

Part 2: The Cost of Contentment

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How many of you are false teachers? How many of you are depraved in mind? How many of you are deprived of truth?

My hope is that in here today we have people from all sorts of different places in their walk with God. But I'm still guessing that none of you willingly self-identified as one of these postures above.

Last week we met Paul and Timothy, Paul had helped start the church in Ephesus and left Timothy there to be the pastor. The Bible contains two letters Paul wrote two letters to Timothy encouraging him as he tried to build the church amidst distraction, hardship and false teachers who were preying on his congregation.

But what's really interesting is to look at what thoughts occupied the minds of those false teachers in Ephesus. Look with me at **1 Timothy 6:3-5**.

Paul says there are two prongs to false doctrine, one is false doctrine about the teaching of Jesus, and one is false doctrine about what it means to follow Jesus, that's what he speaks of when he talks about godliness. And Paul spends most of his time here focused on this idea of doctrine, and did you notice what he said?

In verse five, Paul says that the false teacher is preying on people who are depraved in mind, and deprived of truth thinking that godliness is a means of gain. In other words the anti-gospel that is sweeping up the church in Ephesus is the good news of gain. That gain is godliness. Gaining worldly comfort, worldly success, and worldly riches is the mark of God.

When we think of false doctrines we often think of people who deny the Trinity, people who refuse to believe that Jesus was divine. But here the false doctrine that Paul is guarding against is this: That the purpose of Christianity, the end of godliness, is that we would gain by worldly standards.

This is a far more subtle danger isn't it? Because at face value this doctrine doesn't argue about the divinity of Christ or the inerrancy of scripture. This doctrine will heartily affirm all of that, but it will silently whisper into your ear the lie that following Jesus is a costless Christianity. "Only gain," whispered the false teachers in Ephesus.

Paul sees this lie and turns it on its head. Look at what he says next: **1 Timothy 6:6-8**.

Paul here says that godliness is indeed gain, great gain. But not gain as the world sees it. Not gain in worldly things for they will fade. The source of gain which is the prize of the believer is gain indeed, but not worldly gain.

And he says the distinction between these two types of gain is one word: contentment. For some people they seek gain at all costs but have not contentment, and for others they gain something which is not of worldly value, and yet they find true contentment.

I think our relationship with our phones prove this. The ads we see promote our phones by displaying their raw beauty. They pop up on the screen and rotate in a circle, letting all of that light bounce and glimmer off its every stunning detail. They want us to buy in not only to their utility, but their beauty.

But the irony is that after we shell out that money the very first thing we do is buy some bulky case and cover up everything that once captivated us. Why? Because we immediately fear the possibility of breaking it. It is attractive, but it is fragile. It is mine, but we know how quickly it can be taken away. And this fear of losing what we had worked so hard to gain actually decreases our ability to enjoy what we once longed for. It makes us fearfully discontent.

Paul is saying that our world will always hold out the allure of gain, but a right view of Christ and his call in our life can really hold out the promise of contentment. But what does that look like? This is what we want to address as we continue to talk about our building fund here at Sovereign Hope. Last week we looked at the power of a gospel legacy and today we are going to look at the cost it takes to build a gospel legacy in our own lives and in our city.

What does it look like to find contentment in a world where our hearts are focused on gain? And what does that have to do with my finances, my time and my possessions? To put it another way, what we are going to look at today is the cost of contentment. And we are going to do so by answering three questions: **What is it that we want? What does it cost? What does it change?**

Paul's rebuke, that godliness is a means of gain, and Paul's affirmation, that godliness is great gain both assume one major truth: we want to gain, we want something.

So this is where we turn to our first point today: **What is it that we want?**

The French mathematician Blaise Pascal highlights Paul's point when he says this: **"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."**

What Pascal calls happiness, Paul calls contentment, and whether through materialistic consumption or in our minimalist self-justification it is exactly that which we want. And when it comes to our wants, and the costs we incur to satisfy them, there is a helpful story in the book of Exodus.

In Exodus, Moses brings God's people out of Egypt with might and miracles and in Exodus 19, God is going to speak to Moses. They are at a mountain called Sinai and God says to Moses that on the third day he is going to come down and rest on that mountain, and Moses is going to go up and God is going to speak to him.

But God told Moses, "Be sure that no one except for you comes on the mountain, they can't even touch the edge of the mountain because if they do they will die. I'm am so holy and so powerful that if anyone except for my chosen prophet approaches me, they will be destroyed."

And look at the scene when this happens: **Exodus 19:16-20.**

Quite a terrifying sight right? And it is here that we begin to see a problem. God is separate from his people. For a few more days, Moses and a couple others will continue to go up into God's holy mountain, but the rest of the people can't go and are even fearful of God's presence.

But what's interesting is that after some time Moses goes up the mountain again, and he stays up on that mountain for 40 days. And during those 40 days, this God who stands separate from his people began to give Moses instructions about how God would come down and dwell safely among his people. While no one was able to come up, God was going to come down. Look at what God told Moses in **Exodus 25:1-8**.

God says, ask the people for their riches that you might build for me a place where I can come and be in their midst safely in my tabernacle.

So here on this mountain God is preparing Moses for what needs to happen for God to come and dwell with his people, but at the exact same time look at what is happening at the base of the mountain: **Exodus 32:1-4**.

In this story of the golden calves we see three truths about what we want: The first truth is that **all of us seek an encounter with God**. Here we have these people whom God has delivered and in Moses' delay, confusion and fear set in. But their solution isn't to turn to each other, or to make a king. It is to find another god. They weren't looking for a Moses substitute, they were looking for a God substitute. They knew that there was something they needed, that had to come from somewhere unique, it was a divine experience.

Second, **we joyfully give treasures to this end**. Aaron asked them for their valuable jewelry, their wealth, their riches, and people gave it to him without hesitation or consideration. You see what we don't realize is that each and every one of us is always looking for an experience which only God can provide, and we are willing to incur great costs to that end.

Missoulians on average spend the most amount of money on eating out and recreation. Our city and our money is fixated on the outdoors. And we willingly spend hours, weekends and large sums of money to enjoy it. For many of us as Christians this genuinely helps us enjoy God as we are reminded of his wonderful grace to us in nature.

But for many of us we unconsciously spend time and money not to enjoy God, but to replace God. To experience a transcendence that we hope will grant us escape, relief or peace, if only until Monday. It could be the outdoors, it could be sports, career, family or knowledge, you are still looking for an experience with God, you are just looking to things which are not God.

Which brings us back to the Israelites. Why would they sacrifice of their own gold? Why would they give so much, for false gods when the real God was right in front of them setting an entire mountain on fire?

This is the third thing we learn about what we want. Not only do we want God, not only are we willing to sacrifice to find our own god, but **we believe that we can control the cost**.

They didn't want the God of the Bible because he was too big, too costly. He was a God who may have taken the life of their leader Moses. The calves were more manageable, easier to access, less fiery, less demanding, safer, and less costly. Or so they thought.

But actually it cost them far more than they ever imagined and they were never at more danger than when they built these idols. For as God was planning to come down the mountain to them, he saw their sin and it made the distance between the two of them all the more noticeable. In sacrificing to get what they thought was god, they unknowingly put more of a distance and more judgement between them and what they really wanted. In seeking life outside of God they found judgement apart from him.

You see at the bottom of our desires are desires for the God who made you. And no matter how much you are willing to spend, the cost of you getting to God is too great for you to bear. We can't endure the cost to go up the mountain and we can't endure the cost of making our own God in the plains. So what gives?

So this is our second point: **What does it cost?** Here we have God's people, people who want gain, but who have gone about it in the wrong way. What will it cost them to get back into God's grace?

It actually costs them nothing. Moses, their prophet went up the mountain and interceded before God on their behalf and there on the mountain, God renewed the covenant with his people. When they had done nothing but increase the gap, God himself was going to bridge it: **Exodus 34:6-10**.

Their idolatry ruined them, it destroyed their relationship with God, it cost many of them their lives, but God was going to overlook their sins because of his mercy and love. God was again going to bridge the gap. And that's what grace is, unmerited favor.

Remember way back in chapter 25, before the calves, God told Moses to ask the people for an offering so that they might build the tabernacle and God might actually dwell with his people. Well now, after Moses told the people that God had renewed his vows to them, Moses made the request for an offering and look what happened: **Exodus 35:21-29**. But this wasn't even the end, **Exodus 36:3-7**.

On the heels of them receiving the grace of God, God's people were willing to give way more to the true God than they were willing to give to their idols. They realized that God was exactly what they needed and when that clicked, their treasures were as nothing to them.

Earlier these people feared their own loss: God took Moses, what is this God going to demand of us? And here they give so much of their treasure that they had to be restrained. Why? What changed? Grace. God's grace changed them.

And there really is this beautiful scene where after the Tabernacle was built, after all the offerings were given, after the heart of the people was restrained from providing more and more, it says in Exodus 40, "So Moses finished the work." And God did what he said he would: The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle so much so that not even Moses could go into. God came down. But this scene in Sinai points to a greater contentment, one which unlike the tabernacle couldn't be destroyed or neglected.

A presence that God sent in Jesus Christ, when the apostle John said that the word became flesh and tabernacled among us. You see the only reason God was able to overlook the sins of the Israelites at Sinai was because God came down again. Not from a mountain this time, but from heaven itself.

Jesus was the very presence of God and he was the costly sacrifice for our sins; the sins of idolatry, the sins of seeking God everywhere but his mountain. Jesus set aside his glory, he set aside unending worship and he entered into our mess, he bore our sin, he mounted our cross, he died our death.

That's what it costs.

The scene at Sinai points to the greater Moses, the one who didn't climb the mountain to make intercession, but instead was raised on the cross as our substitute. There is an impassible void between God and his people, but in Jesus it was bridged. Not by our efforts, but by his costly sacrifice.

And just as Moses finished the work and the presence of God filled the tabernacle. When Jesus finished his work, the curtain in the temple was split in two and God's presence was made accessible for his people.

Before we ever look at what following Jesus costs us, we must see that it cost Jesus far more to love us. And it is because he has chosen to love us that we can now revisit contentment and sacrifice. What do we learn here? We learn that when it comes to how we view our walk with God we need to understand first and foremost that costless Christianity is a Christ-less Christianity.

Which means that instead of seeing gain as our God, Jesus enables us, through his costly cross-work, to see God as gain. God himself is our prize.

Picking up on this sacrifice metaphor look at how the author of Hebrews connects the work of Jesus to our life: **Hebrews 13:12-16**.

Because of what Jesus did, our lives are now a sacrifice of praise.

Now this is our final point: **What does it change?**

If we see in history the people of Israel giving lavishly out of joy for joy, if we see something greater than the tabernacle in Jesus, if we know that our greatest problem and our deepest longing have been reconciled in Christ, then don't we finally have what we need to find contentment?

John Chrysostom was a pastor in the fourth century in Antioch. Antioch was such a materialistic town that one historian said that the glory of the city was its entertainment scene. And just like in Ephesus, and perhaps just like us today, Chrysostom saw in his church the lie of "only gain."

And preaching on this text in Timothy he said this: **"For of what advantage is it to reign over nations of our fellow-men, if we are the slaves of our own passions? Or what worse would we be if we ruled over no one, but we are free from the tyranny of our passions? That is freedom, that is royalty and sovereignty."**

See here is the hope for you: Jesus ends the tyranny. Jesus sets us free from being ruled by the passion of "only gain." Paul is saying that if all we have is food and clothing, but Christ and Christ crucified, then we still have contentment in the fullest. What Paul says and history confirms is the paradox of the Christian faith that we experience often the most gain when we are stripped of worldly comforts.

The story of the Israelites show that we will never find contentment when we feel that we can possess God by our own effort, instead we find true contentment and true sacrifice when we realize that God has possessed us by grace.

Which highlights a truth that is so visible in our American church: you will only follow Jesus as far as you are willing to sacrifice for him. I see it all the time: guys come meet with me, really wrestling with pornography and lust and I say, pay six dollars a month for an accountability program. And they start backtracking on the depth of their problem.

In our western world with its wealth and relative ease in following Jesus, I think we have defaulted to a sort of Food Network Christianity. We hear of people radically treasuring Jesus, finding great contentment in lands across the globe. But it's like watching food on TV. It looks good, and we feel good that we've seen it. But the truth is we haven't tasted it.

It costs to go buy the ingredients, it costs to pay at the restaurant, and it's costly to follow Jesus. It's costly to fight sin. It's costly to honor God. It's costly to offer your whole life as a sacrifice of praise. We fear the perceived loss of what we have gained. But if you have experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ, cost and contentment finally meet.

We are going to ask people to sacrificially give, but don't miss the bigger point here if we are unwilling incur the cost of tasting and seeing the promise of God we are neglecting and experience of greater joy: **Psalm 34:8-10.**

Look then at how Paul concludes his letter to Timothy: **1 Timothy 6:17-19.**

To meet our building fund it is going to take generous giving, it is going to take loss by the world's standards. But Paul's comfort to those who give is this: when Jesus has so changed your heart you are able to give in order to gain what is truly life.

Does this mean that in your giving you are able to earn heaven? No. But it means as you become sacrificially generous with your finances you are able to experience heaven. Because worldly gain is stripped away and you realize that it never actually satisfied. For all you have to taste is the goodness of Jesus with no filler.

There is so much grace that we will leave unexperienced and unenjoyed if we are unwilling to sacrifice worldly gain in following Jesus. I realized that this week as I was looking at what we might give to our building fund. We have some excess built into our budget and we have been dedicating all of that to the fund. But in reflecting on this passage in Timothy this week I realized that all of this giving has cost me nothing.

It did little to make me trust in God, it was already tabbed to be spent. It didn't afford me the opportunity to actually taste and see that God is greater than good coffee, or that he grants me enjoyment that DirecTV and vacations cannot. I had found the cost wall of my own heart and trusted in what Paul called the "uncertainty of riches."

In giving to our building fund we have a unique opportunity for us to experience a unique closeness of Jesus, and we also have the ability to allow others to do so by providing for this church for generations yet to come.

As you leave here today you are going to be handed a giving guide. In that guide is some helpful information that breaks down our numbers, shows ways in which you can give, and asks for a pledge of what you might be able to give during this campaign.

We are asking you to take those home this week and really pray about places where God might be calling you to find contentment in godly generosity. Spend a week really praying about what sacrificial giving can look like in your life, and bring back the pledge card next week and join us as we make our pledges and partake of a fundraiser lunch together after the service [tacos, \$10pp/\$5kids/\$25fam, register online].

Financial giving is something we historically haven't spoken about, and not something we will speak about a lot. But in many ways to not address finances is to not address a deeply spiritual issues which the Bible speaks often about.

In the Old Testament we see as a model a tithe, ten percent of your wages given to God. The New Testament does away with that though. In the New Testament the call isn't 10%, it's all of our life. Why so much more? Because the grace of Jesus is greater than the tabernacle. We have been given more than we need so all that we have is an offering.

Now let me say this before we close. Guilt is not a motivator for giving. We didn't see that in Exodus and we don't see that in the New Testament. Don't go home and feel guilty about your spending and give to the church in order to feel justified. Only Jesus justifies us. You can't give enough to be justified before God, but Jesus did and he did it for you.

Instead we give as an exercise to experience in new ways the sufficiency of Jesus. It is to feel contentment in a true and real way. It reminds us of the city we have which will not be taken or shaken. It is our joy not only to give for our own experience of Jesus, but it is our joy to, as part of the great commission, give so that others might experience the joy of Jesus as well.

My prayer is that in this season we might experience radical sacrifice in our fight against sin, our efforts in evangelism and our generous giving so that we might know gain and contentment. Solomon, the richest man in scripture knew contentment and its source: **Ecclesiastes 5:19-20**.

You see it's only when God has so occupied our hearts with joy in the gospel that we can say with all the saints, at cost of our life, "only gain, only gain."