

WHEN IS ENOUGH ENOUGH?

GENESIS 33:9, 11

When is enough enough? How much does it take to have enough? The Forbes Magazine released their latest list of billionaires this past week. Bill Gates of Microsoft led the list. I wonder if Mr. Gates thinks that he has enough. His wealth was evaluated at something over thirty billion, as I recall. I am not sure how much money that is. If he spent a million dollars a day, how long would it take him to spend it? If he spent a million dollars a day for the next ten years, he would have spend only 3.6 billion, so it would take him about a hundred years to spend it all if he spent a million dollars a day, and did not make any more. How would you spend a million dollars a day? You would have to give away considerable sums of money to get rid of a million dollars a day. From what I have read about Mr. Gates, he probably does not feel that he has enough.

As I was reading some sermons from Charles Spurgeon some years ago, he called my attention to something in our text that I had never noticed. In the old version both Esau and Jacob claimed that they had enough. Actually they did not use the same word in the Hebrew text, but it is translated in the same

way in the old version. Spurgeon pointed out however that the two men meant something entirely different when they used the word. A close look at these two statements might help us determine if we have enough.

I. THE CONTENTMENT OF THE UNGODLY.

In the case of Esau enough was actually too much. When Jacob offered him a generous gift, he declined at first because he had “enough”. He said: “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” The word he used is translated “plenty” in the NIV. He felt no need of anything more—he was content.

1. Such an attitude contributes to human happiness.

The Esau that met Jacob seems to be a rather happy man. To be honest with you, I am surprised that he related to Jacob in the way he did. The last time he appeared in the biblical record, he was angry and discontented. He approached Jacob as a man who seemed to be at peace with himself. He has obviously been prosperous and successful in his life. The fact that he brought four hundred servants with him, armed for battle if it was needed, is a testimony to the extent of his prosperity. He honestly did not feel the need of the gift that Jacob was offering. He was happy with what he had.

Even unsaved people can achieve a certain measure of happiness when their lives are filled with material things. It is a mistake for us to believe that all of our unsaved friends are unhappy people. Material things have the power to produce a measure of contentment within.

2. Such contentment can be helpful in preventing greed.

Greed is a terrible plague when it finds a place in the human spirit. It is as likely to be found in the rich as it is in the poor. Esau had evidently overcome the pull of envy in his life. When it seemed rather obvious to him that his prosperity had probably exceeded that of Jacob in the years they had been apart, he felt no need of anything that Jacob possessed. A person is much more likely to find worldly happiness if they are able to escape the grip of greed.

The Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wrote about a Russian farmer who was never content with what he owned. He always wanted just a little more land. He heard about an offer that really excited him—for a thousand rubles you could own all of the land you could walk around in a day.

He paid his thousand rubles and set out early in the morning. He kept walking for he surely wanted to include as much as possible. But he became

aware that he had walked so far that it would be difficult to get back to his starting point before dark, so he quickened his pace. As the sun began to set, he began to run with all that was within him. Just as darkness came, he reached his starting point. But as he reached the starting point, he collapsed, and began to hemorrhage from the mouth. He was soon dead.

His servant dug a grave and buried him right where he died. The title to the story was “How much land does a man need?” In his conclusion he wrote, “six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.” Greed is surely a destroyer of life and everything that is good.

3. Such contentment can be dangerous if a person has become content without God.

This seems to have been precisely the situation with Esau. He had amassed enough wealth that he felt no need of God. He was confident that his possessions would be adequate to meet whatever need he might have in the days to come. He had become a materialist—satisfied with the things of the flesh and the things of this world.

I had an interesting experience a few days ago in a conversation with a roundtable group that meets every Saturday at the Lubbock Club to discuss some topic. They usually invite someone to make a short presentation to them and then they asked questions and react to what has been presented. The group is made up of many of the leaders in the community—including some members of this congregation. Obviously my presentation to them provoked questions about spiritual matters. Some of them are elderly—they have lived long enough to observe the ways of human nature. They seem to agree that men feel more need of God in times of depression than they do in times of prosperity. Any prosperity that dulls our thirst for God, our sense of need for him, is a dangerous thing.

This seems to be where we are in our culture right now. We are in the midst of prosperous times generally. Because of this a significant percentage of our population is content with life as it is—without God. They are not ready to abolish the church, it is convenient to have one when someone wants to be married or needs to be buried, but there is surely no need for God in the conduct of the affairs of your daily life. Prayer and Bible reading are for the aged or the sick, but not for me! I have enough! Why should I pray?

This makes our task difficult. We have to convince those who think that they have enough that they actually need God. So enough can be too much. It might be better have nothing if you would more easily recognize your need of God.

II. THE CONTENTMENT OF THE GODLY.

Jacob should not be understood as saying the same thing as Esau. Their words reflect a completely different perspective on life and on things. What Jacob literally said was: "I have everything. I have all." After his past encounters with God he had learned that since he was in covenant with God and was surrendered to do the will of God, he had everything he needed for the living of life. When you have God, you have everything.

1. This kind of contentment is marked by gratitude.

Have you listened to the conversation between these two men? Have you heard Esau say anything about God? What have you heard Jacob say about God?

When the two men first met, Esau asked about Jacob's family that he had met before he got to Jacob. For reasons known only to Jacob, he had put Leah, her servants, and her children out front. Rachel had come next with

Joseph and her servants and children. Then Jacob had brought up the end of the entourage. Esau asked: “Who are these with you?” Jacob answered: “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” Can’t you hear the gratitude in the response of Jacob?

When Esau expressed his reluctance to take the gift that Jacob was offering, Jacob insisted. He said, “Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” Did you hear the gratitude in his reply? He is aware that God has been generous with him. He knows that God’s generosity has been an expression of his grace. His heart is full of gratitude to God.

Wherever you find the right kind of contentment, the contentment of the godly, you will find gratitude. You will fail to find gratitude in the contentment of the ungodly. They feel that they have what they have because they have done what they have done. They are quick to take credit for their success.

2. This kind of contentment is marked by generosity.

The Jacob who met Esau is a changed man. His approach to Esau was marked by humility and generosity. These two character qualities are often

found together. Jacob expressed the humility as he bowed himself before Esau seven times. Evidently he would take a few steps toward Esau, and then he would take a few more steps and bow. He repeated this seven times. This was a show of humility. He did not come as Esau's lord, but rather as his servant.

You also sense his humility in his speech. He addressed Esau: "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." In his former days he had sought the birthright so he might lord it over his brother. Those days are gone. He now sees himself as the servant of Esau. This is quite a change.

This humility enables him to be generous. Evidently Jacob offered to his brother a sizable gift. The gift should probably been seen as an expression of Jacob's regrets over the way he has treated his brother in the past. He explained to Esau: "These are to find favor in the sight of my lord." He calls Esau "lord" and offers the gift.

Is it not interesting that Esau offers no gift! Jacob is the one who is coming home. Esau has enough, but he does not have enough to be generous. He has

enough but he does not have enough to share. In contrast Jacob has enough so he is able to share, to give.

This gives us some insight into the prosperity of our country at this particular time. As our prosperity has gone up our generosity has gone down. We Baptist were much more generous percentage wise in the depression years than we are today. The contentment of the godly will always be marked by generosity.

3. This type of contentment is basically spiritual.

It is the kind of contentment that you can have whether you have little or you have much. Jacob had been blessed by God on his journey. He did have considerable wealth, but his contentment was not in his wealth. He had met God while on his journey. God had established a covenant with him at Bethel, and then he had surrendered his life to God at Peniel. Since he had such a relationship with God, he had everything he needed.

Let me share a personal confession with you. As you come to my point in life, your perspective begins to change. In our young adult years you ask, “Do we have enough to make it this month?” Then in your middle years you

begin to ask, “Do we have enough to get the kids through school?” Then in the mature adult years you begin to ask, “If my health broke, would we have enough to make it? Will we have enough to make it in retirement?” You begin to watch the investments you have set aside for retirement almost daily and wonder if they will be enough. I have found it helpful for my soul to remind myself on a regular basis that my sufficiency is in the Lord and not in my investments for retirement. I need to remind myself that if the stock market crashed this week and wiped out all of my retirement funds I would still have my relationship with God. Who could ask for more?

Where do you find yourself? Are you more like Jacob or Esau? May the Father grant that you will know the contentment of the godly where enough is enough because you have God. It can be that way if you will surrender your life to the Lord like Jacob surrendered his life. Contentment is found in knowing and serving the living God.

WHEN YOU HAVE ENOUGH

I. IF YOU ARE UNGODLY, IT IS A CURSE.

1. It allows you to find contentment without God.

2. It builds into you a false sense of worth.

3. It blinds your eyes to the nature of life.

II. IF YOU ARE GODLY, IT IS A BLESSING.

1. It develops gratitude in the heart.

2. It encourages humility.

3. It enables generosity.

4. It strengthens faith.