



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

(6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Philippians 4:10-13

2013

"The Secret"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Jim. We do have a great text here, brief, Philippians chapter 4, verses 10 through 13, that certainly raises great questions for us to consider; and does contain the solution,

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4: 10-13

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

Father, what a blessing it is, what a privilege it is to come to this place on this LORD's day and open the Scriptures, as we've done, read the text, and then spend time considering the meaning of it and how it applies to us—and this great subject of contentment in life. It's something we all want. It's not something that we all

experience, not always, not as perhaps we should—certainly not as we should. Life's difficult; life has trials—and certainly some go through much greater trials than others. But Paul did as well; and yet he could say, "I've learned to be content." (vs11).

Give us some guidance, LORD, some insights and understanding into this, so that we might learn to be content as well—and in so doing, bring glory to You. It's a spiritual thing. It's not something we can produce within ourselves. There's nothing, really, that we can produce within ourselves. Ultimately it's Your work within us. We're responsible, and we must act, we must be diligent, but ultimately, LORD, we look to You for even the discipline that we need.

We've been blessed greatly, LORD. As Your people we have received so much from You, life itself, physical life. And we set aside this day to remember our mothers and what they have given us; certainly the physical life comes through them and the many blessings of nourishment: Literally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. And we have all of that, LORD, for You give that to us in a variety of ways. But spiritually, it ultimately comes all from You. And we need to remember that LORD, and remember that You're the source of everything—and that includes contentment.

And so LORD, teach us that, encourage us with that, and give us that great gift. It comes through learning, it comes through practice, it comes through experience—and comes through study. It comes in a variety of ways, but it comes to Your people as we live faithfully. Paul certainly was that. He went through great difficulties, and yet he could make that great statement of verse eleven—and we can too, by Your grace.

But LORD, as I say, some go through great difficulties, greater than others, and we've been asked to pray for them, and we do, and we remember the needs that we all have. And all of us, as I say so often, Father, we could all have our names on the prayer list, because we all need to be praying for ourselves, and we need to be praying for one another.

But we pray for those whose names are listed there. We can't go through all of them, but we pray that You'd bless and give health and give encouragement and give

recovery from surgery, and give encouragement to those who are weighed down with the cares of life. There's nothing that Paul says that takes away from that reality, that 'Life can weigh us down; it can be a great strain and struggle.' That's why this is such a great text of Scripture to consider because even in that, we can be content.

And so we look to You to bless us, LORD. Bless Your people with what we need. Some need employment. Some who have employment and have health, need perspective—and need to be rejoicing and thanking You for what they have. We thank You for everything we have, LORD. We have much to thank You for.

This country is something to thank you for. It is an unusual nation we live in, blessed, maybe beyond any nation in the history of the world. We thank You for that. We pray for the leaders You've given us, and pray that You'd give them wisdom. We pray that You would give us peace. We pray for prosperity, hopefully not to spend it on our pleasures, but in order to live comfortably so that we can serve You better. And may that be our desire. May that be the consequence of our time of study together. May we grow in our appreciation of You, and have a desire to serve You faithfully. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

(Message) I don't pretend to know real estate, but I am told that the first rule in real estate is 'Location, Location, Location!' And I would say, when reading Philippians chapter 4, it is of first importance to remember Paul's location when he wrote that he was "*content*". He was in a Roman prison, which makes this one of the most amazing statements in a book full of amazing statements and deep doctrine.

But this is an example of theology in practice. We can understand a person writing about contentment while lounging on the Roman Riviera, but not chained in a Roman jail. But that's what Paul does—which only adds weight to his words. And it makes you wonder, 'What is the secret of Paul's contentment?' Because even in the best of times, contentment is a rare thing—and it always has been.

The ancient rabbis recognized that. In the Mishnah, one of them wrote, really, a question, "Who is rich?" And then he answers his question, "He who rejoices in his

position." Paul would have agreed. A person can have great wealth in this world and still be restless and miserable. But the person who rejoices in his position, whether it is high or low, is truly rich. So what's the secret to the rich life?

That's what our text, Philippians chapter 4, verses 10 through 13 leads us to consider. And what is clear from the very beginning is, it's not 'location, location, location'. When it comes to contentment, what matters is not *where* we are, but *who* we are. And Paul proves that.

So we come to a significant subject this morning, and yet, as important as it is, Paul only mentions it in order to clarify one of his remarks. His instruction on contentment is actually a digression from his main point, which was the Philippians generosity in helping him with a financial gift. He mentions it in verse 10 where he tells them what joy it gave him, "But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me..."

"Revived your concern." On the face of it, that sounds like their interest in him had declined over some time—but he didn't mean that; rather that they hadn't had an opportunity to show their love and their concern for him until they learned of his situation and then they sent help. In fact to speak of their '*revived*' interest in him, Paul used a word that referred to trees and flowers blooming again. In winter, a tree appears dead but it's not. Then spring comes and it *puts forth* leaves and fruit.

And so it was with the Philippians, where when there was an opportunity to help, they *put forth* effort. They *revived* their interest in that sense. They *revived and bloomed* in their generosity.

Now he says it came "at last", which suggests that the gift came after some delay. He doesn't say why. It may have been that they didn't have anyone available at the time to make the trip from Philippi to Rome to take the gift, and so there was a delay for that reason. Or it may be that they simply lacked the funds. The Philippian church was not wealthy. It was among the Macedonian churches, which were famously poor. So taking up a collection for Paul would have been something of a challenge for this small church.

But they did it—and are an example to us of our responsibility to take care of one another, to help those whom we see in need. And the response should be as natural as a tree blooming in spring; it was for the Philippians. Paul had witnessed their response to give generously at other times, (when the opportunity to help was there), and how they acted willingly and gladly.

That was typical of them and you see this in a variety of places. It's indicated in Acts chapter 18, when Paul comes from Macedonia down south to Athens and then to Corinth. He meets Priscilla and Aquila and they work together—they support each other in making tents. And then his friends come, Timothy and Silas, and he doesn't have to work anymore. They had brought a gift from Macedonia that enabled Paul to minister there in Corinth without working. It was a generous gift.

And then in 2 Corinthians 8, he spoke of the almost 'over the top generosity' that the Macedonian churches showed when they wanted to participate in Paul's collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He speaks at length about that at the beginning of that chapter, and how he tried to discourage them. They were poor; they had needs of their own, very pressing needs—but they insisted. And "They gave", he said, "out of their deep poverty and beyond their ability, and of their own accord." (vs3). "Of their own accord", because Paul was doing everything to discourage them from giving and they insisted on it. And they did, and they gave a large amount.

So Paul knew that the Philippians had collected a gift at great sacrifice to themselves, but without hesitation or regret. They were eager to help Paul, and he was thankful to them for that.

But at the same time, he felt a need to reassure them that he had not been disappointed that their gift had not come sooner, nor did he want them to think that he had been expecting help from them; "Not that I speak from want..." he said, (vs11a), meaning 'Not that I have some desire for earthly goods.'

That would have been very much unlike the apostle Paul, to say something of that nature. He wanted to reassure them that he wasn't motivated by *things* and was

anxiously looking forward to getting some gift from them. His joy over their gift was as much, or more, for their blessing as for his. They gave to him because they loved him.

And of course, they gave him great joy, for they gave to him because they loved the Lord. They gave to him because they were thankful for the salvation that they had. And of course, they had a special relationship with the apostle Paul because he brought that Gospel that led to their salvation to them.

And so Paul rejoiced to see that; he rejoiced to see this response. This is what the people of God do for one another: They help out of love, out of concern. You do that; and there are missionaries in our midst who have given reports recently on that very thing—that we've been able to help some poor saints in some poor places. That's your gift to them. There's more to do, certainly—but we do that, we do it eagerly, we do it gladly.

And that was certainly true of these Philippians in their day with Paul. They had so much to be thankful for. They were eager to give out of a sense of thanksgiving and love that they had—and that's why Paul rejoiced.

It wasn't so much that he had these things, (this money, this gift), but that it indicated the heart of those who gave it. He knew that there's reality there and he appreciated that. He rejoiced that their faith was so active and alive: It was sacrificial; it was selfless; it looked to others, not to self. That made him happy.

Now he did have material needs. He was stuck in a Roman prison and he was in chains. The need was real, and the gift that they gave to him gave relief. But he had not been in great distress without it. If he was, if his material, physical condition was distressing, it didn't affect his soul. His mind was above that. In fact he says that he had been content: "...for," he says, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." (vs11b).

Now again, that is a remarkable statement for anyone to make, but especially since he was in prison. But it also is a statement that can be a little, I think, misleading and misunderstood. This isn't fatalism on his part, or laziness, or casual indifference.

Paul wasn't saying, 'Look, I'm resigned to my situation. I've kind of given up hope. I'm just resigned.' If anything, Paul was a man of discipline and diligence and hope. He was a man who drove himself in pursuit of his goals. He is never resigned to anything.

He was also careful about himself. He didn't trust himself. He was strict and stern with himself. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, in verse 27 he wrote, "I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

It would have been a difficult thing to keep up with the apostle Paul. He worked hard at his mission. He was all for personal achievement, for self-improvement for the glory of God, and for the furtherance of the Gospel. Never for himself personally. But he was for advancement. He was for self-improvement, and he advised it in various places.

For example, he gave guidance to slaves. They certainly needed counsel. Slavery was a pervasive institution in Paul's day. Paul didn't support it or promote slavery, but in Ephesians chapter 6, in verse 5 he did instruct slaves, 'to be obedient to their masters.' They were not to be anxious or restless about their situation but see it as an opportunity—as an opportunity to have a testimony by example. A testimony to those slaves around them; and a testimony to their masters.

So he told them to: 'Work as unto the Lord. Don't work for this master, (you're certainly not working for a wage, you don't get one). Work as unto the Lord—and believe me, you get a wage from Him. Live to please Him, not men.' (vs7&8). But then, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, in verse 21, he told slaves that; 'If they could become free, that they should do that. It's far better to be free.'

So, he was all for self-improvement and diligence—and wasn't resigned to anything. And I think if we can apply that to our own situation, (particularly that specific example of slavery), it would be that when work, for us, is a kind of slavery, or when it's not particularly challenging, (sometimes people get in a job that you get a little bored with, it's not that much of a challenge), what do you do? Find ways to occupy your time? I think that Paul would say, in light of the things that he does say, 'Be diligent. Don't work

for the time you're serving there or your employer—work as unto the Lord. Be diligent in what you're doing.'

Christians, of all people, should strive for excellence. They should strive for improvement in themselves and in their situation. There's nothing wrong with working for a promotion; I think we should. We should try to be as good as we can, and the best that we can at what we do, then based on our merits seek an advance in career.

Now of course, there's a danger in that. And the danger is that we become 'work driven'—and that can be because we're worldly minded and materialistic. (That's wrong of course.) But Christians ought to be good workers; they ought to be the best employees. And they ought to be the best employers.

Sometime promotions, though, don't come—and sometimes those slaves weren't given their freedom. Sometimes our circumstances aren't easy and aren't fair. That's when contentment is a virtue, or as the rabbis might say, 'a treasure'.

Paul had it in prison. He wanted to be free; he wasn't resigned to that, (he worked for his freedom through the courts). But until he was free, he remained content. He remained at ease. Even in chains, he remained in that condition. In fact, he was joyful, as he's already expressed in this book. That's one of the great themes of the book of Philippians: "Joy."

So we should try to improve our lives in every way. We should try to master our circumstances through wisdom and obedience, avoiding what is bad, and following the Lord's revealed will. We can do all of that, but even then, sometimes circumstances are beyond our control. And when we find ourselves in a difficult place, what we have to do is not give up or get resigned to it, (or something like that). No, we rest—'rest in the Lord'. We wait on Him and not allow circumstances to master us.

Easier said than done, I know. I read these things, I put these lessons together, I think about it, and I realize, 'Easier said than done!' Well, so did Paul. He wasn't being glib in the things that he was saying; he wasn't being trite. He's speaking out of his experience but he's also speaking very wisely and precisely. He said, "I have learned to

be content in whatever circumstances I am." (vs11b). Contentment is *acquired*. It is *learned*.

We don't have to learn to grumble and complain. We don't have to be taught to covet. These things are as natural as weeds in a yard. Contentment is cultivated: It grows only with attention, just as a garden grows with constant attention. And the attention we give is in study and experience. And the experience is very often very difficult, (and that's really where Paul learned it).

Very often, you learn a great deal from difficult texts in the Bible. It's almost like they have hidden treasure in there; and you begin to really probe and study it. And so too with experience, when it's difficult, very often that's where the blessing comes. I don't say that because I enjoy that any more than you do, but I think that's true. And I think that was Paul's experience.

He gives examples of that very thing in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, where he describes a physical affliction, (and we assume it was). He describes it as "a thorn in the flesh." (vs7). He doesn't describe it; he doesn't identify it; (and so of course, commentators have spent a lot of time trying to do just that.) All kinds of explanations have been given, but I think that there's a great deal of wisdom in Paul not giving it. And I think that was obviously directed by the Spirit of God, because if he just had that one affliction, well that would be the only one that we would think applied.

No, it applies to all kinds of afflictions. And what he said is, 'He asked God to remove it.' It was a terrible affliction, a physical, nagging, angry kind of affliction that he had; and he prayed that it be removed, and prayed three times—but God said, "No." The LORD had given Paul that thorn for his own good, to keep him humble. And when Paul realized it wasn't going to be removed but it was there for a purpose and for a good purpose, (remember, God never puts anything in our life for a bad purpose, or even a neutral purpose, but always for a good purpose), and when he realized that, that that "thorn" was there for a good purpose, he stopped praying that it be removed—and he embraced it: in fact rejoiced in it.

God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you", (2Cor 1:9). And Paul said, "I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distress, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2Cor 12:10). And really, that was the very thing Paul that was praying for; 'LORD, take this thorn away, because I'm weaken by it. It's weakening me; I'm not able to do Your service.' And the LORD said, 'No. It's for your strength.' And when Paul realized that he said, 'Well, that's what I want.' Is that what we want? When we have that attitude we'll get some contentment.

Well, no one wants *thorns*, and I'm not going to be trite or light about that. We don't want distress, we don't want hard times—but they come. And they come to all of us. That's part of life. And when they happen because of our foolishness; when they happen because of our sin, then, of course, we need to repent. (We brought that on ourselves.) But otherwise, we need to *rest*; we need to trust God. And in time, we will see the goodness of it.

William Cowper had a tough life, but he put it well in his hymn, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*; "Judge not the LORD by feeble sense". (That's what we tend to do. Remember, we have "feeble sense".)

Judge not the LORD by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace:
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

We sing that. Do we believe it? Do you believe that?

Paul did. —And so he could rest and be content when in jail, or when sick, or when in shipwreck, or in the deep, or when he had setbacks. In fact, it was through great frustrations that Paul was brought to great joy. When he was on his second missionary journey, (we considered this; I think it was in our first lesson on the Book of Philippians.),

he tried going to Asia and he took Silas with him, and then Timothy joined their group, and occasionally Luke would be with them.

And they went to the churches that he and Barnabas established in southern Asia Minor, southern Turkey, and then decided, 'We're going to go to Asia. We're going to go to the great city of Ephesus, the metropolitan capital of that part of the world, one of the greatest cities of the ancient world, and preach the Gospel there!' And they found they couldn't go east. They couldn't go into Asia. They were forbidden. We don't know why; was it Providence or was there some conviction that they didn't go?

So they decided, 'Well, we'll go north. We'll go into Bethania, which is on the north, kind of eastern, part of the continent of Asia Minor, on the coast—and they couldn't go there. So it's like they were hemmed in. They're forced to go to the northwestern coast of Asia Minor. And there they ended up in the town of Troas, and utterly bewildered. 'What are we doing here? Why are we here? This wasn't our plan.' And it wasn't; it was the result of, 'They had no choice but be there.' And they were bewildered.

It wasn't their plan—but it was God's plan. And it was there, in Troas, that they got the 'Macedonian call.' They crossed the sea; they came to Philippi; the church of Philippi was established, the church that Paul called his "joy and crown."

Now he must have marveled at God's Providence. I'm sure he had numerous examples like that to think about, but he must have thought when he wrote of that Philippian church, 'You're my joy and crown, and I wasn't even setting out to go to Philippi. I was going in the opposite direction. And God brought me to you, and what a blessing it is!' What it tells us is when things seem to be down, they're really up. We just don't see it. We judge things by our *feeble sense*.

So Paul learned contentment from experience. He learned that his sense of judgment was not adequate. He had to trust the LORD, even in the difficult times. He saw God's good hand in the events of his life, the pleasant events, certainly—but also the unpleasant events.

You and I really don't know what harm 'the disappointment of a moment' may have protected us from. And we don't know what blessing that disappointment may lead to tomorrow. You and I don't know what tomorrow is going to be like. We don't know what this afternoon is going to be like. And the disappointment of a moment may be protecting us from some greater tragedy. Or the disappointment of the moment may be leading to a great blessing. Certainly was for Paul.

Matthew Henry put it well when he warned us to be doubtful of our own judgment—and confident in God's wisdom. He wrote that, "We must follow providence and not force it. Don't be anxious about your situation. Don't try to force events, or manipulate people because you don't like the circumstance that you're in. Recognize God's sovereignty in everything. Be obedient in the moment, pray, and wait for the LORD."

Now that's not to say don't take any action, be completely passive, and just wait for it all to happen. That statement that Matthew Henry made was made in his commentary on the Proverbs. And God has given us the Proverbs to give us all kinds of principles of wisdom on how to deal with circumstances and how to maneuver through life.

And we're to do that. We are to develop our mind in a Godly way, and we're to develop and cultivate wisdom so we'll make the right decisions. But we're never to take things into our own hands and try to manipulate and force the circumstances to our own advantage. So I think Henry gives very sound counsel when he says, "We must follow providence and not force it."

That's what Paul did. He didn't despair and so he could say, in verse 12, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." (vs12).

Paul knew how to live in poverty as well as in prosperity. He could handle both 'feast and famine.' As the rabbi said, 'That is the person who's rich', (and the person who is rare). We think, 'If I just had more money; if I just had a little more money, I could pay

off this or that, and then I'd be content.' That would give some contentment—there's nothing wrong with that...but maybe not.

John D. Rockefeller, who was one of the richest men of his day was asked, "How much money is enough?" And he responded, "Just a little bit more." Well, he would have known. If our contentment is based on money, or it's based on popularity, or position, or something like that, there will never be enough. And the Bible's filled with examples of that. You've probably seen it in your own life to some extent, that statement by Rockefeller, (or it probably rings true to you to some extent). But if it's not your experience, if you've not seen it, read the Scriptures; it's filled with illustrations and examples of that.

I'll give you a few. Ahab was king of Israel—the richest man in the land. He had everything. He had lots of vineyards, but they weren't enough. He wanted Naboth's vineyard, which was a little corner of ground beside the palace. But Naboth didn't want to sell; it was his family's inheritance and it was to be passed on.

And more importantly, it was against the Law. The Law of Moses prohibited selling one's inheritance. But Ahab didn't care. He didn't care what the Law of Moses said. He knew what he wanted, and he wanted that land. And when he couldn't have that little plot of land, that little vineyard, he sulked like a little child until Jezebel, his wife, arranged to have Naboth murdered so Ahab could have the vineyard. And he took it with great pleasure and great delight. He was so excited. It was like Christmas; he got a little vineyard—'just a little bit more.'

And then there's Haman in the Book of Esther. The king made him the *First Man* in the Persian empire. All knees bowed to Haman. And that gave him great joy, until one knee didn't bow; Mordecai, the Jew, wouldn't pay homage. It ruined Haman's day. All the honors he was given meant nothing to him as long as that foreigner, that stranger, that Jew, would not bow to him. And so, he took things into his own hands. He arranged and plotted to have Mordecai destroyed.

It's the story of Providence. You read the Book of Esther, interestingly, the name of God, the word 'God' is not found in the book. And the point is, it's about Providence. It demonstrates the hand of God without seeing God—and it's all over that book. And in the providence of God, you know, Haman was hanged on the very gallows that he built for Mordecai. Ambition, pride, covetousness, they lead to lack of contentment; they lead to destruction.

But the best example of all is the basic example of all, the example that speaks to every person, and that is the example of Adam in the garden. God gave him the fruit of every tree. He put him in a lush garden, a beautiful garden, and gave him the fruit of every tree in that garden—but one. And it was that one—it was the 'forbidden' fruit that he wanted more than any. And so he took it. Not because he was deceived; he wasn't deceived; he took it because that's what he wanted—and ruined his life; and ruined the entire race of men.

Whenever we get the idea that we would be happy if we could just have 'a little bit more', read the Bible. Consider some of these, (and then so many others), that we're not going to be happy by getting a little bit more, by striving for that. That's not where contentment comes from. Haman was rich and powerful; Ahab ruled a nation; Adam was king of the world—and none of them were satisfied. Things, money, power, possessions, they don't satisfy. There's always more to have.

There is great wealth, though, in contentment. There's true happiness in contentment. But contentment, happiness, is not based on location or possessions. That, however, is a truth that we have to learn. Paul learned it; though it wasn't a natural thing. He learned it through Scripture, through his study of the Word of God, and through experience; and then interpreting his experience, seeing his experience in light of the Word of God.

He repeats again, in verse 12, this fact. He says, "...in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry..." In other words, I've learned

the secret of being content in every circumstance of life, every position of life, whether it's hunger or plenty.

"The *secret*". What is "the *secret*" that Paul learned? I would think that if we're following this and thinking about it, we want to know, 'Okay, what's the secret, then?, because that's important. That's the answer to the very question about contentment. It's the key to happiness. The key to contentment. What is it, the secret to really being rich in life?'

Well, Paul doesn't say. One writer suggested it was Paul's willingness to be a public spectacle. And certainly, Paul's selflessness, his humility is one of the great qualities of the apostle's life and makes him an example for us. But I think it's something more basic than that, and really the very reason for his humility and his willingness to be a spectacle.

In fact, from what he has written in this book, it seems to me that this *secret* is really an 'open secret', and it is *knowing Christ*. I've already suggested that by referring to what Paul learned through providence and revelation: That the Lord is wise and good. But Paul has really said this already. It's his great ambition in life, as he made clear in chapter 3, in verse 10, which is, 'To know Christ, and to know His power, to know His life, to experience it.'

But that's the answer he gives, really, in verse 13 of our text, in what one writer called, "His most famous words": "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." That's the secret: Grace. The empowering grace of God in Christ Jesus. Contentment is not the product of some mechanical self-discipline, but the result of our relationship with Christ. —And that is essentially the Christian life. We like to reduce things to their simplest form, which is not always easy to do, but this is the essence of Christianity put in its simplest form: It's life in Christ.

The Lord taught that to the disciples in John chapter 15, verses 1 through 5. He illustrates our relationship to Him with the vine and the branches. Believers are like a branch in a vine: 'Just as a branch gets its life from the vine, and it's fruit as a result, so

too, we get our life from Him.' As He said, "...apart from Me, you can do nothing." (vs5b). But in Him, and through Him, we can do a lot. Like a vital living branch, we bear much fruit, because the Lord is doing it in us. The Lord infuses His life into us; He infuses us in some mysterious way through the Holy Spirit and He gives us strength.

John Wesley's favorite definition of Christianity was taken from the title of a book by the 17th century Scottish pastor and professor, Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. It is a small, little book, (some of you may have it). It was also a very influential book in the life of George Whitfield. Whitfield and Wesley were very good friends.

In it the Scot, Scougal, wrote that, "Christianity is a real participation of the divine nature in the apostle's phrase, 'It is Christ formed within us'." And then he adds, "The root of the divine life is faith. It is through faith alone that we enter into the life of God, that we experience the nature of God that we have. And it is through faith in God's Word that we draw upon the LORD's power and life through faith."

Now that's 'the resurrection life' that Paul spoke of earlier in chapter 3, in verse 10. And if we can 'tap into that life', as we do that, we draw upon an infinite reserve of power that gives us strength in trials, and gives us joy and contentment as we tap into that; as we believe. That's how we learn. That's how we develop.

We learn wisdom. We learn what's important. That was Paul's experience, and he did this through faith. He knew the Lord, he knew about Him, that He was not only His Lord God, but His greatest friend. (I'm always hesitant to use that—describe the Lord in our relationship with Him in that way.) Yet God said that Abraham was His friend; He called Abraham, His "friend". (Isa 41:8). He doesn't, anywhere that I know of in the Scriptures, say 'He's our friend'. And yet, if anyone is a friend, if that word means anything, it certainly is true of the Lord God: He is the "friend that sticks closer than a brother." Pro 18:24).

And Paul knew that. This is the One who had died for him, the second Person of the Trinity, the second Person of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ. And He would not

let anything touch Paul that was not for his good; He let some difficult things touch him, but not anything that would do him ultimate harm.

Paul knew that. And he knew that by revelation, but he also knew that by experience. Jesus promised him, He promised us, He promised every believer the *abundant life*. That's what He has for you—and that includes difficult times. But that's what He gives, that's what He promises, the abundant life. And Paul experienced that, 'as he walked with the Lord', which means, 'as he walked by faith'. As he knew the Word of God, as he believed it, as he acted in obedience, he experienced the life of Christ. He experienced the faithfulness of the Lord as he walked by faith into some of life's darkest places. In those places, the Lord is faithful. He doesn't fail us.

I believe that. And yet, I've lived long enough to know that there are events in life that are just overwhelming. And I've seen those events in the lives of friends. And I've lived long enough to know that those experiences are oftentimes prolonged; they don't get resolved quickly, and very often they don't seem to ever get resolved.

There are great disappointments and there are real tragedies that Christians experience. And we experience those in our weakness. We are weak. We're shortsighted, and we are naturally sensitive to pain and loss. And we can all succumb to the circumstances, even when we know the truth.

But ultimately it is not *us* —but Him. And He promises to be there for us even in those times of difficulty, those times of anguish and weakness and helplessness; and those times of failing faith, and promises to strengthen us. He'll carry us through and strengthen us.

The New International Version translates verse 13, "...through Him who gives me strength." In other words, the Lord infuses us with strength that leads to contentment. And all that is through and by the Holy Spirit. It's not us, it's Him, and He's faithful.

Oliver Cromwell was one of the towering figures of English history. A general, a statesman, Lord Protector of England—and a Puritan, a man who knew the Bible. He declared this verse, "One beam in a dark place." For all his position and power, Cromwell

suffered hardship and trials in life; and some very difficult ones, some that nearly crushed him.

When he was on his deathbed, his daughter, Elizabeth, died of cancer. He called for his Bible and he read Philippians chapter 4, verse 13. He repeated it over and over again, and said, "This Scripture did once save my life when my eldest son died, which went as a dagger to my heart. Indeed it did." And then he repeated the text to himself, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." And he said, "Tis true, tis true."

It is true. When we are without strength, He gives it. When our faith is weak, He strengthens it. He is a friend who is always with us, a friend that sticks closer than a brother, and He gives strength so that we are able to call upon Him. We're able to endure, and we're able, (even more basic than that), to pray, to call to Him for help. He's always with us.

In Deuteronomy 33, shortly before Moses died, he gave Israel that great assurance. He told them, in verse 27, that the Lord God was their "dwelling place", and 'underneath them are His everlasting arms.' Even when we fail, He's there. He never forsakes us. He's always with us to catch us when we fall and lift us up in His everlasting arms.

And He will give us assurance and stability. He will enable us to look to Him, and draw upon His strength, and rest in Him, and trust Him. —And when we do that, we'll have contentment, even in the most difficult of times. Paul was an apostle, but Paul was also a man. And his experience can be our experience as we walk by faith in the Lord.

If you're here this morning without Christ, if you have not trusted in Him as your Savior, you may be restless, you may be dissatisfied, you may be looking for satisfaction and contentment in a promotion, or in more stuff, in more money or whatever, you're not going to find it there.

Contentment can only be yours in Christ. And that comes through faith in Him. He's the eternal Son of God who died for sinners, died to save all who believe in Him. The moment you believe, you're saved. The moment you believe in Him, you're forgiven

of all your sins. You are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. You're a child of God; You're under His protection and His care—then, now, and for all eternity. And you have an inheritance that can never be comprehended and never fade away. May God help you to look to Him, trust in Him.—And trusting that you all have done that, rest in Him and find your contentment in Him. That's something we must do every day. We learn it. We study it. May God help us to do that. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your goodness to us, thank You for this great text of Scripture, and this great example that Paul has given us. He learned contentment; and we must, too—help us to do that. We thank You that regardless of how we respond to the circumstances of life ... and we won't always respond well, often we don't ... nevertheless, what is true is Your everlasting arms are beneath us and You will protect us always, and bring us safely, someday, into that glorious inheritance. Thank You for Your grace. Thank You for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)