

Thanksgiving 2025

Our text this evening is Phil 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.* ¹¹ *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.*

To set the context, The year is 61-62 AD, Paul is in Rome, under house arrest, closely supervised by a Roman soldier, and awaiting trial. He writes four letters while in prison. One to the Ephesians, one to the Colossians, and one to Philemon, all delivered by the hand of Tychicus since Ephesus and Colossae were near one another and Philemon was from Colossae. He then wrote to the Philippians, where he had founded the first European church on his second missionary journey about 10 years prior. He did so, in part, to thank them for supporting his ministry. More than any other church, they had faithfully and generously supported Paul over these many years. Now while Paul was in prison, the Philippian church again sent money by way of a man named Epaphroditus, but upon arriving in Rome, he became ill—almost to the point of death (see Phil 2:25-30), which delayed his return and the letter Paul had intended to send earlier. But Epaphroditus did get well, and returns to Philippi with Paul's letter.

Now we are not here tonight to study the whole book of Philippians, however it is useful to know something about its contents. The Bible Project states Philippians does not develop one singular idea from the beginning to the end as some of Paul's letters, but rather it consists of a series of small vignettes all centered around the main theme of Chapter 2 which describes Jesus's incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection, and his exaltation. Each vignette takes a key word or idea from this section "to show how living as a Christian means seeing your own story as a lived expression of Jesus' story."

So now we get to chapter 4, and in verse 10, Paul starts on a thankfulness and contentment vignette. He wants to thank the church for their monetary support. And so, in verse 10 we read,

Vs 10a, *I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.*

It had been ten years since Paul had been to Philippi. Ten years since he founded the church. Ten years since the earthquake that had set him free and saved the Philippian jailor. Ten years since Paul had moved on from there to Thessalonica, then Berea, Athens, and Corinth. We are not sure when Paul had last received a donation from them, but the implication is it had been awhile. And now he rejoices greatly because at last they renewed their concern. The word *renew* has the idea of blooming. Literally their concern bloomed into the flower of a monetary gift. But why hadn't they supported him earlier?

Vs 10b, *Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.*

Paul says they were not able to support him because they did not have opportunity. We do not know if this means they had no way of knowing where Paul was, or whether they were too poor, or whatever reason. We are not told. The word for *opportunity* means season. They did not have the right season to give. But now the Philippian church knows Paul is in Rome and they send a special envoy, Epaphroditus,

to seek Paul out and provide a gift. We know from chapter 2, that sometime after his arrival he became terribly ill. He recovers and Paul sends him back with the letter he had written. Note how gracious Paul is. He does not know why the church has not given him a gift for a prolonged period—but he assumes the best, and simply says “*you didn’t have opportunity.*”

Then Paul lays out the condition of his heart.

Vs 11a, *I am not saying this because I am in need,*

Paul is saying thanks so much and I appreciate the gift, but my needs are all met. Then he goes on to say,

Vs 11b, *for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.*

In Greek, the word, *content*, means to be satisfied, to have enough, to be self-sufficient. It implies a certain sense of independence because your needs are met. But one man’s contentment is another man’s want. So, the point to emphasize is this idea of mental satisfaction regardless of the amount of one’s physical possessions. One can have little, yet be satisfied, whereas one can have much and be sorely discontent.

Interestingly, the predominant view of contentment in Greek culture was that of the Stoics. The Stoics equated contentment with indifference. In other words, if something were troubling, concerning, or emotionally upsetting, you were to train your mind to say, “I don’t care” The idea was that over time, and with enough emotional distancing, one could train themselves to become insensitive to the myriad concerns and woes of the world. In other words, a Stoic was to abolish the natural emotional response to the difficulties of life. As a writer once said, “the Stoics made of the heart a desert, and called it peace.”

But Paul did not equate contentment with indifference. Rather, he had a different definition as we shall see.

Vs 12, *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.*

Paul says he knows what it is to be *in want*. When we read Acts and 2 Corinthians, we see Paul was at times physically hungry, cold, wet, homeless, lonely, and persecuted. He knew what it was to be *in need*. But he also knew what it was to *have plenty*, food, shelter, friends, support, and love.

Vs 12b, *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.*

Then Paul says I have learned the secret of being content. What secret is that? The secret is in verse 13,

Vs 13, *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Paul’s secret of contentment is this, I can be content *through Him who gives me strength*. In other words, God is enough. God is enough for me to be content. It is that simple and that profound. Is God enough for you? That is the hard question this Thanksgiving. If all you had went away, is God enough?

- a. For Abraham, Gen 15:1, *Do not be afraid Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward.*
- b. For Job, in Job 13:15, *though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him.*
- c. For David, Ps 16:5, *Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing.*
You guard all that is mine, and in Ps 142:5, Then I pray to you, O Lord. I say, "You are my place of refuge. You, are all I really want in life.
- d. For Asaph, Ps 73:26, *Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.*
²⁶*My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.*

Like his Old Testament counterparts, Paul was content with God alone. Now you may say, well Paul is Paul and I am me. I can say God is enough but I sometimes do not feel God is enough. Well here is where a thankful heart comes into play. Thankfulness is both a means to God and a measure of our contentedness with God.

It is a means to God in that,

- a. Thankfulness directs your attention to what you have, not what you lack.
- b. Thankfulness therefore makes you see what God has done in your life.
- c. And when you see what God has done in your life, thankfulness therefore directs you to the true source of your desire which is God himself.

Here are some stats to perhaps put your material situation in perspective,

- a. There are 7.9 billion people in the world.
- b. One billion people earn less than 2 dollars per day.
- c. Another 4.4 billion earn less than 10 dollars per day.
- d. That means 70% of the world's population live on less than 10 dollars per day.
- e. The average yearly global income is 9700 dollars per year.
- f. The average yearly global household income is 12,262 dollars per year.
- g. The average American income is 39,982 dollars per year.
- h. The average American household income is 78,538 dollars per year.
- i. If you are earning over 100,000 dollars per year you are in the top 20% of American earners and the top 10% of global earners
- j. If you earn a million dollars per year you are in the top 1% of American earners and 0.1% of global earners

It is also a measure of our contentedness with God as thankfulness is an external sign of an internal attitude, for the more we are content with God alone, the more thankful we become with everything else. Your expression of thankfulness is therefore a gauge that reflects the contentedness of your heart. I think of Jeremiah, who on viewing the ruins of his destroyed city Jerusalem, says in Lam 3:22- 24, *The faithful love of the Lord never ends!*^[b] *His mercies never cease.* ²³*Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.* ²⁴*I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him.*

So let us be thankful this season.