

## Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021 Philippians 4:10-23

We have reached the end of our series in Philippians and I wonder what will you take away? What has really struck you about this letter. What has God been teaching you??

Let's pray. May the thoughts of our minds and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

How many of you have an iPhone phone or an iPod, yes I still have my faithful iPod. Do you have an iPad and I wonder how many of us use the iCloud? Now this is not a promotion for Apple but I use these as an illustration. You see, I just wanted to share with you the secret that all Christians have. Can you guess what that is? Is it something to do with an apple, I wonder? I have it down here and I'll reveal it to you later. The secret that all Christians have.

In this last section of the letter to the Philippians, Paul reveals the secret. The secret that enabled him to say 'I rejoice greatly, the secret that enabled him to say I am content and say to the Philippians thanks for all the gifts I don't need them but genuinely, thank you anyway.

Before I reveal the secret, let's take a look at our passage and see if you can work it out.

Firstly, Paul talks about joy and contentment.

How many of you are longing to see family and friends again; to go out for a meal; to have a cup of coffee with your friends in your favourite cafe? To re-join groups and clubs, see people we haven't seen for ages. I haven't hugged my grandson for over a year. Many of you are mourning the loss of friends and family members. Some even didn't get the chance to say goodbye to loved ones. It's been a really difficult year. How can we possibly be joyful? How can we possibly be content with our situation?

Our culture today is one of discontent, and I don't just mean because of the pandemic. We have almost learnt to become discontent. We have learnt that it is our right to grumble and complain. It's the default setting many of us go to. On the inside it's almost like we have become victims, victims of our circumstances. It's like a disease, a dis-ease and the name of the dis-ease is called 'if only-itis'; if only I had a job or a better job, then I would be more content. if only I had a better home, I would be content. If only my relationship with so and so, was better, if only I had more confidence, if only I didn't feel so ill all the time then I would be content.

It is the 'if only's' in our lives that are a sign of a dis-eased or discontented heart. How's your if only-it is?

We have heard several times during this series in Philippians, that Paul had learned to be content. He had learned to be content when he has a little.... but also, we see in these verses, that he has learned to be content when he had plenty. Our reading said, 'whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.' I wonder sometimes if we think contentment is something we have to learn when we don't have things, or when things are tough. Well sometimes we need to learn contentment when we have plenty. There are some pretty discontented well-off people and I'm sure you can think of some examples from

our television screens recently, people who have much wealth and good living and fame and yet remain discontent. If only-it is.

But how on earth do you learn to be content? it does not make sense in our current culture. How many people have you met that appear completely content with life? Are you content with your life?

May I suggest that we consider that word content. You see,  
Being content is not denying the reality of our emotions of our pain and disappointments  
Being content is not having to like what we're going through  
Being content is not accepting things that are less than they should be

Being content is a learned behaviour that helps us journey through these situations.

Like a good biblical scholar, I thought I would look up the word content in verse 12 because Paul said he had learned the secret of being content, and I wanted to see what that contentment was; to see what the original Greek word was and I found something both surprising and a little confusing. You see the word content in verse 12 is simply not there. It has been added in several translations, because they assume that was what Paul was meaning. it's not there because contentment is not the secret.

Paul did not say that the secret is learning to be content. But that contentment comes from knowing the secret. What is the secret?

Let us continue with our passage.

In verses 14-19 Paul teaches us lessons in gratitude and generosity.

Throughout this short passage Paul is thankful for the care and concern that the church in Philippi had for him. Thankful for the gifts which most recently came via Epaphroditus and although it seems to have been some time since he received anything from the church, he was genuinely grateful for all their support. The church in Philippi had a longstanding support for Paul even when he was visiting other churches, they continued to support him.

Although Paul is saying 'I'm ok, I am content if I'm hungry or if I'm full, I have enough,' we remember that the only way Paul had anything at all in jail was because other Christians contributed to his needs.

The Philippians generosity to Paul was an ever-present sentiment and he is grateful that he didn't have to instruct them in their giving like he did to the Corinthian church as we read in 2 Corinthians 9 6-7.

Remember this whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give not reluctantly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver.

I have heard Preachers previously use this passage as an opportunity to encourage their congregation to give financially to the church.

It would be remiss of me if I didn't take this opportunity to consider our own giving and specifically our giving to the church. You see the running of our church, particularly with the loss of income from plate giving and hall bookings has not been easy. Just because our building hasn't been opened much, doesn't mean to say there aren't ongoing ministry costs, not the least of which are salaries that need to be paid. I can reassure you that Andrea has not been on furlough!

And Paul does go on to commend the church in Philippi that their giving is a fragrant offering and acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. So, do take an opportunity to review your giving and I'm sure our treasurer would be delighted to hear from you.

Gratitude and generous giving are a fragrant offering and acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God and can indeed be key to unlocking the secret.

Finally, the passage can teach us about how 'Connection and Collaboration' with others is another key.

Paul always drew a team around him. When he went on his missionary journeys he always took someone with him such as Barnabas, Silas or Mark and then there was Timothy who was initially Paul's apprentice but now was with him in Rome. We also read about Epaphroditus and many others. Paul never went on his own he always drew others to him. He knew that independence was unhealthy, and collaboration is fruitful.

Just see what happened even while Paul was in prison in Rome. Verse 22 says 'all God's people sent greetings' ...especially those who belong to the household of Caesar. Let us just think about that for a moment. Caesars household would have been soldiers and servants and slaves. and who was Caesar at that time? Well, it was Emperor Nero, one of the nastiest and most vicious rulers who persecuted Christians. Somehow Paul was converting his household to Christianity, right under his nose. Paul could not keep quiet about the secret he had discovered, and others were drawn to find out more.

There is so much more to this passage but for today, just look at the progression.

We can learn to be content. Whatever our circumstances.

Generosity and gratitude draw us closer and begin to unlock the secret.

And by connecting and working with others we can be so much more fruitful than we could ever be on our own, drawing others in.

So, what is the secret?

I know you are all screaming at the screen – the secret is Jesus! It's not a squirrel...With Jesus is everything – without Jesus is garbage...

And of course, you're right but the secret can be found in verse 13, that wonderful, famous verse.

I CAN do all things through Christ who strengthens me. The secret is discovering the i-Can! [produce the ican!] I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me.

What does Paul mean by ALL THINGS? I thought I'd look up the Greek for the word ALL and strangely that word all means ALL in that sentence. All things, not ALL things that make for a contented life. No ALL things.

Of course, all things that are in keeping with God's character, his nature  
All things that are in line with his will for your life, his good and pleasing will.

Not all things you fancy in life, not all things you'd quite like to have, like good fortune or good luck and not even necessarily things like good health,– but all things that bring wholeness and goodness. All things that will fill your life with joy and fruitfulness, all things that as John 10:10 says, will bring life in all its fulness.

My friends, this amazing verse 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' means you can do ALL THINGS.

If you say this morning but I just can't, Jesus. It is just too hard. You don't know what I'm having to endure. Paul is saying you can, you can do all things.

What is it you need to overcome?

If it is loneliness – you can – yes, say it with me – I CAN overcome loneliness through Christ who strengthens me

If it is unbelief – just say it with me – I can believe through Christ who strengthens me

If it is anxiety – yes it may take time and perseverance, but say it with me – I Can overcome, through Christ who strengthens me

If it is a feeling of inadequacy – a voice in your head that says you are not good enough – say with me – I CAN be more through Christ who strengthens me.

This amazing letter is full of hope and joy; full of peace and contentment, full of gratitude and generosity, full of collaboration and community. This letter shows us that we can – shows us the secret is I CAN do all these things through Christ –

You can - do all things if you accept the grace given to you, if you do things through Jesus, if you rejoice IN the Lord, if you align your thoughts with Gods will and if you trust, trust that God knows the best for your life, trust the power you have within you.

For whatever situation you are in right now – believe that you can  
Trust in Christ, believe in him, keep turning to him because

Well, you see it's not really an 'I' thing at all – it is always a 'we' thing – Christ is always with you.

And may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirit. Amen