

Glow, Philippians 4:10-23, 7/26/20

After his 3rd Superbowl, in an interview, Tom Brady - Hold on Dave, I think there's a better picture of Tom... "Why do I still have three Superbowl rings and still feel there is something greater out there for me? Maybe a lot of people would say I have reached my goal, the dream of my life. Me, I think, God, it's got to be more than this. This can't be all it's cracked up to be, I'm 27, what else is there for me?"

Now the part in me that is an Eagles fan wants - Give me a break. But the more reasonable part of me- understands that **Discontentment is part of the universal human experience.** Discontentment is like an itch we can't seem to scratch. Mark Twain, the American Author, **You don't know quite what it is you do want, it just fairly makes your heart ache you want it so.** And it seems we can find discontentment in just about anything. Discontent being single. Discontent being married. Discontent in our job. Discontent with our financial situation. Discontent with our body. Discontent because we are bored, Discontent because we are too busy. And in a pandemic, there is so much more to fill in the blank.

Of course, the irony is that no society on the face of the earth has had more stuff, access to information, technology, education, property, health, wealth...you name it... than we have. The average American home is 1,000 square feet bigger than it used to be 40 years ago despite the fact that our families are smaller. The average American diet has 500 more calories per person than it was 40 years ago. As one comedian said, "NY to CA now takes you 5 hours. That used to take you 30 years, and half of you would die and you would be a whole new group of people by the time you got there. Everything's amazing, but nobody is happy." Of course, it all points to this simple fact: Contentment will never come from what or how much we have. Most of us believe that and don't believe it at the same time. I would have told you I believed that in my teens and early 20s but I still found myself chasing contentment through partying, lust, the next trip, the next adventure...all leaving me empty.

But Paul says here in Philippians 4 that he has found the secret to contentment. Isn't that an amazing statement? The secret! What is a secret? It is something that not everyone knows about, but is attainable for everyone. Paul is not a superhero. We feel like he is but he's just like you and me. If Paul learned the secret, so can we. **Three Questions about Contentment: What is it? Why don't we have it? How can we get it?**

A little context: In Philippians 4:10-19 Paul is rejoicing in the support that the Philippians sent to Paul through Epaphroditus. Remember him? He traveled 800 miles from Macedonia to Rome to give Paul a care package while on house arrest. And Paul rejoices that this little church has been supportive of him throughout his ministry. But he does something a bit strange. He keeps saying things like, **v.11 I am not saying this because I am in need. v.17 Not that I desire your gifts.** He actually never thanks them for the gift. Awkward. But if you look deeper you see what Paul is doing. He is using this as an opportunity to teach them. He wants the focus not to be on feeling good about their good deed, but on the fruit of their faithfulness. And to teach them that true contentment is not found in our circumstances or stuff.

Contentment: What is it?

Some of us have a somewhat arm's length relationship with contentment. We think of it as a synonym for **settling** and the opposite of ambition. Settling for a C, settling in a relationship, settling in a dead-end job. Yet Paul is holding up contentment as something worthwhile pursuing and is of great gain. And Paul is the very one just a chapter earlier saying he is striving to win the race and setting goals, pushing himself to go beyond. That doesn't sound like he's kicking up his feet in a lazy boy saying, "Good enough, now what's on Netflix?" So contentment is NOT settling.

Contentment is a NOT Stoicism. Stoic philosophers of Paul's day had a stiff upper lip. Their philosophy of life was to be self-sufficient, everything Zen, immovable and emotionally like a rock. This was a way to avoid pain but also master themselves. They looked at fate and said, there is nothing we can do about it. So they would detach from it and kill desire altogether. Some of us think contentment is the absence of emotion altogether so that you don't feel pain or joy. Nothing can touch you, detachment. And on the surface that might seem like what Paul is referring to here but that's not at all what it is. He's vulnerable throughout this book. He's not detached, he's in touch with his emotions. Throughout this letter Paul expresses a range of emotions- sadness, anxiety, joy, longing.

What is contentment? The word here in the Greek means to be **satisfied after a meal**. Paul applies this idea metaphorically. **"The experience of having your deepest appetites satisfied."** For Paul- he learned that the secret to having satisfaction on a soul level was **v.13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.** Often we think of this verse because it's the favorite verse of athletes and successful people. But Paul is not saying he can do all athletic things. He is saying- I can find contentment through all things- mountaintops and swamps when Christ is at the center of my life and the source of my inner strength, my peace, my contentment. Soul-deep satisfaction that my circumstances can't shake. Wouldn't that be incredible to have that? Listen- I am in process on this too. This is what Paul wants for us, what God wants for us and it is a secret that is attainable.

Contentment: Why don't we have it?

Why do we so often find ourselves discontent, grumbling and thinking the grass is greener on the other side? Well we need to start with the first family. No, not the Trumps- Adam and Eve. The picture of Genesis 2 is one of total peace and contentment in a relationship with God, enjoying the blessings that God had given to them. And then chapter 3 comes, Satan spread an insidious lie- "God's holding back on you, there's something better out there that He doesn't want you to have. Just wait until you try this fruit, finally you will be fulfilled when you know everything God knows. And they believed the lie and the exact opposite happened. See, the **first sin in the Bible is discontentment.** God made mankind to find their soul-satisfaction in a relationship with Him and his provision, instead they reject this and we have had a God-shaped hole ever since.

This explains the simplest of experiences- Why your two-year-old throws a tantrum because he has to have the toy that his sister is playing with. Or why your teenage gamer at home constantly feels the need to upgrade his avatar or character. But it also explains why people who win the lottery are most often less content after they become millionaires than before. See it's the lie that we know is a lie and yet we don't know it's a lie. We still want to believe that contentment is right around the corner. This is part of my brother's story- He's very ambitious and he set his goal at climbing the ladder at his company to get himself to a VP role. 20 years he climbed and clawed and with each promotion he felt he was just one more stop away. Finally he got the dream job that came with the money, the benefits, the prestige, the influence. But he would tell you there was a pit in his stomach once he achieved it. Like Tom Brady, "This is it?" What it promised it couldn't deliver: soul-deep contentment. The problem wasn't the job. The problem was the little lie he was quietly nurturing- If I get that, it will finally be enough. He has since left that career altogether and while he makes a third of what he once did, he's now pursuing the secret that Paul discovered.

Discontentment is not just a happiness problem, it is a worship problem. Because if we pull up the rock of discontentment underneath, we would find some ugly things hiding in the dark. **ingratitude.** We can't thank God for the blessings He has given us because we are so focused on what he has given us. **pride.** We think that we deserve more than what God has given, or we think that we would do a better job running our life than He is. **envy.** Comparison is the thief of joy. We look around our neighborhood or around or social media feeds and we want what other people have. Ultimately, the ugliest of what is behind our discontentment is **idolatry.** Beneath every grumble, beneath every murmur, beneath every moment of frustration, the sin beneath the sin is the fact that we want something more than we want God and that we love something more than we love God. And because we do, until He provides that for us, we're going to be discontent and dissatisfied.

Do you find in your soul a nagging discontentment and grumbling in your life that you can't seem to shake? Are you stuck in the ancient lie of Satan **IF ONLY-THEN?** If only I could get the next promotion then I would be content. If only I could find someone to marry then I would be satisfied. If only people gave me the recognition I deserve, if only I can get to a certain number of Youtube subscribers or followers on social media. If only I can get the next car, house, retirement package. If only we could get out of this pandemic then I would be content. Yes, ok.

Contentment: How do we get it?

Well this is perfect question to summarize this entire series, Glow. If you have been tracking with us, you know this is the entire message of this letter. You want joy even in tough circumstances? Love in the midst of hate? Stability in shaky times? You want peace in a hostile world? You want true contentment? There is only one answer that Paul gives throughout this letter. **Soul-deep contentment only comes in a relationship with Jesus Christ.**

Philippians 1:9,11

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more...¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 3:7-8

⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

Philippians 3:14

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4,7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:13

I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

At the risk of sounding to Sunday School answer- It's all about Jesus! You say, like I do, I haven't yet learned that like Paul. I'm somewhere in the process. I think we will be helped by these words from Charles Spurgeon, the famous 19th century preacher in London in a sermon on this passage. "These words show us that contentment is not a natural propensity of man. Covetousness, discontent, and murmuring are as natural to man as thorns are to the soil. We need not sow thistles and brambles; they come up naturally enough, because they are indigenous to earth:

and so, we need not teach men to complain; they complain fast enough without any education. But the precious things of the earth must be cultivated. If we would have wheat, we must plough and sow; if we want flowers, there must be the garden, and all the gardener's care.

Now, contentment is one of the flowers of heaven, and if we would have it, it must be cultivated; it will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature alone that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the grace which God has sown in us."

Soul-deep contentment is a flower of heaven that our nature can't grow. Only our new nature. The new birth in Jesus Christ. When we awaken to the reality of who Jesus is and what he has done and embrace the gospel for ourselves. [Slide] I was speaking recently with a member of our church who was recalling the moment she embraced the gospel and was born again. She would have described her life before this as successful and achieving the American Dream according to the world but she had a profound emptiness that she couldn't put her finger on. A God shaped hole in her soul. She said the moment she accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ she

described it as a warmth in her soul. Jesus came in and planted the flower of heavenly contentment in the garden of her soul. But it must be cultivated to keep it. If you don't nurture a heart of contentment in Christ with the help of His Spirit while you're single, you're going to carry it right into your relationship. If you don't nurture a heart of contentment while you have little, you will carry into your life when you have a lot. We must nurture it through preaching the gospel to ourselves continually. Through the spiritual disciplines. We must nurture it through starving the things in our lives that rob us of contentment- for me, Social Media is one of the things that can steal my contentment, which is why I'm not really on it much. And we need to feed the things that cultivate our contentment in the Lord. Prayer walks, worship music, vital friendships, mentors. Challenge- that I learned from Phil Woodworth- deacon. This week, read one passage of Scripture and find as many things in that passage as you can for why it makes your grateful.

What is stealing your contentment? What would it look like for you to nurture contentment in the Lord?

[Slide] Look Around! The world needs some good news, it's pretty dark. It needs the glow of the gospel- in our words and in our actions.

Facebook

Giving

Connect