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Contentment

Introduction

Recently a lady mentioned to me about part of a message she had heard. It had dealt with the subject of contentment and how little of it there is in this world and among believers. It is not a modern problem but was a major source of difficulty among the ancient Jewish peoples and in the early church as the following records.

- a) One of the earliest sins of the children of Israel after their release from Egypt was to complain about the way God brought them, and the apparent darkness of the way. God had brought them to Pi-hahiroth (Ex. 14:2, 9) and when they saw the Egyptians they cried: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?" (Ex. 14:11). They were constantly murmuring against Moses, Moses and Aaron, and God (Ex. 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num. 14:2; 16:41; Deut. 1:27), etc. They were a discontented people despite the blessing of redemption and liberation.
- b) When John began preaching the people came to him, and among them were soldiers who asked: "Master, what shall we do?" (Lk. 3:12). The answer was: "Be content with your wages" (Lk. 3:14-15).
- c) In the early church there was a murmuring from the Grecians against the Hebrews (Acts 6:1). In this case there was grounds for murmuring for their widows were being neglected in the daily ministrations (Acts 6:2).
- d) In Corinth there was major discontentment of the place in the body the Lord had placed them, or in their gifts, so that some murmured that they were not the hand (1 Cor. 12:15), or the eye (1 Cor. 12:16).
- e) Dissatisfaction leads to discontentment, but the opposite is contentment.

That Which God is Dissatisfied With

God is holy and that means He is a perfectionist. All His works are holy (Psa. 145:17), consequently they are perfect. Man was an enemy of God, obstinate and without any thought of God, how then could the perfect Holy God ever righteously bring man back into fellowship with Himself? He gave man human government, and it failed; His law, but it failed; even with the blood sacrifices He Himself gave He was dissatisfied (Heb. 10:6). He could not be content with anything less than perfection. The writer of Hebrews records a number of deficiencies in that:

- a) They could never give full access to God, it was limited to one man on one day of the year. (Heb. 9:7)
- b) They could not ease the conscience. (Heb. 9:14)
- c) They had to be continually offered. (Heb. 10:1)
- d) The worshipper was never purged. (Heb. 10:2)
- e) They could never take away sins. (Heb. 10:4, 11)

It was not that there were only a few sacrifices, for if one were to count up the number of the minimum of sacrifices to be offered in one year, it adds up to 1100. Add to this all the voluntary offerings, offerings made for vows, for childbirth, cleansing from leprosy, and it was a huge number. Consider also that these sacrifices lasted for some 1480 years from the exodus to the sacrifice of the Lord, and it means there was at the very least 1,628,000 sacrifices altogether, and God's commentary: "Could never take away sin, I had no pleasure in them".

The Things Which Cannot Give Contentment

If anyone wants to see living dissatisfaction and discontentment all one has to do is look at Hollywood in California. It is a world of secret societies, wealth, multimillion dollar homes, fame, and human adoration. Yet despite all this, it is astounding how many lives are wasted on drugs, alcohol, and tragically so many suicides. One of the richest men in the world was dying a few years ago, yet he is reputed to have said: "I have one regret, I did not get more"!

The scriptures give incidents, real and parabolic, which illustrate the discontentment in the heart of man.

- a) The Lord told the parable of a rich man who, looking at that which he had, said: "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and

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build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods” (Lk. 12:17, 18). Despite having more than sufficient he was discontent.

- b) Achan had a wife and a family and evidently wealth, but was not content. Then despite the command of God he took a Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold (Josh. 7:21), but he could not enjoy them for they had to be dissembled and put among their own stuff (Josh. 7:11), and hide them in the earth (Josh. 7:21). Discontentment oftentimes means getting things illegally and then not being able to fully enjoy them. The narrative does not end there for it caused the death of Achan, his wife, sons, and daughters. Discontentment results in spiritual, and sadly at times, physical death.
- c) Space forbids to consider:
 - i) Adam who, despite being God’s gentleman farmer, took the opportunity to get more and brought sin into the world
 - ii) Judas who was discontented with what he had and became a thief
 - iii) Martha who was discontent with having so much to do and Mary not helping her so she complained to the Lord
 - iv) The prodigal son was discontented with the blessings he had in the home, and learnt the costly lesson by shame
 - v) One day a man came to the Lord who said: “Speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me” (Lk. 12:13). Sadly the man had wrong priorities for covetousness was goading him on. The Lord could not be party to such a spirit. Rather, He used this situation as an opportunity to reveal what contentment is, the knowledge that God cares for us providing for our food and clothing (Lk. 12:22-31).

The final reality is:

Nothing in this world gives permanent contentment.

Where is True and Eternal Satisfaction and Contentment To Be Found?

True, eternal, permanent contentment and satisfaction **can only be found in one person** - not in things. That singular person is our Lord Jesus Christ, who has and ever will satisfy the heart and mind of God. This begs the question, “How do we know God is satisfied with Christ?” There are multiple reasons, some of which are:

- a) God raised Him from the dead, man denied its truth.
 - i) “And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.” (Acts 3:15)
 - ii) “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.” (Acts 4:10)
 - iii) “But God raised him from the dead.” (Acts 13:30)
 - iv) “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:15; Gal. 1:1; Col. 2:12)
- b) The evidence He was raised from the dead:
 - i) The vacated tomb. I know we often speak of the empty tomb but in reality it was not empty, for the grave clothes were left.
 - ii) The post resurrection appearances of which the following are a few, and they were all skeptics:
 1. He appeared to Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:9); Cephas (1 Cor. 15:5); James (1 Cor. 15:7); to those on the Emmaus Road (Mk. 16:12).
 2. He appeared in the upper room (Mk. 16:14; Jn. 20:19-24; 26-29); at Galilee (Matt. 28:16-17).

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- c) He was justified by the Spirit.
- i) When we speak of justification it normally refers to the record of our guilt and crimes being eradicated, but how can it be used of God and Christ? Let us consider:
 1. "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." (Rom. 3:4)
 2. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." (Lk. 7:29)
 3. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim. 3:16)
 - ii) How is God and Christ justified since being holy they could never have a record of guilt? It means that they are cleared of all seeming guilt. The Lord claimed He was the Son of God and for that He was crucified. When God raised Him from the dead, and justified Him by the Spirit's descent (Jn. 7:39), it was the divine approval that all He claimed to be, He was.
- d) God exalted Him to His own right hand (Matt. 22:44; 26:64; Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20); God let Him take the book of the ultimate government of earth (Rev. 5:7); God has no word of disapproval when His name and Christ's are united in praise (Rev. 5:11-14), and through Him there is forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31; 13:38; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14); and eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9).

When an individual puts their faith in Christ for salvation, they are put "in Christ" and in that Person God has given us the Holy Spirit: "That we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12); He "freely gives us all things" (Rom. 8:32); there is "given unto us exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Pet. 1:4); He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). What then are some of those blessings:

- a) When a loved one is a believer: "We sorrow not as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13)
- b) If the Lord comes while we are alive we know: "We shall all be changed, in a moment" (1 Cor. 15:51-52) and then, "caught up to be forever with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).
- c) Then to eternally be in a sphere where we "shall see His face" (Rev. 22:4)
- d) "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:4)

Blessed contentment!

But that is in the future. What of the present in the "let down's" of life, when life has lost its meaning and the future is so dark, when sitting alone in silent house? He has pledged that:

- a) When life is shadowed by loneliness: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).
- b) When life is dreadfully difficult due to afflictions: It is only for a moment, and "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17); He will strengthen you (1 Pet. 5:10).
- c) When the home is silent due to the death of a familiar voice: He is "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3); He will "comfort you" (2 Cor. 1:4).

Who can comprehend the blessing of being able to say like Job: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26). The Psalmist could say: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psa. 17:15).

The fact is, it is very easy to say these things when in a comfortable friendly situation. All I can pray is that as we, as individuals, go through these sorrows and trials, may God be merciful and give us grace, and make it abound toward us, comforting us and strengthening us in the dark and dreadful days, preserving us from

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discontentment and murmuring against Him and His ways, and in truth be able to sing the words of Henry Bennett:

Satisfied with Thee, Lord Jesus, I am blest;
Peace which passeth understanding, On Thy breast;
No more doubting, no more trembling,
Oh, what rest! Oh, what rest!

Occupied with Thee, Lord Jesus, In Thy grace;
All Thy ways and tho'ts about me Only trace
Deeper stories of the glories
Of Thy grace, of Thy grace.

Taken up with Thee, Lord Jesus, I would be;
Finding joy and satisfaction, All in Thee;
Thou the nearest and the dearest
Unto me, unto me.

List'ning for Thy shout, Lord Jesus, In the air!
When Thy saints shall rise with joy to meet Thee there;
O what gladness! No more sadness,
Sin nor care, sin nor care.

. . . Rowan Jennings