

Saying Thanks

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 13th of February 2005. The preacher is Andrew Moody. His sermon is entitled, Saying Thanks, and is based on Philippians chapter 4, verses 10 to 23.

Please take a seat. Let me begin with an apology for my voice. It's not that Philippians has driven me to chain smoking.

It's just that Jack and Emma, having brought home whatever they brought home, have passed on to me and are now enjoying rude health. Why don't I begin by praying for us and for me.

Dear Lord, you said through your Apostle Paul, he said, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Please strengthen me now as I speak and try to explain your word.

Help all of us, I pray, to hear your word through the power of your spirit so that we can understand you and know your will for our lives. Transform us, we pray in Jesus' name.

[1 : 13] Amen. Well, I wonder what it would take to make you contented with your life. How much would you need before you could say, I'm satisfied, that's enough.

Or maybe we could ask the question another way. What is it, I wonder, that keeps you from being contented with your life? Is it lack of money or lack of time? Or worries over health or family?

Maybe it's dissatisfaction with the way your life has turned out. Maybe you have anger or resentment towards somebody. Maybe you're a marriage partner. Maybe you're bitter that you haven't actually got a marriage partner. Or maybe it's something as basic as physical pain or having a cold.

I think we live in a society which is desperate for contentment. Although we are well supplied in many ways in terms of the basic needs of our lives, food and shelter, still we crave something more.

We crave something more that will give us satisfaction and contentment. And the surest sign of this, of course, is the number of people and the number of institutions dedicated to providing contentment for us. For those who seek contentment in beauty and comfort, there seem to be endless TV shows presenting us with visions of the best food we can cook or how to renovate our homes to perfection or information on surgical procedures that can remake our very bodies so that they will make us satisfied and content at last.

[2 : 41] For those who seek contentment in culture and life experience, the weekend pages of the paper present us with travel guides and books designed to stimulate our minds.

And of course, for those of us who hope to find contentment in entertainment, there are the ever-expanding arrays of home theatre systems and gadgets designed to keep our idle hours occupied.

I think for many of us, if we're being realistic, however, the most fundamental ingredient to contentment is money. Of course, we know the official line that money can't buy us happiness, but we have a strong suspicion that if we don't have enough money, poverty can certainly buy us unhappiness or discontent or it will make us unsatisfied.

And of course, in a secondary sense, we know that money allows us to take care of those things that do bring us satisfaction or promise to bring us contentment. Money allows us to look after our families or to enjoy those things in life that we do look to to find contentment and satisfaction.

Some people even claim to be able to put a figure on contentment. A little while ago, Jen and I received a phone call from a company that was going to offer us free financial advice on how to manage our money.

[3 : 51] Now, I, feeling guilty because I'm very irresponsible in these matters and haven't even managed to organise superannuation for myself yet, thought this might be a great opportunity. So we dropped Emma off at Kindy and took Jack along and went to this meeting.

It turned out to be about an hours-long harangue by a financial advisor who attacked our hesitations about becoming rich and told us that we were immoral because we weren't making adequate provisions for our retirement.

And we were going to be a burden on the state. At the bottom line, she said that to maintain a lifestyle we could be content with, that we would be happy with, we needed a minimum of \$1.2 million by the time we retired.

And she, for a mere \$4,000, would help us to achieve that figure. Of course, we lapped up that opportunity. There are many people offering to sell us contentment, to provide us with what we need to become content.

As we look at Philippians, we see that the Apostle Paul has discovered a far deeper contentment. His is a contentment that holds up even if he is poor or hungry. His is a contentment that is his, even as he writes from house arrest in Rome, guarded day and night, awaiting to present his case for his life before the Emperor himself.

[5 : 10] And Paul is happy to give us this great contentment for nothing. If he were a modern Christian writer, of course, he'd be providing his secret in a book form.

He'd be padded out with lots of anecdotes and small bite-sized theological insights at the end of every chapter. And he'd be marketing it through IVP or HarperCollins. If he were a modern TV evangelist, he'd be telling his mega church that God has provided him contentment and satisfaction through success in his work, through becoming a successful and healthy and wealthy person.

And that if members of his congregation care to donate a little bit more, God will certainly provide them with all the things they need for contentment as well. Health, wealth, satisfaction. But Paul is a different kind of Christian leader.

And we know it because when the Philippians send him financial assistance, he says to them, Thanks so much. It's lovely that you want to take care of me and look after me. It's really nice that you're thinking of me.

But don't fear you have to give me anything more. I'm well provided for. I've got enough. In verses 10 and 11, he says, I rejoice in the Lord now that you have received your concern for me, renewed your concern for me.

[6 : 19] Indeed, you were concerned for me, but you had no opportunity to show it. Not that I'm referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. Now, just in case there's any misunderstanding here, if we think that Paul is putting up a bit of false humility, fishing for a bit more money, he brings out the same point a bit later on in the chapter.

After thanking them for their history of giving, he begins verse 17 with the disclaimer, Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. I've been paid in full and have more than enough.

I've been paid in full. Sorry, I am fully satisfied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. Paul is content, you see. It's really nice if the Philippians want to give him things, but he's fine.

Otherwise, too, he is content. So what is the secret of Paul's contentment? Well, according to verse 13, the secret of contentment is to know and serve Jesus Christ.

I can do all things through him who gives me strength. Or perhaps we could better translate it. I have strength for all things through him who empowers me. So the secret of contentment is to know Jesus Christ, the Lord of the whole universe, and to receive Jesus' power to live our lives in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, rich or poor, hungry or well-fed, in prison or free.

[7 : 38] Now, Paul, as he writes these words, he's bringing together several of the themes that have already cropped up in Philippians, and he's summarizing his own experience and attitude to life that has also been shown through these previous chapters.

In chapter 1, we saw how Paul was contented with his imprisonment because of the opportunities it presented for him to serve Jesus and tell people about him. Chapter 1, verses 12 to 14. I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel.

So it has become known through the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

Later in the same chapter, Paul says that he's basically content with whatever happens as the result of his trial too. Chapter 1, verses 21 to 22. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

If I'm to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And if I'm sorry, and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two.

[8 : 41] Later in chapter 3, Paul talks about all the changes that have been brought about in his life through following Jesus. Once upon a time, he thought he was right with God, he was a good person, because of his Jewish heritage, because of his lineage, because of all the things that he had and did.

And he thought he was a good person because of his strict adherence to the Jewish law and his zeal in persecuting heretics, his zeal for God. But now he's put his trust in Jesus, and he's put all those things aside.

He counts them rubbish, he says. And what's more, he doesn't just regard them as rubbish. He's actually lost them. He can no longer claim acceptance by the people of Israel. They've rejected him.

He can no longer claim the ceremonial cleanness that he used to have, because he hangs around with Gentiles, and when required, eats with them, and eats like them. But Paul is content to lose all these things.

In chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, he says, For Jesus' sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ.

[9 : 48] So for Paul, the secret of contentment is the realization that every part of his life, every circumstance he finds himself in, can be related to Jesus Christ. No matter where he is, he knows who is in charge and who is looking after him.

Jesus Christ. No matter where he is, he knows what his mission is. He's supposed to be encouraging people to trust and love in Jesus Christ. No matter where he is, he knows that he will have power.

He can call on power to get through the hardship, or whatever. He can call on Jesus Christ. He will strengthen him. And once again, as he says in verse 13, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

The secret of contentment is simply Jesus. Jesus is in control of our circumstances. Jesus offers us the power to live for him, no matter what those circumstances are. Jesus will help us to live for him, whether we are rich or poor, angry or well-fed.

Now at this point, we might be excused for thinking, well, that's all very well for Paul. Of course, he's an apostle. He's got a special mission from God. He sees visions and he does miracles. And there's a kind of heroic and clear purpose to his suffering, isn't there?

[10 : 55] He's in prison for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There's no confusion about that. How on earth does that apply to me? I'm not called to be an apostle. I'm not suffering for the gospel.

I'm just trying to get through my life. How can I possibly have this sense of mission and contentment that Paul has? Well, the thing to remember is that the way Paul sees it, Jesus is interested in every Christian life and every Christian circumstance.

As we've already seen in verse 12, there's a Christian way to be well-fed. There's a Christian way to be rich, just as there is a Christian response and Christian power for being poor and hungry.

Jesus can empower us wherever we are or whatever our circumstances. And Jesus promises his contentment to everyone who trusts in him too. A couple of weeks ago, we read those terrific words from Philippians 4, verses 6-7.

Paul tells the Philippians to pray about everything. He promises them in return something that sounds very much like contentment, the peace of God that passes all understanding.

[11 : 56] Philippians 4, verses 6-7. Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The contentment that Jesus offers is for every Christian and every circumstance. The power that he offers is for us all, to live wherever we are, for him. And there's another thing that we need to note here.

Though we're not all apostles, and though not all of us have public ministries like teaching, or leadership, or evangelism like Paul does, we can all be part of the same enterprise. Did you notice how Paul describes his relationship to the Philippians in verse 14 of this chapter?

He says, It was kind of you to share in my distress. Or again in verse 15, You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone.

Now these words that our Bible's translators shared is a little bit stronger than that actually. It actually has connotations of a business partnership, or a shared investment. The Philippians aren't apostles. They aren't called to travel around the world preaching the gospel like Paul is.

[13 : 05] Yet through their giving and through their prayers, they are partners with Paul. They share in his ministry. They are part of the same thing, the great enterprise. Paul writes to the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 2, and he boasts about the Philippian church and the churches of Macedonia where Philippi is.

He proudly describes how they're quite poor, but they pleaded with him to be able to give money, to share in this service. And here in Philippians 4 verse 15, he reflects on that same pattern to the Philippians themselves, celebrating their unique involvement in his ministry through their support and prayers.

No church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. The Philippians share in Paul's ministry. By their giving, they are partners with him. But then, although they also share in its cost and in the giving associated with the gospel, they also share in Paul in the matter of receiving, the blessings that come from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Once again, he says, No church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, he says. So where there is generosity on the part of Jesus' people, there also there will be great generosity from Jesus toward his people, not necessarily in material terms, but in ways that can far exceed what we can imagine, and in ways which will certainly bring contentment.

So in verse 19, Paul says, My God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Of course, he echoes the words of Jesus himself, who in Mark chapter 10 says, Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age, houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children and fields with persecutions.

[14 : 54] Paul himself writes along the same lines elsewhere too. In 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 6 following, he says that no one who sows sparingly, sorry, the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

God loves a cheerful giver, and God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

So Paul, as he writes to these Philippians, he's very excited for them. He's not excited by the material blessings that their gift to him brings, but he's excited because he knows they will be blessed for supporting the spread of the gospel, for sharing in his ministry that he's received from Jesus Christ.

Not that I seek the gift, he writes in verse 17, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. Your gifts are a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God, as he writes in verse 18.

Do we want to be contented and reassured of God's love? Do we want to please God and know that he is pleased with us? Really, one of the key ingredients to achieving contentment is being generous.

[15 : 59] The more we take risks with our own resources, the more we experience a far more extravagant provision of our great and generous God, who can fully satisfy every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul writes in this chapter that he has learned the secret of contentment, and as he writes about the Philippians, it's hard to escape the conclusion that they too have worked out the secret of contentment. The Philippians get it.

They understand what life is about. They know that they are on this earth to serve Jesus and know him. They know that they are here to help other people hear about Jesus, and they're keen to participate in that great mission.

They know that Jesus is in charge of all their circumstances. They know they can trust him and make sacrificial gifts to him. They know how to act when they are well off, and they know who gives them strength when they are hard-pressed.

The question, finally, of course, is for us. Have we worked out the secret of contentment? Do we get it? Do we know what it is to trust in Jesus in every aspect of our lives? Do we really believe that he is interested in giving us power to live for him no matter what we do or how we are situated?

[17 : 05] Do we lean on Jesus and pray to him to gain strength for our lives? Have we experienced a participation in the gospel ministry? Through costly giving and received back in return from our generous God?

Are we partners with those who are working hard to spread the gospel, both here in our own church and all around the world? Do we pray for them? Do we give to support them? There are a lot of things in this world who distract us.

So many things in this world which promise us contentment, promise us satisfaction, but really lead nowhere. How often our lives are driven by shallow aspirations and merely worldly fears.

And yet, how simple is the secret of real contentment? Jesus is our life. He can give us strength wherever we are, in every circumstance, whatever happens to us. Let's finish by asking him to teach us that secret and give us his power.

Dear Lord, we thank you that all those years ago, you enabled Paul to live for you in every circumstance. We thank you that you taught contentment to the church at Philippi, and their witness comes down through the centuries to us.

[18 : 07] Please help us to live for you, Lord Jesus. Please help us to find ourselves in you. Help us to draw strength from you for every circumstance. Help us to experience the joy and contentment of risk and of receiving back from you contentment and satisfaction.

We pray these things in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.