

Dear Philippians, XIII

Under the Circumstances

May 4, 2003

AVERAGE JOE

We've been **looking** at **ITEMS** from Philippi in an **attempt** to **connect** with the **people** of **Paul's time**.

- **Today** I want to **look** at one of the **actual people**.
- **Not** a **ROMANTICIZED IMAGE** (statue) of an **important person**.
- An **average Joe**; living a **normal life** until Aug 24, **79 AD**.

He was caught in the **ERUPTION** of Mount **Vesuvius**, on a **Friday**, at **4:00** in the morning. **Killed** by the **toxic fumes**, he was **encased** in **ash** and **mud**, and his **body** slowly **decomposed** and **disappeared**.

When **ARCHAEOLOGISTS** first began **excavating Pompeii** (near **Rome**) they **found** what **seemed** to be hollow **gas-pockets** in the **ground**.

- They **filled** one with **cement** to **examine** its inner **formation**.

To their **shock** and **amazement**, what they **found** was: **AVERAGE JOE**.

- He would have **been** about **thirty** while **Paul** was in **prison**.
- A **man** who just **happened** to **live** while the **NT** was **written**.
- A **normal guy** with no idea **when** or **how** his **life** would **end**.

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13

This is sometimes **referred** to as Paul's **thankless-thank-you**.

He's **grateful** for the **Philippians'** recent **gifts** to him; but he wants to **avoid** coming **across** as trying to **solicit** further **funds**.

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

SEASON OF DISCONTENT

Content makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor.
- Benjamin Franklin

If this is true, we are a poor nation; a culture bombarded with the message that contentment is sprayed on, rolled on, shampooed in, worn, driven, eaten, or inhaled.

And those who fail to discover that contentment is a learned state of mind are destined to die unfulfilled, unsatisfied, and unhappy, regardless of what they accumulate.

Paul has no physical reason to be content (in prison, awaiting possible execution) and yet he is content.

- There're three valuable lessons here in Paul's statement.

LESSON #1: AVOID COMPARISONS

Q: Have you caught the new series: Extreme Makeover?

Talk about comparisons! The whole premise is "fixing" homely people with televised plastic surgery. And people lined up for blocks, just hoping to be deemed ugly enough to be on the show.

"I'm sorry, sir; you're just not that unattractive." "C'mon; I'm hideous!" "Okay, you're a little homely." "How can you say that? I'm repugnant!"

- Disappointed masses were turned away, "I am too, ugly."

Comparing ourselves to others to measure our achievements can only breed jealousy, envy, pride, and misery.

... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. -
Philippians 4:11 NIV

- Contentment is independent of circumstances.

Three quick misconceptions about contentment:

1. To be happy, I must have what others have (This is the myth that drives every fad, fashion, and TV ad.
2. To be happy, I must be liked by everybody (Something even Jesus himself didn't attempt.

Any more, I'm overjoyed just being tolerated.

3. To be **happy**, I must **have more** than I currently **do**

Okay, **this** is **true** ... **temporarily**. We have an amazing **ability** to **adjust** and grow **discontent** again. As **income** increases, so do **expenses**, **demands**, **worries**, **troubles**, **hassles**, and **expectations**.

• **Comparing yourself to others always leads to discontentment.**

LESSON #2: **ADJUST TO CHANGE**

Q: Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?

Put 'em **into** the same **adversity** (boiling water):

- The **carrot** loses its **strength**, **wilts**, and becomes **weak**.
- The **egg** looks the same **outside** but **hardens** on the **inside**.
- The **coffee bean** releases its **essence** and **changes** the **water**.

Q: Which would you most like to be: carrot, egg, or coffee bean?

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 4:12 NIV*

- We **have** to be **flexible** because **circumstances** usually **aren't**.

A **tree** has **no chance** against the **wind** if it doesn't **bend**; and likewise **us** with the **winds** of **change**.

- **Stubborn refusal to be flexible leads to discontentment**

You **ask** someone **how** they're **doing**; they **say**, "Okay, under the **circumstances**." **Under** the **circumstances**?

- **Don't crawl under the circumstances; rise above 'em.**

Q: Do you know what's crucial for adapting and adjusting?

A: A sense of humor; the ability to laugh at ourselves.

At **funerals** we have people **share** humorous **memories** and **stories** about the **deceased**. Tremendous **comfort** and **consolation** come from **finding** something to **laugh** at in the **midst** of our **distress**.

Paul makes one thing **clear**: where **others** might **choose** to be **victims**, he **chooses** to be a **survivor** with a good **story**.

LESSON #3: **DRAW ON CHRIST'S POWER**

Most **people** don't **read** an insurance **policy** till **disaster** strikes.

We can't **treat** God's **Word** that way; we must **press** into His **Word** and **discover** what's **covered** and what's **assured**.

• **Contentment** comes from **knowing** the **guarantees**

I can do **everything** through him who gives me strength. -
Philippians 4:13 NIV

He isn't **talking** about **accomplishments**; he's **talking** about **facing** whatever **circumstances** may come his way.

1. **God is sovereign** over **circumstances**

We can **trust** that **nothing** comes our **way** that He hasn't **ordained** with good **purpose**; even **when** we're in **need**, **hungry**, or in **want**.

2. **God empowers** us to **face** whatever **He** has **ordained**

When our **contentment** is **deep** within our **soul** and **founded** on **Christ** it's completely **independent** of **circumstances**.

Q: So, in the **meantime**, should we just be **complacent** and **lazy**?

Q: When does **ambition** and **determination** become **discontentment**?

• **I'm asking ... someone help** me out ... that's a **real stumper!**

There's a big **difference** between being **content** **IN** (the **midst** of) a **bad circumstance**, and being **content** **WITH** a **bad circumstance**.

• **Paul** is certainly **not** content **WITH** his prison **situation**.

But **he** can be content **IN** his **cell** even while his **ambition** is to **get out**; because his **contentment** is in his **delight** in **Christ**.

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. - *Psalms 37:4 NIV*

The **Lord** doesn't **want** us to be **content** or **complacent** with **anything** that's **unhealthy**, **unjust**, or ultimately **unfulfilling**.

If our **delight** truly is in the **Lord**:

1. We won't **act** on a **bad** desire that **displeases** Him
2. We won't **act** on a **good** desire that **displaces** Him

We'll be **content** in the **midst** of **trial** or **triumph**; we won't **crawl** under the **circumstances**; but we'll be **survivors** with good **stories!**

PRAYER

Father God, Help us learn to avoid comparisons with people who have more money, better looks, fewer problems, greater opportunities, better health, and nicer cars.

Empower us to be flexible, adaptable, and adjustable to the many changes we face; and help us find humor in the midst of it all.

Jesus, remind us to draw on You, to delight in You, and to trust in You to meet all of our needs.

BENEDICTION (Num. 6:24-25)

May the Lord bless you and keep you;
May the Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious unto you;

May the Lord: **HELP you to be a COFFEE BEAN,
CHA-CHA-CHA.**

May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you His peace.

Three quick kinds about circumstances:

1. **Those I can control and I do**

This **brings** its own **contentment** through a **sense** of **accomplishment**, **victory**, and **triumph**.

2. **Those I can control and I do not**

It's **wrong** to seek **contentment** for **situations** we have the **power** to **change** but **don't** want to.

3. **Those I can not control**

This is **where** we need contentment; **uncontrollable circumstances**; things **beyond** our **power**.