

“FROM COMPLAINT TO CONTENTMENT”

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- The title of this sermon is ***From Complaint To Contentment***, and today we are going to look at how we show up during those moments in our lives that may not go according to the way we think they should. Maybe everything falls apart, or goes completely wrong, or the expectations we have are not met. People we love don't always do what we want them to do.
- This fall has been filled with amazing moments in my family that I want to capture. My youngest daughter got married in September and everything was absolutely perfect. We had spent a year planning her wedding. When we started out, we figured that COVID would be over and done by the time the wedding rolled around. Instead, it began to ramp up again right before the big day. Thankfully, even with threats of shutdowns and new mandates, everything was just as we had hoped it would be.
- We just celebrated our 33rd anniversary this month, and I will tell you - it nothing less than a miracle that we are still married. Very few things in my life with Derek have gone the way I planned or the way I had envisioned. And truthfully, it all began the day we got married. For instance, his inability to pose nicely for a picture.
- I think it's safe to say that very often, the events, holiday dinners and activities, and just life in general, don't always go the way we want them to and then some of us in this room and online begin to complain. Some of us complain a lot. I've noticed that when we complain, we become discontent.
- The opposite of discontent is contentment. How can a person shift from one to the other during a difficult time?
 - *The Epistle of Excellent Things*
 - *The Epistle of Joy*
 - *The Epistle of Rejoicing*
- My favorite book in the Bible is Philippians. Paul's letter to the Philippians is lovely and has been called the **epistle of excellent things** and the **epistle of joy** and even the **epistle of rejoicing**. Each verse is a life lesson in and of itself. Combined, they make up an entire seminar on living a joyful, abundant, and content life. And what's surprising to me is that Paul wrote this book while he was in prison.
- The book is filled with short powerful verses that many of us learned in Sunday school. Here's the one I love the most:

(Vs) Philippians 4:13 – "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

- From the moment I memorized this short Bible verse, I clung to it as if I was a superhero that could suddenly leap tall buildings in a single bound, with the assistance of the almighty God, of course. As a child with only one leg, I felt like I had to prove to the other kids that I could do everything they could do. The verse brought much consolation as I struggled to accept my limitations.
- Even though the verse by itself was comforting and helpful, I had no idea that I was taking it completely out of context.
- When I finally read the entire book of Philippians and backed up a few verses before the hero verse, I realized that Paul's idea of being able "to do all things through Christ," was a bit different from my interpretation. Just two verses earlier, Paul wrote:

(Vs) Philippians 4:11-12 – Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

- In this passage, the word "content" is an interpretation of the Greek word "Autarkes" (ow-tar'-kace). The word's meaning is self-sufficiency or entirely relying on oneself without the need for any outside assistance or aid.

"Autarkes" (ow-tar'-kace) : Entirely Self-sufficient

- It's a state of satisfaction with one's lot in life that comes from self. Paul intentionally uses this humanistic pagan word so that his audience can grasp the contrast between dependence on oneself and total reliance or surrender to Almighty God. He states the reason it's possible to be content in all circumstances is not because of his ability but because of Christ's strength.
- Philippians 4:13 is a superhero verse, and the hero is Jesus Christ. The gift of being fully content and reliant on Christ in all situations is genuinely comparable to leaping tall buildings. Paul was far from discontent. One might even declare that he was the expert on how to be content regardless of life's circumstances. If ever a person had the right to complain and be discontent, it was the apostle Paul. He gives the rundown of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians:

(Vs) 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 – "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."

- Let's take a look at an example from the Bible of a person who complained. Her name is Martha. I love Martha because I feel as if I can relate to her. I think she is to women what Peter is to men. She just blurted out what was on her mind and let the chips fall where they man. It's not that she was a bad person. Quite the contrary. She opened up her home to Jesus and the disciples so they could get a good meal and have a place to rest. We first meet Martha in Luke 10:38:

(Vs) Luke 10:38-40 – “Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving.”

- Pause there for just a minute. This scene sounds so familiar – like holiday celebrations that many of us experience from now until the first of the new year. She was **distracted**. One definition of this word is **troubled greatly**. She was **discontent!** She was not happy with the situation. I dare say that things were not going the way she had planned. For her, **the moment was ruined**. So what did she do? She complained to Jesus – yes she complained to God Himself! And then she gives Him an order. In other words, she tells Jesus to **fix it**.

(Vs) Luke 10:39-41 – And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” 41 But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.”

- When Jesus says her name twice, he is reproaching her in a loving way. He's calling her out on her stuff, but he's doing it with compassion. He speaks in a similar way to Peter in Luke 22:31. Jesus says “Simon, Simon” when just before His crucifixion, Jesus tells Peter that he is going to deny Christ. There is no question that Jesus loved Martha, because John says so.

(Vs) John 11:5 – “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”

- But even so, He continues on in his gentle scolding of Martha Jesus was not going to fix it for Martha, but he did give her the answer to how she could find contentment:

(Vs) Luke 10:42 – “...but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

- Mary chose to be fully present with Jesus in that moment. Mary was content with Jesus. Martha filled her thoughts with all the busy things that she thought were important to her.
- We have another experience of Martha in John, chapter 11, after her brother Lazarus has died and Jesus finally shows up. It's different this time, but again Martha complains to Jesus.

(Vs) John 11:21 – Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

- And then she goes on basically telling Jesus what to do again – FIX IT.

(Vs) John 11:22 – “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”

- And this time, Jesus does fix it when He raises Lazarus from the dead. You see in the first picture of Martha, she is drawing from her own self-sufficiency. It's all about what she can do and what she is not doing. In the second encounter, she is relying on God. She knows that her situation is out of her reach and out of her control. Through Lazarus's death, Martha is forced to look to God for strength.
- Have you ever complained to God? I mean, really beat your fists in the air and let Him have it? Is it always wrong to complain? I believe that it's good to get it out and be honest with ourselves and with Jesus when we cry out to Him, **"I don't like this – it is not the way I wanted it to be!"**
- My purpose in sharing this story is to look at how impossible it is for us to find true contentment by being self-sufficient. Discontent and fear and pain wipe out any inkling of contentment. And left unchecked, complaints become a habit that robs us of fully experiencing those precious moments in life. I wonder what Jesus thinks when we complain to Him. I'm not suggesting that we should never feel upset or uncomfortable or sad or in pain. The leaders here at Kessid have spent a lot of time helping us work through pain and grief. This is quite different than this disappointment and discontentment that I'm talking about here. Although quite often one leads to another.
- Three enemies that threaten contentment, even among Christians today, are **fear, pain, and comparison**. Sound familiar? The minute any one of these bandits enters the picture, they rob our feeling of satisfaction and contaminate it with doubt and cynicism and complaints abound. Let's come back to Paul to see his example of how we can learn to get through the darkest days and remain in a state of contentment and peace from trusting God. Paul understood that even though his life was hard, he was where God had placed him, and therefore, he could be content despite his struggles. Contentment is not a result of outer circumstances but rather an attitude of the heart.

(Vs) Philippians 2:14 – Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

- How is this even possible? In Chapter 4, Paul gives us three ways to convert our habit to complain into a habit of contentment.

The first is to... "Rejoice in the Lord or praise and worship Jesus Christ."

(Vs) Philippians 4:4 – "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."

- The words rejoice and joy appear in Philippians 16 times. Sometimes I get this feeling that Christians are not allowed to be happy. Or maybe we just think that when we are serving the Lord, everything should always be hunky dory and the disappointment that settles in when we realize that it simply is not true is hard to understand. Rejoicing in the Lord is praising Him because He is worthy of praise. We can rejoice in the Lord regardless of any circumstances that we are going through. Our praise to God is not dependent upon our feelings.
- If you struggle to rejoice in the Lord or to praise Him, the I suggest that you read out loud the last five chapters of Psalms.

The second tool to combat fear, pain, and comparison is... "Gratitude."

(Vs) Philippians 4:6-7 – "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

- Gratitude is a choice. Giving thanks is more than a warm fuzzy taken off the shelf during November when we turn our attention to Thanksgiving. Nor is thankfulness reserved just for good days when all is going just right. Gratitude is also a state of the heart. Being thankful and trusting God brings peace and satisfaction and the patience to wait for His purpose to appear.

The third weapon guaranteed to shoot down discontent is to... "Shift your focus to all that is good from God."

(Vs) Philippians 4:8-9 – "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

- No matter difficult your situation, I guarantee you that there is something "right, pure, lovely, praiseworthy, or admirable" that is right in front of you at any given time. In our walk with Christ, we throw off self-sufficiency and fully embrace that it is God who gives us strength and provides for all our needs. The sweet spot is when we arrive at that place where we fully surrender to all that God is doing and trust Him. Through Him, we are daily provided for and sustained especially when circumstances don't go the way we'd like.
- Instead of waiting for what is to come, we can enjoy what is and be content.
- You cannot live fully in the moment unless you are fully content in the moment. And the only way to be fully content in the moment is by the strength of Jesus Christ.