourselves, to refocus our vision *back on the gospel of Jesus Christ;*

*to firmly believe in it so much that we really do look to Christ alone to satisfy our hearts! To truly believe that the deepest longings of our souls can only be satisfied, and truly **are satisfied**, in the grace and love of God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ! So take a fresh look at your life: **recognize that your greatest need, and the truly greatest desire of your heart, is forgiveness from your sins, acceptance in the sight of God, security in knowing that your life really will turn out for the best, and the assurance of eternal life, joy and peace.** This is what we're longing for. *And this is exactly what we have in Christ! Jesus lived, died, and was raised in the place of sinners, like you and me, so that if we truly trust in Him, we receive all of the spiritual riches we long for, **by grace through faith alone!****

As we rest in the promises of God in the gospel, believing that our greatest needs have already been met in Christ, we have sure grounds for contentment. We remember that **our best life isn't now, but it is sure to come: in eternal life with the Lord of Glory!**

But that doesn't mean we don't have any hope or comfort for this life either! No, Paul assures us that *even now we can rest in God's promises for provision, even in this life!* IN verse 19, we are assured: **"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** Our contentment in Christ is rooted in the promises of God, which we receive freely through faith in the gospel. And these promises include not only forgiveness and eternal life; they also include **God's fatherly, providential care for us throughout this life; as we set our eyes on Him and the Kingdom of Christ, by continuing to trust in Him and live a life of faith, then we can rest assured that He will provide everything we need to live a fruitful life, abounding to our good and His glory.** Our desire should always be to persevere in a life of faith, persevering and growing in Christ to the very end, and doing all things *for the glory of God.* And if these are truly our desires, if a life *in Christ* is really where we ground our joy and contentment, then have no fear: *you will not be disappointed!* **God promises to provide everything we need for the Christian life; in Christ, He promises to provide for us, working out all things, even the storms of this life, for our good, and His glory.**

So then, once establishing that our contentment rest in Christ alone, we are then free to *receive every good gift* in a godly, Christian way: receiving it in faith, as a gracious gift from God.

And such contentment also means we are *free to give generously and sacrificially as well.* This leads us to point number 2...

## II. True Christian Giving (4:14-18)

Paul then moves on to explain *why he rejoices that the Philippians sacrificially gave a generous gift to care for Paul's needs*. He is rejoicing *because of what it demonstrates about the hearts and faith of these dear Christians*. This passage unfolds for us some rich theological truths about **Christian giving**. It reminds us that *it is better to give than to receive*. After all, the heart content in Christ does not waver, whether we gain or lose money and worldly possessions, right? And what we see here is that *when we give sacrificially in the Lord, it is spiritual gain for us*.

Paul commends the Philippians for their sacrificial gift, noting a couple of reasons: first, because *of their loving concern* for Paul amidst his troubles; secondly, because they were generously giving *for the sake of the advance of the gospel*. This is made clear in verses 14-16. Not only did they give recently out of loving, personal concern for Paul's needs, but they *had been giving and supporting his ministry since the very beginning*; they had long given sacrificially, partnering with Paul in gospel missions.

Next, Paul explains *the importance of such Christian giving* in verse 17: ***“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”*** As the Philippians gave sacrificially, it demonstrated their faith in and love for Jesus Christ and the gospel of grace; such sacrificial giving and Christian generosity *is a fruit of the Spirit, a visible fruit and demonstration of genuine saving faith in Jesus Christ*. When we generously and joyfully give away our money, our time, and our resources for the sake of the gospel, we are demonstrating the gospel's effects in our lives. We're saying, *“I firmly believe that I have received all things freely in Jesus Christ; I firmly trust in Him and in God's provision in my life; therefore, I am free to give all that I have for the Kingdom of God; since, after all, everything I have belongs to God anyways!”* That's what we're saying every time we give; this is the heart behind true Christian giving.

And Paul goes further: he paints it in terms of *spiritual worship* to the Lord. He describes the gift these believers sent as ***“a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”*** He's drawing on Old Testament sacrificial language to show that *sacrificial giving* of our time and resources *for the sake of the gospel* is, indeed, a form of spiritual worship to the Lord! It is a way we demonstrate faith, give thanks to Him, and serve Him with all He has given us! And make no mistake: this doesn't mean that our giving somehow increases our standing with God or makes us holier or more righteous; no, by no means! What this means is that our spiritual

*sacrifices are accepted by God because we are in Christ! IN Him, we are free to offer such sacrificial worship, knowing it is acceptable and pleasing to God **through doing so by faith in Jesus Christ!***

So then, as Christians, we should **give sacrificially and generously for the sake of the gospel as a form of worship to the Lord, visibly demonstrating our faith in Christ and desire to see His name glorified in all the earth!** That's what we see in verses 14-20.

Obviously, this has very practical applications for us today. Because of our contentment in Christ and faith in His promises to provide, we, too, should seek to *sacrificially give* of our resources for the sake of **caring for our fellow Christians' needs and for the sake of seeing the gospel advance in the world.** A very obvious application for this is **giving for the sake of what we normally call "missions" - seeing the gospel go forth, disciples made, and churches planted - where we live, our nation, and around the world, especially among those who have never heard the good news of Christ!** We should *all* aim to have missions-oriented hearts, longing to **worship God by giving of our resources to see His name glorified throughout the earth by the proclamation of the gospel and the salvation of sinners.** For this reason, I am very grateful for the Southern Baptist Convention, which our church is a part of. I am grateful for the International Mission Board, our missions agency that sends and supports gospel missionaries and church planters around the world, taking the gospel to those who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ! I am grateful for the Lottie Moon offering, which is collected this time every year; it is very much in the spirit of this very passage - an opportunity to give sacrificially for the sake of taking the gospel to the nations. This is a wonderful way to apply this passage.

But I think there's also another application we can make: this passage also applies to our giving to the local church. When we think of missionally giving, we can sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that **missions is only something that happens *out there*.** But, in fact, **we, too, are on mission! Our mission in Christ is, first and foremost, to share the gospel and make disciples here, in our church, in our community, here in Plattsburgh, NY!** As we give money, time, and resources to our church, *this, too, is missions! It's our first mission!* **Everytime we use money to maintain the building, pave the parking lot, pay utilities, or provide financially for a pastor to be able to spend more time *studying the Word to preach and spend time caring for the church* - all of this enables the gospel to be proclaimed, for us to obey God**

in being the church and worshipping Him, for each of us to be equipped to take the gospel to our neighbors, and to bring new disciples into the fold!

Furthermore, as we give in order to be a sustainable church body, **we become a stable, sustainable missions base, so that we can give, out of our overflow, for the sake of taking the gospel to the nations as well!** These aren't disconnected ideas or competing priorities; giving to the local church we are members of, and using our resources for becoming a *sustainable* base, leads to *carrying out the gospel mission*, both carrying it out **here**, and overflowing into **giving and sending resources for the advance of the gospel elsewhere.**

So then, be encouraged: everytime you put your tithe in the offering plate; everytime you give extra to support other churches and missionaries - *every time you do this as an act of faith in Christ, rest assured that it is spiritual worship, fruit increasing to your account, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God* because you are in Christ Jesus! Rest assured that, when you give *in faith*, as an overflow of trusting in Christ - rest assured that God is pleased with you, will provide for you, and will glorify His name in and through you!

Brother and Sisters, let us be a people who are utterly content and satisfied in Christ, no matter what! AND let this overflow into our lives, so that we can both **give and receive** every good gift with joy and faith, doing all *for the good and salvation of others*, and ultimately, *to the glory and praise of our great God!* For this is the right response of gratitude for those of us who have received the greatest gift of all: **salvation in Jesus Christ by grace through faith!**

If you don't know the **truly satisfying salvation of Christ for yourself**, then hear the closing application and response for you: turn away from whatever you're trying to find your contentment and satisfaction in, and *look for it in Jesus Christ alone!* Because there your soul will know **true peace and contentment.** Turn from your sin and trust in the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Christ, believing he died as a sacrifice *in your place.* If you have any questions about this, please come and talkin to me or one of the deacons. YOu can come now during the last song, or find one of us after the service. YOu can also come if you have any questions about or are interested in baptist or church membership. We would love to talk with you.

Let us pray.