

Thanks for reading that, Paul; I appreciate that, for stepping in. Thank you, Nancy, for putting that passage on the bulletin; she hit me Monday, "what do you want to have put on the front of the bulletin?" I don't know; I will get back to you on that; that was a little early for me. I appreciate the song service today, really Zach's class--I appreciate everybody being here.

There was a lady by the name of Vivian Greene; I don't know if you ever heard of her. She's a writer of some note, probably most famously known for a quote that she's written about "when the storms come, dance in the rain." It is really a metaphor for just dealing with the issues as they come in our lives. It's a great quote, but here's another one that she said--it's what I want to really talk about today-- "It is not circumstances that create our discontent or contentment. It is us." It is us. To state that in a different way . . . when we have our current culture here in the United States, it seems to be about a culture of victimology where we blame other things, or other people for the things in our life. When in actuality, in reality, really it's just a lack of accountability on that person's part who uses that method. So as Ms. Green puts it, it is really just up to us. It all boils down to the attitude that we take toward things. Do we have a poor attitude? Do we have a bitter attitude, a selfish attitude, or an attitude of discontent? Or do we have an attitude of joy, of contentment? Is it well with our soul? Are we satisfied with just the cottage below, a little silver and a little gold? Do we indeed dance in the rain when the storms passed by? What is our attitude toward that?

Let's take a brief look at several lessons from the Bible and we'll see different characters and their attitudes they have toward the things that happen to them in their lives. Let's consider God's servant Job first. After all the loss Job suffered with his animals stolen or killed, all his sons and daughters killed, Job reacts in the first chapter verses 20-22 , "Then Job arose, tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground in worship, and he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gives and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.'" [I'm doing King James here; I don't know why]. "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." --as some people seem to do sometimes. Then Satan ravages Job with sickness and sores. Job's body was covered from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head with boils. Job's wife questions him. At this point in Job 2:9-10, "His wife said to him, 'You still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!' but he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and not accept adversity?' In all this, Job did not sin with his lips." Two people going through the exact same thing-- Job suffering a little bit more. We see two different attitudes there--one of discontentment, one of contentment. Job's three buddies show up to comfort him in all his grief. In the midst of all this tragedy, Job's three buddies show up in Job 2:13 reads like this, " so they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great." Yeah, Job is grieving, but his heart was not bitter. He was not discontent. Job writes about God, and in the 23rd chapter of Job, the 10th to the 12th verse and he

writes this, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to his steps. I have kept to his way and not turned aside, I have not departed from the commandments of his lips. I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." What do we treasure when our troubles come, when our storms come? What did Job's wife treasure when her storms came? Again two people going through the same thing with different attitudes, different approaches. It is indeed us that create our discontent or creates our content. Nobody else.

Let's look at Abraham. Paul speaking of Abraham in Romans 4:20-22 the Scriptures read this, speaking of Abraham. "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced [as we just sang] that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" Are we fully convinced, are we fully convinced of the promises of God like Abraham? Or are we like that man James talks about in the first chapter, unstable, doubting, tossed about like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed about by the wind, double-minded, unstable in all ways. What are we like?

Noah and his family spent over a year, about 375 days on a stinking boat with all those animals, and God never spoke to him that whole time. That might become kind of depressing, just hanging out with your family and I guess that would get kinda old. After a year, just talking to your family? You run out of stuff to say, "hey, what's new?" Nothing's new, the same old stuff. But God, finally in Genesis 8:15-16, "God spoke to Noah, saying, 'Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you. " And all the animals went out, two by two and Noah and all his family got off the boat finally. And what was the very first thing that Noah did once he got off the boat? Genesis 8:20 said the very first thing he did was to go out and build an altar and offer a sacrifice of thanks to God, the very first thing he did. Do we remember who to thank for our contentment? Sometimes I forget myself.

Paul writes this--what might be the most definitive verse in the Bible on contentment-- in Philippians 4:11 and 12. "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. " Paul had to learn that; it didn't come to him naturally ; it doesn't come to us naturally to do that, but Paul had to learn that process. It tells me it's an ongoing thing. I'm sure Paul failed many times; I'm sure he did. And isn't it remarkable that all these men we talked about, are exactly like us. They all had to fail at some point or another, but what did they do? They pressed on; they kept running the race as Paul put it; they did not quit. They kept going. Paul writes in I Timothy 6:6, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain." I don't see how you can really separate the two. I'm looking at II Peter 1:3--I don't see how you can separate the two from each other, but that might be time for another lesson, but these men we just talked about, these examples, were tested. They were tested in good times; they were tested in bad times, and they all found the secret to contentment. Each one of them found the secret and it's not a big secret, it's just a revelation.

Here's a quote I found-- I just I wish I could write stuff like this because it's just great in my opinion. I don't know who wrote it, so I can't give credit to it. "Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of what you already have." Think about that--the realization of what you already have. It's quite a reflection upon American society. The condition of it when less than 12 hours after we give thanksgiving for everything we have and we have a nice meal, it's time for Black Friday so we can go out, get all the stuff we think we want, the things that we think we need! And now it's even back to Black Thursday--it's aptly named, is it not?--Black Thursday, Black Friday where you have people coming to blows over \$14 rice cookers and flatscreen TVs, are you kidding me? Brothers and sisters, to state the obvious, our salvation is what our hope is. That hope leads to our contentment. It is the only way we can ever be content is to have salvation. It requires at least two things: it requires the confidence that we sang about today (Song 338 that Gerald led) and it requires conviction of our hearts and our minds and our souls. They're so close. I don't know which one comes first. We need those two things.

I like the word **conviction**. You may call it "going all in," you may call it "swallowing the Kool-Aid," "drinking the Kool-Aid." You may say I swallowed the "whole shebang, hook line and sinker." I like the word **conviction**. It just has a little bit more class to it and a little more meaning to it. No matter what you call it, it is what we need. If it is not settled, if this issue is not settled in our hearts and our minds and our souls, if we are not fully convinced of what God our Father has promised us, then that hope is not in you and in and me. If it is not the hope that leads to eternal life, contentment will be only something we read about. We'll never experience it, otherwise. It is pointless. Believe me, it is pointless to seek contentment outside of God's kingdom because it simply does not exist. Contentment is a satisfied condition and if you seek it from temporary sources, that's exactly what it's going to be. It is going to be temporary.

Ecclesiastes 5, which Paul read for us, in the 10th verse down to about the 12th: "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance with increase. This is also vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes? The sleep of the laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep." -- will not permit him to sleep because there is no rest for your soul. You will not be able to sleep; you will have no rest. And this is written by a guy -- he IS the powerball, he didn't hit the powerball, he was the powerball-- he was rich beyond belief. He was one of the richest men ever. And he says this is vanity! Does the writing sound like the writing of a contented man or a troubled man? He had to fight this issue. He came to the conclusion Fear God! Only in the kingdom of God can and does contentment exist. We sing about the kingdoms of earth pass away one by one, but the kingdom of heaven remains. Even God's name indicates the everlasting promise--he's called the rock of ages, he's the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, from everlasting to everlasting.

Back to Ecclesiastes 5:18-20: "Here is what I have seen: [Solomon writes this] It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage." That's

cool, that's good to do, we get to do that. That's fine." As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor--this is the gift of God." Praise God for that. The 20th verse: "For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart. " The joy of our heart. It's a thing that means the most to us, the things we keep closest in our hearts, the things we value the most. We keep the most precious treasures in our heart. Is our heart full of thanksgiving for all the things God has given to us? Paul writes about this in Romans expressing the treasure that he holds closest to his own heart. It is on the front of the bulletin, Romans 8:18: "For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." What did Paul treasure? What do we treasure? We sang 338 and it read, "I know whom I believe --I have believed and I'm persuaded --I'm persuaded beyond a shadow of a doubt that God can do whatever he says he does. Do we believe this? Do we live it? Sometimes I don't. Sometimes I forget. Believing and being persuaded even though, as we sang, we know we don't know everything about everything. We sang about that--we may not know how it may exactly work together, but we are content just as Paul was. He writes this in regard to where his contentment lies, of how joyous his heart is in Philippians 3: 8-11. I love this passage. I love it from the first time I came into the church. John Lee read this before he baptized me. I still find it stunning. I just love this passage. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." The excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ as your Lord, more valuable than gold or silver or anything else in this world.

One more Scripture before I close --it's one that--when I was going through a what seemed to be a pretty tough patch in my life at the time. It seems nothing now, but at the time it was a pretty rough patch for me,-- this passage kind of knocked me back to center where I needed to be and through the kindness of members here and some of the deeds that were done for me, it just helped tremendously. The 30th Psalm, verses 2-6: "O Lord my God, I cried out to you and you healed me. O Lord, you brought my soul up from the grave; you have kept me alive that I should not go down to the pit. Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning. Now in my prosperity I said, "I shall never be moved." Sometimes it's hard, a lot of times it's hard. Paul learned it. I'm trying to learn it. I hope you're trying to learn it. If you've already gotten to that point, God bless you; that's amazing. For me, sometimes, I just have to think about eternity one day at a time. I just can't think that far ahead sometimes, but never be unthankful regardless of the situation you may find yourself in. Never be unthankful to God for what he has done for you. If you're having trouble with that even in your trials, remember this that the Holy Spirit will help you do that. Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our

weaknesses." We have the Holy Spirit to help us with that, to give us strength, to keep us rock steady, so we pray. We pray. We must trust that Holy Spirit himself to help us make our fallibilities known to God. He knows how we fail and what makes us fail. Let the Holy Spirit intercede for us as the Scriptures say "with groanings that cannot be uttered" Romans 8:26.

Above all, if you don't remember anything else today, remember this. Don't quit. Don't quit. God doesn't want to lose you. God doesn't want to lose any of you. You're his children, just as you parents would never want to lose a child of your own. God is exactly the same way. His son died for us, for you, for me, and everybody here, everybody in the world, so that we could live. I'm fully convinced-- I am convicted-- that God is worried about those who are not in his kingdom. Scripture says it so I believe it-- those who do not have a joyous attitude treasured up in your hearts, that firm understanding, that submissive will that God wants from you and that only have an empty deceptive faith in themselves and not in God's love and his grace and his mercy.

Steve asked Wednesday night's class, "What is your motivation?" What is your conviction? In Mark 8:17-18 they're talking about the bread there, but I think it's applicable to our lives too, yet Jesus asked the disciples five questions: have your eyes not seen? have your ears not heard? are your hearts still hardened? do you not yet perceive? do you not remember? That's applicable to each one of us today. Be thankful today and please turn over to God your very short life, so you can begin to make your heart full of joy instead of full of stuff, so that you can be on the road to contentment. You will have that hope inside of you.

We take this time to offer God's invitation to be one of his children, to come forward and confess your sins, be baptized into his name. But also this is a time if you have something heavy on your heart to come forward and share with this congregation, ask for help. Whatever we can do-- they've helped me many times in my troubles, so if it's on your mind and you're a willing spirit, come forward as we stand and sing.