

Calum Cameron: Phillipians 4 - Are you content?

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] Well, this evening we come to our sixth and our final study in this short run through the Book of Philippians and we are moving on into chapter four. So if you're following along in your Bibles, you might want to have it open in Philippians chapter four, but we should have the relevant sections on the screen. It's been a really rapid race through the Book of Philippians and I can only apologise for all the wonderful sections and passages and verses that we've overlooked or we've missed, but hopefully you've been able to get a big picture idea of what this letter is really all about. Now this evening is our last study. We're going to look primarily at these verses here in verse 10 to verse 13 and we'll just read them again briefly. Paul says there, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, that you had no opportunity. Not that I'm 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. So I want to begin this evening just by asking one question. Are you content? When you stop and you think and you reflect about where you are in life and everything that's going on right now.

Are you content? I suspect that for many of us the answer to that question is often no. In our hearts if we're honest with ourselves we are not content. Well this evening in Philippians chapter 4 the Bible is teaching us that there is a way to be content in any and every circumstance of life. And I just want to think about these few verses just under two brief headings. The first we're going to look at the problem of discontentment and then secondly the secret of true contentment. So first of all the problem of discontentment. We live in a world that is permeated by a spirit of discontentment. The message we get from advertising, from the media, from the people around us is that we don't have enough stuff. We don't have enough possessions. We'll be happy if we have more money, if we have a nicer car, if we have a better house, if we find the right person. But Paul tells us here in Philippians,

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. I think that is what people in our world are longing for. We have a problem with discontentment and discontentment I think is dangerous. Discontentment is something that often leads to more insidious, to more damaging struggles and sins. I have heard one minister once say that he has never come across someone who has had an affair or something like that without having a deeply rooted discontentment in their hearts. I think we find that for those of us who have had addiction problems, those of us who have turned to things like drugs and alcohol, it has often been a deeply rooted discontentment that has begun that process. But I think even in times of abundance, even in the times when life is going well, when we are as populous, when we have plenty, we can be discontent. We can be discontent when we are being blessed. Because for some reason we never seem to have enough. Towards the end of the 19th century there was a man called John Rockefeller and he controlled most of the oil in the USA and he is widely considered to be one of the richest men, if not the richest person in modern history. His fortune, if you adjusted for inflation, is worth over \$400 billion. This was a rich, rich guy, a staggering amount of wealth. And apparently he was once stopped and asked the question, how much is enough? In terms of happiness, how much money is enough? And his answer was just a little bit more than I have.

This is a man with \$400 billion. And if we are honest with ourselves, I think that is so often our own answer to life. How much is enough? Just a little bit more. I don't want much, I'm not greedy, just a little bit more. And I think that doesn't just apply to money. I think it applies to most of our circumstances in life. Maybe it's our material possessions. Maybe we think, well I just want a slightly better car. I just want a slightly nicer house. We do it with lots of things in life. We do it with family. I wish my children were a little bit more like theirs. I wish my husband or wife could be a little bit more like that. We do it with our bank balance. I wish we just had a little bit more coming in at the end of the month. I think we do it in so many different ways. We do it when it comes to church. I think we can have discontentment when it comes to our church life. I think our elders and our ministers, I think, can be looking to growth, to conversions as their ultimate contentment in life. And that can of course become a source of discontentment.

There are so many ways that our circumstances can be our source of contentment. And the point is that there's a real problem with that. There's a problem with looking to our circumstances for contentment. Because circumstances change. Circumstances don't last. People change. Jobs can be lost. We can grow dissatisfied with our work. Our health, our health is something that's never guaranteed. Many of us know that from experience. Finances can become strained.

[6 : 46] The latest model of Audi or BMW can quickly become outdated by a faster, shinier, newer model. In all of these things, our circumstances can change. And ultimately, if that's where we find contentment, that's where we look for for contentment, we're going to be disappointed.

And if we think about Paul's circumstances, he has faced both poverty and hunger. He's faced plenty and needs throughout his missionary journeys. There were times when Paul didn't have to worry. But as we see in 2 Corinthians 11, he says there, five times I received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Night and day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers. In toil and hardship through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food in cold and exposure. This was a man who had faced the loads. This was a man who had been in need. And as he as he writes this letter, he's saying he's learned the secret to being content, regardless of the circumstances. Again, think about the context that this is written. He's he's in prison. He's possibly facing death. I think it's hard for us to imagine being content in those kind of circumstances. Paul is not writing this letter from a comfortable armchair on the Mediterranean Sea. He's writing from prison. So Philippians chapter four is describing a contentment that is not based on your circumstances.

It's not contentment based on what you have or you don't have. It's a contentment that doesn't disappear when a crisis comes along. Because the reality is, I think it's it's easier to be a Christian. It's easier to be a believer at some points in life than it is others.

There are going to be highs and there are going to be lows. There are times of blessing. There are times of trial. There are going to be times of abundance and times of need. Paul is not saying you become content by avoiding the lows and denying yourself the highs. He's saying sometimes you will abound, sometimes you won't. And he knows how to be content in either scenario. Now if you're sitting here tonight and you're feeling that, you know, maybe you are lacking contentment, maybe you're not content in your heart right now, then I think Philippians chapter four is good news. It's wonderful news. Philippians four is telling us that there is a way to be content regardless of what's going on in life, regardless of our circumstances, no matter how bleak and how dark life might be feeling. And the Bible teaches us that when you realize that, when you when you see how much your life lacks ultimate contentment in your circumstances, you're much more likely to be content. Jesus says this in Luke chapter 12. He says, Watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in abundance of possessions. And he told them this parable, the ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. Then he said, This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store my surplus grain. And

I'll say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, You fool, this very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, but it's not rich towards God. See, you will have an easier time finding true contentment when you realise that you cannot find it from your circumstances, from building up possessions or material things or any of this stuff.

[11 : 11] And that's hard for us to realise. I think it's really hard when life is going well to not look for contentment in the circumstances. Even King David struggled with this. He said in Sam 30, As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved. I shall never be shaken. In other words, in the good times, in the prosperity, when life was going well, David is saying he developed a dangerous kind of overconfidence in those circumstances.

And we do the same things. We look to our circumstances for security, for contentment, for fulfilment. But the point we made here is that it's much harder to find that true contentment if we're looking and if it depends on those circumstances.

So as we've gone through the letter to the Philippians, I think we've seen that it's the repeated theme is it's about living the Christian life, living the Christian life with joy. And Paul here in Philippians chapter four is continuing this. He's continuing to teach us how to live the Christian life with joy and contentment, not just in the good times, not just when life is going well, not just when we're feeling blessed and wonderful, but at all times in any and every circumstance. Our world today loves how to guys. It loves five quick steps to do such and such and such a thing. One of the most searched for topics on Google, you know, if you search something on Google and you see the predicted results coming up, one of the top ones is how to be happy. And if you Google that, the kind of results you get are this, you get follow these five easy steps to find true happiness, 10 ways to be happier, the 15 habits of incredibly content people that you have to know about.

And all of these guides that you find, they tell you that contentment comes by changing your circumstances. It comes by self empowerment. If you don't like your job, get a new job.

If you don't like your marriage, get a new marriage. If you don't like your circumstances in life, change them. I've heard of several people who have moved here to the Western Isles in an effort to do that, to find contentment, to get away from their problems. But I think in every case, people quickly realize that the problems follow you. The discontentment is not something ultimately that's found in your circumstances. It's from your own heart.

[13 : 50] So the human heart has a real problem of discontentment. So what's the solution that the Bible gives us? Well, Philippians four tells us that there is a way of finding true contentment in whatever circumstances you're in in life. Paul says, for I've 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.

So secondly, what is Paul's secret of contentment? Well, first of all for Paul, true contentment does not come from his circumstances. His circumstances, the stuff that's happening in his life does not add anything or take anything away from his contentment. The world tells you you have to change your circumstances. It tells you to get more stuff. It tells you if you want something, go get it. It tells you if you're finding something in life difficult, get rid of it. The world tells you that you are in control of your own happiness and your own contentment. But the message of the gospel, the message of Philippians is that true, lasting ultimate contentment, it comes from something outside of ourselves, outside of our circumstances.

And Paul tells us in verse 13, he says here, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Paul is saying I can do all of this. I can be equally content with the lows as I am with the highs. I can face the times of need just as I face the times of abundance, as I do it all through Christ who gives me strength, Christ who enables me, who empowers me to do that. I think we have to be clear on what this verse doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that you can do anything you want in life. It's not a blank check to do anything.

It doesn't mean that we have a get out of jail free card for when life gets tough. Sometimes we have to face the lows. Sometimes we do take it to mean that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength means we can do anything. It doesn't mean that Paul could fly or walk on water. It doesn't mean that I could preach the rest of the sermon in Gaelic. Sometimes we do look at this verse as if it does mean that. What this verse does mean and it's wonderful and encouraging and powerful, it means that whatever your circumstances are, whatever's going on in your life, God will equip you to face it. God will equip you to be content in it, whatever they are. I don't know what most of you are going through this week, but the Bible is teaching us that the secret for being content in any circumstance, in every circumstance, in all situations in life is looking to Christ, looking to the one who gives us strength. Now the word to strengthen, it comes from this word *dunamis* and you might recognise it. It's the word that we get dynamite from. It's that kind of power. This explosive power, powerful strength and Christ fills you with that to face any circumstance with contentment. And by giving us these two extremes, Paul is giving us plenty and hunger, abundance and need. He is covering the entire range of human experience. He's saying Christ gives you power to face all situations in life and to be content. And

I think this verse is really just reiterating what Paul's been teaching us right through the letter. If we look at chapter 1 verse 21, he says there, for me to live is Christ.

[17 : 53] He goes on in chapter 3 verse 7 and 8, but whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Paul says elsewhere in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, he says, for the sake of Christ, I am content. And listen to how he goes on.

He says I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with hardships. I am content with persecution and calamities. Why? For the sake of Christ.

Sinclair Ferguson put it like this. He said, when Paul was weak, Christ made him strong. When he was empty, Christ filled him with his power. When he was poor, Christ made him rich. In whatever situation, in Christ, he had learned to be content. Since Christ meant more to him than life itself, how could it be otherwise?

Paul is saying that Christ is the answer to being content, whatever the situation is. I can do all things. I can face all circumstances. I can be content during any challenge in life through Christ who strengthens me. With a verse like Philippians 4, 13, we have to look at the context. The context of this question, how can you be content in any and every circumstance? The question is not how can you change your circumstances? It's not how can you avoid all of the lows? It's not how can you get out of having to go through the times of need and the times of lacking? The question is how can you be content in them? Paul is saying the answer is found in Christ. It's found in the one who strengthens you. God's word is telling us that there is a way to be content. There is a way to have radical ultimate contentment. It's through Christ who gives us strength.

See material possessions, while they can be a blessing and they can be a privilege and a joy, ultimately they don't last. Our physical health is fragile. People are changeable.

[20 : 27] But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the only source of permanent ultimate contentment in the whole world. In my home congregation there was an old Christian lady I used to go and see. She was simply wonderful and I think she modelled this kind of contentment so well. Towards the end of her life, if you went in and visited her and you asked her how are you doing, she would just smile and she would quote from Sam 73.

She would say, my flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never. She was so content in the face of difficult circumstances, in the face of pain and illness and being close to death. She had this wonderful contentment that just flowed out of her. That's contentment.

The reality is we don't know what tomorrow will bring. We don't know what the future holds for us. But God's word tells us that there is a contentment that we can have that will not yield to our circumstances, that cannot be taken away from us. I think this is a daily challenge for us as Christians. I think we can often say that we are content in Christ. We can say that to live for us is Christ like Paul. We might say that Christ is all we need, but often our lives are inconsistent with that. Often we want to have Jesus plus, we want to have Jesus and a nice car, Jesus and the good job that we're after, Jesus and human praise and popularity, Jesus and a big thriving church. But ultimately none of the things will give us the contentment that we're so desperately looking for. Ultimately we're looking in the wrong place. See when we feel like we're lacking, when we feel like we're going through a time in life where we're maybe not being blessed, where we're not abounding, our contentment can vanish because we feel like God is withholding stuff from us. Maybe we look and we see other people being blessed. We see other churches being blessed. We see other people abounding and we feel like God's not doing that in our life. We can feel discontent, but Paul is saying fix your eyes on Jesus. Look to the one who gives you strength and you can be content in any circumstance. Think about how generous and how good he's been to you in the gospel. And he goes on in this letter in verse 19 to promise us that God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. And

I think this is the heart of the issue. True contentment comes from a complete and total trust in God's providence. In believing this promise that God will supply everything you need, not everything you want, not everything you desire, but everything you need. Paul Tripp put it like this, he said, there will be moments in life where it will seem as if your prayers have gone unanswered. There will be moments of trial when it will seem as if God is absent. There will be moments when you feel misunderstood and alone. There will be moments when it feels like God is not blessing us. It is in these moments of hardship when what God is doing doesn't seem to make sense that it's all the more important to look to Christ, to preach to ourselves the gospel of his unshakable, unrelenting, ever present care. We need to have that deep trust in God's providence, that God will supply us with everything we need for the circumstances he's called us to face. I think again, it's important to remember what this verse is not saying. It's not a blank check to get anything we want in life. It's not saying God will grant every desire of your heart, but God will give you exactly what you need. Think about what Jesus said to his disciples after he told that parable in Luke chapter 12. He says in verse 22, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or about food or about your body, what you will wear.

For life is more than food and this body is more than clothes. Consider the ravens. They do not sow or reap. They have no store room or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds. Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? See, true contentment comes from a complete and total trust and dependence in God's providence.

[25 : 41] And elsewhere the Bible teaches us that God wants you to be content. He says in Hebrews chapter 13 verse 5, Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have. For he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say the Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me? And then in 1 Timothy chapter 6, it says, Their godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and we cannot take anything out of the world. I had a conversation recently with a friend and I was talking about this verse with them and they said, you know, honestly, no I'm not content. I'm not happy. I'm not satisfied in my Christian life. They said, I don't remember the last time I was actually happy. And he started talking about all the things in his life that he felt weren't going his way. All the ways he felt God was ignoring him, how it felt impossible to have any kind of contentment because of the things that were going on. And then there was another friend I was speaking to who by comparison, it seemed things were going great. His life was going well. He had a nice job. He was getting a good income. He had secure, respectable career. He had a nice family. But he absolutely hated his job. He hated what he was doing. He would wake up every morning feeling miserable in life. He felt utterly discontent. And both of these people I think were discontent because they were looking at their circumstances for their contentment rather than to Christ. And the reality is that we will never find contentment when we do that because we're created to find it in God. Augustine, one of the great early church fathers, he put it like this. He wrote a wonderful autobiography called The Confessions. And he said this well-known quote,

And thou hast made us for thyself, and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee. See God has made us for himself. God has created us to find our satisfaction and our joy and our fulfillment in him. So if we're looking for it in other places, our hearts are going to be restless. When we look to our careers or to family or to material possessions or to human praise, when we're looking to any of these things to make us content, we will always want more. We will never have enough. Remember what John Rockefeller said, just a little bit more. Just a little bit more is enough. See our restless hearts will always crave more if we're looking to our circumstances for contentment. Because ultimately we are created for something much more. So if you want to learn Paul's secret, if you want to be content in any and every circumstance in life, to face plenty and hunger, to know how to be brought low and how to abound, to face abundance and to face need, he says you need to look to Christ. You need to look to Jesus. You need to look to the one who will give you everything you need, the one who strengthens you. Alec Motier wrote this, he said the key to all of this is in Christ. It is ultimately because of Christ that Paul is contented.

And it is Christ whom he offers to us as the means and the guarantee of our contentment. For Paul, the person who possesses Christ possesses the world. So are we content this evening? These are challenging words. The world tells us that contentment will come if we have enough. But the secret Paul says to true contentment is finding Christ himself. It's ultimately a contentment that however difficult tomorrow might be, however hard the week might seem, whatever temptations and trials might come our way, we can face it all through Christ who gives us strength. See, God wants us to be content. God wants his people to be content.

Whatever is going on in our lives, God wants us to be content in our hearts. He wants you to have a real deep contentment in Jesus Christ. And the Bible promises us that nothing, nothing in this world can take that away. Let's pray. Lord God and Father in heaven, we come before you now and we just give you thanks and we give you praise for the wonderful provision you've made for us in Jesus Christ. Father, we thank you for your promises in your word that you'll meet every one of our needs. Father, we thank you that in you we can find contentment, we can find fulfillment, we can find joy, we can find peace. Father, we thank you that you have created us for yourself. And Lord, our hearts are indeed restless until we find your rest in you. We pray that in this week to come you would enable us and equip us to look to Jesus, to look to the one who strengthens us. And Lord, that in all that you would receive all the glory. In Jesus' name, amen.