

## In Christ Alone, Godliness and Contentment Go Well Together!

A sermon based on 1 Timothy 6:6-12

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Something's just go together. Peanut Butter and...? Jelly. Peas and...? Carrots. Hansel and...? Gretel. Bacon and...? Everything! :) Godliness and..? Contentment. Some things just go together.

Godliness and contentment go together. In fact, you really can't have one without the other. Contentment can only last so long without Jesus. The fear of death will eventually nag. And when you have godliness, you are content. You don't need worldly wealth. You have the one you have the other. They just go together.

But sadly, we're not often very content with the blessings God's given to us. We always seem to want more--bigger, better, newer, faster. And that malcontent is really a complaint against God that he hasn't given us enough. We sin against him by complaining and we aren't very godly.

But we rejoice that God sent Jesus to pay for our sinful whining and, in doing so, making us godly. And this godliness he's given us makes us content even if we have nothing else. We know what Jesus has done for us to rescue us from this place. And so, in Christ alone, godliness and contentment really do go together...and go well together!

A wealthy businessman found a fisherman sitting lazily next to his boat. "Why aren't you fishing?!" he demanded. "I've caught enough fish for today," he replied. "Why don't you go catch more?" he asked. "What would I do with more fish?" the fisherman replied. "Well, you could sell them, earn more money, and eventually buy a bigger boat, hire a crew and make even more money still. If you'd work a little harder, you could become rich!" "Then what would I do?" the fisherman asked. "Then you could relax and enjoy life," the business replied, as if it were a stupid question. But the fisherman answered, "What do think I'm doing *right now*?"

The truth is, not many of us have the same contentment that that fisherman had. We wish we had more money, more stuff, *nicer* stuff? And even if we're happy with our current job and salary, we still find some things missing in our life. Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's purpose. Maybe it's something you can't quite put your finger on. But because of our sinful nature, we all have trouble being content.

But the problem is, getting whatever it is we want, won't bring the fulfillment we think it might. Someone once asked J.D. Rockefeller, the richest man in America at the time, when he would have enough. He replied, "Never. I'm always in pursuit of the next dollar." But Alexander the Great, the richest man in the *world* at the time, ordered that at his death his hands should be exposed to public view to show that he couldn't take a single penny of his great wealth with him. **"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it."** Ultimately, the pursuit of money and nice things, is kind of like drinking saltwater. It only makes you thirstier for more until, ironically, you die of dehydration from drinking too much in.

But even worse than not providing the satisfaction it promises, the love of money and the things it can buy, the malcontent with the blessings God's given to us, the jealousy of others when we look at what

they have and we don't are all rebellion against the gracious God who gave us so much. And it results in spiritual dehydration and ultimately spiritual death.

Raise your hand if you have clothes on your back right now. Keep them up if you have any food in your refrigerator. Keep them up if you have a roof over your head and a place to sleep tonight. If you have your hand up, you are better off than 75% of the world's population. Now raise your hand if you have any money in the bank or in your wallet (any at all). Keep your hand up if you have spare change laying around somewhere (in your car? In a dish at home? In a couch cushion?). If you still have your hand up, you're in the top 15% of the world's wealthiest people.

Now, how have you used that wealth? If you gave me a hundred dollars to purchase supplies for our outreach activity, our Christmas for Families, and you watched me take your money to the bar and spend it all there, would you entrust me with more cash tomorrow? Well, God has entrusted us with the wealth he's given us to use it to his glory, to serve others. But don't we often use it selfishly, not caring all that much about others... not caring all that much about the God who gave it? Why should he entrust us with more?

Us, content? Rarely. Us faithful? Barely. Us godly? Hardly.

The thirsty pigeon spotted a big bowl of water on the side of a billboard. Not realizing it was only a picture, he flew toward that water as fast as he could. And you can guess what happened. He slammed into the billboard, broke his neck, and that was the end of the pigeon. He was deceived and killed. Well, Satan and the world like to deceive us. They promise to satisfy our every craving. But in the end it leads to death.

***"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."***

We should be content, but we're not. Thank goodness, then, that someone else was not content in the most wonderful way. Jesus was not content to watch us throw it all away chasing after the cheap trinkets of this life. He wasn't content with us trying to find our value in how much more we can get. He wasn't content to sit by watching as we worshipped the green paper god. He wasn't content to lose us. And in love, he had to act.

So, to save us who *crave* everything, he *gave up* everything. Born in a barn, not in a hospital, he lived in a simple house, not one with 800 square feet per person. During his ministry he slept on the ground, not a sleep number. He ate only what others gave him and it would seem that he never tasted bacon. He didn't even have indoor plumbing. And through it all he was perfectly content all the time. In every way Jesus humbled himself to rescue you and me.

And you know how he humbled himself the most. ***"He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"*** (Philippians 2:8) And you know why he did it. ***"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."*** (2 Corinthians 8:9) Now you and I have forgiveness. You and I have Jesus. You and I are godly, not with a godliness of our own, but with the godliness of Jesus, given to

us by God. You and I have heaven. You and I are truly wealthy. And it is these spiritual blessings that make us content...

The apostle Paul once wrote, ***"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."*** (Philippians 4:11-12)

So what *is* the secret of being content? Well, in the words of country music singer, George Strait, we know that ***"You don't bring nothing with you here and you can't take nothing back. I ain't never seen a hearse with a luggage rack"*** (from *You'll Be There*). But even more than that, we know what God has done to make us godly. And just as you have heat wherever you have fire, so too, you have contentment wherever you have a Christian. Made godly by Jesus, we are made content by him too. And we love God for making us godly. We love him because he first loved us. We love him more than the money he's given. And we long to use the money he's given us to his glory.

So what does that look like? Well, once we find contentment in Jesus and in what he's given us and promised us, we stop buying things we don't need, that promise happiness but never really deliver. We stop spending money that we don't have and ditch the debt. Then we save our resources that we might give generously and use the dollars entrusted to us to serve God, to share the Gospel, to bring him glory.

By the way, this text is in the lectionary for this Sunday. I didn't choose it because you'll be getting your PFD's soon. It was already chosen for this 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost long before Alaska was ever a state or any oil was drilled. Is it a coincidence that we happen to have this text this Sunday? Or is it God's perfect timing? I'll leave it to you to decide.

Will finding contentment in what we have and using our resources to God's glory be easy? No. Satan, the world around us, and our own sinful natures will pester and harass us to the end. That's why Dave Ramsey would urge us to get "gazelle intense," that is, to run from temptation, to run from debt, to run from bad decisions, like a gazelle getting chased by a lion runs. Now that's intense!

That's pretty much what Paul tells Timothy here: ***"flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called..."***

It won't be easy to keep our focus on the cross when we start getting all those ads of all the things we could have. It won't be easy to keep our focus on the empty tomb when the PFD checks come in, tempting us to buy new toys or to finally have the money to pay off those mounting bills. It won't be easy to keep our focus on heaven when the money is spent and gone. But we're not in this alone.

When Paul urged Timothy, ***"to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,"*** he added an encouragement. The NIV translates it, ***"which God will bring about in his own time."*** And while that translation seems to suggest that God would bring about ***"the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ in his own time,"*** it could be referring to Paul's encouragement ***"to keep this command,"*** that is, to ***"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called..."*** Thus, a different version, the Holman Christian Standard Bible makes it a new sentence: ***"God will bring this about in His own time."*** In other words, "God will keep you faithful as you fight the good

fight of faith until you take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." ***"God will bring this about in His own time."***

"How much did he leave behind?" a man asked the friend to a wealthy businessman who had just died. "Hmm..." He thought and wisely replied, "***All*** of it." My dad even once had a shirt that said, "He who dies with the most toys...still dies." Soon enough this life will be over. And money and the stuff it can buy won't matter when we take hold of the eternal life to which we were called. In the meantime, let's use our money wisely, faithfully, generously, serving Jesus, serving others. And as we rejoice that God has made us godly through Jesus, he will make us content and eager to do so. In the name of "***our Lord Jesus Christ... the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light... To him be honor and might forever. Amen.***"