

“The ‘Secret’ of Contentment”

How do we cope when we feel we are not free to enjoy our normal life?

When we feel we are not free to relate to one another as we normally would.

When we feel confined to our own different kinds of ‘prison’, a prison of a limited lifestyle.

For some of us there is perhaps also another kind of prison - an emotional prison - as we feel controlled and limited by being anxious about today and fearful of the future.

I want to share some verses from a letter in the Bible the Apostle Paul wrote. It’s called Philippians – and Paul is writing to a church. Paul is in prison and he communicates: *As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.*

Paul understood being imprisoned. Literally. Paul was in prison for His Christian faith. And yet it’s a letter that is all about joy in circumstances, and despite circumstances.

Some verses from Philippians Chapter 4:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We are to be joyful in the Lord and I don't mean just know his peace and hope but to en-JOY the Lord.

Because of His loving presence we can give him our circumstances, and concerns about our lives and lifestyles. We are to pray for all needs, big and small. But we're called not to be anxious, and we are called to be grateful, which means that we are to count our blessings as well. Saying ‘thank you’ really helps with perspective.

The way to deal with anxiety is to focus on the God who is bigger than our circumstances and trust Him. And then we get that peace that is deeper, more real, more lasting than anything else; that is not fickle or dependent on the latest good news headlines or life's experiences.

Later, the Apostle Paul says this (and remember that he is in prison):

¹² 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.

Content! We need that. It is worth more than anything money can buy. The secret of contentment. Paul knows what life can be like. He’s had the good times and the bad times but the secret is more joyful than the good times and carries us in the bad times. The ‘secret’ is the reality and presence of Jesus.

Because of this Paul can go on to say ¹³ *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

In other words- ‘I can handle today because Jesus is here’

The 'prisons' of life - where we are not free to enjoy life as we should perhaps because of things like poor relationships, poor health, little money, having a job you dislike or not having a job, or... well it could be lots of things - or simply life now with the reality of Covid-19.

How do we cope with life now?

If you don't look to Jesus your confidence is going to be rooted in circumstances, or something or someone else, or in yourself - and those things can fail.

Jesus makes the difference. When our lifestyle may not feel great, even so our souls can be peaceful and joyful because of Jesus. Jesus never fails us so even though we might feel imprisoned, we are free - spiritually free! Freedom in Jesus cannot be extinguished, limited or locked away.

When Jesus is at the centre, we have a different perspective, a contentment that is really powerful because it is resilient and lasting.

Look to Jesus. He will keep you going with peace and joy both when life feels very hard - as it does now - and when life one day feels much more 'normal'. Freedom in Jesus, contentment in Jesus.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

AMEN