

THANKSGIVING, 2009
NOV. 25, 6:30 PM, NOV. 26, 9 AM

MESSAGE

Intro. There was an old clique which was repeatedly used in my childhood by my parents who had lived through the Great Depression of the Dirty 30's and WWII and by my Grandparents who had immigrated from Europe with not much more than what could fit into this wooden box. This box is what my Grandpa Pitra carried with him across the Atlantic Ocean, across half of North America to Bordulac, North Dakota. Their clique, when I griped and complained about my circumstances which I am prone to do, was 'David, beggars can't be choosy, be thankful for what you've got'. Thinking of that advice from people who really knew what need and plenty really were, I can feel pretty guilty, and I should, when I feel discontented when I can't find the exact brand of cereal I want at Lannings or Walmart for that matter. I can feel guilt, and I should, though I live in the lap of luxury upon luxury, I become envious and covetous of what all the rest of you have and I don't. Here it is Thanksgiving. And we all want to be thank full. We all want to be content. But on this side of heaven our thanksgiving is often tinged with that guilt and apprehension. Will our Thanksgiving contentment end before the day is over? That phone ringing, is it an accident or are they just a little late? Looking around the Thanksgiving table or in church today, who won't be here next Thanksgiving, maybe it will be me? I truly want to be content if only ... and it's this guilt and apprehension that makes us those sinful beggars. And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit to day with my message entitled: 4 Options of Contentment!

I. In our epistle reading for today, Philippians 4, we are looking at part of a thanksgiving letter which the Apostle Paul wrote to his friends at Philippi, Greece. Believe it or not, Paul was in prison under house arrest, chained to a Roman guard when he wrote the words of our text: **'I have learned in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty'**. But, how does a person achieve that contentment, that true thanks living which Paul confesses and we all desire as we are faced with life's apprehensions and guilt and discontentment? A woman came to her Pastor with a problem. Her husband had recently invested in a small business. And their investment blossomed beyond their wildest expectations. "I have a strange feeling. And don't smile at me, Pastor, as though you know what I'm about to say. But, I think I should feel guilty'. 'Why' her Pastor asked. 'Well, I don't think we deserve all this. And I know we haven't really earned it'. The Pastor continued to smile at the woman with this advice, 'If business is up, simply sing 'Now Thank We All Our God' and when business is down simply sing 'Lord, Have Mercy On Us' because you see God is with you in both situations'.

II. Knowing that, believing that, affirming that is contentment which leads a person to say with Job **‘The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised’**. There are 3 common ways by which most people try to achieve life’s contentment or satisfaction.

#1 ‘If I make more money’. And very few people would argue with that. But, remember Jesus’ warning in His Parable of the Sower about the ‘cares and riches and pleasures of life’ which can choke out our contentment.

#2 ‘If I could improve my self image, feel good about myself’. But, do we ever really achieve changing ourselves for the better, old habits die hard, if they die at all.

#3 ‘If I could just get away for awhile ... stop the world I just want to get off’. But passivity can create ‘no purpose in life’. And we’re right back to feeling guilty, apprehensive, discontentment.

And all of us have experimented with these options in our lives. And most of us have learned more money, a better self image, even a vacation, as good as all of these sound and are, they don’t last. We are truly beggars of what we desire = contentment.

Which brings me to our 4th option, recognizing that discontentment is actually a spiritual problem which infects us all. Discontentment is a recurring problem whether you’re rich or poor, in need or in plenty, whether your self image is positive or negative, even whether you’re on vacation or busy, busy, busy. Discontentment is part of our beggarly sinful nature which nags at all of our hearts and souls and minds.

III. Which brings me to the 4th option for contentment. Are you ready to receive it? It’s going to simply be given into your beggarly empty hand of faith. God by His grace, God by His love for us, promises **Hebrews 13 ‘Be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’, so we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid’**. That’s the same source where Paul received his contentment in plenty or in want in the promises of God’s Word.

1 Timothy 6 ‘Godliness with contentment is great gain’ = Godliness. And how do we achieve that? It’s not something you achieve, it’s what God has already given to you. Paul’s contentment was in the fact no matter what his circumstances he was a forgiven sinner because of Jesus Christ. That’s Godliness, that’s your standing before God who promises **‘I will never leave you; never will I forsake you’**.

If we are continually discontented it's a sure sign we have become disconnected from God and His Means of Grace in our lives. The verses just prior to our text of **Philippians 4** says **'The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus'**. This peace of God is not just a passing mood or something we talk ourselves into or something we achieve with more money or more stuff or a better self image or even a vacation which never is long enough. This peace of God is a gift of His forgiveness when you have your apprehensions, deal with your guilt, are discontented. The Apostle Paul was content in all life's circumstances, rich, poor, healthy, ill, befriended, betrayed, hungry, full, imprisoned, free because of the sufficiency of God's grace, God's love for him no matter the circumstances. And that is true for you and me also. The strange thing about the power of God's grace, however, is it's actually found in the weakness of God. Paul learned to be content though he suffered because he trusted in Jesus who had suffered first for him. Remember Paul's words of **2 Corinthians 12** when he prayed for God to release him of his **'thorn in the flesh ... that instrument of Satan'** and the Lord said to Paul **'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect – made complete in weakness'**. Paul responded **'I will boast all the more of my weaknesses ... I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities. For when I am weak, I am strong'**. This is the confession of the inner contentment of a saving faith which continues to say **'I can do ALL things through Him = through Jesus, who gives me strength'**. Being certain, being confident of Jesus' grace and mercy towards us beggar sinners is to have true Godliness. To be certain, being confident of Jesus' weakness as our Substitute and Savior is being confident of Jesus strength. Which is the source of our strength of faith to resist life's temptations to despair, to face life's apprehensions, to overcome life's greed and covetousness of accumulating more stuff, to offer forgiveness as we have been forgiven, to be at peace with ourselves because we know God is at peace with us, to outlast evil's attacks and ambushes and wounds, to be renewed day by day, to be a survivor, to love again because God has never stopped loving us. This is Paul's Godly contentment which is ours also through the Word of God.

Conclusion I think I used this story last year at Thanksgiving or sometime during the last year. I forget. It comes from a book which Marlene gave me as a gift a number of years ago already, entitled 'Then Sings My Soul'. It's about the hymn writer Horatio Spafford. His wife and daughters were drowned in the Atlantic Ocean when their ship sank. One of the most beautiful expressions of Christian contentment came from that awful tragedy.

'When peace, like a river, attendeth my way;

When sorrows, like sea billows roll;

Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say:

It is well, it is well with my soul'.

When the human soul truly receives contentment in Jesus Christ, we really have all we need! We have strength to face and cope with anything and everything this sinful old world throws at us; guilt, apprehension, discontentment, fears, death itself. My Great Depression and WWII survivors my Mom and Dad, my immigrant Grandparent survivors with all their earthly possessions in this wooden box, were right:

'David, beggars can't be choosy, be thankful for what you've got'. You and I my friends have Jesus! And nothing, absolutely nothing else matters! That's truly Godliness with contentment and it's all our gain. God's peace be with you this Thanksgiving and everyday of thanks living. Amen