

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.”**

So we say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

What can mere mortals to do me?”

(Hebrews 13:5-6)

Once there was a stonecutter who was dissatisfied with himself and with his position in life. One day on his way to the quarry he passed a wealthy merchant's house. Through the open gateway, he saw many fine possessions and important visitors. "How powerful that merchant must be!" thought the stonecutter. He became very envious and wished that he could be like the merchant.

To his great surprise, he suddenly became the merchant—enjoying more luxuries and power than he had ever imagined—although he was envied and detested by those less wealthy than himself. Soon a high official passed by, carried in a sedan chair, accompanied by attendants and escorted by soldiers beating gongs. Everyone, no matter how wealthy, had to bow low before the procession. "How powerful that official is!" thought the stonecutter-turned-wealthy-merchant. "I wish that I could be a high official!"

Then he became the high official, carried everywhere in his embroidered sedan chair, feared and hated by the people all around. It was a hot summer day, so the official felt very uncomfortable in the sticky sedan chair. He looked up at the sun. It shone proudly in the sky, unaffected by his presence. "How powerful the sun is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the sun!"

Then he became the sun, shining fiercely down on everyone, scorching the fields, cursed by the farmers and laborers. But a huge black cloud moved between him and the earth so that his light could no longer shine on everything below. "How powerful that storm cloud is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a cloud!"

Then he became the cloud, flooding the fields and villages, shouted at by everyone. But soon he found that he was being pushed away by some great force, and realized that it was the wind. "How powerful it is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the wind!"

Then he became the wind, blowing tiles off the roofs of houses, uprooting trees, feared and hated by all below him. But after a while, he ran up against something that would not move, no matter how forcefully he blew against it—a huge, towering rock. "How powerful that rock is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a rock!"

Then he became the rock, more powerful than anything else on earth. But as he stood there, he heard the sound of a hammer pounding a chisel into the hard surface, and felt himself being changed. "What could be more powerful than I, the rock?" he thought.

He looked down and saw far below him the figure of a stonecutter.

Contentment. Why is it so hard to find and to keep? We're about to enter into a New Year where many of us will make some commitment to change something. Perhaps you will commit to change a habit or your image or your attitude about something. Regardless if the goal of the resolution is to be skinnier or wealthier or kinder or more organized or better rested or more disciplined or holier, the underlying desire is usually centered on contentment. "If I give up (fill in the blank), I will be healthier and therefore happier." Or, "If I spend less on this, then I will have more for that, and therefore I will be happier." Or, "If I make more time for so and so, it will make them happy, and therefore me happier." The goal of change is usually to be more content. But as we all know, the good intentions for change at the beginning of the year rarely lead to lasting contentment by the end of the year. Why? Why is contentment so hard to find and keep?

For starters, as a Christian, you might say that in one sense we are not supposed to be content with this world. You might remember the famous quote from *Mere Christianity*; C.S. Lewis puts it this way: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." Yes, discontentment with this world can serve the purpose of reminding us of what is to come when we finally meet our Lord and Savior face to face. There should be, in a sense, a healthy amount of discontentment with this world.

But can we as Christians be content in this life? Can our hearts find a certain rest here and now? Yes. Our text actually commands us to be content, and God does not give commands that

we are not, on some level, able to achieve. But the author prefaces the command for contentment with an admonishment. He says, "Keep your life free from the love of money." You see, he knew what prevented his audience from finding contentment in the present—the love of money. And still, the love of money is what so often can lure our hearts away from contentment in this life.

Why is money so powerful in preventing us from being content with what we have? First of all we must remember that money has no moral quality. Money is neither good or bad, although it can be used for both. Having or not having a lot of money is neither good or bad, although both poor and rich can be materialistic. It is the love of money that is the sinful characteristic the author is addressing. It is the heart's motivation concerning wealth that must be addressed.

And for examples of how money tempts the heart into false contentment, we have to look no further than the Bible. You might remember in the book of Joshua when the people of Israel conquer Jericho and God tells the people not to take any of the plunder from Jericho. But there was an Israelite man named Achan who did take some gold and silver for himself and hid it under his tent. It probably didn't seem like that big of a deal to him, after all, there were times when God allowed His people to take some of the plunder of a conquered city.

But in Joshua chapter 7 God tells Joshua to confront Achan's disobedience. God actually uses Achan's sin and punishment to expose to the people of Israel the danger of loving money more than loving God. What Achan did was actually an example of mistrust. It wasn't about the plunder, the actual gold and silver. It was about the trust that God wants His people to have in Him rather than in money. When people love money more than God, what they are saying is that they trust what money can give them more than what God gives them.

Money can also make you feel safe and in control. You might remember the rich young ruler who talks with Jesus in Mark 10. He asks Jesus what he needs to do to enter eternal life. Jesus tells him to obey the commandments. But he already obeys them. So he asks what else can he do. Jesus responds that he should sell all he has and give the proceeds to the poor and then follow Jesus. But the text says the rich young ruler became very sad because he was a man of great wealth. Because his identity was so wrapped up in his wealth, it prevented him from being able to follow Jesus. To give it all away would be to lose himself and that was a risk he could not take with a consequence that no amount of obedience could rectify.

Can you relate to the rich young ruler? Are you extremely obedient when it comes to telling the truth, being honest in your work, reading the Bible, praying, remaining faithful in your marriage or respectful to your parents or trustworthy for your friends...all

good things! Yet your identity is so wrapped up in your possessions that you'd be unrecognizable if they were taken away?

This warning and command seems simple but is so difficult. The real issue is when **we** determine what will satisfy us—like money and all it brings us—then we are trusting the broken compass in **us** rather than God. As one author put it, "Contentment is elusive because sin is pervasive." The extent to which our hearts pursue contentment in wealth make it very difficult to find contentment in anything else.

So what are we to do? How can our hearts be drawn away from finding contentment in money? The author writes "...and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.'"

That is an important "because" as it grounds the way we can be content in the work that Jesus has already done. The author of Hebrews uses a grammatical technique in Greek here that is defined as the strongest way to negate something. The N.T. rarely uses this grammatical form outside of the sayings of Jesus. In fact this verse in Hebrews is the only place this particular construct can be found outside of the Gospels. Here the author of Hebrews means there is no stronger way he can communicate that God will not leave us.

The Greek construct here denies potentiality... in other words, leaves no room for God to be any better at not leaving or forsaking us than He already is. We can therefore find true contentment in that God will never ever, ever leave you or forsake you; it's not even possible.

There's a hymn we like to sing to our kids before bed called "How Firm A Foundation." The final verse goes like this:

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"*

As the grounds for our contentment, what is so powerful about this promise that He will never leave us?

Throughout the book of Hebrews the author has been building a case that Jesus is our high priest. As our high priest who never leaves us or forsakes us, He continually intercedes for us, bringing abundant grace and forgiveness. You might remember that in the Old Testament, once a year the high priest of the Jews would enter into the innermost temple area, the area where no one was allowed because it contained the holiness of God's Spirit. Yet, once a year the high priest would spend an incredible amount of time consecrating and cleansing himself through rituals and special equipment and clothing and finally he'd be able to enter the holy of holies to make atonement for the sins of God's people. He would be wearing white robes and an ephod, a

breastplate of sorts, infused with 12 precious valuable stones or jewels, and inscribed on each one of these stones was the name of a tribe of Israel. He would act as the mediator between God's people and the Lord Almighty.

Now, if Jesus is our high priest as the author has previously described, then, as one scholar points out, it is reasonable to believe that Jesus right now stands before the throne of God the Father in heaven bearing your name written across His breast, having cleansed your sin once and for all with His sacrificial death on the cross. And with Christ as your mediator, when God the Father looks upon Him and sees your name on His chest, He finds you more beautiful and precious than all the stones that lie beneath the surface of the earth. To Him you are an absolute beauty. And this will never change because Jesus will never leave you. He will never ever forsake you to His Father.

To the extent which that reality is true in your heart, you will grow to find contentment in nothing else. As the reality of His residence floods your heart, it will wash away any contentment in money.

Then, as the author points out, we will say, ***"The Lord is my helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me?"*** Another reading of that quote from Psalm 118 is, what can man do for me, or provide for me? The next line in that Psalm questions should we find what

we need in man or in princes or in money? No, because as that old wonderful hymn reminds us:

O soul, are you weary and troubled?

No light in the darkness you see?

There's light for a look at the Savior,

And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in His wonderful face,

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace.

As we start this new year, you can begin this year off seeking contentment in many things, and perhaps some changes you might make will be good. But don't go seeking contentment purely by your efforts and in material things. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, let Him fortify your heart with joy and gladness and give you the never-ending reality of His presence in your life. It is a taste of the reality of heaven and as one author put it, "Heaven is so happy because those who are there have come to see, without any impediments or weights of sin, that God is their all in all. In heaven there is eternal delight without the things we so often chase after."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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