

THE WAY TO A LIFE OF CONTENTMENT
PSALM 37: 1-9

Need: Inner Contentment.

Proposition: Inner contentment is found by making certain spiritual commitments.

Objective: To lead the people to a life of contentment in the Lord.

Introduction:

There is a lot of discontentment in our world. It is written on the faces of so many people you see. You can pick up on it as you listen to their conversation. They are troubled within. They are never happy with what they have or enjoying their present situation. The grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence. They are continually experiencing inner turmoil. They lack inner spiritual contentment. They are usually good prospects for a divorce, a job change, a health problem, and even a change of religions.

David knew such people in his day. He addressed this Psalm to them. The Psalm takes the form of the wisdom sayings that are found in the Book of Proverbs. The Lord had enabled David to see the cause for much of the discontent. He identifies at least two sources of this discontent in the Psalm.

David points to anger as one source of the discontent. “Do not fret because of evil men”. The word translated “fret” is the Hebrew word for anger. The Living Bible translates verse eight: “Stop your anger! Turn off your wrath. Don’t fret and worry—it only leads to harm.” He specifically refers to anger that is directed toward evil men, persons who have done you wrong and have gotten by with it. It refers to someone who has prospered at your advantage or the advantage of someone you love. It is distressing to consider how many people live with this type of anger burning in their hearts. You cannot be around them without feeling the heat of their anger. This keeps them from ever experiencing real inner contentment.

The second source is “envy”. “Or be envious of those who do wrong.” Envy or jealousy in this case is directed toward some outwardly prosperous evil person. You are having a hard time making ends meet and this person who never makes any attempt to do the right thing seems to have the Midas touch. This just eats on you. Their children get the honors at school. Their picture appears in the local paper reporting honors they are receiving. You know in your heart that you should have received the honor. You deserve the

good things that have come to them. This will keep you from ever knowing contentment.

You will never have contentment and anger or jealousy in your heart at the same time. But what we need to know is how to find contentment in a world like this. The chances of the world about us becoming gentler and fairer are not too good. You will have to live out the rest of your days in a world in which “might makes right” and the only golden rule seems to be that “those who have the gold rule”.

The Lord God points us to the way to contentment through this Davidic Psalm. In four simple steps He tells how it can be done. You can have inner peace and contentment regardless of what others may do, if you will do these four things. If you are like me, you shy away from simple formulas unless they come from the Lord. When they come from the Lord, you can bet the farm on them.

I. TRUST IN THE LORD.

David had opportunity to learn the truth of this approach to life. As a young man he became the object of the wrath of the powerful king Saul. Saul was

continually attempting to destroy David and those who traveled with him, even though David had demonstrated nothing but loyalty to Saul. He stayed just one step ahead of Saul for several years, and thus just one step ahead of death. He was living off of what he could beg from people along the way while Saul continued to eat the rich fare of the king. He hid in caves, in the desert, and even fled to foreign countries.

How do you survive physically, emotionally, and spiritually in circumstances like this? It was in this time of great stress in his life that David discovered the trustworthiness of the Lord.

Moses used the word translated “trust” in the same way that David uses it, but in a different context. The Lord said to the people, “they will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down.” (Deuteronomy 28:52). In a time of great danger the people would be hiding behind the strong and high walls of the city, and trusting the walls to secure them from the attack of their enemy. They “trusted” in the wall. We are told to trust in the Lord like they trusted in the walls. David found that when he had no walled city into which he could flee that the Lord was a good hiding place. He could trust in the Lord and he would not fail.

He adds to the admonition to trust, “and do good”. When you feel your life under stress, what do you do? Do you seek to get even with the person who is causing your stress? Do you plot against the person who is taking advantage of you? No! You do the good thing, the right thing. Jesus taught that you return good for evil. This is just the opposite of anger and envy that prevent contentment.

And there is a promise: “dwell in the land and enjoy safe pastures”. If you trust in the Lord, He will see that your needs are met. You will not find yourself without help in time of trouble. David knew this to be true. The testimony of David in this Psalm is: “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.” I borrowed my mother’s Bible while I was working on this sermon in my Dad’s hospital room this week. She had boldly underlined this verse in her Bible, and beside it she had written, “Yes!” He is trustworthy!

Are you looking for inner contentment? Then “trust in the Lord”!

II. DELIGHT IN THE LORD.

What does it mean to “delight” in the Lord? The prophet Isaiah uses this same word in two different contexts. He uses it of the “delight” that you might find in your favorite food. What is your favorite dish? Can you imagine yourself in a real state of hunger, you have found your way to your favorite restaurant, and your very favorite meal has been set before you? You pick up a knife and a fork. You cut a nice slice out of the nice juicy steak or whatever your favorite may be. You put it in your mouth and just relish it for a moment. O it tastes so good! You are delighting! To delight is to enjoy.

The other context in which the prophet uses the word is more personal and intimate. The prophet uses it of the delight that a man and a woman find in each other in their more intimate moments together. When they love each other, it is a time in which they seek nothing more than to please each other and to enjoy each other. In a good marriage this is about as close as two humans can come to pure delight while they are on earth.

When you put these two ideas together, you begin to see what “delight” means in this context. It is to make the Lord the joy of your life. It is to develop a deep love relationship with Him in which your only goal is to

please Him. When you develop such a relationship with the Lord, then the promise will surely come true—He will give you the desires of your heart. This promise is limited to those who have truly made Him their delight. Why shouldn't He give them the desires of their heart since they desire primarily to please Him?

Do you see how this will set you free from the anger and envy that prevent contentment? You have taken your focus off of others, and what they have and do, and you have placed it on the Lord. They no longer have control over your life.

When David did this, it allowed him to view Saul and his activities in a totally new light. Delighting in the Lord set him free from anger toward Saul and envy toward his prosperity. So if you want inner contentment, delight yourself in the Lord.

III. COMMIT YOUR WAY TO THE LORD.

There is a helpful picture in this word “commit”. It was used in that day of the process of loading a camel. Whenever you loaded a camel, it would kneel down on its front legs so that you could roll the load it was to carry on

to its back. Camels were the UPS of the ancient world. This is what we are to do—we are to roll our way on to the Lord of the covenant. You have a choice—you can attempt to carry your way yourself or you can roll it on the shoulders of our able Lord.

What does the “way” involve in this passage? This word occurs many times in the Hebrew Old Testament. The primary meaning of the word is a road or highway. It takes on added meaning that must be determined by the context. A possible meaning of the word is “a manner of life”. This would mean to roll your manner of life on the Lord. By doing this you would allow the Lord to determine whether you enjoy poverty or prosperity. You would leave up to Him the choice as to whether you face good time or bad times. You would make your manner of life His responsibility.

For David to do this meant that he left it up to the Lord to determine whether he was a king or a fugitive. The Lord could determine whether he had a shepherd’s rod in his hand or a king’s scepter. What would this mean in your life?

The other shade of meaning that can be found in this word is your condition. Your way is your condition in life. Suppose you find yourself like David with a bounty on your head hiding in a cave? Do you lie in that cave and fret about the injustice that has befallen you, or do you roll it over on the Lord? It is obvious that you cannot change the condition in which you find yourself, so why not roll it over on Someone who can change it? What is the condition that you need to roll up on the Lord?

The promise is “and He will do it.” This verb is one of the verbs used in Genesis 1 for the creative activity of God. It is not the verb that means to create out of nothing, but the one that is used of God taking existing material and making something new. Does this not shed some encouraging light on your situation? If you will roll it on the Lord, He will take it and make something new out of it.

When David rolled over on the Lord his condition in the cave as a fugitive, the Lord took it and made out of it a whole new life as the king of Israel. In fact the Lord made him the greatest king that Israel ever knew. Wonder what He could do with your condition if you rolled it on to His shoulders? He

might take that in justice that you have experienced and turn it into a source of real blessing in your life.

This word “commit” is used by David in the prophetic Psalm that describes the experience of the Messiah upon the Cross. “He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him.” (Psalm 22:8) These were the words that would be railed at Jesus as He hung on the Cross. “Trust” is the word translated “commit” in our text. So His enemies understood that Jesus had rolled his condition on to the shoulders of the Almighty God, and He had. When He rolled His condition on the Lord, the Lord made His condition the means of salvation for the whole world. Wonder what He would do with your condition if you rolled it on to His shoulders?

This is another part of the way to contentment.

IV. BE STILL BEFORE THE LORD.

The verb “be still” is translated in various ways in our Old Testament. The KJV translates it “rest in the Lord”. The word has a basic idea in it of shutting up and being quiet. It is used as a parallel here of “waiting patiently” for the Lord to do whatever the Lord pleases to do. To paraphrase the word into our context it means to “quit fussing and complaining, and quit

stewing over your circumstances, and just wait and see what the Lord will do with it. Do not pass judgment on the Lord until He finishes the last chapter of your life. All of our fussing about the circumstances of our lives is premature since the Lord is not finished with us yet. Can we wait until He has finished His process?

Have you noticed that the key in each of these steps to contentment is the Lord? You trust in the Lord. You delight in the Lord. You commit to the Lord. You rest in the Lord. The Lord becomes the key to everything. Instead of fretting over things you cannot change, you turn it over to one who can change them. Instead of being envious of others, you trust the Lord to determine your situation in life. Your present and your future are now in the hands of another. You can give yourself to life with a freedom and contentment that the citizens of this world only dream about. You can have contentment right in the midst of the most difficult of situations. The great Christian Paul learned this by experience. He bore testimony to the Philippians that he had found contentment while he was confined in a Roman prison and was facing the possibility of death every day. He was trusting in, delighting in, committing to, and resting in the Lord. In the Lord he found all that He needed for life every day.

This is the way to the life of contentment for you. Let's take it together.