

Victory of the Lamb // August 1/2, 2020 // Pastor Ben Sadler
Theme: The Secret to finding joy in any circumstance

¹⁰I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I 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. ¹³I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:10-13)

How are you coping with all the changes? Each day we seem to be faced with a new change that challenges our normal way of life. I think about all the changes we've had to deal with as a church. When the pandemic hit, we stopped in-person worship and worshipped online only. Then recently we partially opened with social distancing and cleaning measures. And now, because of the mask mandate, we've had to implement the mandatory wearing of masks.

What are some of the changes that you have had to make? If you are a business owner, you might have had to drastically change your business model or maybe even shutdown. If you are an educator, you are probably scrambling trying to prepare to teach virtually or partially in-person. If you are a parent, you are scrambling to figure out if you are going to have to teach your kids from home and how you are still supposed to work like before. So let me ask you again: How are you coping with all the changes?

I don't think I've done a very good job coping with all the changes. On Thursday, when I heard that Governor Evers made an executive order for mandatory masks in public places, I jumped on to Facebook to see all the different opinions about the mandate. I was trying to cope by finding people who backed my perspective.

How about you? Do you find yourself trying to cope with all the changes by obsessively getting more information and checking all the different news feeds? Do you find yourself trying to work harder than ever hoping to control this uncontrollable situation? Do you find yourself using food or alcohol or pornography to escape and distract your brain from all the pain? Do you find yourself scrolling through endless entertainment on Netflix or other feeds?

Obviously being informed or eating or drinking are not bad in themselves. But when we use these things as coping mechanisms, they make everything worse. All these things become incredibly addictive and take us down a never-ending black hole of despair.

As Christians, God has called us to something greater. He hasn't just called us to cope, but to be content in every situation. That is why we have been going through this sermon series called "**Finding Joy**". This series has not been about just coping with the new normal that we are experiencing. We want to find joy and contentment. And so the question we want to answer today is:

What is the secret to being content in any situation?

To answer that question, we are going to look at Paul's letter to the Philippians on last time. We are in some of his closing statements to his church in the city of Philippi. In this section Paul reminds us why he is writing this letter in the first place. He says, **I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed**

your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. (Philippians 4:10)

Remember Paul was in prison and the Philippians sent a man named Epaphroditus with a gift to take care of Paul's needs. And so Paul is rejoicing in the Lord that they renewed their concern for him. But Paul wants to be clear. This is a sincere "thank you" letter. He is not writing to them with ulterior motives to solicitate more funds. He is really praising God their gift. In fact, he says that he really doesn't need anything from them. **I am not saying this because I am in need..." (Philippians 4:11)**

Now this is truly remarkable. Paul is in prison and he says, "I'm alright. You don't need to worry about me. I don't need anything from anybody." And he wasn't saying this because prison life in Roman was that pleasant. So how could he say that he didn't need anything from anybody?

Paul explains, **"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."** (Philippians 4:11) Paul says that he has learned to be content. Now the word "content" in Greek doesn't just mean satisfied. It means something like "self-sufficient" or "independent". Paul is saying, "I'm not controlled by my circumstances. I'm not like a raft floating in the open sea being tossed about."

Paul mentions briefly some of his circumstances. He says, **I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. (Philippians 4:12)** Paul has experienced for full spectrum of circumstances. He has had comfortable times when he was well fed and rich. And he has had difficult times of poverty and suffering.

In fact, in his second letter to the Corinthians, he explains in more detail what kinds of circumstances that he has experienced, ²⁴ **Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.** ²⁵ **Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,** ²⁶ **I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.** ²⁷ **I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.** ²⁸ **Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)** And we thought we have had a rough year in 2020. Just think what it would have been like for Paul?

And yet, in the middle of all these circumstances, Paul tells the Philippians, **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. (Philippians 4:13)** Does Paul have your attention yet? He has been through much more than most of us. And in the middle of it all, he has discovered the secret to contentment. Isn't this what we want? We want to be content in every situation, in times of prosperity or pandemic, in times of peace and times of unrest, in times of plenty and times of need.

Paul says, **I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)** This is a good translation of Paul's words. This is a little different than the translation I grew up with. In the English translation called the NIV that I grew up with it said, "I can do everything..." But this translation was update in 2011. And now more accurately explains what Paul meant. Paul couldn't do everything. He couldn't escape prison and travel and see the Philippians. But Paul could do this. Paul could be content

in this situation because it was Christ who gave him his strength. Paul's relationship with Jesus allowed him to get through this situation.

You see Paul knew what Jesus said in John 15:5 **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."**

So here is the answer to our opening question: **What is the secret to being content in any situation?**

1. We can be content through Christ who gives us strength.

We can't do everything. There are quite a few things that we can't do. We might not be able to hit a home run or hit a drive down the fairway. We might not be able to land that job or sing like our music team. But Paul says that we can do this. We can be content in every situation through Christ.

If that is true, then why am I struggling so much to be content and satisfied? Why do I feel like I am on a rollercoaster of emotions every moment? I believe my coping mechanisms are keeping me from Christ. When I run to Facebook to see everyone's opinions on the pandemic to cope, when I fill my face with food to cope, when I distract myself with my phone to cope, those coping mechanisms are keeping me from finding strength in Christ.

That's what I was like on Thursday. So Friday morning I tried something different. I want to get rid of my coping mechanisms so that I would have room to find strength in Christ. First thing, I kept my phone off. I turned my phone off at night and I didn't turn it on in the morning. I knew that if I would check Facebook or the news I would be right back at it. I also didn't eat in the morning. I didn't want to use food to cope with my anxiety. I got into the office and I kept my computer off. I didn't want to rush into writing this sermon. I just sat with my Bible and read Psalm 119. I am so weak and so frail that I need Jesus. Friday was a good day. Not all days are like that.

So if you don't feel content in all these situations, maybe that is a warning sign that your running to coping mechanisms. So let me ask you, what are your coping mechanisms that are keeping you from connecting to Christ? Are you trying to control the situation by working harder? Are you trying coping by reading everyone's opinions online? Are you distracting yourself with social media, food, alcohol, or something else?

2. Call out your coping mechanism.

Then let's find your own way to connect with Christ. For me, I have to turn my phone off in the morning and read Scripture and pray. Maybe for you it's listening to Christian music. Maybe it is today as you receive the sacrament. So once you have called out your coping mechanism, now the next thing is to:

3. Reconnect with Christ.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. If we abide in him, we will bear fruit, we can cope, we can be content. Apart from him we can do nothing. Find your way to reconnect with Christ. Receive his forgiveness and love. Receive his acceptance. Enjoy the presence of his peace.

Look what happened to Paul when he abided in Christ? Look at what this contentment in Christ did for Paul. Paul looked at all his circumstances and believed that Jesus could use everything for the good. So, for example, in the beginning of this letter, Paul explains that he is in chains for the gospel. But being in prison didn't defeat him. He was still content. He believed that Jesus could use it. He saw that more of

the brothers and sisters were emboldened in their faith and that through his imprisonment, all of Caesar's household was hearing the gospel.

Then Paul says that some people are stealing his church members and causing him problems. Now usually when a pastor steals members from his congregation he gets angry and frustrated. But not Paul, who says, "Jesus can use that. In fact, I'm just glad that Christ is being preached." Then later on in chapter one, Paul says that he might die in prison. But again he is content. He says, "Jesus can use that. If I die I'll be with Christ, which is better by far." No matter what the circumstance, because Paul was getting his strength from Christ he could be content because he believed that Jesus could use it all.

It makes me think of the perspective of Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie. Corrie and Betsie were Dutch Christians that were imprisoned by the Nazi for hiding Jews in their home. They learned to find their strength in Christ. In fact, Betsie was such a strong Christian that she almost annoyed her sister Corrie.

She told Corrie, "God told us to give thanks in every circumstance. So I'm going to do that right now." Corrie was skeptical and wondered what they could really be thankful for. Betsie said, "Well, I'm thankful that we are in prison together. And I'm thankful that we have so many women in our barracks. We are all crammed in here. Think of how many women we can encourage with God's Word. I'm even thankful for the fleas." When Betsie said that, Corrie got frustrated. She said, "How could we be thankful for the fleas?" But Betsie said that God wanted them to be thankful in every situation.

Well, a few days later, Corrie came back to barracks after working, and Betsie had a big smile on her face. Corrie asked why she was so smiley. Betsie said, "I found out why the soldiers leave us alone in our barracks and allow us to have all our Bible studies and minister to all these women."

"Why is that?" Corrie asked.

"Because of the fleas! The soldiers leave us alone so we can share the gospel because of the fleas! See I told you that we can be thankful for even the fleas."

When we abide in Christ and get our strength from Christ, we start believing that Jesus can use everything. We look at the pandemic and we say, "Jesus can use that." We look at all of the unrest and evil, and we say, "Jesus can use that." We know that Jesus can use it all because we know that he even used the cross and a bloody crucifixion to bring us back to God and make us right with our Maker.

You see, we don't just have to cope. We can be content in Christ who gives us strength in any circumstance. So when the next announcement drops or the next crisis begins don't run to your coping mechanism. Run to Christ in confidence and say, "Jesus can use that." Amen

I would like us to close this sermon by saying a prayer together. Would you read this prayer with me?

Lord, I know that today events will happen, some good and some bad, some that are in my control but most that aren't. I know that these events will trigger thoughts, such as, why me, this shouldn't happen to me, poor me. Those thoughts will produce feelings that can either flow from faith or fear. So when these events happen help me remember that you have promised to never leave me or forsake me (Hebrews 13) and that you will work it out for my eternal good (Romans 8), so that I can control and have feelings of contentment and joy with the goal that my behavior brings you glory in all I say and do, Amen.