

# Have You Learned the Secret? by James Jennings

by James Malachi Jennings

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*The secret to contentment is learning to rely on Christ's power and strength in all circumstances, recognizing God's sovereignty and trusting in His goodness and love.*

**Duration:** 59:41

**Scripture:** Psalm 68:35, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:10, Philippians 4:13, 1 Timothy 1:12, 2 Timothy 4:17

**Topics:** "Contentment In Christ", "Trusting God"

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## Description

This sermon focuses on Paul's contentment in Christ, highlighting the secret he learned that allowed him to be content in all circumstances. Paul's reliance on Christ's strength, his acknowledgment of weakness, and his satisfaction in Christ alone are key points. The sermon emphasizes the need to trust in Christ's power, acknowledge personal weakness, and find true satisfaction in Christ regardless of circumstances.

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## Transcript

I'm going on in Philippians, which I've been preaching through. And I just wanted to note the sermon title I mentioned last time has changed. We are going to mainly observe one thing about Paul this morning.

And that is his contentment in Christ. And we will look at the secret he learned that allowed him to possess contentment in all circumstances that he faced. So go ahead, Philippians 4, verse 10.

Paul writing thanks to the church at Philippi. He says, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, but now at length You have revived Your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but You didn't have opportunity.

And then one of his clarifying statements. Not that I'm speaking of being in need. For I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low. 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. That it was kind of You to share my trouble. I'm going to stop right there.

Let's go ahead and pray. Father, I'm weak. I pray that You would strengthen me right now.

That You'd open up this passage. That it would become an intimate friend to these dear, precious saints here today. Lord, that these truths would grip us.

Lord, please help. Please, Lord, help me to serve right now with the strength that You supply so that in this, as I teach, You will be glorified. Lord, that's what we want this morning.

We want You to be glorified. Our eyes are on You, Lord Jesus, in Your name, in Christ's name, Amen. So let me draw Your attention to Paul's words in chapter 4, verse 12.

He says, I have learned the secret of facing. And then he lists some types of circumstances he's faced. Plenty, hunger, abundance, in need.

And he's basically trying to include everything he can think about. He says every circumstance, whatever situation, he has learned the secret of facing any situation and doing what? Verse 11 says at the end there, in whatever situation, he is content. So he learned the secret of facing any situation whether poverty, abundance, and he remained content.

Paul says he was not speaking of being in need in his thank you response to the Philippians. He's wanting to clarify. I'm not speaking of being in need as I rejoice at this gift.

His life did not depend upon the circumstances changing. Now what is contentment? Contentment. A Greek lexicon that gives the definition when my wife heard this, she said, wait, that's the definition? It defines it as this, a perfect condition of life in which no aid or support is needed.

Meaning a content person is self-sufficient. They don't need anything. They're self-sufficient.

So wait, Paul needed no aid or support? Paul was self-sufficient? He needed nothing to change in his circumstances? That's pretty proud. Did he cut all help off? No. Paul is saying he ultimately only needed help ultimately from one source.

From Jesus Christ. So he wasn't self-sufficient. He was Christ-sufficient.

So he was content. He did not depend truly on their aid or support because he was totally dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean that he refused their aid though.

So, what is the secret Paul learned? Verse 13 gives the answer. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. And that Him refers to Christ.

Through Christ who strengthens me. Christ empowers. You could think of strengthens or empowers is another word.

Christ empowered Paul. Paul was Christ-sufficient. Or literally, the verse reads like this, for all things, I have strength in Christ strengthening me.

Or as one translated it, Lloyd-Jones liked this translation, I am strong or made strong for all things in the One who constantly infuses strength in me. That was Paul. He was not dependent on his circumstances because he was totally dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

He didn't need the circumstances to change. But this does not mean Paul rejects their help. He thanks them.

Even in verse 14, he says, yet it was kind of you to share in my trouble. He's thankful they shared in the trouble. But he's wrestling with thanking them and at the same time not wanting to be misunderstood.

His attitude was not one of being proud. How do you try to both thank them and also make it clear that you were not impatiently waiting on some gift from them? And to let them know in the big schemes of things, you weren't really dependent on them and their gift. Because Christ, that's His reason, was the One who brought him contentment.

Paul is saying, I have learned the secret of faith in any circumstance and not needing aid or support except from one place, from Christ who strengthens me. Sadly, this well-known verse is not well understood in our generation. Paul's point is not that he can go and do any extraordinary and supernatural thing in the world like dunk a basketball or climb a tall mountain with Christ's help.

That's not his point. Rather, his point, he can do the extraordinary thing of being content in whatever situation he is in, whether greatly afflicted or having abundance. The extraordinary act for the basketball player is not putting a sticker on the top of the backboard.

It's not doing the 360 dunk. But it's in that professing Christian basketball player's life, in his abundance, he remains content and doesn't compromise and forget the Lord. That's the miracle.

For him to have abundance and yet still be satisfied that all I need is Christ. Not my career, not money, not fame. None of that.

That's where Christ strengthens. Not the extraordinary act. Brethren, there are many of you who have needs this morning.

I have needs. Where it appears that I need aid and support. Maybe you're in the midst of an affliction by which you're suffering.

Physical sickness. Or a situation? Singleness. Have you learned the secret of facing that situation and yet remaining content? Are you facing that situation and able to say, you know what, I don't actually depend on it changing.

I'm satisfied, held up, content in Jesus Christ. Now, you could say to that, you say, well, don't we need to be encouraged by brothers and sisters? Don't we need aid and support? We do. Don't get me wrong.

Don't get Paul wrong. But we have to make sure that they are not the ones propping us up. And that we're sustained by Christ.

Do you remember King Saul? I don't believe he was a Christian. You know what he did? He attached himself to every strong man. He was propped up by the power of God on others' lives.

What happens when the church, if something happened and we dissolved and you were out there by yourself, would you still be sustained because you have Christ? I remember as a new Christian thinking to myself, what if all these men I looked up to turned out to be like Judas and apostatized and denied the faith? Would that faze me? Is my reality of Christ built on them? Or is it that I myself know Christ? He is the One sustaining me, not a person propping me up. There are some of you this morning with plenty of possessions. Have you learned the secret of facing that abundance and yet remaining content and not forgetting God? Is it easier to be content when abounding or when having nothing? What do you guys

think? Is it easier to be content when you abound? Or you have nothing? Are you satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning? To where no matter the change of circumstances, you're content and rejoicing in Him.

The content person can say with Paul in 1 Timothy 6.8, but if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. The discontent person, they say, but if I just have food and clothing, I will not be content. I need this.

I need that. I need this circumstance to change. This isn't right either.

I need all these things to change and when they do, then I will finally be sufficient based on all of these things being in order. And Paul's saying no! Even if you get all of that in order, just how you think it is to have your little joy and peace, it's going to last for a moment and something's going to fall down. But Christ, He won't fall.

He will sustain. Paul said in 2 Corinthians, He was content with insults. Are you content with insults? Are you content with being taken for granted? Are you content with being disrespected? Are you content with being misunderstood? Or do you feel like I can't move on in life until that changes? Isn't Christ sufficient? Are you content with your position? The discontent person, they can't be content with their position.

They're full of bitterness and anxiety. The discontent person is not satisfied until their circumstances change. The content person is satisfied whether their circumstances change or not, because their true joy comes from being satisfied in Jesus Christ.

Think of it like this. Whatever their conditions, they're not controlled by them. Are you controlled by your conditions? Your circumstances? Your situation? How well is my health this morning? How are all of these things? Am I being respected in this way? How's the business going? Is that what your joy is fluctuating based upon? Now, when we think about contentment, we should also think about holy discontentment.

And that is a discontentment that is pure. You saw in Philippians 1, if you remember what Paul said in v. 23, he said, my desire is to depart and be with Christ. So Paul wasn't actually too content being here.

He had a holy discontentment. I want to go and be with Christ there. So there are discontentments that are very good.

We should not be content. That southeast of India, there is an island, North Sentinel Island, that is completely unreachable. And there is a tribe of natives running around there.

And our God has promised to save someone from every ton in tribe. And how will they be saved unless someone is sent? Should we be discontent that there are people perishing? 150,000 people dying every day in the world. And Christ says, few there be that find eternal life.

And we are the ambassadors that have the great message to take to them. Should there be a discontentment there at that situation? Yes. We should be discontent with our level of Christlikeness.

No one should sit here and say, I'm happy at where sanctification has brought me. Now, let's just plateau for a couple of years. No.

You should pray, Lord, do whatever it takes to make me like Christ. Discontent. Not satisfied.

You do want change. You want Christ's aid to help you. So here, the question is, do you agree with and know that God's standard for you is contentment? This matters.

Do you actually agree with that? That in these ways where it is sinful to be discontent, do you see that as sin? Do you see it as what it is? Even to the newly converted soldiers, what did Jesus say in Luke 3? He said, don't extort money from anyone by threats or false accusations. And then Jesus said what? Be content with your wages. These guys just got saved.

Christ is already saying be content. Be content, guys. You have Me now.

You don't actually need all your circumstances to change to have fullness of joy, because fullness of joy comes at My right hand according to Psalm 16. Be content. Don't need aid.

Don't need support. Don't depend upon it ultimately, but depend upon Christ. Think about it.

If you're not content, it's saying that Christ is not sufficient. It's declaring that God had an oversight in part of what you're facing in your present circumstances. He just missed it.

He missed it. That's an insult to God if we think that. Rather, it is because of His loving watchfulness that you are facing your present circumstances.

Do you know that? The set of circumstances you face today is because of God's watchfulness over your life. It's not a neglect. It's not an oversight.

It's because of His carefully given attention. The discontent person is a grumbler. What did Paul say in Philippians 2.14? Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

Grumbling is complaining to God. I don't like what you've done. The discontent person often is what? Anxious.

What did Paul say in v. 6 of this chapter? Do not be anxious. And he commanded that. He didn't give it as an option.

He commanded that. How often? We're sinfully discontent and we're so anxious. What's going to happen here? What's going to happen? Look, some of you, you face a trial where you're getting a scan back on your health and whether you could have cancer or not.

And you're sitting there, even there. Trust Christ. Don't be anxious.

But through prayer, say, Lord, help me. So, I want to look. I have five observations.

That was kind of my introduction. Thinking about contentment, what it is. There's holy discontentment.

Now, I want to give five observations to help you learn the secret, you could say. Let me read those five and then we'll look at them briefly. Number one, there is no situation by which Christ's power is not available.

Not available. There's no situation. Number two, there is no situation that Christ is not in control of.

Number three, there is no situation by which your own power is sufficient. And number four, this is a lesson Paul had to experientially learn in an affliction that everything was beyond his strength. And

number five, we'll see that there is no set of circumstances that will truly satisfy you except to know Jesus Christ.

And that's good news. If you're lost here today, I hope by the end of this, you realize you can spend the next 50 years of your life trying to get your little perfect set of circumstances in order and it's going to let you down. But Christ will not.

So number one, there is no situation by which Christ's power is not available. Notice again the literal reading of this verse. The ESV, I can do all things through Him.

Part of the reason it gets misinterpreted so much by these basketball players and people is just the way it reads there. So I can do all things. I'm just going to go and whatever.

But the literal, I believe, is more faithful at bringing out the thrust. Here it is again. For all things I have strength.

For all things I have strength in Christ strengthening me. In other words, for all situations, I have strength. There is strength available.

Meaning the strength and power from Christ is always available for any set of circumstances. If Paul says for all things Christ strengthens, that means the strength is always available. 24-7.

Now think of this. Paul looks back at every set of circumstances he has been in. Being in prison.

Receiving lashings. Shipwrecked. And he says strength from Christ was available each and every time.

There was never one situation that he was abandoned and left in a trial without sufficient strength being available. And to illustrate that, think about those in Puerto Rico. They are without power right now.

Their source has been cut off. But Paul makes it very clear here, this will never happen to the believer. Never! Your power source of Christ will never be cut off.

Not even for one second. That means it is available at every single trial along the way. No matter the size of the hurricane in the spiritual realm, you'll still find full access to power from God for you to be content in that specific set of circumstances through the power that comes from Jesus Christ.

I don't know about you, but I find that very encouraging. Because Satan wants you to think, believer, that there is a set of circumstances where maybe that measure of power is not available. But Paul says no, for all things.

I've had strength. For every circumstance, there was strength there through Christ strengthening me. You couldn't find one set of circumstances where that wasn't there.

Where the office was closed. Where the generator was off. No.

Always. This is because the source of the power is Christ. He does not sleep.

He does not slumber. He is alive and seated at the right hand of the throne of God this morning. And He hears you.

If you're a Christian, you've got access to the blood of Christ. So this means, believer, you're never abandoned by God in any situation. And the writer of Hebrews appeals to this.

He even says, be content with what you have. Why? And what's his reason? He gives. For the Lord has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Meaning the Lord is never going to leave, never forsake you. This power is always available. Do you see that? There's not one single circumstance for the believer in which Christ is not offering and ready to give you strength.

There will never be a trial, ever, by which strength is not available through Christ. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10, 13, God is faithful. And He will not let you be tempted in a trial beyond your ability.

But He'll give a way of escape. So, two questions on this first point. Do you think your situation and circumstance is beyond finding help from the Lord? You think that right now.

May it never be. Second question, do you think you need out of your situation in order to survive? Paul was not needing out of it, but he was being upheld while in the midst of it by the power of Christ. So, point number one, we just saw, there is no situation, there will not be one single millisecond in the life of the believer by which Christ's power is not available.

You can be fully reliant upon Him, and He is good to His Word. Number two, there is no situation by which Christ is not in control. This secret, Paul says he learned it.

This is not just something intellectual. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Or I've had strength in all my circumstances through Christ strengthening me.

This secret can only be learned by those who believe God is sovereign. If you don't believe God is sovereign this morning, you're not going to be able to lay hold of this. If you doubt God's control over all things, then you would have reasons to believe that there could be a situation by which He underestimated the conditions.

And therefore was not sufficient and had power for it. But this is not true. Even v. 19 in Philippians, Paul said, my God will supply every need of Yours according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

Not half. Not two-thirds. Every need.

Paul clearly believed God was sovereign. I just want to think of a couple places he believed that in Philippians. What's the first one? What's the first verse? Philippians 1.6 And I am sure of this, that He who began... So who began the good work? God saves.

He who began the good work in you will do what? Bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Paul believed that God saves and that God is the ultimate reason the Christian will endure to the end. He believed that.

What's something else Paul believed? He believed God was in control. And listen to what he says in Philippians 1.12. He says, I know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. His imprisonment really served a purpose.

Just lay a hold of those words. Really served. Your set of circumstances right now really serves a purpose.

Because God put you there. It's not an accident. And he's the one in prison telling the Philippians that.

That no, no, my imprisonment really served a purpose. And what was that? Those brothers out there had now become much more bold to speak the Word without fear because they saw Paul sustained by Christ in prison. And they realized, hey, if we get put in prison with Him, it'll just be a time to sing a bunch of hymns and rejoice.

Why should we fear it? Did Paul believe God was sovereign? Do you need to believe God is sovereign? You better believe it. And Paul said in Philippians 1.29, it has been graciously given to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in Him, but also suffer for His sake. So Paul believed that it was graciously given to you to even believe and be saved.

And Paul believed that every trial, all the suffering was a gracious gift from a heavenly Father, and He perfectly gave it to you. God saves us, gets us to the end. Purpose is really served.

He grants us to suffer. That means He grants the trial. Philippians 1.29 is teaching.

A fourth thing here. God is sovereign. Philippians 2.13, what did Paul say? For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

So Paul knew that God is supernaturally working in him to will, to desire. What to do? Just like Ezekiel 36, I will cause you to walk and obey My statutes. God works in you to will and to work for His good pleasure.

I'm glad God is sovereign. I'm glad He mentions in v. 19 as we already said, that He will supply every need. The only person who can promise you to supply every need for you is the person who is totally sovereign over all things.

Because if they're not, they can't say that. The only person who can promise to supply every need of yours according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus is the person who is controlling these circumstances and is granting you to suffer. And is the person who granted you to believe.

So you're not going to find strength in Christ to endure in all circumstances if you don't believe God is sovereign. Paul knew. Paul knew this.

God graciously gave him the power and strength to believe. Colossians 1.16 says, all things were created through Christ and for Him. There you got it.

All things were created through Him and for Him. I can do all things through Christ. Through Christ.

All things were created through Him. So He who created all things through Christ, He offers strength through Him. The same power in the creation of all things is right there available for the Christian.

Now, why would Paul say he's learned a secret? A mystery? Here a question is, why do we at times seem to not experience this reality of strength being given to us as Paul did? Why not? Paul said he had to learn the secret. So the implication is we've not learned whatever this secret is to the degree that Paul did. And that shows Paul had a progression of growth in his own life as a believer.

We're going to find the secret, it's none other than the simple reality that's the opposite of the world, and that is that when I am weak, I am actually strong. It's not that big of a deal. But to the world it is.

It's a reversal. It's not about us being strong. It's about us being totally cast on Christ.

So, my third observation. There's no circumstance by which your own power is sufficient. You have to get this in order to always cast yourself on Christ.

If you are sitting here this morning and you still have any subtle belief that you have power in yourself that is sufficient for the task, I hope I can dismantle that and this is a beautiful thing about God's design for the Christian. He has designed us to be weak. Notice v. 13.

It says, I can do all things through Him who does what? Strengthens. Who needs to be strengthened? People who are what? Weak. People who are weak need strength.

God's designed us. We're powerless. We're not self-sufficient.

I lack the strength. As Jehoshaphat rightly said in 2 Chronicles 20.12, O our God, we are powerless against this great whore. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You.

Powerless. But have you learned you're powerless? Do you recognize, oh, I need to be strengthened. That implies I'm weak.

I'm not self-sufficient. You say, well, everything? Aren't there a couple things that apart from Him we can truly do and truly bear fruit for His glory? John 15.5 says what? Apart from Me, you can do nothing. Nothing.

Or, are you out there today like the branch trying to run around without the vine? The problem is it cannot do anything apart from the vine. You're going to decay, rot, break, crumble, whatever happens to that branch. I'm trying to make this point.

One great hindrance from us experiencing Christ's power at work in our lives, one great hindrance for you, for me, is that our pride and self-sufficiency get in the way. Your pride and self-sufficiency gets in the way. Again, being content is defined as being self-sufficient.

But Paul's Christ-sufficient. Not self-sufficient. So what is the solution? We have to learn how weak we are so we don't trust in ourselves.

How? How's that going to happen? Through afflictions. Through trials. Maybe some of you are in right now where you proudly trust in yourselves.

And then you humbly find out like Peter did when he thought he wouldn't deny Christ, and he did. You find out, I did not have the strength. And then God strips all the resources from you.

And you arrive at a place where you truly acknowledge, apart from Christ, I can't do anything apart from Him. At that point, we will constantly rely on Christ for power. We will not rely on our own power.

We'll be all the more prayerful and acknowledge the Lord in all things. God has to wean us off the bottle of our own strength. He has to teach us that it will not do, and the Lord taught Paul that very thing.

The Lord's got to get you to a point where you say I don't need self-sufficiency. I don't need strength. As Kevin Williams said years ago, Christian maturity is not becoming more and more reliant and independent.

It's becoming less reliant on yourself, more dependent on God, until you get to the bottom where you can say I can't do anything without Christ. Fourth observation. Finding out everything is beyond our strength must be experientially learned.

Turn to 2 Corinthians. We're going to ask this question. When did Paul learn this? In years prior to this Philippian letter, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians.

In that letter, we find at least two places at which Paul was learning of his weakness and of his absolute need to always rely on Christ for power. We'll find that we must become people who do not despise our weakness, but who gladly boast in it. Because in doing so, Christ's power will rest upon us.

So, first place where we see this is in chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians. And I know you guys are thinking chapter 11 and 12. We're going to get there.

But chapter 1 is the first place. And he is giving an update to the church and we see in v. 8, as he does this, he says, we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we trusted Christ.

Oops, he doesn't do that right there. That we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

But, this really served the purpose. This was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. And He has delivered us and He will deliver us again.

So my take right there would be that Paul despairing of life was not him being content, not him being self-sustained by Christ at that moment. And he says this happened for a reason. To make him no longer rely on himself as self-sufficiency, but to rely on God who raises the dead.

That's Christ's sufficiency. And he's sharing this in this introduction here to that church. He's sneaking in a lesson for them as he doesn't want them to be unaware of what happened.

So Paul was learning here, I believed. In other words, Paul had to fully rely on Christ in Whom there is strength to face that situation and not despair and want out. I know I did a message on these verses years ago, but it just amazed me, Paul saying he was utterly burdened beyond our strength.

He despaired of life. And he felt like he received a death sentence. Paul the Apostle saying that.

Yet here in Philippians 4.13, he says, I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me. But brethren, he says he learned that. It took time.

It took trials. The same thing for us. God is slowly but surely teaching us and breaking us from self-reliance.

That's what it says in v. 9. To make us rely not on ourselves, but on God Who raises the dead. And now, here he is in Philippians in prison with people trying to afflict him. He's facing a possible cruel martyrdom.

And he's rejoicing, not despairing. 2 Corinthians 1, he despairs of life. Philippians, rejoice always.

I believe Paul has learned something. Why is he so content and satisfied? Because he has learned through experience the secret of facing every circumstance and is convinced he has no power in himself.

Only power comes from the Lord.

I think that's a big part of our problem. We're not convinced of this as we should be. I mean, even as I was preparing this, it's like I noticed different areas of self-sufficiency and pride and preparing in different things.

And it's like, Lord, I need to learn more. My own powerlessness. 2nd place, turn to chapter 11 where we see our second example.

Paul has just listed countless trials he endured. And in v. 30, he says, if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. Now wait, what Paul? Boasting in what shows your weakness? He goes on in chapter 12, v. 7 to discuss the thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan that was given to him to keep him from becoming proud and conceited.

Self-reliant, you could even say. And in the midst of wanting this thorn removed, the Lord answered Paul in v. 9 records what is said, but He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, Paul. My power is made perfect in weakness.

Now, now that is a reversal that the world cannot understand. God's power is at its full strength is perfect when you are weaknesed. When you're weakest, because you're not getting in the way.

God's power is at its full strength, is perfected, is most manifested when you are most weakest because in the weakness, you're reliant on Him for strength. All your own devices are gone. You're cast on God.

As in, unplug the power completely of your own strength and abide in Christ and His strength. Entirely abide in Him and His strength. Don't try to abide 90% in your own power.

Or 90 in Him. And then I've got 10% me. No, knock it down to 9, 8, 7, get it all the way down to zero.

Lord, I need You. Like Jehoshaphat, we're powerless. We don't even know what to do, Lord.

But, our eyes are on You. But, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me in every single circumstance. Now, this text here, or even his conclusion here in v. 9, 2 Corinthians 12, 9, he says, Therefore, because of this, I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness.

Why? So that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Now, when Paul says boast of his weakness, he's not talking about weaknesses and some besetting sin in his life. Rather, he's facing trials.

He's suffering. There's a messenger of the adversary. He's got the concern for all these churches.

And he's weak to endure all of that. He finds that he wants these circumstances to change unless power is given to him to be content and satisfied in that situation. And Christ is giving that power to Paul.

Notice here, Paul said he will boast all the more gladly of his weakness. See that? I will boast all the more gladly. It implies he used to boast of his weakness.

He used to, but now he does it more gladly because he's learned the purpose more fully. Do you get that? So as a Christian, you know what? You look and you say, you know, when I boasted of my utter weakness, how God has designed me weak, not sin, but weakness, inability, I boast more gladly now than I did five years earlier. Because now I all the more realize that's actually the secret.

I should be boasting in my weakness because when I am weak, then I am strong. How did I get that reversed? Well, that's not the idea of the world. The world is go do it.

You've got strength. You've got power in yourself. The Christian says, no, I don't.

But Christ has all power. He can meet all my needs. He will strengthen me.

No, I'm not just going to sit still. I'm going to go work and toil and trust the grace of God is going to enable me. And Paul says, verse 10, for the sake of Christ then, I am content with weakness, insult, hardship, persecutions, calamities, for when I am weak, then I am strong.

You can turn back to Philippians. So those are two places I believe you see somewhat Paul learning something. In one, he says it made me rely not on myself, but on God.

And in the other, he says the Lord said. So there's teaching happening. There's an enlightenment happening in affliction that I am not sufficient.

And it all goes back even, you could say, how's a Christian saved? By works of righteousness that we have done? No. I am justified before God because of the righteousness of Christ alone. He has satisfied the wrath of God.

I'm not saved by my works. In the same way as I live the Christian life, I'm casting myself on Christ for power. What time do we have? 45? So, are you content with this idea of a total lack of strength in and of yourself and your own resources? Do you rejoice at God's design that as you grow, you become less self-reliant and more God-reliant? Do you rejoice that the only One you can boast in is the Lord and not yourself? The proud person hates this.

The Christian loves it. And the fifth observation was that Paul was a man who knew that there is no object or person that will satisfy as Christ does. That's why in any situation, he didn't ultimately need anything to really change.

He wasn't dependent upon it because the one Person who satisfied was Christ and he had Christ in that circumstance. So, it's kind of you to share in my trouble. That was really kind of you.

And yes, you guys were concerned. Thank you for your gifts. But just so you guys know, not that I'm speaking of being in need.

Because I'm fully satisfied in Christ. Paul, what did he say? For me to live as Christ to die as gain. Paul, he wanted to depart and be as Christ for that is better.

Far better. Paul 3, verse 8, he counted everything as a loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, His Lord. He counted it all as done and lost because of Christ.

He was totally Christ-focused, centered. Paul's object of satisfaction and contentment was Christ. And this is such cliché language that we can hear.

But we have to learn that. I have to learn that. Where it's not just me up in a pulpit saying Christ will always satisfy, but it's going through affliction, going through trial, and getting to a point where you really realize I cannot depend upon myself.

This trial has made me rely on God who raises the dead. And He will deliver me. And He has delivered me.

And He will keep on delivering me. And at the next trial, I'm going to look to Christ Who's always strengthened me. Paul said in 1 Timothy, godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. We can't take anything out of the world. But you know what Paul knew he could take out of the world? He said right there in v. 17, why was he not seeking their gift? Because he was seeking the fruit that increased to their credit.

Paul was wanting, as he said in chapter 1, for them to be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. If you want to bear fruit, be satisfied in Christ. Be content in Christ.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. And then all these things will be added unto you. So, how? You're saying that I can be strengthened through Christ in every circumstance.

How? What did Paul do? The first thing is believe that Christ so cares about you that His power is there to be had. Believe that. Acknowledge that.

Trust that to be reality according to these verses. He'll supply every need. You have to believe that.

We're doing this looking to Christ in faith. Acknowledge to God in prayer your weakness. That's one of the first things you can do is acknowledge, Lord, I am weak.

Help. Like Paul, when I'm weak, I'm strong. Now, this verse does not mean you sit around and wait for some power.

You go in faith and work out trusting God will work within. And this text does not mean you directly go focused on attaining some power from Christ. Focus on obeying Christ while constantly praying to Him for help.

Isaiah 40 says those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. Just pausing. Lord, I need help.

This set of circumstances, I feel like the walls are crumbling in. Lord, give me some strength. It could be those in Houston.

Hard circumstances. But Christ is faithful. Maybe someone says this, I'm too full of unbelief this morning, James.

And I feel too much pride to cry out for help. Well, here what encouragement is, the text says who does the strengthening? Christ strengthens. There's a place to trust that even when you in unbelief don't look to the Lord, here Christ is going to strengthen you.

I mean, that would be my prayer. Lord, that brother, he's in a whole lot of anxiety. He's grumbling.

He's in sin. He's discontent. Lord, would You strengthen him to see truth at this moment? Do what Jesus did.

He prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail in the midst of the trial. Trust that in the second chapter, that verse we quoted, that God is working in him to will and to work for his good pleasure. And say, Lord, work in him righteous desires.

That's struggling Christian. So, Paul is writing this. He's presently imprisoned.

Commentators say he's got guards chained to him. I doubt those guards, unless they've been converted, they're probably cursing him out. It's not a friendly environment.

Yet in the midst of that, the Apostle who was previously stoned, often near death, received nine lashings, face robberies, all these other things. Cold and exposed, yet here he is rejoicing always and calling out from prison to us. Telling us to not be anxious.

To not grumble. To be content. And he's saying, yeah, through Christ.

That's possible. It's actually possible for you to rejoice always. Paul's not mocking us.

Rejoice always in the Lord. That's real hard to do. No.

There is power sufficient. That's your unbelief. That's my unbelief.

Here he is rejoicing always. And think of this application. Paul's contentment, you know what one of the results of his contentment is? It so affects his entire attitude that we see in this chapter how graciously he even writes a thank you letter.

I mean, look at this. Paul rejoices for the gift, but he knows he's wrestling here. Well, I'm thankful for it, but I don't want them to misunderstand that I was impatiently waiting for it.

And so he says, you were indeed concerned for me. He wants them to know. I know you were concerned even though you didn't have an opportunity.

And then he clarifies v. 11. Not that I'm speaking of being in need. Because I've learned as we just read.

And then he says it was kind to share. And then he thanks the Philippians that in the beginning, they were partnering with him. Even in Thessalonica v. 16, he says, you sent for me help once and again.

And then v. 17, he clarifies again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek fruit that increases to your count. If you meditate on that, Paul was throwing out qualifying statements, clarifying statements, not wanting to be misunderstood, being incredibly gracious, yet wanting to teach them a lesson.

How on earth can you write an email or a letter like that? You have to be content. You have to be totally cast on Christ. Paul was relationally sensitive.

If he was discontent, if he felt troubled, like why did you guys take so long to send the gift? What do you think his letter would have been like? Maybe some hurtful things in there. Like what took you so long? You kind of thought, we've been supporting you since the beginning. Think of it.

What have you said that was hurtful and sinful because you were discontent and you were discontent because you were not at that moment totally God-reliant on the power of Christ? You're discontent, self-sufficient, wanting your circumstances to change, grumbling and complaining, being anxious. Brethren, we're weak. You and I need Christ's power to write a thank-you letter.

Do you realize that? That's my one application. You need Christ's power to write a thank-you letter in a loving and sensitive, God-honoring way. If you say I don't, then you're proud.

And you've not learned the secret. You're still thinking, you know, just for getting martyred, I need Christ's strength. For preaching, I need... You need Christ's strength for listening to a sermon.

To get the right amount. I'm assuming some of you are coming here praying, Lord, give me something. Teach me.

Grow me. I'm not content. I want to be more like Christ.

I have a holy discontentment. So Paul, through afflictions, has learned a secret that there's no circumstance by which his power is sufficient. That there's no situation by which Christ is not in control.

That there's no situation by which Christ's power is not available. And there's no set of circumstances that can satisfy compared to knowing Christ. Therefore, he boasts in his weakness, because when he is weak, he is truly strong.

Through Christ strengthening him and as he abides in Christ, he is most satisfied. Do you know this? I want to know it more. Paul learned it.

I have not been shipwrecked. I have not even been on the trips to Mexico held up by the cartel. I don't think any of us have.

But imagine going through things like that. They strip you of self-reliance. You learn through experience that Christ is strengthening me in all circumstances.

I have strength through Christ. That's Philippians 4.13. It's not a cliché verse for an athlete. It's for us in the midst of our most difficult suffering and afflictions, and for us in the midst of abundance where we do not want to forget God.

You feel like Ager in Proverbs 30. He said, Lord, give me the food that's needful for me. Give me neither poverty nor riches.

And Ager says, because I don't want to deny You. If I have riches, I could deny the Lord. But if I have poverty, I could profane the name of the Lord and steal.

And so, Ager's praying, Lord, put me right in the middle. Keep me content. Colossians 1.29 Let me rattle off a couple of verses that show this same idea.

For this I toil, struggling with all Christ's energy that He powerfully works within me. 1 Corinthians 15 I work harder than any of them. You see, Paul realizes I can.

You've got to go do. But it was not I. It was the grace of God with me. Peter also knew this reality.

1 Peter 4.11 Whoever speaks is one who speaks to the oracles of God. Whoever serves is one who serves by the strength that God supplies. In order that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 6.10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 1 Timothy 1.12 I thank Him who has given me strength. Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalms 68.35 And the God of Israel, He is one who will give power and strength to His people. And Paul, at the end of his life, in horrible circumstances, deserted by many, all have forsaken me. You remember

Craig's message on that last year? And what does he say? In 2 Timothy 4.17, he says, but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.

At the end of his life, he learned, you know what? Circumstances get rough. People deny you. Judas, as Jesus had, forsook him.

People denied Paul. Here he is, this trial alone. But you know what? Paul was content because the Lord stood by him.

And the Lord, believer, will stand by you and strengthen you in whatever circumstance you're in today. Whatever circumstances you will continue to be in. And God who is sovereignly in control has graciously given you those sets of circumstances to make you more like His Son and to teach you this lesson that you might not be self-reliant, but totally cast on Christ.

In that same passage, Paul says, He will deliver me from every evil deed and bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom. You hear that? He will deliver me from every evil deed. Paul says in Philippians 4.19, my God will supply every need of yours according to His glory in Christ Jesus.

Every need. Every need. Every evil deed.

How can you not believe that God's strength is available even today in whatever trial you're in? Let's pray. Lord, what a mystery. We who are Your enemies have been saved by the blood of Your Son.

We've been adopted to become children of God. Lord, that would be enough just to be Your child. And yet here, Lord, You are powerfully at work in us.

You are strengthening us. And Lord, we confess this morning, Lord, we're weak. Lord, there are times we're not content with insults.

We want them to go away. We think we have to have our circumstances changed to press on. Lord, even thinking of this message how Paul had to learn this.

Lord, even there, I could feel anxiety in my heart and think how am I going to have to learn this? What's the next thing? But Lord, whatever the next thing is, You're going to get strength in it. So we don't need to fear. Lord, thank You for standing by us.

Lord, even when none other do, You're the one who propped Paul up at the end. And Lord, here this morning, we're not trusting in others. We're trusting in You.

Not our horses. Not our chariots. But Lord, our hope is in You, the Lord our God.

And I just ask, Lord, if there's any here who hate this idea of being totally dependent on Christ, Lord, I pray You would show them their sin that they would run to You and be saved from self-sufficiency, saved from trusting in themselves. Lord, would You do whatever it takes to tumble them down like You did Paul, that they one day could say that I've had strength in every circumstance through Christ strengthening me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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