



THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD IN TROUBLED TIMES

If you met someone who said to you: “I have the secret of being contented in any and every situation.” How would you respond to that?

Some people would be cautious, others cynical or some would say: “You certainly don’t have the issues I am having to face. You don’t have my disappointments, my temptations, my fears, my pain, you are not married to my wife/husband and you definitely don’t have my

kids. Your life has probably been easy and wrapped up in cotton wool, you probably have a very sheltered life.”

Yet, that is exactly what the apostle Paul is saying in Philippians 4 verse 11-13: “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I 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. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.”

Paul uses a lot the words rejoice, joy, be glad, spirit of joy; confidence seems to permeate this book and while reading it, we could think Paul is in a very good situation. He is probably on a beautiful Mediterranean island, sitting under a palm tree with his toes in the water, dictating his letter to the Philippians. “Rejoice and again I say rejoice!” Because we are having such a great time here, under the sun, with our toes in the water!

But you’d be wrong, dead wrong! Parallel with the theme of joy, is the theme of suffering. He talks about being in chains, and makes lots of references to suffering and persecution. The truth is, he is writing from Rome where he is in jail. And yet, despite the fact that he is chained to Roman guards, he says: “Rejoice and again I say (in case you thought I used the wrong word there, I will say it again) rejoice.” This letter was not written in a comfortable study, with a coffee pot at his side. This is not simply theory unrelated to the reality of life but this is a man in a prison discovering the utter sufficiency of God.

Some of us may feel in a prison of some kind, with some invisible bars; maybe your work life has become a prison to you, maybe your marriage is difficult, your children are not living for God, maybe your body is not functioning properly, maybe you are in a financial prison, or a victim of gossip, of misunderstandings, but listen to Paul. Through his prison bars, he says there are resources for life and joy, no matter what the situation is.

If your relationship with God works in a prison, it will work anywhere. If your relation with God does not work in a prison, it won’t work anywhere else either.

Paul also tells us: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Most of us can think about a number of things to be anxious about. As we bring our problems to God, some of us, when we are finished praying, are just as uptight and concerned and anxious as before we started praying. To present them to God with thanksgiving does not mean to thank Him for your troubles but to thank Him that He is with us in our troubled situation.

There is nothing that is bigger than me that is bigger than God. What frightens me does not even cause God to blink.

This security in God is not founded on where we are and what we face, but in Who is with us when things go wrong. When we will fully give our anxieties to God and thank Him for His presence with us, we will be filled with a peace that passes understanding, peace in the midst of trouble.

Some years ago, an art competition was held and the subject to be painted was peace. One artist painted a beautiful picture of a lake on the foreground, mountains in the back ground, blue sky, a few white puffy clouds, a little family of ducks floating along on the foreground; he won second prize. Another artist painted a picture of a storm, with a cliff coming down in the waters and waves lashing against the rocks; the sky was black, the rain was beating down. There was a cleft in the rock, and in the cleft, there was a nest and in the nest, a gull with its eyes closed, sleeping. He won first prize. The peace that passes understanding is the peace in the middle of the storm.

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul gives us a sample of what he went through in his life: he had been in prison frequently, he had been flogged severely, exposed to death again and again, beaten with rods, pelted with stones, three times he was shipwrecked, he had been in many kinds of dangers and sufferings and had to endure hunger, thirst and cold. God did not stop these things from happening to him, He did not keep his boat afloat, He did not stop the stones or the whiplashes, but He never abandoned him.

And this is a man who says: "I have learnt to be content in every situation." What was his secret? *I can live in any circumstance when God is my life.* I can have my back against any wall, I can have all the things I rely on taken away from me, because my strength is not in myself, it is in God.

So many people pray: "Take me out, change things!" The secret is not how to get God to take you out of your circumstances, it is how to bring God into your situation. It does not mean you will have a trouble free life and that if you give a problem to God, it will disappear. It just means that in your problems, difficulties, trauma, grief, you walk with Him and you trust Him, and you will have peace.

Someone had this little saying, which he would say of many situations he was in, whether it was good or bad: *"For this, I have Jesus"*. And as we are knocked down so many times, Jesus is the One who is our security, our strength, the One to whom we turn, and upon whom we rely. *For everything, we have Him.* He is a living Savior, not looking on from a distance, and I pray as you read this, that you will be able to bring to Him all your pains and your anxieties, with thanksgiving, thanking Him that you can trust Him and that He is sufficient for you.

Is this your Jesus? Is He your life, your strength, your sufficiency?