

Sermon for November 28, 2013 - Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:10-13 (AAT)

Theme: Learn the Secret of Being Content.

- 1) *Understand what a gift it is.*
- 2) *Understand how it expresses itself.*

¹⁰ *It made me very happy in the Lord that now again you showed a fresh interest in me. You were interested but didn't have a chance to show it.* ¹¹ *I'm not saying I need anything. I've learned to be content whatever my condition.* ¹² *I know how to live with too little or too much. In every way of life I've learned the secret of eating heartily and of being hungry, of having too much and too little.* ¹³ *I can do everything through Him Who gives me the strength.*

It's sad, isn't it? Thanksgiving is a time to consider, with a spirit of contentment, all the blessings the LORD has given us and praise Him for His wonderful providence. And yet, how is our American society celebrating this important holiday? "Shop early this year – stores are open Thanksgiving Day! Get your family the gifts that they *really* want at rock bottom prices. You're doing all that hard shopping for others, but don't forget to get yourself that gift you *deserve* – the new shiny tablet, or clothes, or shoes, or whatever else. Be truly happy this holiday season. . ."

And with this drive for getting more and more stuff we think we need to be truly happy, guess what we will never be? Truly happy. How sad it is; for I believe that our fellow countrymen are searching for true happiness and contentment, but aren't finding it. Why? Because they believe the devil's lie that material things bring happiness. Sure, something new is nice and exciting, but I think that the vast majority of our happiness comes from our expectation, not the product itself. Very soon the "newness" wears off, and we realize that it didn't bring us true happiness. "But don't worry," advertisers tell us, "if you just upgrade to a newer thing, then you too can be truly happy."

The lust after material possessions and money is like a drug addict looking for morphine. The morphine of materialism might numb the pain of living in this sin cursed world, but it doesn't cure the cancer of our sin. When the drug-like effects wear off, you find yourself wanting more - a higher dose. Then cycle repeats itself. How can we break free? St. Paul tells: **Learn the Secret of Being Content.** *Understand what a gift it is. Understand how it expresses itself.*

Part One: Understand what a gift it is.

St. Augustine once prayed: "Our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in Thee." Yes, our hearts are restless, looking for something to fill an inner void that is inside each of us. Pleasure, material pursuit, and personal crusades all give us a sense of happiness and peace, but the feeling doesn't last long. It wears off, and then we are back where we started, looking for another high. All people are like drug addicts: looking for peace and happiness but never really finding it, because we spend too much of our time getting high on this world.

Why are our hearts so restless? In a word: sin. Every person on this earth has separated himself from God. How? By not doing the good God wants us to do, and by doing the evil God doesn't want us to do. That, in a nutshell, is what sin is. We inherited a rebellious and sinful nature from our parents, who inherited it from their parents – and so on - going all the way back to Adam and Eve. Every human heart

is totally corrupt and only desires evil, all of the time.¹ Because of sin, we deserve to be eternally separated from our holy, perfect God. We deserve hell.

But God did not want anyone lost in hell. This is why, after Adam and Eve fell into sin, God made sure that His Holy Law would be written on the hearts and consciences of all people². In doing this, God made all people restless so that they would search for Him³ - and it is clear: everyone is searching for something to fill the God-sized void left in our hearts ever since Adam and Eve were cast out from God's presence. It's only when the LORD creates faith in our hearts through the Gospel that we find true rest and peace. Why? Because He forgives our sin and reunites us to Himself. When a person is found by Jesus, that person has all he needs to be truly and eternally happy.

The world rejects Christ, and this is why it is never content and at peace. Do you want true peace and happiness in your life? Then learn the secret of how to be content. The secret is Jesus.

In Jesus we know all our sins are forgiven. Why? Because Jesus lived for us the perfect life we all failed to live. He also suffered and died for our sins. And to show that they have been paid for in full, He rose from the dead. Through faith in Jesus we can approach God in the confidence that He will not reject us. Our restless searching for peace and happiness ends.

Does this mean a Christian is always content? No. We still have a sinful nature that is discontent. It hears the drug dealers of Satan and the world, peddling the heroin of carnal pleasure, the cocaine of cash, and the morphine of material things. It longs for the narcotic like highs we experience from acting out on our greed for more, and we still struggle with our addiction to it. But, thanks be to Christ, He helps us through our addiction by giving us His Holy Spirit⁴.

In Christ we have contentment – and this contentment is more than just ignoring our problems with the motto, “Don't worry, be happy!” No, we are content because we have a real reason not to worry about anything: Jesus Christ. He himself is our happiness and contentment.

Why can we be content in Christ? First of all, He forgave all our sins, so our greatest worry – the threat of eternal separation from God in hell - is gone. Secondly, He promises to protect us from all that the devil and the world will throw at us because of our relationship with Him⁵. He promises to work in any and every situation for our eternal good⁶. He promises to listen to all our prayers⁷ and give us everything we need⁸. The list could go on and on as to what God has promised to do for us in Christ. In Jesus we have everything and need nothing. In Christ Jesus we can't help but be content.

Now someone might say, “Well that is easy for you to say, but what about me? I can't even afford to clothe myself. What about the person who has a painful illness? How can he be content? What about the person who is starving?”

¹ Genesis 6:5; 8:21

² Romans 2:14,15

³ Acts 17:26,17

⁴ Romans 7:15 through all of chapter 8

⁵ John 17:11-17

⁶ Romans 8:28

⁷ John 14:13,14

⁸ Romans 8:32

Understand that Paul was not living the high life when He wrote about contentment. He wrote our sermon text while under arrest in Rome. Paul was not a man who had it all; he was a man whose sufferings rivaled those of Job. And yet through it all he was content and happy.

How was Paul able to keep such an attitude? Faith. You can't be content without it. If you don't believe that God is going to keep his wonderful promises to you, then you will worry, and not be at peace. But if you trust that, regardless of how bad things look, God is faithful and will do what he says, then you will be content and have peace. Then you can face any and every situation with confidence, rejoicing in Christ, knowing that you have everything in Him.

When asked who the wealthiest man on earth is, the philosopher Socrates answered, "*He that is content with least, for sufficiency is nature's wealth.*" He who is content has "made it," even if he only owns the clothes he is wearing. He who is content in Christ has truly made it, because he is not only content with what he has, he also has a God who provides everything for him. Faith in Christ to keep all His promises is the secret of contentment, and gives us strength to face any and every situation. Now let us look at how wonderfully contentment can show itself in the lives of Christians.

Part Two: Understand how it expresses itself.

Contentment in Christ, which flows from a deep faith, really expresses itself in some amazing ways. The congregation at Philippi was poor⁹ and yet they gave themselves fully to the Lord by financially supporting the Gospel - even beyond their own ability. What made them do this? Their contentment in Christ.

Contentment in Christ allowed the apostle Paul to boldly face beatings, shipwrecks, stoning, thieves and disease, all to spread the Gospel of Jesus, which gave Him great hope and eternal joy.

If you ever have some time, research the persecutions of the early Christian Church, and how, when faced with prison, being burned at the stake, wild animals, and all sorts of grotesque means of torture, Christians would sing hymns, and triumphantly march to their suffering and death in the Roman amphitheaters. Contentment in Christ made them do that.

I have personally seen contentment in Christ exhibit itself in a girl, so poor that she was at the brink of being homeless, distribute clothing and humanitarian aid to those much better off than her. When asked why she didn't take any for herself, she answered that she didn't *need* it. She was content in Christ.

I have personally seen contentment exhibit itself in a homeless man getting his first apartment. One of the first things he did was invite other homeless people he barely knew to stay with him, so they too would have a place to keep them warm. He didn't ask them for anything in return

I knew a wealthy business man who – instead of living in a mansions and driving exotic cars – lived rather simply (given his situation) and donated millions of dollars to the church – almost at the drop of a hat. Contentment in Christ allowed him to do that.

The Scriptures show contentment exhibiting itself in a poor woman putting all she had into an offering box at the temple - trusting that the Lord would take care of her¹⁰.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Philippi is in Macedonia

¹⁰ Mark 12:41-44

I have often heard, and even thought myself, “If only I had more money, then I could do more good by better helping those in need and giving more to church.” The truth is that you wouldn’t. Did you know that, on average, the more people make, the less they give – percentage wise - to charity? Americans, on average, still earn more now than in previous generations. They also give (percentage wise) much less to church and charity, than previous generations.

True contentment not only shows itself in financial giving; it will also show in the giving of yourself. If you are content, you will spend less time pursuing things and more time with your God and your family. You will rejoice in these things. True Contentment will also help you focus on the joy of helping another person. Contentment in Christ gives you rest.

I want to highlight two verses of the last hymn we just sang, which wonderfully sum up the thoughts of this sermon.

All depends on our possessing
God's abundant grace and blessing,
Though all earthly wealth depart.
They who trust with faith unshaken
In their God are not forsaken
And e'er keep a dauntless heart.

Many spend their lives in fretting
Over trifles and in getting
Things that have no solid ground.
I shall strive to win a treasure
That will bring me lasting pleasure
And that now is seldom found.

May the Lord forgive the times we forget him, and his providence. May the Lord forgive any and all discontentment in our hearts and – in the peace of forgiveness – may the LORD keep us in Christ, focused on the treasure He has won for us in heaven. This is the secret of contentment: faith in Christ. Praise God for this wonderful gift. Amen