

Contentment: The Lost Virtue (Part 2)

Philippians 4:10-13

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It's interesting to note, when you come to Scripture, that it often indicates that whole nations and cultures can have a particular sinful propensity. In other words, an entire society can be characterized by a sin that absolutely runs rampant in that culture. For example, often God describes the Assyrians for their cruelty, the Babylonians for their pride, you remember, encapsulated in Nebuchadnezzar himself as he walked around his palace and said, "Is this not great Babylon that I have built by the might of my power?" And the Cretans, you remember, Paul described as prone to laziness.

I wonder what God would say if he critiqued America in the Scripture. I wonder what our particular propensity would be. I think, if He were to do it, it may well be that our national propensity would be a basic discontent, discontent. You know that discontent that is a part of our culture expresses itself in a variety of ways. For example, the Department of Labor says that the average American worker will have three and a half different careers in his lifetime. He'll work for 10 different employers and only average about three and a half years per job, per place of employment. The same American will also frequently grow discontent with his car, his house, his city, and unfortunately, often even with his or her spouse. This discontent also leads to a sort of rampant materialism.

But that's nothing new. This has always been a part of our culture. It's interesting, I read this week from a book that was written back in the 1830's. It was in the 1830's that a young French attorney and historian by the name of Alexis de Tocqueville traveled around the young United States. And as he traveled around the United States he made a number of observations and he eventually encapsulated those observations in his famous book called *Democracy in America*. Listen to what he entitled chapter 13 of that book written in the early 1800's, "Why the Americans are Often so Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity." Listen to de Tocqueville's brilliant and really timeless observations of our culture, and remember, this was written almost 200 years ago.

Americans cleave to the things of this world as if assured that they will never die. And yet are in such a rush to snatch any that come within their reach as if expecting to stop living before they have relished them. They clutch everything but hold nothing fast and so lose grip as they hurry after some new delight. An American will build a house in which to pass his old age and sell it before the roof is on. He'll plant a garden and rent it just as the trees are coming into bearing. He'll clear a field and leave others to reap the harvest. He'll take up a profession and leave it, settle in one place and soon go off elsewhere in his changing desires. If his private business allows him a moment's relaxation, he will plunge at once into the whirlpool of politics. Then, if at the end of a year crammed with work he

has a little spare leisure, his restless curiosity goes with him, travelling up and down the vast territories of the United States. Thus he will travel five hundred miles in a few days as a distraction from his happiness. Death steps in and stops him before he's grown tired of this futile pursuit of that complete happiness which always seems to escape him.

Those words have proven to be a timeless assessment of the culture in which you and I live.

Two hundred years later and with a much higher level of affluence, we are still discontent. In fact, there was an article in the 1990's in the US News and World Report, Amy Bernstein wrote, citing a Roper poll, that "Americans with household incomes under \$25,000 said that it would take about \$54,000 a year for them to feel like they had arrived at the American dream." What's interesting though is, in the same poll, those who made a \$100,000 thought it would take an average of \$192,000 to make them happy. The article concluded with this observation, "In other words, the American dream usually lies nearly twice the distance away." Wherever you are, happiness lies just twice as far.

How can that be? Well, Benjamin Franklin put it this way, "Content makes poor men rich, discontent makes rich men poor." In other words, it's not our circumstances that determine our level of contentment, it's our hearts. That's the issue that Paul addresses in the closing verses of Philippians 4. I'd like you to turn to Philippians 4. We're going to continue our study of this great epistle. Let me just remind you that as we approach the end of this letter, the historical purpose for this section is to thank the Philippians for the financial gift that they had sent to Paul. But as Paul expresses his thanksgiving, he teaches us a profound lesson in contentment. Let me read it to you, Philippians 4:10,

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

The theme of this paragraph is found in verse 11, "I have learned to be content." What an amazing claim. It's a claim all of us wish we could make. And as we examine this revolutionary claim of the apostle, we're answering three important questions about contentment. Last Sunday we surveyed all of Scripture and we answered the first question, which was this, what causes us to be discontent? What is it that causes us to fail to be content?

We ransacked the Scripture and we discovered that there are essentially two word groups that are the opposite of the virtue of contentment. One of those is "to covet." "To covet" simply means

“to want to have more.” That’s what the word means, “to want to have more.” I just want more. The other word group is “to lust.” Now, when we hear that word we typically think of sexual sin, and that’s included, but the word is much larger than that. The word essentially means “to crave,” “to crave something you don’t have.” So when you look at the Scripture, these two words “to crave,” or lust, and “to covet” encapsulate the opposite of contentment and they are the reason that we struggle with discontent so much.

We noticed last week that we can crave and covet material things, and that’s what we often think of when we think of those words, material things. For example, houses, property, tools and resources that produce income, other people, which of course is usually in reference to sexual sin, money, clothes, we can covet transportation. Essentially, we can covet anything that can be seen with the eyes. Anything that can belong to us, we can covet, we can crave.

But we learned last week that coveting and craving goes beyond that, it goes to intangibles. You and I can covet and crave things such as a different appearance, a more understanding husband, don’t raise your hands wives if you’ve ever coveted that, a more beautiful wife, power, position, status, a better family situation, etc., etc. The bottom line is, you and I can crave and covet anything that we don’t have, whether it’s material and can be touched with our hands or whether it’s intangible. If we don’t have it, we can crave and covet it, because craving and coveting are actually a part of the fallen heart. There isn’t a single unbelieving person who doesn’t struggle with craving and coveting, who isn’t characterized by craving and coveting that which he or she doesn’t have. We learned last week, Paul says, that is a description of the fallen heart. We saw it all the way with Eve in the Garden of Eden, craving the one thing she didn’t have.

But even as believers, when we come to faith in Christ, we retain what the Bible calls our flesh. There’s a part of us that remains unredeemed, that will eventually be redeemed. And out of that flesh there is the same expression of these cravings, these longings for things we don’t have. And left alone, these two forms of spiritual cancer, coveting and craving, will spread throughout our hearts and create in us a settled state of discontent. That’s our problem. That’s what causes us to be discontent. As the Lord said, it starts in our hearts and flows out.

This week and next week, I had planned originally to finish this week, but as is always true with the Word of God, the more I meditate, the more I study, the more profound it is, and the deeper I go and the more there is that I want to share with you, so this week and next I want us to look in detail at Philippians 4:10-13. And in these verses we will find the answers to two more important questions. We’ve already answered the first question and that is, what causes us to be discontent? In these verses we will learn the answer to the second question, what does it mean to be content? Exactly what is this state that Paul claims to be in? And thirdly, how can we become content? How can we, like Paul, learn to be content? So let’s begin by looking and answering this second question, what does it mean to be content? Notice again verse 11, the

theme of the section; Paul says, “I have learned to be content.” What exactly is this virtue that’s the opposite of covetousness, that’s the opposite of craving?

Well, first of all, I want you to notice that it is a state of mind that has to be acquired. He says, “I have learned to be content.” You see, Paul wasn’t born with it and neither were you. In fact, Paul’s greatest sin before he came to faith in Christ was craving and coveting. Turn back one page to Philippians 3. You remember, when we studied this in detail, he claims in verse 6 of Philippians 3 that before his conversion, “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, I was found blameless.” Now, blameless here means “my observable conduct was such that no one could find fault with it.” He’s not claiming perfection, that would be contrary not only to what he teaches in the New Testament but even to Jewish theology. He’s not claiming that his conduct somehow satisfied God. He’s simply saying that as far as anyone else knew, he kept the law.

But Paul knew something they don’t. There was something that happened in the heart of the Apostle Paul that exploded his bubble, that caused him to realize just how sinful a man he was, and he tells us about it in Romans 7. Turn to Romans 7. He gives us a bit of his personal testimony here before he came to faith in Christ. In verse 7 he says, “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?” In other words, is the law of God, does it produce sin? He says, “May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.” And then he makes it very personal and very direct, he says,

for I would not have known about coveting, [*craving,*] if the law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.” But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind.

This was the sin that was in the forefront of the apostle’s mind. This is why he needed conversion. This is why I needed salvation. He realized that he coveted everything.

But apart from the Law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died.

Paul is saying, listen, before I really understood the tenth commandment, before I really came to grips with what it meant, I thought I was okay, I thought that I pleased God. He said, but then I came to really understand the tenth commandment, you shall not covet, and it decimated me, it absolutely destroyed me. Verse 10,

this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

What's he saying? You see, it was through this command, you shall not crave, you shall not covet, that Paul came to understand that the law of God was not merely external, but it was internal, that God was concerned with what was going on in his heart. And that simply by craving something he didn't have he violated God's law and he plunged himself under the wrath of God.

By the way, this is a mistake a lot of Christian parents make in teaching their children, they emphasize external issues. And as a result, they raise a bunch of Pharisees, like Paul, who think they do okay in their standing before God. It's easy to measure up to external requirements. It's much more difficult to deal with sins of the heart. Listen, point out to your kids how far short they fall of the standard of God, not merely externally, but internally. Point out that God demands a selfless heart instead of a selfish heart. Point out that God demands humility instead of pride, that God demands contentment instead of covetousness. That's where Paul learned his sin.

Not only was Paul not born content but notice, he didn't become perfectly content at the moment of salvation either. This verb that's translated learn, the tense of the verb in the Greek text has the idea of sort of stepping back and looking at a span of your life in a nutshell, looking at a progression of time, a length of time. Paul says, listen, I learned contentment over a long period of time.

What exactly is it that he learned? What exactly does it mean to be content? Well the Greek word that's translated content here means to be self-sufficient, to have enough. The Stoics, a popular philosophical group at the time of Paul, used this word to refer to someone who had learned self-control and self-mastery, so that even in the worst of circumstances they were unflappable. But Paul takes it a step further. He doesn't merely say it's self-control, it's sort of biting your lip and biting your circumstances. He says no, it is instead having a heart that is truly satisfied with your circumstances, that is satisfied in God in spite of your circumstances.

Jeremiah Burroughs was an English Puritan who pastored in the 1600's and he wrote a classic book on the issue of contentment. I highly recommend it to you. It's called *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. In that book he defines contentment this way, listen to his definition, "Christian contentment is that sweet inward quiet gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition." You know what he says? He says, it is a delighting in and a submission to God's providence in your life. Whatever circumstances he has you in, it's delighting in His goodness, even in those circumstances.

Easton's Bible Dictionary defines contentment this way, and I like this definition, "A state of mind in which one's desires are confined to his lot, whatever it may be." In other words, you don't want any more than you have. That doesn't mean you don't work hard. That doesn't mean you don't try to excel in what you do. It all comes down to what's going on in your heart, why do you do it?

In summary, contentment is the opposite of craving what you don't have and wanting more than you do have. It's being satisfied, and even delighting in, God, regardless of your circumstances, and accepting whatever lot you have as God's best for you. So if I were to give you a test this morning on the issue of contentment, how would you do? Would you pass? By that standard, are you content? I think every one of us, if we're honest with ourselves, would have to say that we struggle in some area with contentment.

So that brings us to our third important question about contentment. And that is, how can we become content? How can we learn to be content? What practical steps can we take to get us there? Paul says, "I have learned to be content." How, Paul? Teach us. Listen, all you and I need to know about how to live contented lives is buried within this majestic paragraph of text. I want us to look at it today and next Sunday, because in these verses are four attitudes that will produce true lasting contentment. You want to know how to be content? Paul tells us right here through his own example. And if you and I will mimic, will imitate these four attitudes, you and I too can say with Paul, "I have learned to be content." But let me give you a warning, Paul said, "I have learned to be content" – over a process. You will not learn and master these basic attitudes overnight. It will take time to learn this, just as it did with Paul. But we need to start. We need to get on the road to contentment.

What's the first basic attitude that will build contentment into our lives? Number one, find your ultimate joy in God, find your ultimate joy in God. Notice how he begins in verse 10. He says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly." That's where Paul consistently found his joy. What he's describing here is the moment he received that gift from the Philippians. He says, at that moment, when Epaphroditus showed up with a gift that you had for me, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly." You say, well yeah, I could rejoice in somebody bringing me a large financial gift too. That's what he's talking about. He says, when I received your substantial financial gift, probably intended to cover his lodging. Remember, he had to rent his own quarters and his food, while he was incarcerated. When he received that, he says, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly."

But you know, it wasn't only in good circumstances that Paul rejoiced like this. Don't be confused. Don't think that that was the source of his joy. In fact, he suffered incredibly difficult circumstances. Even as he writes this letter, for two years Paul was chained day and night, he's reaching the end of that period by the time he writes this letter, for two years he has been chained day and night to a Roman soldier. And to add insult to injury, the Roman government wasn't even paying his way, he had to raise the money, this was typical in ancient Rome, he had to raise money to support himself while he was chained. He had to pay for his food and he had to pay for the room in which he was confined.

And if that wasn't bad enough, there were Christians in Rome with evil motives who were attacking Paul and trying to make his situation in prison even worse. Look back at Philippians 1. You remember, we studied this in detail. What's Paul's response to all of that, to the worst of

circumstances? He says, so what? Or, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.” Paul’s rejoicing in God wasn’t connected to his circumstances. Chapter 2 verse 17, he talks about his suffering this way, he says, “But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith.” Again, you remember when we studied this, in the Old Testament when they made a sacrifice, they would often cap that sacrifice by pouring out a drink or a fluid on top of that sacrifice as sort of the completion of the sacrifice. And Paul is saying, listen, if my suffering is sort of the final complement to your service to Christ, then that’s okay. What’s his response? He says in verse 17, “I rejoice and share my joy with you all.”

In Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4:6, Paul uses this same image of a drink offering to refer to his life about to be poured out, his execution. He says, listen, not only is my suffering okay and I rejoice in that if it is to your benefit, but even if my life is poured out, I still rejoice. If my head is taken from my shoulders, I rejoice. When his suffering reaches the maximum in death he still rejoices. How could Paul rejoice in all of those different circumstances? Listen carefully, here’s the reason, it’s because his joy was not found in anything that happened to him or around him. His joy was in his God, “I rejoice in the Lord greatly.”

When you and I crave or covet what we don’t have, what are we really doing? We’re looking for our joy someplace other than God. That’s why, you remember, as we saw last week, coveting is called idolatry. Because when you crave or covet something it’s as if you’re putting that in the very place that God deserves in your life.

You’ve probably heard the name Augustan. Perhaps you’ve even read his *Confessions*. Not only are they deeply spiritually moving, but they’re a classic in Western literature. Augustan was one of the early church fathers. He was the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa in the late 300’s and the early 400’s. What you may not know about Augustan, however, was that before his conversion Augustan was absolutely enslaved to sexual lust. At the age of 17 his father sent him to Carthage to study rhetoric. Before he left, his mother who had already come to know a little bit of his character, warned him in these words, “not to commit fornication and, above all, not to seduce any man’s wife.”

So Augustan goes to Carthage and what happens there? He writes, “I went to Carthage where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust,” which he goes on to describe. He says, “My real need was for You my God, who are the food of the soul, but I was not aware of this hunger.” For years to come, as he studied rhetoric and eventually ended up being an instructor, he was a brilliant mind and he was absolutely swollen with conceit and given over to the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Of that period of time he wrote in his confessions, “During all those years of rebellion, where was my free will? What was the hidden secret place from which it was summoned in a moment so that I might bend my neck to your easy yoke?” Remember the confessions are all a prayer to God, 300 plus pages of a prayer to God. But listen to how he

describes his conversion, listen to how the Lord changed him. He said, “How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose.” He’s referring to his absolutely insatiable appetite for sexual pleasure. He says, “How sweet it was, all at once, to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose.” How? How could that happen? Listen to what Augustan says, “You drove them from me. You who are the true, the sovereign joy, You drove them from me and took their place.”

You see what Augustan’s saying? He’s saying, my whole life I was looking to satisfy the hunger and appetite of my soul through sexual pleasure and then You brought me to understand, to realize, that my heart could only be satisfied in You. You became my joy. You replaced those fruitless joys with Yourself. Augustan found deliverance from the slavery of craving and coveting, in his case sexual sin, by finding his joy in God. Listen, do you want to stop craving and coveting whatever it is, whether it’s sex or stuff or whatever it is that consumes your heart? Then like Augustan, you must find your joy in God.

The same has been true throughout the history of God’s people. In fact, let me show you a biblical example. Turn to Psalm 73. Psalm 73, Asaph opens his heart and allows us to see inside with disturbing honesty really. Verse 1 he says,

Surely God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart!
But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,
My steps had almost slipped. [*How?*]
For I was envious of the arrogant
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

And then he goes on to recount all that he saw in these people, the earthly wealthy, the wicked people who control things in his society, just as they control them in ours. And as he saw all the prosperity, as he saw what they enjoyed, he wanted it, he craved it, he coveted it, he envied it.

So how did he overcome this near devastating fall? Well, one of the ways is found down in verse 17, “When I came into the sanctuary of God; I perceived their end.” One of them is to realize that that prosperity isn’t going to continue. A day of reckoning is coming when God will set all things right. But there’s another reason here I think that’s more compelling, another point of satisfaction that allowed Asaph to overcome his craving and envying of the prosperity of the wicked. Notice verse 21,

When my heart was embittered
And I was pierced within,
I was senseless and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You.
Nevertheless I am continually with You, God;

You have taken hold of my right hand
With your counsel You will guide me,
And afterward receive me to glory.
Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and [*He is my inheritance, or*] my portion
forever.

In other words, God you are all I want. Verse 28, “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I might tell of all Your works.” Asaph found just what Augustan found, that he could overcome his craving and his coveting by finding his ultimate joy in the person of God.

What we see illustrated in the life of Augustan, in the life of Asaph, is taught explicitly in a number of New Testament texts, but I want to turn to just one as an example. Turn to Hebrews 13, Hebrews 13:5. The writer of Hebrews says, “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have.” Now, why is it that most people love money? Well, there are a number of reasons obviously, but I think the two most common are they want to be wealthy, they want what comes with it, and they want security. Notice what the writer of Hebrews says, “be content with what you have; for God Himself has said, ‘I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU.’” You want wealth? Here it is, have God. You want security? Notice verse 6, “so that we may confidently say, ‘THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. FOR WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?’” Find your wealth and your security not in your money, not in your stuff, but in God.

Now let me ask just the very practical question, how can you and I really begin to find our ultimate joy in God? If we’re honest with ourselves, many of us don’t, we don’t really find our ultimate joy and satisfaction in God. How can we begin to do that? Well, let me just give you a couple of practical ideas. First of all, start investing in heaven’s currency, start investing in heaven’s currency. I’m going to be going to Russia in February to be teaching an expository preaching institute for a large group of Russian pastors and I’m so much looking forward to doing that. But as I was getting prepared I was getting my passport renewed and I was just sort of flipping through my passport and was reminded of God’s goodness to me in allowing me to travel so much over the past 10 years, been in so many different countries of the world because of my connection with Grace to You and the international ministries there.

When you travel internationally, those of you who’ve done that, you understand that when you go to a different country you immediately have to find a way to exchange your U.S. currency for the local currency wherever you’re going to be. And the trick is to spend most of that, if not all of that, before you get on the plane, because once you get back in the States, first of all, the

exchange rate is awful and secondly, it's worthless. So, you want to spend essentially all of it before you get on the plane and usually when I come home, I come home with just a few coins or maybe a few small bills for my family to enjoy, my kids to enjoy. Why? Because once I return here that currency is all worthless. I mean, after all, have you ever tried to use Russian rubles at Albertson's? They don't want it; it's worthless.

In the same way, you and I live in this world, but the Scripture says we're really just visiting here. And as we visit here we are forced to use the currency of this world, money, stuff, the things that matter here. But the Bible says that you and I are really citizens of heaven. When we leave this world, nothing we have accumulated here will have any value in heaven. So start investing in the currency of heaven. Start investing in the things that have value there.

What is the currency of heaven? Well, turn to 1 Timothy 6. Paul tells us. In verses 3 through 5 of 1 Timothy 6, Paul's talking about false teachers and he concludes that section by talking about, at the end of verse 5, that false teachers, by their very nature, are in ministry for the money. They "suppose," verse 5, "that godliness is a means of," economic, financial, "gain." Paul takes that in verse 6 and sort of turns it on its head and he says this, "But godliness really is a means of great gain." In other words, it's got true lasting value, not only in this life, but in the life to come. You want to know what the currency of heaven is? It's godliness, it's Christ-likeness. What's remarkable, Paul says that godliness is even more valuable when it's "accompanied by contentment." Why? Verse 7, because "we brought nothing into this world, so we can't take anything out of it either."

Many of you have attended the births of your children. You've noticed, they haven't come in with a single thing. And guess what? You're not going out with anything either. When I was in seminary I worked in a funeral home and I never saw a single person take a single dime with him. Perhaps you've heard of the wealthy Russian businessman who demanded in his will that he be buried in his Cadillac. So they dug a huge hole and as the two guys there who were facilitating all of this, the two cemetery workers, were watching, a small crane lowered this Cadillac down into this huge hole with the dead man sitting at the wheel, and one of the cemetery workers said to the other, he said, "Man that's really living." Obviously it's not. It doesn't matter. You can't take it with you.

Notice verse 8. He says, "Therefore, if you have food and covering, with these you shall be content," "with these we shall be content." If you've got food and clothing here, be content. That doesn't mean you can't have other stuff. We all we live in the wealthiest country in the world. We all have a lot of stuff. It's okay to have stuff. Just don't want it. Don't crave it. Don't seek it out. Sheila and I are spoiled here in Texas, having come from California, but we constantly remind ourselves in the Lord, Lord, let us enjoy what You provided, but don't let us ever set our hearts on these things. Help us to be willing to walk away and go to Indonesia and minister in poverty, if that's what You want. Help us to be content with food and covering.

That's what Christ said in Matthew 6:33, "'seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things,'" that you need, "'will be added to you.'" It's a matter of priority.

There's another way to find our joy in God rather than things. Not only use, start using heaven's currency, but secondly, meditate on the surpassing value of Jesus Christ above everything else. Meditate on the surpassing value of Jesus Christ above everything else. You see, Christ is our mediator, if you're really going to learn to find your ultimate joy in God, it means finding your ultimate joy in Jesus Christ. Paul did. Turn back to Philippians 3. You remember what he said in verse 8. He says, "whatever was gain to me," whatever was in my asset column, he says, "I count everything else to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things." Probably lost a lot of things, his reputation certainly, but probably even his inheritance, when he came to embrace Jesus Christ. He said, I've suffered the loss of it all and, you know what? It doesn't matter. "I count all those things I lost," and he uses a strong Greek word, "as excrement, that I may be in Christ."

You want to learn to let go of coveting and craving earthly things? Then think about the value of Jesus Christ. That's how Moses did it. You remember? We looked several weeks ago at Moses in Hebrews 11:26, where there the writer of Hebrews says that Moses "considered the reproach of the Messiah greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt." In other words, Moses thought about it. He meditated on the value of the Messiah. And when he weighed out the value of the Messiah to all the wealth that he could have had in Egypt, he realized that Christ was worth more than it all.

Have you come to a point in your own life when you've really come to that place where nothing comes close to measuring up to Jesus Christ? And if you had to make a decision today, to have Christ or to have everything else, and you could only have one, you could have everything imaginable or you could have Christ, are you willing to walk away from everything and have Christ? If you'll contemplate and meditate on the surpassing value of Jesus Christ, then you can arrive at a place where the stuff doesn't matter anymore. And if that's not where you find yourself today, then get alone with God and be honest with Him. Say God, the truth is, I like the stuff more. Give me a heart that's willing to let it all go. Help me to learn with Paul to consider Christ more valuable.

Russell Conwell was the founder of Temple University up in Pennsylvania. He often related this story that was told to him when he was on a trip to the Middle East, over to ancient Persia, back in 1870. *Al Hafed* was the name of an ancient Persian. *Al Hafed* owned a very large farm with orchards and grain fields and gardens. He lent out money at interest. He was a very wealthy and contented man. Until one day a Buddhist priest came to the home of *Al Hafed* and told him for the first time about diamonds. And he explained to him how wealthy he would be if he owned

just one diamond mine. As the locals recounted, *Al Hafed* went to bed that night a poor man, not because he had lost anything, but because he was discontented.

Craving diamonds, the diamonds he had learned about, *Al Hafed* decided to sell his farm. He left his family with a neighboring farmer and he went on search of a diamond mine, intending to take all the proceeds of his wealth and pour it into a single mine. Out of which he expected to extract great wealth. He searched the entire world. He traveled all over the Middle East and Europe. And when at last his money was all spent and he was in rags and poverty, he found himself standing on the beach at Barcelona. And as the story is told, he decided to throw himself in, to drown himself as a result of his fruitless search.

The story doesn't end there, however, because the man who purchased *Al Hafed's* farm, one day led his camel to the brook that ran through the property to drink. And as the camel was drinking, he looked down and saw a curious flash of light from the white sands of the stream. He reached in and pulled out a stone that when he held it up, reflected all of the hues and colors of the rainbow.

What that man had found was the famous diamond mine of Golconda, one of the most famous diamond mines in all of history. In fact, from it came the Koh-i-Noor, that huge diamond, all of the gems that are in the Russian and English royal jewels. Most of the most magnificent diamonds in history, the largest diamonds on Earth, came from that mine at Golconda, which were, all the time – acres of diamonds – buried on *Al Hafed's* property, which he sold to go in search of the diamond mine he never found.

You know, we shake our heads when we hear that story, but tragically, many of us do the same thing. We spend our lives on a fruitless search for baubles, for trinkets, when all the time there is within our reach, the universe's greatest treasure, the universe's biggest diamond. Paul says, "in Him we live and move and have our being." It's none other than God Himself.

Where do you find your ultimate joy? If it's anything in this life, let me tell you, you are destined for disappointment and a life of discontent – because everything here is all smoke and mirrors. It's as C.S. Lewis says, "These are just stage props. And someday the director of the play will call an end and demand from each an accounting for his performance." Learn to value your relationship with God more than anything else. In the person of Jesus Christ, find your ultimate joy in God. Well, there are three other attitudes that build contentment and we'll look at those next week. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your word. Thank You for the way it convicts us. Lord, there isn't a single one of us here this morning who, if we're honest before You, doesn't struggle with this sin of discontent. Lord, help us to end the slavery to our own cravings by finding our ultimate joy in You. Forgive us, Father, for chasing baubles and trinkets instead of prizing You, the great treasure.

Father, I pray for anyone here this morning who lives enslaved to various cravings; they've never come to know freedom in Jesus Christ. I pray this morning that You would hold up the precious diamond of Jesus Christ, the treasure, the great pearl of all price, above all value, and Lord that they would come to know Him by repenting of their sins and embracing Him, being willing as Paul was, to give up everything else to get Christ, if that's what it requires. I pray that today would be the day, in Jesus' name, amen.