

Contentment in a Consumer Society

We live in an extraordinary age. Never before has mankind had such knowledge. Never before has man been able to leave the earth, fly over it, and even travel to the moon. It is an amazing era, and there is much for which we should be thankful.

On the other hand, there has been an increase in stress-related diseases, in immorality, greed, drug taking and other sorts of wickedness. In some parts of the world there is great wealth, while both there and elsewhere many go to bed hungry every night.

Yet daily we are urged to be more addicted to the consumer society. "Take out a loan and have that car NOW"; "buy the boat of your dreams, or the holiday of a lifetime"; "join our competition and win a fortune"; "buy a lottery ticket, and it could be YOU who is rich".



In stark contrast, we read about the Lord Jesus, who despite being the Son of God, was so poor that he often had nowhere to sleep. The demands of a consumer society do not mix well with him and all he stands for.

Getting the Right Perspective

Now, with Bible in hand, let us see things in perspective. Consider the futility of man without God. Psalm 49 begins by calling the rich and poor, and everyone all over the world to hear a very important lesson. However rich we may be, none of us can save the other (v7). The Psalmist adds:

He sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others (Psalm 49:10).

The Psalm continues:

Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever... they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish (v11-12).

This is a powerful passage, and pulls no punches, but we know it is true. Grasping after riches cannot bring true happiness. The writer follows with a resounding call of hope:

God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me (v15).

Well-placed Confidence

When we turn to Psalm 146, it shows us where we should place our confidence:

Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever (Psalm 146:3-6).

Which will we choose? To trust in mortal men and women or to take refuge with the mighty being who made everything? Nobody can extend our lives, but God offers eternal life.

The New Testament speaks equally plainly, as in these words of Jesus:

Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15).

Yet getting things is the dominant thought today. If anyone is rich, people long to be like him or her.

Then with piercing logic, Jesus continued to tell this parable:

The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry'" (v16-19).

As far as the man was concerned, life was good, and he was going to have a great future. But he had not thanked God for His provision, and thought only of himself. The crushing answer from God came:

Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? (v20).

Jesus finished with the clear lesson:

So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (v21).

Money Troubles?

Many of us may be anxious about money at times, or even all the time. Jesus continued in Luke 12 to give us reason for a brighter outlook:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? (v22-24).



For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you (v30–31).

The crowning lesson followed:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (v34).

Do we trust in the money we may have in the bank, or the goods we possess? The Lord was emphatic: choose to have your treasure in heavenly things; make God the priority in your lives, not material things.

The apostle Paul follows the same theme and says with great clarity:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out (1 Timothy 6:6–7).

Why strain all through life to be better than our neighbours? Why put every effort into ambition for power and privilege? We entered the world naked and helpless, and will leave it in the same way. No money can stave off death. The finest gold cannot purchase immortality.

Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (v8).

The Christian sees all blessings as having come from a merciful God. We should thank Him daily, realising that all we have belongs to God, who gave it to us in trust. This includes our food, our clothing and the roof over our heads, as well as the love of those near and dear to us. Paul continues to warn his readers:

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (v9–10).



Are we like an overloaded ship which can only sink? We can only answer for ourselves but here is the crucial point: Do we want the lure of wealth, or the blessings of God and eternal life? There is nothing wrong with money in itself but it is deadly if it takes away our awareness of God and our need for Him.

Using Wealth Properly

What if we are rich already? Maybe very few of us consider ourselves rich, but many of us have some goods or wealth.

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy (v17).

The Bible is warning us against the danger that riches can bring. They can

make us feel superior, but they can disappear overnight, as many have found to their cost in recent times. The whole financial world is unstable and unreliable. Far better to put one's trust in God, who can do immeasurably more, and even open our graves at the resurrection.

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (v18–19).

Whatever you have, whatever you do, be rich in good works. Be bountiful to those in need, but do it without letting anyone know. When countries or cities are torn by natural disasters, what should we do? When people we know suffer loss, are we eager to do what we can? If so God will see and smile. Not only this, in doing so we are following the example of Jesus, which is what his Father asks of us.

Sacrifice

There is more, when we turn to the Book of Hebrews:

But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Hebrews 13:16).

The Christian church was to face terrible persecution. Many would have to flee for their lives. Some would be savagely ill-treated, and others killed in horrific ways. The call was to share what they had with each other, and thereby to show the self-sacrificing love of their Saviour. Their money could be a demonstration of the love they felt for members in need. Their

contribution was to be looked on as a privilege. Whilst we all should try to provide for ourselves, we should give what we can:

He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD (Proverbs 19:17).

Contentment

Here is contentment. The Bible not only shows us how brief life is, but points forward to a wonderful future for the God-fearing man and woman. Now let the Psalmist sum up for us with a few well-chosen words:

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness... I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!... Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble (Psalm 119:36, 127, 165).

It is a peace that passes all understanding. It is a peace that overcomes in all the rush and bustle of life. It brings us to adore God who has shown us the foolishness of trying to keep up with the rat race, and has promised what no man can give us – eternal life in His kingdom. What greater contentment could anyone wish for?

So where will we place our confidence and our effort? To work only for the best that life can offer now? Better to respond to the call of the Lord Jesus:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

What an amazing invitation!

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