

Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain!

✚ **The flight of fright (vv.6-10)**

✚ **The fight for right (vv.11-16)**

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, dear fellow champions of God's grace:

How is it that a child can grab a jar of homemade jam off the basement shelf and feel so content? Breakfast oatmeal again? Hand-me-downs from kind relatives? A beggar will come to the door asking for two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Dad will offer one because they're too poor, but content.

The young couple's car is a "rust bucket," "cancer car" out West. He just told his pregnant young wife how much he likes their 350 V8. Contentment meets rock that rolls the full length of his new exhaust system, bends the flywheel, dents the transmission box, punctures the oil pan...car smoking. A semi truck driver from the other side of the mountain rushes with fire extinguisher – not needed. Tow truck driver says how he broke two axels from rocks off the mountainside. They're safe, and content.

Cold wind at his back chills the plastic bucket astride a hole in the ice, not like warm icehouses dotting the lake. Line dangling deep, he's thinking, "It doesn't get better than this." Sunset takes his old pickup and catch of slimy dead things past the drive through rush for fast food. Why is he so content?

Food, cars or fishing can't create it. Fear dogs many rich who don't feel it – always wanting more, jealous of neighbors. Who can see these in the same sentence: **Godliness with Contentment...Great Gain?** Yet prisoner Paul writes, "*I have learned the secret to being content.*" (Philippians 4:12) Is he dreaming? **The flight of fright + The fight for right** – if **Contentment** is a gift, how do you get it?

✚ **The flight of fright (vv.6-10)**

Paul was just telling young Pastor Timothy how some preachers only think of *godliness* as *a means of financial gain*. But that's like jam with no jar, car without oil, fish with no catch. **Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain!** Since hearses don't have no trailers, and God is the Giver of everything good, food and shelter really are all we need to be content. The more you have the more you fear losing it. That **fright** takes **flight** in God-created faithful fear, love and trust in God above all things.

Long ago but not far away a state congressman seemed to have it all. Wife and family, church treasurer. Did he hope to hit the big one and give a huge donation to his church? Was he praying as he dipped into offerings for gambling debts? If fear runs away too soon, it's costly because sin never looks deadly until after you commit it. Embezzlement cost his marriage, position, job, office, freedom. The best of us can prove the Holy Spirit right. One who longs for and strives after money eventually impales himself on a skewer, as if roasted over an open pit. Enticing aroma, except when you're the meat.

Is there a way out? First recognize the enemy within. We're all guilty of greed and discontent. We all fall for the age old lie that money can buy happiness. We know better, but "*the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV84) Our gracious God does. He is so kind to withhold too much which would only make you a target of others who always want more. "*Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.*" (Proverbs 30:8 NIV84) *Ten thousand thousand precious gifts My daily thanks employ, Nor is the least a cheerful heart that tastes those gifts with joy!* (CW 259:2)

Honestly, money may not be your biggest struggle. Many don't care nearly as much about money as family and relationships. You might feel right at home with the super hospitable woman from Shunem, Israel. She asked her husband if they could build an apartment for a traveling man of God. Elisha was so

grateful, he looked for a way to give thanks and found out she had no child. She was so content with her life, that when Elisha promised she and her old husband would have a son, she responded, “**No, my lord, you man of God. Do not deceive your servant.**” (EHV¹) God’s love gave her a son! (2 Kings 4:8-17)

Who can imagine her grief a few years later when her boy died maybe of sunstroke. She took him up to Elisha’s apartment, laid him on the bed, and went looking for the man of God. How could she keep telling everyone – her husband, all who asked, “**Everything is all right**”? She finally grabbed Elisha’s feet and cried, “**Did I ask you my lord for a son? Didn’t I say, ‘Don’t give me false hope’?**” Only the kind of faith that conquers grief could say, “**Everything is all right.**” (2 Kings 4:18-37) She became one of those women heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 who “**received back their dead by resurrection.**” (v.35)

Such conquering **Contentment** only God can create. But while the world despises you for not matching up to its criteria, on your worst day you’re still wealthy with God’s joy and peace even through tears. **The flight of fright** becomes reality because **Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain!**

The fight for right (vv.11-16)

Godly **Contentment** does not make complacent couch potatoes. First of all, God’s Word keeps us running away from false teachers whose lies in God’s name only produce **conceit**, misunderstanding, **controversies and battles over words...envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions...constant frictions among depraved minds, who have lost hold of the truth, imagining that their godliness is a means of financial gain.** “**But you, O man of God, flee from these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of eternal life, to which you were called....**” (vv.3-5, 11-12a EHV)

While so many self-righteous Americans today are pursuing their own brand of “social justice,” the real battle God says is for souls, starting with our own. If we could produce real **righteousness** on our own, why would God tell us to **pursue** it? If **Contentment** were possible by your own strength of character, there would be no need to **fight for right** in these Christian virtues. We’re not always known for **gentleness**, are we? Don’t you just feel like giving up sometimes? So where is the patient **perseverance** in that? Love of self comes so naturally, but Christ-like, unselfish **agape-love** for others? Christian **love** is a miracle that warms your heart to see. After WELS Kingdom Workers sent volunteers to teach Apaches on the reservation the skills to repair their own homes, some apparently wanted to say, “Thank-you!” When the opportunity arose to travel 1600 miles from Arizona to Appleton, Wisconsin, last summer, a group of Apaches volunteered to help a mission church with Builders for Christ. One said how glad she was to return the favor after WKW helped her grandparents fix their home. That’s the kind of **fight for right** that builds people up because Christ died for you, for me, for all!

Faith in the coming Christ was built up by God’s Word and faithfulness to His promises for the Shunammite with her son restored. After she was widowed Elisha warned her about a seven-year famine. She took his advice and left the country with her household. When she returned, she had to see the king to get her property back. What legal status did a widow have? What way to take back what was hers? God’s good and proper time sends chills down your spine. Elisha’s servant was just telling the king about the man of God raising her son from the dead when the woman appeared in the royal court to plead her case. “**This is the woman and this is her son whom Elisha brought back to life.**” She was only trying to get her land back. The king assigned a high official to also return seven years of profit too! (2 Kings 8:1-6) It all started when she heard God’s Word and responded in thanks with a place for God’s servant to stay. Without a request, even praying against her heart’s desire, God gave her a son, restored him to life, and cared for the whole family coming and going. **Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain!**

We guard God’s command because at His own good and proper time Christ will appear. For now He comes with peace and blessing in His chosen means of Word and sacrament. So soon all will see that Jesus is eternally “**the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who lives in unapproachable light....To him be honor and power forever! Amen.**”

¹ EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle. For *The Preacher’s Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126