

# Philippians 5:10-20

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[0:00] A few years ago, I met a guy called Richie for the first time. I don't think you ever met someone who within about 30 seconds of meeting them, you know exactly what their life is about. You know exactly what makes them tick. Richie was one of those guys. Within about 30 seconds, he told me all about the companies he'd worked for, all about how senior he got in them, and all about how great he was.

Now, he was obviously trying to impress me, perhaps partly because the context of me meeting him in was that he'd just started an affair with a former colleague of mine, and so I think he was trying to say something good about himself. Probably not the best move.

But it was quite clear that all he wanted in life was material status. That for him, his money, his career, everything was all important to him. It was all important to who he was. Family evidently wasn't important. He just left his wife and daughter to start this relationship with my friend.

Now, most of us aren't unsubtle as Richie. Most of us aren't that unsubtle, are we? And yet, perhaps in our words, in our conversations, in the way we spend our time, we can show what our lives are really about.

I guess if Richie could sum it up, he'd say, for me to live is to make money. For me to live is to be succeeding in my career. For me to live is to have status. I wonder how we would complete that. For me to live is what?

[1:31] In our culture, there are many different answers to that, aren't there? In a consumer culture, life is often about being as comfortable as possible. For me to live is to be comfortable. For me to live is to experience pleasure. For me to live is to acquire, to have more stuff.

As we look at the Apostle Paul, we see that he had a completely different take on life. He's told us the philosophy of his life, back in chapter 1, verse 21. You might want to turn back one page and look at the top of the previous page.

For me to live is to live is to live is to live is to live. For me to live is Christ, he says, and to die is gain. Well, what does that mean, Paul? What does that look like in reality? Well, as we listen into his conversation here with the Philippians, as he finishes this letter, we get an insight of what that means.

What it means for Paul is that Christ secures his contentment, and Christ sets his purpose. That's what to live as Christ means.

It means for Christ to secure his contentment and to set his purpose in life. And we see that as we look at his thanks here to the Philippians. Just to take a step back for a minute, why is Paul writing a letter to them in the first place?

[2:43] Well, in part, it's to say thank you. If you've read through this letter, you'll see that he'd received a gift from them. He tells us back at the end of chapter 2 that Epaphroditus, their messenger, had almost died to give them this gift, this money to help them.

So in part, he's writing to thank them for this gift. But as we look at the way he thanks them in these final verses, we see there's something much more important to him than just getting some finances to make his situation more comfortable.

There's something much more important. So what is it? What is it that makes Paul happy? Well, let's look at verse 11 to begin with. Do you hear what he's saying?

St. Philippians, thank you for this gift you sent. Thank you for renewing your interest in me. I knew you were interested, but remember these were the days before Western Union credit transfers,

before emails, before telegram services even.

They couldn't immediately show they were interested. It took a long time to save up the money and then to be able to send Epaphroditus on foot or perhaps a little bit by boat from Philippi up there in Greece, kind of towards the Turkey end of Greece, to get all the way to Rome where Paul was probably in prison.

[4:10] It took time to do that. He says, I know you've been concerned. Now at last you've shown you're concerned. But what's important to me is not the money. Why? For I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

Paul wants them to know he's grateful. He wants them to know that their gift was not what's made him grateful. Well, not the money in itself. For he's learned to be content. Now, do you know just the word he uses there?

I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content. This has taken time. It's not that he paid money to go on a seminar for a weekend that told him how to be content in life. It's not that he's been doing a course online which has given him a few top tips.

This is something it's taken him time to do. Like learning to play the piano or learning to ski. It takes time and effort and there are setbacks on the way. Nothing important ever comes quickly, does it? But before we look at the secret of Paul's contentment, let's just consider for a moment, where do people look for contentment these days? It seems to me there are a couple of places people look.

[5:12] One is in possessions, material things. Another is in practicing some kind of spirituality. So think about possessions. A lot of people think they'd be content if only they had a bit more.

I'm told, although I haven't read this survey for myself, that apparently if you ask people how much more would you need to earn to be content, the answer is always about 25 to 50% more.

It doesn't matter if that person's on £10,000 a year, £20,000 a year or £200,000 a year. They always need, they think, another 25 to 50% to be content.

Now, other surveys have shown that actually the amount you have, the amount you earn, doesn't make any difference. What makes a difference is what everyone else around you is earning.

There's a survey from Warwick University, one of the researchers, concluded this. Earning a million pounds a year does not appear to be enough to make you happy or content if you know your friends earn £2 million a year.

[6:12] So if you want to be content, it's not really possessions, it's the people around you that count. But some people look for contentment in possessions, but never find it. Others look for contentment by pursuing some form of spirituality.

Practicing some form of spirituality. Apparently Buddha taught, teachers or taught, that contentment is the highest wealth. And a lot of forms of Buddhism are concerned with trying to achieve this contentment.

Zen Buddhism teaches that contentment comes through, I quote, practicing non-attachment. A kind of denial of desires. A kind of trying to rise above your appetites.

Actually, there's a very similar philosophy around in Paul's day, called Stoicism. And interestingly, the word that Paul uses here for contentment is a word that Stoics used for being content.

And a bit like the Buddhists today, or the Buddhists of the East, they sought contentment through a kind of self-sufficiency. Through detaching themselves from the desires of the world, and trying to rise above it, and being content in themselves.

[7:17] In fact, their word for contentment literally has the idea of self-sufficiency. So there are two ways people look for contentment, aren't they?

Through possessions. Through pursuing some kind of spirituality. Practicing non-attachment. Is that how Paul gets his contentment? Now let's look on verses 11 to 13.

He doesn't get it through possessions, or through the practice of some spirituality. He comes to contentment through a person. Through Jesus. Not through self-sufficiency, but through Christ-sufficiency.

Not through a philosophy, but a person. Verse 11. 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, and I know how to

abound.

In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger. Abundance and need. How? I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[8:15] Now of course that all things doesn't mean I can do anything I like. It doesn't mean I can grasp quantum mechanics. It doesn't mean I can fly. It does mean what the context says it means. I can learn to cope with abundance.

Or being in low circumstances. Literally being humiliated. With plenty and hunger. I can cope with these things through Jesus. I have the strength to face all conditions through the power Christ gives me.

See, Paul's contentment is not detachment from the world, but attachment to Christ. To knowing Christ's power working through him. My laptop is getting old.

It does have a battery. But after about an hour now, the battery is dying. It needs to be plugged back into the source. While Paul lives his life plugged into the source. In fact, for Christians, if we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are always plugged into the source.

It's one of the pictures Jesus gave his disciples. He said, I am the vine, you are the branches. If we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are connected to him.

[9:24] His supplies of resources, of strength, are constantly being poured into our lives through our union with him. Which comes through trusting in his promises. And that's what Paul is reminding himself here.

I found my contentment in Christ because I'm in him. His resources, his power is sufficient for me. In fact, the word translated strength there is the same word from which we get dynamite in English. That's the power, the resources, the strength of Christ in Paul that brings him contentment. Now, for those of us who are Christians, you might be sitting here today thinking, well hang on, I don't feel content.

Work has been horrible when I just left it just now. I have all sorts of problems in my family. I'm worried about my finances. I don't feel content. Now are you making me feel guilty?

Let me say a few things quickly. Firstly, Paul learned contentment, he tells us. It took those ups and downs and those bruises. In each and every circumstance he had to find that Jesus was the reality.

[10:34] That Jesus was the one who didn't change like his circumstances. That Jesus' power was still there. His strength was always sufficient. So if we're struggling with contentment, the answer is not to beat ourselves up or pretend we're not content.

The answer is to go in faith, so it's Jesus. Back in the 17th century, a great Christian leader of the time, a bloke called Jeremiah Burroughs, wrote a book with a brilliant title, The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.

That should be an encouragement to all of us. Contentment is a rare jewel. He starts the book by saying, in these terrible days it's hard to be content. I'm sure it's not any easier in a consumer culture that we now live in.

It's a rare jewel. Contentment isn't possible by being super spiritual. It's possible by trusting in Jesus. Let him secure our contentment.

As he secured Paul's contentment. So Paul, Christ secures his contentment. But also, Christ sets his purposes. We see that as we look on to verses 14 to 18.

[11:38] Paul's rejoicing in this gift he's received. But he wants the Philippians to know that it's not the gift. It's what the gift symbolises that's important to him. So look what he says in verses 14 onwards.

It was kind of you to share in my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Thessalonica was the place he went to as soon as he left Philippi. And straight away, they were sending him money and helping him.

So what's Paul excited about? What's he thrilled about? What's he rejoicing about? It's that phrase in verse 15. Their partnership with me.

Their partnership in the Gospel, as you put it back in chapter 1. Now what does that mean? Well first we think, what does the Gospel mean? What is Gospel? The Gospel is the good news about what Jesus has done.

[12:40] And Paul's been alluding to that, and talking about that all the way through this letter. So back in chapter 3 for example, he showed how, because of what Jesus has done, Paul's identity and security are no longer wrapped up in his behaviour, the way he's lived.

It's no longer wrapped up in his background, in fact he was a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day, etc, etc. His identity isn't, and that's in what Jesus has done. His hope is not in his own performance, but in what Jesus has done.

Dying on the cross to give him new life. And his future is in Jesus' hands. In fact, everyone's future is in Jesus' hands. In chapter 2 verse 10 and 11, Paul says that the end of history is going to be that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

That's what God has done, and is doing, and will finally bring to completion. That's the Gospel.

That's the good news. That's the announcement. It's a partnership in the Gospel and working with Paul to make that good news known.

This Gospel, this good news, set the purpose for Paul's life. Having discovered Jesus to be truly God in the flesh, come to rescue us. Paul was so gripped by this Jesus that Jesus set the purpose of his life.

[14:01] And he's rejoicing now that the Philippians are joining in with that purpose in their partnership in the Gospel, which other churches haven't done. Now, what does partnership in this Gospel look like?

What does it mean? Well, there's two elements that Paul's talking about here. One is giving. So he says, even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. They were giving to help him.

And also, back in chapter 1, verse 19, not only were they giving, they were praying. So chapter 1, verse 19, he says, I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, his imprisonment and all that's happening to him.

So they were partnering in the Gospel by giving and by praying. So they were sharing in this great purpose set by the Lord Jesus Christ. They wanted others to know too. But we might think, for us sitting here and eating, so what?

Why get involved? Why invest time and energy and money in partnership in the Gospel and working to let other people hear this good news about Jesus? I want you to notice some of the spin-offs here for Paul and the Philippians.

[15:13] So, first is the spin-off of true friendship. There's great affection all through this letter. If you look back at the start of chapter 4, see how Paul addresses these people he's writing to.

Therefore, my brothers whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. There was a true friendship there through that partnership in the Gospel.

They were invested in this same purpose. You see that again at the end of the letter in verses 21-23 as Paul sends greetings, love being expressed between believers in Christ.

There's true friendship, true relationship there. But also, their partnership in the Gospel was one element of their true worship in praise to God for all he'd done for them through Christ.

Look at what Paul says in verse 18 of chapter 4. I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied with the gifts that they've sent. Having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.

[16:13] What are those gifts? They are a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. Paul's saying, the gifts you've given to me don't just help me, they're a sacrifice of worship to God, they're pleasing to him.

In the Old Testament when sacrifices were offered, we often read of this picture of the sacrifice being a pleasing smell to God. Not that he needs it, but that he delights in it.

Yesterday when I came in, having been out, I walked into my house and it was a pleasing aroma. My wife was baking a birthday cake for our daughter and it smelled great. Oh my God, let's eat it later.

I'll eat it better. Now what did that pleasing aroma do for me? Did it make me love my wife more? No. But it was something I enjoyed and I appreciated. And so for God, as he sees these gifts, this partnership in the Gospel, does it make him change his mind? Does it make him think, oh, actually those Philippians are right after all? No. Does he enjoy it? Does he accept it as something pleasing to him? Yes, he does. So this partnership in the Gospel results in true friendship, true worship, and also true reward.

[17:28] Look at verse 17. Paul's using language of business here. He says, not that I seek the gift, I'm not looking for you to give me more, but what I seek is the fruit that increases to your credit.

Paul's saying, what you've given to me is like a, you've invested in Gospel work, you've invested in this partnership in the Gospel. And that's actually like an investment that cannot go up or down. I'm looking for what will result in your credit. Reward, true final reward with God Almighty when Jesus comes back.

So we're used to seeing adverts for investments, aren't we? in magazines and newspapers on the tube. They always have that caveat, don't they? Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Please read the small print.

Paul is saying, Philippians, because your priorities are set by Christ, because you're investing in the Gospel, this is an investment that will never go down. I'm seeking what will be credited to you.

[18:30] It's an investment that never fails. So Paul's rejoicing in this gift from the Philippians not because it's made his life easier primarily, but because it shows the fruit of their faith in the Lord Jesus in their lives.

It shows their genuine love for Jesus, their genuine experience of the forgiveness and mercy that is only available in Christ. It shows that their lives have been transformed by Jesus too.

That Jesus is setting their priorities as well as securing their contentment. Now there's always a thought in our minds, isn't there? Can I really risk giving more to Gospel work?

Can I really give more of myself, more of my time, more of my energy, more of my money? Isn't that a risk? Isn't that something we all think? Well look at how Paul addresses those fears for the Philippians in verse 19.

It says, my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ. Can you notice, it's not that God will supply all their needs out of his riches and glory, but according to his riches and glory.

[19:39] What's the difference? Well imagine if Roman Abramovich, the Chelsea owner, was to provide a meal out for you, out of his money.

He might give you 30 quid to go and spend at the Indian restaurant on the corner of your road. That might be nice, I'd be grateful. But imagine if he provided a meal for you according to his riches. What would that look like? I guess the limousine would pick you up, take you to the nearest helicopter pad where his private helicopter is, whisk you away to Paris, have you dining in some beautiful restaurant in Paris for the evening on the best food available in the city and either fly you home or give you a nice night out in Paris in a beautiful hotel.

That would be according to his riches, wouldn't it? According to the billions he owns. How is God going to supply our needs? Ultimately, according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

He will take care of our daily needs. Uncomfortable as life may be sometimes. But ultimately, he will eternally take care of our needs when the Lord Jesus comes back and we see him in all his glory.

[20:52] And that will be according to his riches, according to the glory there. No wonder Paul then finishes with this burst of praise, our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

See, that's where Paul's looking. Because Christ sets his purpose through what he's done. Because Christ strengthens Paul and secures his contentment. he's always looking to give glory to God. His life is orientated around praise for God. My friend Richie in that conversation gave away quite quickly what the purpose of his life was. It's material success.

What sets the agenda for us? What sets our purpose? What secures our contentment? possessions? Status?

For this Jesus who's done so much for us. Paul finishes the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Isn't that what we need? Let's pray.

[21:54] Let's pray. Let's pray.