

Rev. Dan Welch Thanksgiving Eve/Day 11/21/18 and 11/22/18 Text- Philippians 4:6-20

Every year we come together for our Thanksgiving Service, we have our familiar Bible readings about thankfulness, including the Ten Lepers, of which only one returns and thanks Jesus for healing him. We sing inspiring Thanksgiving hymns like “Now Thank We all our God”, “We Praise You, O God, Our Redeemer Creator” “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come.” But, for **what** are we thankful? **Why** are we thankful? If we need help answering those questions we just have to look at the First Article of the Creed and its explanation as we did earlier! That gives us a good, long list of things that God gives to us and for all of which “it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.”

Is it enough though? Are we **content** with all that God has given us or do we want more? I would argue that in order to be thankful, we first must be content. Are we content? Do we long for more stuff, do we wish for a better job, a bigger house, a happier life, less stress? How can we truly be content in life and therefore be thankful?

If you're like me and you want to learn to be more content in life, or even if you've come to a place in life where you're 100% content and happy, this evening I'd like to invite you to join me on a Thanksgiving pilgrimage to a place called Philippi. “What's so special about Philippi?” (pause) I'm not exactly sure, but it sure produced a lot of people who were very content. So in our minds, let's go to Philippi to learn the secret of contentment!

I. The first person I'd like you to meet is Lydia, Paul's first convert on the European continent (Acts 16:11-15). It seems Lydia was pretty wealthy. She sold very expensive purple clothing for a living, so she had to be doing pretty well for herself with that kind of career. But, as we'll see it wasn't her wealth that made Lydia content: When she and her household heard Paul's Gospel message, they believed in Jesus and were baptized. Then immediately, Lydia wanted to help. She invited Paul and his companions to work out of her home and, according to the book of Acts, she wouldn't take no for an answer (Acts 16:15). Yes, Lydia seems to be a woman who was very content.

Or how about a man, with the fun-to-pronounce name Epaphroditus who also shows up in our text? (see also Phil 2:25–30) He seems to be a man who was also extremely content. Epaphroditus couldn't do enough to help Paul's work! No expense was too great! Paul even writes that "he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me" (2:30). You **have** to be really content to be willing to do that!

How about the Philippian congregation as a whole? No other letter from Paul flows over with such joy! Paul calls the Philippians his partners in the Gospel (Phil 1:5). Of all the places Paul traveled, of all the congregations he served, he only accepted financial support from—you guessed it— these same Philippians. And when the Jerusalem Christians were suffering severe poverty because of drought and persecution, "In the midst of a very severe trial, (the Philippians) overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people" (2 Cor 8:2–4). They were having a rough time of it themselves, but they insisted on helping "beyond their means," Paul says. Like Lydia, they just wouldn't take no for an answer. They must have been very content people to give so much away when they were barely scraping by.

The generosity Lydia, Epaphroditus, and the Philippians displayed can come only from hearts that are content. If you aren't content, you can't be generous with anything. Instead, you guard it with your life, like a dog protecting his last bone.

II. There's one more content person you have to meet, although he didn't actually spend a lot of time in Phillipi. His name is Paul. He wrote these words, and he wrote them while sitting in a prison cell in Rome, in chains for the Gospel. This was nothing new for him, and the Philippians knew that full well. They had seen how Paul and Silas were arrested, brutally flogged, and thrown in prison right there in their own town (Acts 16:16–24). It was absolutely amazing that they were willing to suffer that kind of treatment! More amazing still, they filled their prison cell with hymns of

praise to God! And when an earthquake broke open their prison cell, rather than escaping and letting the sleeping jailer pay for it with his life, they stayed put, a witness to the Gospel that God would use to save not just the jailer's earthly life but his eternal life and the eternal lives of his whole household as well (Acts 16:25-34). That's pretty content—after a beating and a night in jail.

And now, back in prison, this time facing the very real possibility of never getting out but instead being executed, Paul writes to the Philippians about as contented of a letter as anyone could imagine. At least eighteen times in this short letter he says something about joy or rejoicing. He even repeats it for emphasis: "Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again, Rejoice!" (4:4). Without a doubt, Paul was content!

III. What an amazing list of content people! What is it that Lydia and Epaphroditus found, that made them so glad that they threw themselves, their money, and even their lives, into the service of the Gospel? What did the Philippians know that made them beg Paul to take their offering, promising even more, when they're barely getting by themselves? What was Paul and Silas' secret that they would sing from their prison cell, with heavy shackles on their feet and painful wounds on their backs? What made Paul write such a contented letter even while he was facing death? Where do *you and I* get contentment like that?

We are blessed to live in the wealthiest nation this world has ever seen. We have been given freedoms that many have never even dreamed of. We have more and greater comforts than ever. Our pets have more to eat than some people in other parts of the world do. We have traveled to more places and done more exciting things than past generations would have imagined possible. We have indoor plumbing and outdoor carpeting, water softeners and air conditioners, central heating and accent lighting, cars with satellite radio, heated seats, cruise control, and more.

But are we Americans *content*? It sure doesn't seem so. Families are falling apart. Cases of clinical depression, especially among youth is rising at an alarming rate. Drug abuse is climbing, and with it, the crime rate. Is this what a contented people looks like? I don't think so.

So what is the secret of contentment that Lydia and Epaphroditus, the people of Philippi, that Paul and Silas all discovered? We want to know it too. How can Paul, with bloodied back and shackled feet, say “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.” (Phil 4:11–12)? He says he learned the secret? So what is it?

As we stand here, anxiously looking into an unknown future, let’s hear and absorb Paul’s reply: “I can do all this through (Christ) who gives me strength.” (Phil 4:13). When you finally get down to it, Thanksgiving is not about wealth and abundance, or at least it shouldn’t be. Neither is contentment. It’s true, God has showered, even flooded us with many blessings. God has blessed us with so much stuff that we don’t know what to do with it all. But you won’t find contentment buried in that pile of stuff. Paul had no such pile, nor did the Philippians, yet they were content! Why **was** that?

IV. They had more than a pile of stuff. They had the God who owns it, and who promises to give it if ever it is needed. Listen again to Paul: “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:19).

The Philippians and Paul didn’t have all that stuff; but they did have the God who gives all that stuff and a whole lot more. Or, should I say, **He** had **them!** He purchased them back from sin and death by the blood of his Son, Christ Jesus. If that doesn’t give contentment, nothing will! “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:32)? “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor 8:9). They had the true God, and He had them. That’s the secret to contentment.

“Rejoice in the Lord always,” Paul says; “again I will say, Rejoice” (Phil 4:4). In the Lord. That’s the secret. From the prison cell in Rome, facing death, Paul writes, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (1:21). When I

have Christ and He has me, it's always a win-win. That's the secret of contentment.

Contentment? You can't find it in earthly things, and if you try, you're asking *them* to be your god, something they can only pretend to be. They can't handle the pressure! But when you have the real God, the one who loves to give because He loves to forgive in Christ—this God “will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:19).

The secret to contentment? Simply put, it is *Christ*! Through Him, the Father is eternally for us; and “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). In Him, we come to know what Lydia and Epaphroditus, the Philippians, Silas, and Paul had learned so well: “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever.” (Phil 4:19-20) Happy Thanksgiving! We really do have a lot to be thankful for... in Christ. In Him we truly can be content, now and forever! Amen.