

Title: The Infinite Worth of Contentment
Text: Hebrews 13.5-6
Theme: Contentment is built on the gospel
Series: Hebrews #54
Prop Stmnt
Aim

Read Text:

This week I read a sermon delivered by Brigham Young, president of the Mormon Church from 1847 to 1877. In it he preached against using bad language, against keeping company with profane people, against the all out pursuit of wealth and a few other activities that we would be inclined to agree with as being wrong. The entire sermon however, is completely empty of the gospel. So, what does Brigham appeal to in order to coerce his audience to not use bad language, keep company with profane people....? He appeals to guilt, disappointment, and disapproval from others, all of which are typical “fear of man” tactics. Sadly, the same tactics for behavior control are used by churches that supposedly preach the gospel and by parents with their children who, again supposedly embrace the gospel. But genuine Christianity is not behavior control. Genuine Christianity engages the heart and captures our affections. The ultimate basis for our behavior should not be driven by our concern over what other people think, but from the gospel and from a Holy-Spirit fueled desire to live as the people of the Kingdom.

This chapter has more specific warnings and admonitions than in the rest of the book. It is clear that we have moved from some of the deep, sophisticated arguments that the author of Hebrews has used to put the supremacy of Christ on display to some really practical matters. But, in reality, we have not moved away from the rich doctrinal content, but we are in fact building on it. These commands do three things:

- 1) They are the logical and necessary fruit of a life that has been changed and is being changed by the gospel.
- 2) These commands reveal whether or not I really possess with my heart what I profess with my words.

How do you know whether or not your belief in Christ is genuine or you have been fooling yourself and others? How do you know? Is that not the most important issue of all time? Talk is cheap. Raising a hand in affirmation, nodding your head in agreement is convenient, but loving a brother, showing hospitality, visiting those who are in prison at the risk of losing your job..., well that’s a different story – isn’t it? Genuine Christianity is not simply giving intellectual assent to a theological position or signing a doctrinal statement. Correct theology is foundational to Christianity, but there is more to it than intellectual agreement. Real faith involves our wills. Genuine Christianity involves the surrendering of one’s life to the authority of Christ. So, how do I know if I have done that? Seriously, if we only “believe the gospel” because this is the only way to save our bacon, then is that

really loving Christ and believing the gospel or is that simply a form of loving ourselves and using Christ as the means to watch out for ME? Since I am not able to discern my own heart, I need help from God's Spirit and Word. That is why these commands are so helpful. So, when you read these commands, ask yourself about how do you respond to them? Do they seem to be a weight, a burden, and some form of constriction upon you? Do these commands steal your joy, or do they make your soul sing? Seriously, do you remember what David said in Psalm 119.97, "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day."

If I am using the gospel and using Christ to get the life that I think that I deserve or the life that I want, then commands like this are going to get in my way. If however, I truly love Christ and his gospel, then I am already convinced of the goodness and mercy and trustworthiness of Christ, so that I recognize that his commands are from the all-wise, all-loving, all-good, all-knowing heart of my King.

3) These commands go after our hearts.

In v. 1 we are commanded to "let brotherly love continue." You cannot obey that command without engaging your heart. We are commanded to show hospitality. Again, you cannot obey that command without engaging your heart. To remember a fellow-believer who is in prison because of the gospel means to identify with your brother so much, that you are willing to lose everything in order to have the opportunity to serve them. Once again, that is a heart issue. Now, we come to verse 5. "Keep your life free from the love of money." Again, we are talking about love. The point is clear, love people not stuff, not money. But you cannot understand the heart of these commands apart from the gospel. You cannot love these commands apart from the gospel. You cannot profit from them apart from the gospel. The gospel, is the good news of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The gospel tells us the good news how that, although we are sinners and are therefore deserving of the righteous wrath of God, that God, being rich in mercy, sent Christ to this earth in order to live the life that we could not live and die the death that we could not die. In other words, he died on the cross in order to take my wrath, completely and pay my debt, completely. There is nothing left for me to pay, it is mine by faith alone in Christ alone. The gospel makes it clear that Christ is supreme above all. There is no other Savior, no other King, no greater treasure and no greater purpose. When you are a follower of Christ then, already you are in the company of the redeemed. Already you are in Christ, and you are "receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken." Therefore, these commands come from the heart of our Savior. That means that these commands are given from a heart of love and given for our joy. Christ is so jealous for our joy he warns us against wasting our love on money. In a bit I will point out why this was such a timely issue for those to whom this letter was originally written. But, it is also very timely for us. For one, we are observing communion this morning. This is a time to examine our heart as the bride of Christ to see if we have been cheating on our husband (Christ) but giving our affections to anything or anyone else. Money has a way of stealing our hearts. The other timely issue is the political, economic and financial condition of our country. We are living

in very perilous times. We have a level of debt as a nation that is exceedingly dangerous. The economic picture is not good and this country is very, very vulnerable. Are you ready? What would you do if the government was so broke that all social security payments stopped, that unemployment checks stopped, that funding for police, fire, and education dropped in half and inflation jumped to 40% annually? It is not out of the question. In a setting like that, this text would take on fresh urgency. Do those statements strike fear in you, or do you see in the crisis, all of the opportunities for the gospel? My responsibility as your pastor is to prepare you for this, by teaching you how to be content now.

So, if you are guaranteed an inheritance in Christ of receiving an unshakable kingdom, do you now see how you can keep your life free from the love of money? If, however, you live controlled by your love of money, then is it not right to question whether or not you are truly a follower of Christ? Adultery in marriage is so serious because spiritual adultery is so offensive to God. One of the ways in which we commit spiritual adultery is by placing our faith, security and dreams in money instead of in God. The command is clear.

1. **Live Free as a Citizen of the Kingdom.** (5a)

Look carefully at this phrase. What do you learn from it? The verb here, speaks of an ongoing battle. "KEEP (and keep on keeping) your life free from the love of money." What is it about money that we have to be warned about so much? Jesus warned about this in his teaching. No man who loves money is qualified to be an elder in the church (1 Tim. 3.3). But have you ever attempted to get to the bottom of this and figure out why is it that money has such a hold on us? What is it about money? Or, to be more specific, what are the promises that money makes to us?

Money promises us protection. Money promises us love. Money promises us health. Money promises us acceptance. Money promises us esteem. Money promises us good looks. Money promises us power and influence. Money promises us respect and honor. Money promises us adoration, attention, - worship? When you really think it through you realize that money promises us not only things that God alone can provide, but it goes beyond that and promises that we can be god! That is why the love of money and trust in God are diametrically opposed to each other.

But this is what is so fascinating about money. We think that money is what give us freedom, (freedom from God, freedom to be God, freedom from depending on others) when in reality, if we love money, we are the ones who are in bondage. We are in bondage to the money and whatever the money tells us to do, we have to do. But note that it is not money itself that we are warned about, but something more challenging. We are warned against the love of money. If money was the problem, then we could all take a vow of poverty and make certain that at the end of every year we have not had any increase in money or possessions. But the text warns about the "love of money." That hits us all. You may think that because you are in debt, or because you have very little money that you do not have to worry about this

one, when in reality it is not whether or not you have money, but whether or not money has you. You can be the poorest person in the city and be in bondage to the love of money.

Now, what do you think is going on here? Why did the author of Hebrews include this? Let me explain it this way. Back in the late 1930's this country went through what we call the Great Depression. People who lived through that and remember that are often characterized as people who will not throw anything away. This attitude of "waste not, want not" was elevated to virtue status. In reality, people who will not throw things away, or give them away when there is no use for them are themselves held captive by them. We may blame it on the Great Depression, but in reality these people lived through a time of need, and have made up their mind that they will never go through something like that again. Something similar happened to these people to whom the book of Hebrews was written. They had endured a time of persecution when they took care of their brothers and sisters to the point where they lost much material possession. Now, the AH is preparing them for the next round of persecution and their attitude seems to be, "I have already done my part. I have already paid my dues. I have already been through that. I went through tough times before; I am not going to do that again. Let someone else do it this time."

What about you? Is the way that you handle your finances consistent with what you sing and what you claim to believe? In other words, is the ministry of the gospel your real passion in life or do you believe the lie that you can do whatever you want with your money and possessions and it has no bearing on your eternal status? I do not mean that you can purchase your salvation, you most absolutely cannot. I do mean that if you seriously love Christ, then your life will not be ruled by things nor governed by money, and you will not be inclined to hoard things, but will long to be generous when it comes to the gospel. The command to keep your life free from the love of money is a gracious command to keep you from being held captive by an idol that will stop at nothing less than sucking your soul dry of all joy and love for God and his kingdom.

2. **Live Content with what you have.** (5b)

(I recognize that the grammar is not great, but the point is). There is a connection between being content and being free.

Rather than focusing on what you don't have and believing the lie that if you had what you don't have that you would have happiness, be content with what you have. Well, how do you do that? Look at the end of verse 5. God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." What do you have? You have the King! Now, when I say that you have the King, I mean that you have Someone that is worth far more than money and living for him cannot be calculated in terms of money.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates this. Many of you are familiar with the story of Corrie Ten Boom, whose family hid Jewish people in their home during the Nazi

occupation of their country. Well, Corrie's father was a watchmaker. One morning, the family prayed that they would have at least one customer that day so that they could pay a bill that was due at the bank. Later that day a rather wealthy person came in and bought a rather expensive watch, but in the process complained that he was buying it because he had bought a watch from "Christian watchmaker" and that it was defective. Corrie's father asked to see the defective watch, and upon examining it, realized that there was a very minor problem with it. He fixed it for free, gave it back to the man, knowing that the man would now return the watch that he had just purchased, which he did. Corrie was puzzled and asked her dad why he had done that. "Aren't you worried about the bills that are due?" Her father responded, "There is blessed and unblessed money." God would not be pleased if he had sold this man a watch at the expense of another believer's reputation.

Corrie's dad had the King and the Kingdom. When you live with that, you live by another set of values. The reputation of another believer, meaning the reputation of the gospel is more precious than money. You can be content with that. I love what C.S. Lewis said. "He who has God and everything has no more than he who has God alone." Those who are without can be consumed by their grasping to get, while those who are with can be consumed by their holding and protecting. Neither one is content.

Being content is the realization that God has already provided for me everything that I need, including death. God will provide death for me, when it is his time to bring me home. So, if God will provide everything that I need, when I need it, I can relax in Him and live responsibly and generously. You see, God is at the same time, the most terrifying and safe place one could ever be. If you are in Christ, then you are covered. You are safe. You are at home. You can rest. ...

3. **Live with Confidence in the help of the King.** (6)

So we can confidently (courageously) say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Living free from the love of money, living contentedly in the presence of God is what enables you to live with confidence. You cannot live confidently if you love money because money does not last and it can be stolen. But if the Lord is your helper, you have no reason to fear. What can man do to you? Well, the truth is, man can do a lot to you. But what man does is not greater than God.

This is a great verse to memorize. This is a great truth to grasp. Some of you may not live in bondage to money, but you live in bondage to the opinions of others. You live in fear of what others think. Now, how does that work – huh? Your Father is the KING and you are a slave to the master of people's opinions. Does that make any sense? You live in fear that others may hurt you, that others may threaten your esteem, that you may lose a friendship, or lose the respect of others, or lose some comforts. Wait!! Can anyone take away your inheritance? No! And if your inheritance is certain and the kingdom that you are receiving cannot be shaken, then how should you view money? How should you view life?

We hold on to things when we fear that we will be vulnerable without them. But, when we recognize that we have God, then we are free to be generous. What can man do to me? He can do nothing that does not pass through the plan of God.

John Flavel was a faithful Puritan pastor (300 years ago) who asked this wonderful question. "How is it imaginable that God should withhold, after this, spirituals or temporals from his people? How shall he not call them effectually, justify them freely, sanctify them thoroughly, and glorify them eternally? How shall he not clothe them, feed them, protect and deliver them? Surely if he would not spare his own Son one stroke, one tear, one groan, one sigh, one circumstance of misery, it can never be imagined that ever he should, after this, deny or withhold from his people, for whose sakes all this was suffered, any mercies, any comforts, any privilege, spiritual or temporal, which is good for them."