

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 401, 11-25-2020 †† Thanksgiving

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 4

12b I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, while being full or hungry, while having plenty or not enough. 13I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.



It was a bitter taste for victory Sunday. Vikings defeated Packers by 3. But the victory was short-lived. The maniacal rampage of a vehicle running over crowds at a parade in Waukesha left us in tragedy. Kind of awful to gloat about a Viking victory when so much suffering has taken place in Wisconsin.

Feelings of success are accompanied with a dull aftertaste of all the others in this world who feel failure instead. Feelings of *having* are accompanied by the chaser of those who are *in want*.

Maybe that's the secret to life. Maybe we should all feel guilty for tragedy. Maybe that is the secret to thanksgiving: guilt and penance for all the sad things. Maybe a collective or systemic guilt over every misfortune that takes place in life will cure society. Maybe that is the secret formula for overcoming our worries.

No, guilt will not accomplish all this. Over against every gloomy outlook of life, Paul happily gives us the secret formula for overcoming our worries and for enjoying a carefree life.

Our text is about sharing a secret. We have looked at the whole Christian life and thanked God for it. But from one stage to the next, nothing has changed. It is the same secret to all sufferings: Be Content.

What is the secret to being content? To do anything and everything in Christ.

In Christ, nothing you need can be taken from you. No spiritual gift can be ripped from your heart.

Spiritually Rich Is The Real Contentment

1. Not to have, but how to have

As he often did in Philippians, Paul began with joy for these fellow Christians. They expressed concern for him, but more than that. They sent Paul an offering. In fact, they were submitting offerings for a long time. They were abundant and generous givers to the gospel work God did among them and abroad.

But as soon as Paul rejoiced over their concern for him, he was quick to say that he wasn't going without any needs, as if the Lord at some point stopped caring for him.

On the contrary, because of the Lord Jesus, Paul had a thanksgiving secret. He was able to use this secret whether he had plenty in life or very little in life. The secret for Paul was real contentment.

Paul knew how to adjust himself to either one—rich or poor, having much or having little—with equal contentment. All sorts of people suffer poverty, but to KNOW HOW is a mark of greatness. All sorts of people have riches, but it will sinfully corrupt them unless they KNOW HOW. That know-how is, simply put, contentment.

You thought you were going to feel stuffed after the meal. No, by faith like St. Paul's, you are stuffed before, during, and after the meal. By faith like St. Paul's, you are stuffed with or without a meal. Like St. Paul, you approach every morsel by faith.

2. Not rich in ourselves, but rich in Jesus

Paul was in prison as he wrote this letter. It wasn't his richest station in life. Paul reached into his pockets, and he found them empty. Yet he was confident that he would never want. He did not know where his bread was coming from tomorrow, but he did know that God promised him food, clothing, and shelter.

"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus," says Philippians 4:19.

See how Paul did not promise worldly riches, like some false prophets? See how Paul did not promise a surplus or a mysterious fortune, as we would find in a cookie? Paul was sincere in his words about God's goodness. He promised them God's supply to meet their needs – nothing more, nothing less. He could say this because God produces fruit in our giving.

Our society is growing more and more materialistic and dissatisfied with its possessions. Many behave as if they are drinking salt water; the more they drink, the thirstier they become. This desire to have more and more comes from greed and sin. Let Thanksgiving be a day when we remind each other how to have possessions. We have them contentedly, because we have Jesus Christ above all. We seek first His righteousness, and all these things are added to us as well.

This richness of Jesus Christ is not just in giving us so much, but in forgiving us so much. Our materialism, when repented of to Jesus, is removed from our hearts and from the record of our souls. Eternal life is opened in this rich expression of forgiveness. It is a gospel, a good news of spiritual richness, because it wells up in our hearts, and it determines our feelings and thoughts before we get more "stuff."

The spiritual richness of the gospel is in words found in the Bible. This gospel soothes, comforts, quiets, and calms. Sin is forgiven. Strength is promised. Every need of the soul is satisfied. All is done at His cross. Grace is repeated through His voice of the Word.

Now feelings of tragedy can be accompanied by facts of spiritual success. Sad events are accompanied by words of comfort and hope for the life to come. Feelings of being in want are accompanied by facts of our Good Shepherd. He will supply all our needs, from the manger to the cross to the crown of glory. Amen.