

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Isaiah 25:6-9*

- 6 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.**
- 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations;**
- 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.**
- 9 In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”**

PSALM: *23*

1 Psalm 23 A psalm of David.

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.**
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,**
- 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.**
- 4 Even though I walk through the *valley of the shadow of death,* I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**
- 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**
- 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Or through the darkest valley

EPISTLE LESSON: *Philippians 4:4-13* (also serves as the Sermon Text)

- 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**
- 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.**
- 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**
- 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**
- 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.**
- 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**
- 10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.**

- 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.
- 12 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.
- 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

GOSPEL LESSON: *Matthew 22:1-14*

- 1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying:
- 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.
- 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.
- 4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’
- 5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.
- 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.
- 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.
- 8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.
- 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’
- 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.
- 11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.
- 12 ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.
- 13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’
- 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Most of us seek contentment in our lives. Our goals point to a certain level of contentment—maybe we strive for a certain salary or position. Maybe we seek someone special to share our life with. We may even seek contentment in freedom from addictions.

In our readings today, two constant themes shout out at us: one of contentment, and one of feasting. Now, it may seem obvious to us that if one has bounty in the pantry one would likely be content. What worries does one have who has food—and plenty of it—to eat?

In our text this morning we look at Paul's words. We see the **strength of contented living**. *Paul explains how to lead lives of contentment. Paul also shows us who gives us the strength to live in contentment.*

In our everyday, hum-drum living, we do not always feel content. There are bills to worry about, emergencies arise that throw our plans awry. Maybe we struggle with a weakness, an addiction, or a personality conflict. Our plans and timetables for our life do not follow the path we think they should follow. In our minds, things can always be better, we could always have more, someone has more than I do, my life isn't as ordered and "spotless" as another's life. I can confidently go out on a limb here and say we all have had times of discontent in our lives.

But why aren't we content? Isaiah tells us in our Old Testament reading this morning that the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast and wipe away our tears. In the psalm King David asserted, *"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want."* Jesus in his parable this morning speaks of a wedding feast. Obviously not situations that speak of times of discontent. Contentment is the tone in all these readings!

In Paul's letter, in chapter four, some see these paragraphs as Paul just adding on random thoughts. But are they? Let's look.

Paul begins with *"Therefore my dear brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!"* In the previous chapters, Paul had spoken of imitating Christ, not relying on our own works, and pressing on in the Lord toward the goal he has won for us. Thus, Paul makes this exhortation a personal challenge to the Philippian Christians.

Next, we see Paul address the only problem we know about in Philippi—two dedicated ladies with a difference of opinion. Paul encourages not only the ladies in dispute but also the congregation at large to put aside differences. Why does Paul mention this? First, to address this potentially devastating problem. Secondly, it is a sign of discontent and Paul is addressing contentment.

As we go through Paul's words, notice how he encourages his church—Rejoice! We cannot be content if we do not have joy! Do not be anxious! Again, how much rest can you get and contentment can you feel if you are anxious about something? From my own life, I know I have been anxious about things—often, I still am. You name it—bills, grades, impending sermons, job interviews, job opportunities. But you know what? Whenever I have been anxious, I have not slept well. I get extremely tense to the point my shoulders ache. In essence, I am paying for my sins against the First Commandment by worrying about things God said He'll take care of!

Paul addresses that with his next words: *“by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* Have you thought about praying—and then leaving what you prayed about in God's care when you have a problem? Have you thought about being thankful? I was vividly reminded of Paul's words this past week. My computer died and I was at wit's end. There were things, such as this morning's sermon, that I wanted to do, but I couldn't use my computer. Needless to say, I let it get to me. In discussing this with a friend, who lives a long ways away, he said, “I'll pray for you and your computer. I know how much you depend on it for your livelihood.” I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels God doesn't care about my petty little problems—but that's what God wants us to do! Come to Him and ask for His help. My dad often let me try things on my own (I was stubborn growing up). I'm sure many things he could have done much quicker on his own, but he sought to teach me. Often I struggled needlessly when he was right there. Had I just opened my mouth and said, “Dad, I need help,” he would have immediately helped. Is our heavenly Father awaiting the same request from us?

Next Paul encourages us to think about *“whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned from me or seen in me—put it into practice.”* How many times do we become anxious and discontented because of something we have done or not done? We know we shouldn't use drugs, but we do and regret our action later. We know we should pay our bills in a timely manner or live on a budget, but we become financially foolish and become anxious when pressure is put on us to “pay up.” Maybe we allow our pleasures to control our sexual activity and later anxiously wonder if a child was created or a disease is shared because of our actions. Have any of us become anxious because of harsh words that hurt our neighbor?

Yes, we all have sins and crimes against God. We don't live in contentment in our Heavenly Father's arms. We decide we'll do it our way—and in the process, whether we want to hear it or not, we attempt to take God's place in the control of our lives. We decide what's best for us.

But realize that our heavenly Father did not abandon us. He did not throw up His hands in despair and just walk away. He remains by our side, always offering to take the load off our shoulders and lay it at the foot of the cross. You see, when we think about those things that are noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy, we don't have time to think about temporary problems. We realize, as Paul did, that our troubles are *not worth comparing to the glory that will be ours*. We have eternal life—full and free pardon from all our sins, no matter what that sin was!

Why are we anxious? Why are we not content with what we have, who we are, and where we are? Is it just human nature, or is it part of our sinful nature?

We can go all the way back to Adam and Eve and their brief stay in the Garden of Eden. Remember what led them to be expelled from that Garden? That's right, they were not content with what God had given them. Talk about a feast! Trees as far as the eyes could see, all loaded with fresh fruit and good things to eat. God asked for only one favor—do not eat from this tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It seems like an easy command, doesn't it? Eat what you want, but don't eat from this tree. But what happens? Satan plants a seed of doubt in Adam and Eve's mind. Does God not want you to eat from this tree because then you will be like Him and know good and evil? Soon, Adam and Eve are no longer content. Yeah, maybe God is holding out on us. Let's take what God won't give us. And the result is that we all have followed that pattern first laid out next to that fateful tree. We become anxious over matters not in our control. We are not content with what God has given us and the blessings He continues to shower upon us.

And what has God given us? We often fail to see how abundantly God has blessed us. Like Job, we only see our immediate suffering and conveniently forget that God created us, He continually preserves us—yes, He gave you the strength and the breath to get up out of bed today! And He gave His only Son to save us. This Son, Jesus, lived that perfect life in our place. He was content with what He had—He and His disciples traveled with very little! He was content with who He is—He refrained from performing miracles when prompted by scoffers and He successfully fought off Satan's temptations. And He was content with His station in life here on earth, subject to the laws of nature He created and to the rulers and authorities He established. How many people are content enough to give up a life of leisure to live in poverty and sacrifice for ungrateful people? That's what Jesus did to save us from our sins. He came down from the glory of heaven and lived, suffered, cried, and died.

Now we know how to lead lives of contentment. Be joyful, don't be anxious, think good thoughts. But it seems easier said than done, doesn't it? When life is a mess around us or our personal life is a shambles, there's not much to be content about. So how can we be content when it seems impossible?

Here we look at Paul's words closing our Epistle lesson and sermon text today: *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."* Did you catch that—"through him who gives me strength." You see, God not only tells us what He wants us to do, He also gives us the strength to do it. And how does God give this strength? Through His Holy Spirit, whom He sends to create and strengthen faith in our hearts. Let's revisit our lessons from this morning. Isaiah says, *"The LORD will prepare a feast...he will swallow up death forever...The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace."* King David in our psalm stated: *"The LORD is my shepherd...he makes me lie down...he leads me beside quiet waters...he restores my soul...He guides me...[He] prepares a table and anoints our heads with oil."* Matthew records the parable that Jesus spoke, where the king prepared the feast, the king invites, and the king gathers. The king has prepared and provided everything, right down to the wedding garments!

You see, on our own with our own weak, sinful flesh, we can do no better than to flail away in failure. Without God we see despair, hopelessness, death, and eternal destruction. But God came down to earth, took on human flesh, became subject to His own law, and died a horrible death that we deserved. Not to give us more laws that we couldn't keep. Not to give us false hopes. Not to paste on any false self-esteem because we try to do the right thing or because, well, there just has to be something good in everybody. No, we can be content because we have a God who loves us so much He created us, He died for us, He remains with us—even when we fall away and plunge headlong into sin. He's there for us to pull us back into His grace and restore us as His own dear children. While we continually become anxious, our heavenly Father gently pulls us by the hand to himself, taking on our cares upon himself, creating contentment in our hearts. This grace and contentment comes because the price for sin, as Jesus said from the cross, is "Paid in Full."

There is strength in contentment. We can be content by rejoicing in the Lord. We can be content by not being anxious about matters that are only temporary and instead of being anxious about them, take them to the Lord in prayer and let Him handle them. We can be content by thinking and dwelling on what is noble, good, and positive, not by dwelling on past sins which God has already forgiven and forgotten. But most important, we can be content—whether in plenty or in want—because our Heavenly Father and Holy Savior gives us strength and enables us to lead lives of contentment knowing that we are His children for all eternity and our God will let no one snatch us from His hand. Rest contentedly in our Lord's full pardon and free salvation. Amen