

### *Thanksgiving Contentment*

John Robert Fowles, the English author said, "Content is a word unknown to life; it is also a word unknown to man." That's pretty depressing, isn't it?

Thomas C. Haliburton, also an English author wrote, "Contentment is, after all, simply refined indolence." I don't know whether he said that tongue-in cheek but real contentment has nothing to do with laziness.

Benjamin Franklin wisely said, "Content makes poor men rich; discontentment makes rich men poor."

Contentment is really what all seek after. We want to be satisfied. But what's the source of real contentment?

We just celebrated Thanksgiving. To me it's significant that as a nation we still see the need for thankfulness. But where does real thankfulness and contentment come from?

If you've been doing life for a few years you probably have realized that lasting contentment doesn't come from the stuff we accumulate. We get temporary pleasure from stuff, but owning things can never ultimately satisfy our soul.

Where does real, inward, genuine contentment come from? Can you honestly say you're satisfied in life? Are you really at peace, or is something missing? Can you say, "I'm content. I'm fulfilled," or do you have to admit there's a serious void in your life, an emptiness you just can't seem to put your finger on?

You know, when a pastor gets up to preach, there's really nothing new for him to say from the pulpit. The Bible has basic truth and the fundamental job of a pastor is to think of as many ways as possible to present that truth.

The Bible contains various doctrines and teachings but as the pastor tries to teach those doctrines his end result or goal is always the same.

First, he wants people to understand God's good news of salvation and second, he tries to challenge those who believe the good news to live out their faith in every day life.

Accomplishing point 1 isn't always easy. There's a lot of spiritual confusion that needs to be overcome for people to truly believe. You'd think that the second point would be the easy one. You'd think people who have received Christ as savior would be chomping at the bit to serve their savior.

Unfortunately point 2 can be just as hard to achieve. Amazingly, sometimes it's easier for people to see their need of a savior than it is for them to see the wisdom of living for the savior after they trust Him.

Seeing the need of salvation starts by comparing our lives to the Bible. If you ask the average guy on the street how we get to heaven, his answer will involve doing something. The essential truth that people need to know is, there's nothing any of us can do to get to God.

He's the Holy One, not "the kind of good one." He's a God of perfection, not just of goodness, and so He demands that same perfection from us. Obviously none of us are perfect, which would be a real dilemma, if Jesus hadn't died to take our sin and rose to impute to us His righteousness.

But Jesus, the Son of God, did die in our place. He was our substitute and our sin bearer.

The Bible says, *But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."* Romans 4:5-8

According to the Bible there's only one thing that we can do to be forgiven by God and that's to *believe on Him who justifies the ungodly.*

When we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our sin bearer and savior there's a real sense of peace and contentment that comes over us. The Bible promises, *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Romans 5:1

If you're feeling like something's not right in your life it could be that you don't have peace with God. If you've never trusted Jesus Christ as savior you aren't at peace with your creator. There's no way that you can begin to have real contentment in this life

until you are right with God and know that your sins are forgiven.

That's step one. That's the first part of the pastor's challenge. Part two is the challenge of really living for God. This one's not as obvious as it seems.

The Bible says, *As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.* I Thessalonians 2:11-12

The Bible says to us who have trusted Jesus Christ as savior to have a life that matches up to our calling. We represent God's kingdom and God's glory.

Why is this one often the hardest point for believers to understand? Besides the fact that we still have our old sin nature, there's another problem. It's easier to trust God with your soul because unless your dying of some incurable disease most of us don't look at death as an actual reality.

We plan out our lives. Death is something that's far off in the future. It's something that happens to other people. We have plenty of time left.

The truth is we're all dieing. Some just have a better idea of when than others, but we're all dieing.

But what about here and now. November 29, 2009 in Gambrills, Maryland? Is the same God who's able to save your soul take care of you right now? Can God meet the deepest needs of your life? Is contentment actually possible?

To put that question another way, does the same God who obviously knew what He was doing 2000 years ago when He sent His Son to die a horrible death on a cross to buy your forgiveness know what He's doing when He asks you to live for Him?

God says, "Put your faith in Jesus and you'll go to heaven," and we accept that as true. God says, "Live for Me right now and I'll make your life fuller and more meaningful than you could ever imagine," and we balk at that.

We wouldn't say it out loud, but we say by our actions, "Wait a minute God, you don't know what you're talking about. There's no way I could ever live the way You tell me to in the Bible and still be content. I mean, I can handle some of it, but not everything You say."

Does God really know what He's talking about when He says "Obey me fully and

you'll be fully blessed?"

*I. Living For God Can Sometimes Rob Us Of Earthly Avenues Of Contentment*

**Open Bible to I Kings chapter 16 Page 321**

In the book of I Kings we meet up with one of the most fascinating characters in the Bible. His name is Elijah. Elijah, whose name means "Jehovah is my God," knew what it meant to stand up for God when no one else did.

Some of you are in situations at work or at school or in your family where being a God follower isn't very popular.

In fact, some of you are in places where there's a real hostility against God. You'll be able to identify with Elijah and hopefully learn from his example.

Many of us have had this experience. We're with friends, maybe neighbors or someone at work or school that we've gotten to know pretty well and we think to ourselves, "I know I should try to share my faith, but if I do I might lose them as a friend. They might think I'm pushy or strange."

And we just never seem to get around to bringing up the subject of our faith in God.

You know what we're really saying when we let that happen? We're saying, "If I talk to my friend I might lose my friend. If I lose my friend I won't be happy. I'll be discontent."

What we're really saying is, "I can't be content with God's way of living. I can't be happy doing life God's way. I can only get what I think I need if I do life my way."

Elijah was in a situation where he was under a lot of pressure. He had to make a choice.

**Read chapter 16:29-31**

You know, with Facebook and Twitter and these social networking sites, we have to be careful. What we post online may come back to haunt us. Once it's out there it's almost impossible to get back.

I'm reading this thinking this is even worse than that. Ahab was worse than everyone

who came before him. That's in the Bible. Talk about public exposure. You can't hide that information.

Ahab married a woman whose name became much better known than his. Her name was Jezebel.

**According to verse 32, Ahab set up... Read 32 - 33**

Ahab completely devoted himself to the pagan Canaanite gods and turned his back on the true and living God. His wife was a Phoenician, the daughter of the king of Tyre and Sidon.

She brought in the worship of the Canaanite goddess Astarte or Ashtoreth, sometimes referred to as Ishtar. Astarte was the goddess of sensuality, fertility, and maternity. In idol form she was usually presented as naked. Worship involved sacred prostitution by priests and priestesses.

You can see why Astarte became so popular. She was the party goddess. Jehovah, the holy God, was the party pooper.

Under their reign, the royal court supported 450 prophets of Baal, 400 prophetesses of Astarte and killed most of Jehovah's prophets. Needless to say God was really not happy with these 2.

Now look what happens. **Read 17:1**

Sometimes God chooses to give us some background on His Old Testament prophets but not on this one. Elijah just kind of shows up here in chapter 17 with no real introduction. We're not told anything about his family or his place of birth.

What's obvious is, Elijah was a man that was specially chosen by God to confront Ahab. So in he comes into Ahab's court and proclaims the vengeance of Jehovah God for the apostasy of the king. No rain in the kingdom for 3 years.

I would assume from the way God issued warnings to others that this was the culmination of a long series of warnings about Ahab's ungodly leadership.

Now stop and think for a moment what Elijah has just done. Try to put yourself in his place. He's just walked up to the king to chastise him.

This wasn't some elected official. This was the king of Israel. This was a king who had

done more evil than all who came before him and a king who held the power of life and death in his hands.

That's a good way to loose your head. If you stand up for God and share your faith you might loose a friend or 2. That happens sometimes. But the thing about loosing a friend is you can always find another one. Obviously that doesn't hold true for your head.

Well God had more instructions for Elijah. **Read verses 2-6**

Again, try to put yourself in Elijah's place. First God commands him to risk his neck by announcing to the king that God was angry at him and now He tells him to go hide by a brook and ravens will feed him.

That wasn't Ray Lewis and Todd Heap, that was birds.

To put myself through seminary I worked as a checker at Giant. You know in 4 years I had plenty of people come through my line buying birdseed but it was never the other way around. I never had a bird picking up a few items for a person. That's abnormal. That doesn't make sense. That's just not the way things happen, right?

I thought if you lived for God He blessed your life. Now He's saying "Here, Elijah, serve Me and you'll end up homeless living under a bridge."

*I. Living For God Can Sometimes Rob Us Of Earthly Avenues Of Contentment*

*II. God Wants Us To Trust Him To Meet Our Needs His Way*

Think about it. Here's Elijah risking his very life being obedient to God's commands and what does God do? God says, "I'll take care of you in a way you'd never think of. I'll take care of you in a totally unusual way."

So God provided for Elijah's physical needs in a way that had never happened before and hasn't happened since.

Here's a man whose name means "Jehovah is my God," living in accordance with his name.

While everyone else, including the king, was standing up for Baal and Ashera, Elijah was standing up for God. He said, "Jehovah's my God no matter what it costs me."

How about you this morning? I've already tried to think through this one and ask myself, "What would I have done?" What if God said to you, "Go crash a Whitehouse event like that couple who got into the reception for the Prime Minister of India a couple of days ago?"

What would you have done if God said, "Your assignment is to go to Barack Obama and tell him he's evil and he's in trouble with God."

Elijah probably had to run down to that brook and hide out because there was a bounty on his head. You don't mess with the king. You tell him good things. You tell him things he wants to hear. You don't tell him how bad he is.

I'm sure that if Ahab could have caught up with Elijah at that moment he'd of strung him up by the thumbs.

God told Elijah, *Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.*

"Go hide out and I'll have your meals delivered by airmail. Bird express."

What would you have done if God had said that to you? "You just do what I tell you then go where I tell you and I'll have birds bring you your supper."

How would you have reacted? Would you have said, "Oh sure Lord. I'll get right on that. Lets see, I'll tell the king just what he's dieing to hear (how rotten he is) and then I'll hide out and wait for birds to fly in my supper. Right."

Would you say, "When do you want me to leave?" Or would you say, "I don't think so. I don't think you're going to meet my needs."

Would you pull the Spock thing and say, "The whole thing is illogical. It doesn't make any sense to me so I'm not going to do it."

Now see, it's easy to sit there in your comfortable chair in this warm, dry environment and say, "If God spoke I'd listen. I wouldn't hesitate for a minute." Really?

God has spoken to you, hasn't He? On 47 different times the Bible itself uses the phrase "the word of God." In Luke 4 when Jesus was tempted by Satan He said, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*

Jesus was tempted 3 times and each time He quoted from the Bible. The word of God.

God has spoken to us through His word. How about, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.* (Acts 16:31) The word *believe* is in the imperative mood in the original. It's a command, not an option.

Have you obeyed the gospel by trusting Christ alone for forgiveness and eternal life? Here's one for those who do believe. *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.* (Mark 16:15) Are you actively involved in getting God's message out to the world?

How about, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* (Romans 12:1) Does God really have all of you?

*Be holy, for I am holy.* (I Peter 1:16) *Live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.* (Titus 2:12) *Forgive one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.* (Ephesians 4:32) We could go on and on, couldn't we?

What are you going to do? God has clearly spoken to you now how are you going to react to what He's said?

Are you going to say, "Whatever you say, Lord." Or is it more like, "All the world, living sacrifice, be holy, forgive? That's a little over the top Lord. I can do those a little bit, but I have my limits. After all I want to be happy and I sure won't be happy going overboard with this obedience deal."

"God You can't provide satisfaction and contentment in my life. I have to find it my own way and my way is different from Your way."

Listen, God has not only told you how He wants you to live but He's promised to meet your deepest needs if you do.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are those who mourn, Blessed are the meek, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Blessed are the merciful, Blessed are the pure in heart, Blessed are the peacemakers, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.* (Matthew 5:3-10)

The word translated as "blessed" is *makarios* in Greek, and it literally means "happy."

God tells us there's a way to happiness that's completely foreign to our way of

thinking. It seems illogical. It doesn't make sense. It's kind of like *I have commanded the ravens to feed you.*

God has already spoken to each one of us today. The question is, what do we say back to God?

I believe if God forced us to say it out loud it wouldn't be so easy to choose our way instead of God's way.

So let me play the Holy Spirit for a minute this morning. Can I do that? Is the allowed? Should I have you raise your hand in front of God and everybody in this room so we all know what your answer to God is?

God's already spoken. Is your answer, "OK God, I believe you. I want to serve you as a Christian to the best of my ability by the power of Your Spirit regardless of what my friends, coworkers, family, classmates, neighbors might think, say, or do." Or is it, "Sorry God, that's not my way of doing things. I couldn't really be content. I couldn't really be happy doing life Your way."

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*II. God Wants Us To Trust Him To Meet Our Needs His Way*

*III. The Greatest Joy In Life Comes From Living In Obedience To God*

We don't have time this morning to read through all the rest of the chapter so let me give you the highlights.

The drought became severe in Israel. There was a crippling famine in the land. God commanded Elijah to leave his hideout and head to the Sidonian village of Zarephath.

God said, Elijah, "When you get there don't worry about how your going to survive because I've arranged for you to meet a widow woman there and she'll take care of you."

Well, that makes a little more sense than the bird deal so Elijah takes off for Zarephath. When he gets there he finds the woman and asks for some bread.

She said, "Bread? All I have is a handful of meal and a little oil. I'm about to make my last meal for my son and I and that's it. We're going to die."

Elijah's thinking here we go again but he didn't say, "God this must be the wrong

woman.”

This is what happened. Her flour container never ran out. Her little cruse of oil never ran dry. God used another totally unlikely scenario to meet Elijah’s needs.

Then the woman’s son died. Look what happened. **Read verses 20-24**

God used all these ways to provide for Elijah. Why? Because Elijah was a man of God and the word of the Lord was in his mouth.

How about you? Are you a man of God, a woman of God, a boy of God, a girl of God in the realms of life where God’s placed you?

Or do you say by your actions, “God either doesn’t know what He’s talking about or He’s trying to trick me because there’s no way I could ever be happy living for Him.”

Where are your priorities this morning?

Jesus said, *If you know these things, blessed are you (happy are you) if you do them.* John 13:7