

## Enough is Enough

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*1 Timothy 6:6-11 — There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, child of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.*

Once upon a time, there was a very rich man. He owned a great deal of land, and this land produced a great deal of crops. Come harvest time, he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I no longer have room to store all of the crops I have?” Then he said, “I know what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and *there* I will store all of my crops. Oh yes, and then I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have plenty of goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God interrupted him and said, “You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And all of these things that you have stored up, whose will they be?” The end.

This is one of Jesus’ parables. It’s recorded in Luke 12, and it is often called the parable of the rich fool. At the beginning of this past week, when I read this morning’s passage from 1 Timothy 6, I was reminded of this short, arresting story and the lesson that it teaches about contentment. And that’s what we’re reflecting on together this morning: contentment. Our passage in 1 Timothy begins by saying, “There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment,” and then it goes on to say that “if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these things.”

In English, the word “contentment” connotes the emotion of happiness. If I say that I’m content, I mean that I’m feeling happy, and specifically happy with what I have. But the ancient Greek word for contentment doesn’t necessarily have that same connotation. The word is not so much about one’s emotion and is more so about the idea of sufficiency. It’s about having enough. Often, the Greek word for content is simply translated as “enough.” So, if I say that I am content, using the Greek word in our passage, I may or may not be particularly happy, but I *do* recognize that what I have is sufficient for me. I recognize that I don’t need to tear down my barns and build bigger ones, because I already have enough. Interestingly, the root word behind the Greek word for contentment means to repel or to fend off. Being content, then, doesn’t mean that you sit back with a big smile on your face and let out a long sigh; it means that you lift up your hands and say, “Stop. That’s enough. I have enough.”

These days, in this country, I think that this is one of the hardest things to say: “I have enough.” We live in a culture of consumerism. Almost everywhere we go, almost everywhere we look, we are confronted with some new product on the market, and we are invited, even mandated to

acquire it. The signs on our roads, the commercials on our TVs, and the advertisements online all entice us to get ahold of this great new thing, which promises to improve our lives, help our relationships, boost our social standing, and ultimately give us happiness. As a society, we are preoccupied with acquiring new things, in part because we are relentlessly bombarded with the lie that if we get these new things, our problems will go away, and conversely, if we don't get these new things, we simply can't be happy.

And it's even worse than that. Our culture of consumerism tells us that if we do not get these new things, then we are not enough: not rich enough, not pretty enough, not smart enough, not successful enough, not secure enough, whatever. The lie is not just that we don't *possess* enough things or the right things; it's that we ourselves, our very selves, are insufficient, unworthy, unacceptable, unloveable — until we get this new thing. Contentment means to repel that lie; to fend off the onslaught of our consumerist culture; to see all the signs and the commercials and the advertisements, and then to resolutely respond with “Enough. I have enough. I *am* enough, right now, just as I am.” It's one of the most radical, counter-cultural things we can say.

And again, it's very hard to say, in a society where it seems like everything is conspiring to keep us from being content. But friends, we must learn to say it, for the sake of our own sanity in this world. And more than that: our passage from 1 Timothy says that when we lack contentment, we “fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” Some people, the passage says, in their insatiable eagerness to acquire more, “have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.” According to our passage, then, and according to the parable of the rich fool, we strive to be content not just for the sake of our sanity, but also for the sake of our salvation. We strive to be content not because God doesn't want us to acquire things, but because God wants us to have a truly abundant life, and when we are hell-bent on getting hold of some new thing, a life of true abundance can slip right through our fingers.

Now, just to be clear, I don't believe that God is upset whenever we acquire new things. On the contrary, material possessions are a gift from God, and we are meant to enjoy them. Even Jesus, who lived a life of intentional poverty with his disciples, still *feasted* from time to time. So, it's not a problem to enjoy the things of our world and to satisfy our desires. It *is* a problem, though, when our fondness of and our craving for those things begin to dominate our thoughts and our daily lives. It's a problem when we compromise our values or cause injury to another in order to get the things that we want. And it's a problem when the things that we want matter more to us than the blessings that we already have. Whenever we find ourselves slipping into these problematic areas, we need to preach the message of contentment to ourselves: “I have enough. I am enough. God has told me that I am enough.”

In closing, our passage addresses us, the readers, as children of God. “But as for you, child of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.” Friends, knowing our identity as children of God, and reminding ourselves regularly that this is who we are, is one of the most important ways, I think, in which we strive for contentment. Let us repeat

to ourselves throughout this week that we are enough not because of what we have or what we might have one day, but because of the God to whom we belong, who loves us perfectly and who provides for our needs. In the end, this God is the only thing we have that will not return to dust one day. Amen.