

Do we have enough: hope, finances, faith, things, health, compassion, love? Do we have enough to take hold of life that is really life? Last week our scripture told us that God provides enough of everything we need, even enough that we can share. The word for enough is translated contentment in our scripture today.

Contentment by itself can be elusive. On one extreme we try hard to gain contentment by working non-stop or doing whatever it takes to get what we think is enough. It is like eating a meal. Even if you gorge yourself, in a day you are hungry again. Contentment rarely lasts. On the other extreme we try to gain contentment by ignoring difficulty or doing nothing (cutting off our interaction with any who would reveal the lie to our contentment.)

In Church we may be content and never address why someone else would never think of coming to the church. "Church is fine for me." In Church we may never be content because we can never do enough or have enough money to get people to come. There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment. In the context of godliness, the church as it serves and strives to be faithful to God, is content that God will bring fruit. Godly contentment is not derived from apathy or overwork. It is recognition of God being in control of our lives. It is our following Jesus Christ.

Contentment on its own is self-indulgence, but in the context of godliness it is trust in God. The difference is like that between being upset that something bad has happened and pretending that everything is okay and being at peace though something bad has happened and we are sad. In Jesus Christ we have enough to be the person, to be the church God has called us to be and to take part in his mission no matter our circumstances.

Our society doesn't believe Jesus Christ is enough. If pressed we would probably say or our actions would say that having more money will help us have less worries. More money will bring personal fulfillment by giving us the opportunity to do whatever we want. If we had enough money we will have everything we need for a full life. Godly contentment is what truly brings no worries, personal fulfillment by doing what God wants, understanding that we have everything we need to live for God.

The story is told of a rich industrialist who was disturbed to find a fisherman sitting lazily beside his boat. "Why aren't you out there fishing?" he asked. "Because I've caught enough fish for today," said the fisherman. "Why don't you catch more fish than you need?" the rich man asked. "What would I do with them?" "You could earn more money," came the impatient reply, "and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch

even more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and be rich like me." The fisherman asked, "Then what would I do?" "You could sit down and enjoy life," said the industrialist. "What do you think I'm doing now?" the fisherman replied as he looked placidly out to sea.<sup>i</sup>

We look for money to bring us life, to bring us all that we want. Desiring wealth is foolishness. Our desires define our actions, they drive what we do. (I didn't spend money this week for a flu shot because money was more important than possible illness.) The wrong desires plunge people into ruin and destruction says the Bible. The doubling up of the words ruin and destruction communicate a sense of irretrievable loss and eternal condemnation. There is lasting negative spiritual impact, a loss of life when we pursue money, when we pursue contentment apart from God.

Desiring wealth leads away from faith and brings pain. An example of evil that come from loving money is selfishness leading to loneliness. Think about Ebenezer Scrooge in a Christmas Carol. Also loving money minimizes the value of people leading to oppression or worse. In Sudan the desire for money from oil is one of the factors that sustained civil war and still has affects on tribal fighting and people dying today.

A church or individual that is controlled by lack of money or because they have money loses sight of other people and the ministry God is doing and calls them to be a part of. It is easy for our focus to be on doing whatever it takes to get and keep money, rather than on believing that God wants to use us and our money to show his love to the world. Real living is not just gaining what is temporary for ourselves. (A life of contentment or a life of riches with out Jesus Christ, is that a life worth living?)

Our challenge is to "fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called." Jesus shows us where to put every ounce of our energy. We are to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. This is what is worth fighting for more than money. In confessing before Pilate, Jesus said in John that my kingdom is not of this world. When we confess our belief in Jesus, our desires change. Where we put our energy is no longer determined by our society's values. What we love is living the life found in Christ. The Lord has more power and life to give than any amount of riches. Eternal life is a gift that we are brought. Eternal life means hope centered on God. Eternal life means living out of hope in God. Eternal life gives us freedom to live. We acknowledge this as we share Communion and we continually pursue it as we keep the commandment to love God with all of our heart and love others as we love ourselves.

We may think, okay I've got it, believe in Jesus, check, share Communion, check, keep the Golden rule, check, now I can be content I have taken hold of

eternal life. Having godly contentment does not mean that we have done all we need to do or have become all we think we should be. God asks us to pursue (to work towards) eternal life out of our contentment in his promise of eternal life. Eternal life has been given in Jesus, is being given, and will be given. We live eternal life now as Christ's life is formed in us. Christ's desires and not senseless and harmful desires like the pursuit of riches are what define life.

What does this mean for us who have riches. We have riches. If we make more than 25,000 a year we are richer than 90% of the people in the world. If you make 50,000 a year you are in the top 2% in terms of riches as we consider riches in the present age.<sup>ii</sup> How will we remain uncorrupted by them? They cannot be our foundation, our hope, what we rely on. They cannot be used to consider ourselves better than others. We cannot do nothing with them.

How we enjoy our riches and use them shows our hope is set on God and eternal life. God asks us to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share. As we share our money, we share our lives. As we are generous with our money we are no longer controlled by it. As we do good works with our money we take hold of eternal life.

True contentment in the present depends on a belief in the future that does not revolve around material things. We are to strive for hope and godly contentment as a church. They are found in Jesus. The life that is really life is the eternal life of faith found in communion with Jesus Christ. This real life is lived out in forceful, vigorous engagement in ministry, giving our lives to others as God leads. Real life is not revealed by zeroes.

---

<sup>i</sup> *Our Daily Bread*, May 18, 1994.

<sup>ii</sup> [www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com) and [www.leastof.org](http://www.leastof.org)