

A Meaningful Life Finds Contentment in Christ

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

Speaker: Matthew Black

Text: Ecclesiastes 8:9-17; Philippians 4:11-13

Date: Wednesday, July 28, 2010, 7pm

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Philippians 4:11-13**, and then we'll look at our main text in **Ecclesiastes 8:9-17**.

Life has many ups and downs. Prosperity and adversity, good times and difficult times are all part of the plan of God. Do you know how to remain content in the Lord through all of it? Do you see God's hand in the past. Do you trust God's hand in your future?

Paul says in **Philippians 4:11-13**, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

If I were to ask you tonight, do you know how to be content in life? Recently we talked about how God brings both the day of adversity and the day of prosperity (7:14). He gift wraps trials for you. He gift wraps mountain top experiences for you. Life is not all one trial, neither is it all adversity. It's a mixture. The question tonight is do you know how to be content in Christ? Have you learned how to keep your heart content.

I asked the question, "Do you know how...", but this message tonight is not about knowledge. I'm asking a heart question. Have you learned how to fix your heart on Jesus Christ in such a way that you are at rest in His sovereign control of your life. Have you learned to be content in Him?

What we find in **Ecclesiastes 8:9-17**, is that Solomon is in the midst of all this garbage. People doing wrong—even professing believers being wicked and doing evil—and wrong and trouble happening to God's people, and prosperity and happiness happening to people who could care less about God.

How can you live to please God and be content, and not be affected or influenced by the ups and downs in life and by the inconsistency of people? Solomon tells us just how in this chapter—how to be content, how to enjoy God and how to enjoy life.

I want to ask you, have you learned how to be content?

The Story of Darlene Deibler Rose

I want to tell you the story of Darlene Deibler Rose. She was a missionary to Indonesia when the Second World War broke out and she and her husband were taken captive in Japan. Her husband was immediately taken from her and died a year later in a prison camp. She was only 26 years old and a widow.

She was taken from there and accused of spying for the US. She was interrogated every day. She was fed rice and porridge each day, and much of it was infested with maggots. She did her best to be thankful for what she had, but from her little six by six cell, she could see women freely taking clumps of bananas from the banana trees. Darlene began to pray for bananas. She told the Lord that she was thankful for the rice and porridge, and she understood that no one, probably not even He could not bring a banana to her in that lonely prison cell. There was only one officer that had ever treated her well, Mr. Yamaji. He had visited her that day, and he saw that she was very ill. When Mr. Yamaji and the other officers left Darlene realized she had not bowed to the men! She was sure they would come back to her cell and beat her. A little later she heard their approaching steps, and got ready for an interrogation and possibly a beating. The guard opened the door, walked in and laid a pile of bananas at her feet—*bananas!* She was told they were all from Mr. Yamaji. Darlene was stunned as she counted—there were *ninety-two bananas!*

Darlene Rose wrote of this day. She said:

“In all my spiritual experience, I’ve never known such shame before my Lord. I pushed the bananas into a corner and wept before Him. ‘Lord, forgive me; I’m so ashamed. I couldn’t trust You enough to get even one banana for me. Just look at them—there are almost a hundred.’”

We have so much to be thankful for. Sometimes God gives us rice. Sometimes He gives us bananas. We are blessed above all people. But it is a struggle to maintain a spirit of contentment. How can we do it? Solomon tells us how.

I. **We should determine to remain Faithful to the Lord, regardless of the wicked world we live in (vs. 9-11).**

Solomon esteemed those who feared God amidst a great current of wickedness. In **verse 12** he said, “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.”

Is it the central desire of your life to be faithful to the Lord and to fear Him, regardless what others do? Do you have a settled outlook that keeps you faithful—knowing that “it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him” (**verse 12**)?

A. God’s people are faithful in the midst of **cruelty**. It is easy to become disillusioned when we see cruelty around us. It seems everyone is pushing for their own way. Solomon observed this too. He said in **Ecclesiastes 8:9**, “All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his **hurt**”.

So often we observe cruelty on this earth. People abusing other people. We wake up one day, and a person that we've trusted, a friend, a professing believer seems faithful, but then they turn. They **hurt** others. They do wrong to others.

A wise person is not going to be surprised at all the **hurt** that goes around. We live in a sin cursed world. We live among sinners. We are going to see some awful abuses of power. The wise person is not surprised by the abuse of power. We put our trust in the Lord. We are faithful regardless of the faithlessness around us!

- B. God's people are faithful even in the midst of **hypocrisy**. **Ecclesiastes 8:10**, "Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity". These are surprising verses. Solomon says the wicked go to the Temple—they are among those who worship God. They look the same as believers, they even receive "praise", but they are the tares among the wheat.

A wise person observes much wrong and hypocrisy in life, but it doesn't taint him. You are going to see people who go in and out of the holy place be praised, and yet in their private lives you find out they are wicked. What a vain thing it is to praise men. We ultimately know no one's heart. We need to be faithful despite the many accounts we hear of people we thought we knew, turning from God back to sin.

Illustration: It can be disheartening. The Facebook revolution has revealed where many people's hearts are. Many I went to Christian school with boast about their worldly escapades. It makes you want to blush. What are we to do? Be discouraged? No, we need to be faithful. We need to remember what God's Word tells us about the wheat and the tares.

Wheat and Tares

We need to realize that the wheat and tares are mixed together until the last trumpet. When Christ comes he will do just as we read in **Matthew 3:12**, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

He says again in **Matthew 13:30** regarding true believers and hypocrites in the church, "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

God will sort out the hypocrites at the judgment. You don't worry about that. You be faithful even amidst so many people's hypocrisy.

- C. God's people are faithful in the midst of **evil** (vs. 11).

Ecclesiastes 8:11, “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.”

Illustration: Some people seem to literally get away with murder. Every year 200,000 murders are committed in our country, and half of them go free. People steal and think they can get away with it. People think they can live any way they want to and because nothing happens immediately, that they are going to get away with it.

Solomon says “the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil” for the sheer reason that they can get away with it. The “sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily”. But we know that even if people get away with everything on this earth, there is a pay day, someday. There is a day of judgment. We can live in contentment because when we are wronged, we can submit ourselves to the Lord.

Peter says that Christ “when he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23). If you trust Christ, then you can “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

As believers we understand that ultimate justice is coming: “...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). The wise are faithful among outright evil around them.

Paul says in **Philippians 2:15**, “that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”. The wise are faithful even amidst constant evil around us.

II. We should determine to remain **Focused** on the Lord is we are to be content (vs. 12-14).

A. A **Virtuous** Focus is on God. **Ecclesiastes 8:12-13**, “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God”.

Is your focus on this life or the life to come? Yes there are many wicked people that seem to have everything go their way. They prolong their life. But truly, Solomon says in **verse 13**, “it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God”.

The wicked will not live forever. One day we are all going to meet God. Live with that in mind and you will be wise. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33).

If your focus is on the Lord, it will be well with your soul. That’s what Solomon says, “I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him” (verse 12). Is your joy in the presence of God? Contentment comes from walking closely with God.

Transition: On the other hand, it is vain to focus on circumstances.

B. A Vain Focus is on circumstances. **Ecclesiastes 8:14**, “There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.”

I know so many people who have built their lives around a bitterness or an injustice. It seems whenever there is a family reunion, I find out that there is deep pain from the faults of parents. And some people live their whole lives bitter about some serious disappointment or injustice that has happened to them. The wise don’t live that way. They know it is vanity to live that way!

If you don’t have your focus on God, then the circumstances of this life are really going to confuse you and embitter you. You’ve got to live with a bird’s eye view. You’ve got to TRUST God. You cannot lean to your “own understanding”.

Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

What’s your focus? Are you worried or angry about things you cannot control. People and circumstances ought not to control you. Focus on God. Sometimes godly people die as if they were wicked and the wicked prosper.

Illustration: Think of our Lord Jesus Christ. His death made no sense to the disciples, but there was a resurrection day! Don’t lean to your own understanding. Trust God!

III. We should determine to **Find our joy** in Christ (vs. 15-18).

How does that happen? This is very practical. Sometimes we have this very middle aged view of serving God. It’s like we have to be poor to really serve God. Actually, if you are poor or rich you can serve God. The key is enjoying the use of God gifts for His glory.

A. The wise person knows how to enjoy the **gifts** God sends him (vs. 15). Solomon recommends us to be joyful in all that God gives us! **Ecclesiastes 8:15**, “And I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.”

James 1:17, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

We are commanded to work hard (“toil”) and to enjoy the benefits hard work, all the while recognizing that it is God who is so generous to us. We are to appreciate the Lord for the “life that God has given him” (**verse 15**).

B. The wise person knows that ultimate joy does not come from our **plans**, but God’s plans for us (vs. 16-17). **Ecclesiastes 8:16-17a**, “When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one’s eyes see sleep, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun....”

1. ***Our joy can never come from the uncertain circumstances of life.*** Neither can our joy come from our ability to manipulate life and / or people. We are not the master of our own destinies. We need to see “all the work of God” in our day to day plans. Can you honestly say you see God working in the details of your life. If not, can you say that you are at least willing to trust Him?

- It’s true there are many days when we say with Solomon, “man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun....” We cannot ultimately figure out many of life’s most difficult details.

In fact, to really have a bird’s eye view of God’s goodness in our life is impossible this side of heaven. Too many things are hidden.

1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.” If we set out to understand how and why things happen the way they do, we will never find it out! In **verse 17b** Solomon says, “However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.”

2. ***Often life goes haywire!***

- Remember Moses in the wilderness, Joseph in the pit, Daniel in the lion’s den, David in the cave running from Saul, and Job who lost everything. Suffering and sorrow are all part of our life.

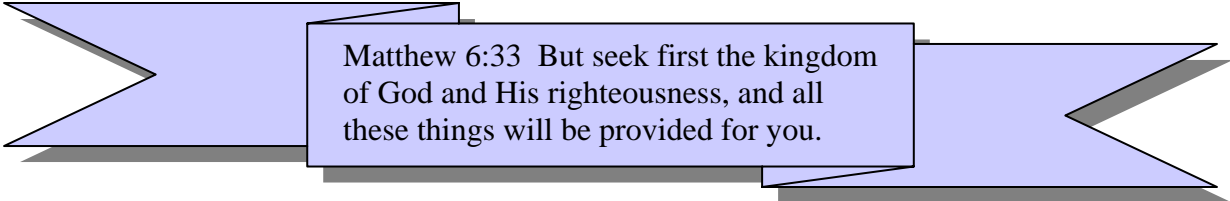
3. **God's got plans for those haywire days.** God will make sense of it all one day. Yes, He'll wipe away all our tears. He loves us. He's not cruel.
- We read in **Jeremiah 29:11**, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."
 - David says in **Psalms 40:5**, "You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told."

Contentment is found in Christ! He loves us. He cares for you and is thinking on you when you think you are forgotten!

Conclusion: Are you content?

- Let's apply it to **relationships**. If you are single, are you content to remain single? If you are married, are you content in your marriage? It's not about singleness or marriage. It's all about being content in Christ. If you are content being single, you'll be content being married. As far as testing, there's not a whole lot of difference. Both singleness and marriage are hard for different reasons.
- What about your **job**? Are you content? Can you be thankful for your place of employment? Remember Joseph who was sent to prison, and he took his job in prison seriously, and the Scripture says in **Genesis 39:22-23**, "the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed." Joseph knew how to take lemons and make lemonade.
- Let's talk about the root of the tenth commandment. Covetousness is essentially discontent. You know how to tell if someone is covetous? They are whining and complaining and not helping. Do you struggle with whining and complaining? Children certainly do that, but we as God's people ought to be content. The Bible says in **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Contentment comes from Christ. Let's be faithful to Him, focus on Him, and find our joy in Him. People change. Circumstances change. Both are disappointing. But "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (**Hebrews 13:8**).



Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.