Pursue Contentment

What Makes You Happy?

When I was still in graduate school, Mary Jo's youngest sister asked me to officiate at her wedding. I had never before conducted a wedding ceremony, so I put a tremendous amount of work into preparing. The big day arrived, and the wedding was held in the backyard of a beautiful, expansive mansion. The groom's father was one of the most successful lawyers in Louisiana. As the guests were milling around down below in a magnificent living room, I stood on the walkway that was above the living room on the third floor. All of a sudden there was a buzz in the crowd as someone entered the living room area and he was immediately surrounded by the guests who greeted him, shook his hand and stood around as he held court. The fellow walked over to the white grand piano at the center of the living room and began playing gospel songs, while many stood around and listened. It turned out that the man at the piano was either the second or third most well-known and watched televangelist in the world, Jimmy Swaggert. Jimmy Swaggert was a client of the groom's father. As I stood at the front waiting for the bride to come down the aisle, I wondered why it was that I was conducting the wedding when Jimmy Swaggert was there. I felt very small and inadequate and if I could have turned over the duties of leading the wedding to Jimmy Swaggert, I would have gladly done so. Our text today describes someone who happily turned over his ministry to someone much more qualified than him to develop it. The preacher's name was John the Baptist. Here is the big idea. Contentment is more valuable than getting what you want.

This is our text for today. **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"**(John 1:14-15 NIV) If you lived in Judea at this time, you would have been stunned by this pronouncement of John the Baptist.. It would have been almost like Jimmy Swagert standing up in the middle of the wedding and telling everyone I was much more qualified to lead the wedding than he was. John the Baptist was the most celebrated and respected preacher of his time. Huge crowds came to hear him speak out in the desert and even though he preached harsh sermons about sin and repentance, he was flooded with requests from those in attendance to have him baptize them. Keep in mind that John was made to preach, designed by God to preach and from before he was conceived, it was his mission to preach. Yet, John the Baptist happily turned over his ministry to Jesus. Preaching was John's entire life and as far as we know, he had no other vocation or interests. Bringing people to God was it. Yet he gave up what made his life meaningful to Jesus for Him to have and do with as He wished.

There are four times listed in the Gospel of John when John the Baptist essentially gave up his ministry to Jesus, making it clear Jesus needed to be the center of attention. Here is an example. **John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"**(John 1: 15 NIV) Later, after baptizing Jesus, John the Baptist began sending his disciples over to Jesus to follow Him instead. **The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.** (John 1: 35-37 NIV) It takes great contentment at the height of your success, to turn over your work to someone else far less accomplished than you and toss aside the personal acclaim your work has generated. John the Baptist could do so because he was contented. There are signs you are not content. You have to prove you are right, and you argue until the other person gives up the fight. You need to be acknowledged and respected. You must have your way. You are easily frustrated and disappointed. You get upset with God over how your life is going. Little pleasures no longer satisfy you and you find it hard to be happy. People you love and trust always seem to let you down. You complain and talk about your problems more than ever. Smiling no longer feels authentic and is often awkward. Depression is creeping into you, and you find yourself envying others. You focus more on what Is missing rather than what you have. Nothing ever feels good enough. Just because everything may seem to be going your way doesn't mean you will be content. Solomon, for all his wealth and success, could not find contentment. He was one of the most miserable people of his time. Listen to what he said of himself. **I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.** (Ecclesiastes 2: 10-11 NIV) Having what you want does not lead to contentment. In fact, many times the opposite is the case.

John the Baptist found the secret to contentment, but like most, King Solomon did not. The Bible has this to say about contentment. **Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.** (Hebrews 13: 5 NIV) Then there is this. **But godliness with contentment is great gain.** (1 Timothy 6: 6 NIV) Jesus gave clear orders to anyone who has authority over others. **Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely — be content with your pay."** (Luke 3: 14 NIV) Many believe contentment is not even possible, especially those who have lived some and had difficult lives. Just because you have made it in life, doesn't ensure contentment. In fact, Solomon proves the opposite is almost always the case. The more you gain things and success and acclaim, for most, the less contented they are. The Apostle Paul, however, insists that contentment is possible; he had it and surely you can too. **I am not saying this because I am in need, for 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. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.** (Philippians 4: 11-13 NIV)

Contentment is better than getting what you want. It is the secret to peace and happiness. And discontent has ruined many people or just made them miserable. It is good to remember that contentment depends on your attitude. Suppose you never had a car and got around as best you could. But then the car you have was given to you and for the first time in your life you had a car. Wouldn't you be content to have that car? What if you had not eaten in several days and barely could afford anything for lunch or dinner. Would you be glad to have the meal you had last night, whatever it was? Suppose you did not have a friend in the world and then the person who is now your friend that you complain about was suddenly your only friend. Would you not be happy to have that very friend? Perhaps you had not worked in years and were living in poverty and then you got the job you have now. Would you not consider the job you have now a blessing and a boon to your life? Contentment is based on your perspective and not on your circumstances.

The book of Proverbs makes some astounding statements, but this one stands out for me. **The fear of the Lord leads to life: then one rests content, untouched by trouble.** (Proverbs 19: 23 NIV) The idea here is when you give God His due and respect Him as Almighty and worthy of all honor, that is the foundation for being content regardless of what your circumstances are. You know He is in charge, and He loves you and will not do anything to ruin you but only to bless you. I read of a man in ancient times who had great respect for God and lived wholeheartedly for him. But because he was blind, he was asked if it upset him that he could not see. The blind man asked his friend. "Should I be upset that I do not have what a fly or a lazy dog has but possess what angels have? God has given me the very things that make angels glorious and should I not be happy I have been given that?" Is there anything better than faith in Christ and the knowledge that you have eternal life? Listen to this great word from the Bible. **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.** (Ephesians 1: 3 NIV) Everything available to the greatest of angels and the most noble of saints is yours. It is in your heavenly bank account. Should you envy Bill Gates who has riches for a few more years when you have for eternity the greatest wealth and splendor to enjoy? Job is such a fascinating personality to study psychologically. Even with his bitter circumstances, the loss of his children, his wealth and his health, he still refused to curse God. Without knowing what we do about how his life would go, he still had hope in God his Savior. And what awaited him? In this life greater wealth and restored health and a family to love. But if that was what he had in this life; what was coming in the next life was infinitely greater.

It would be good for each of us to think about all the good God has already given us today. Every day is a day of blessings and goodness. Write down each day something God has given you for which you are thankful. Tell someone of a good gift you have received that day and work with all your might to not complain about something. Each day you have been given something millions of other people would love to have so treasure it like the costliest pearl. Our big idea is still our big idea. Contentment is more valuable than getting what you want. This week, keep in mind that contentment is the goal and not the search for something you don't have. And do this. Bless the Lord.