

## I. Introduction

- A. Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition. (Jeremiah Burroughs, Puritan Preacher).
- B. Most people just want to be contented. We don't need fame, adulation or lots of money. Though, if God were to shower those things on me, I wouldn't turn Him down. But, what we want is contentment.
- C. What is it?
- D. Well, that depends on who you ask.
- E. Eastern philosophies, such as Buddhism, teach that contentment is a kind of numbness to the pain of life, because suffering has no independent reality. It is an illusion. The only way to find contentment is to train your mind not to react to suffering and pain.
- F. Greek and Roman philosophies, like Stoicism, taught that contentment was the result of total mastery of your passions and emotions. Self-control creates self-sufficiency and self-sufficiency creates contentment.
- G. Another school of thought, called Epicureanism, taught that the pursuit of simple pleasures is the source of contentment.
- H. Hedonism took it a step further and taught the pursuit of any and every pleasure for your contentment.
- I. Our culture today connects contentment with wealth, a comfortable lifestyle, an enjoyable job or family, the good life. That's why we're all mortgaged up to our eyeballs.
- J. In stark contrast, a man in prison for his faith named Paul wrote.
  - 1. *"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."* Philippians 4:11, 12, NKJV
- K. He also wrote,
  - 1. *"And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."* 1 Timothy 6:8, NKJV
- L. Think carefully before you answer this question. When a person like Paul says, "I can be content if I just have food and clothing," is that person setting the bar really, really low or really, really high? Think about it.

## II. Secrets of a Highly Contented Life

- A. We are coming to the end of a series called the Secrets of a Highly Contented Life. Today and next weekend and we'll be done. Don't you think the story of Joseph is one of the best stories in the whole Bible? It's amazing to me and we're nearing the finish. Let me quickly mention the seven secrets of contentment and then, today, we will add another one:
  - 1. *Having the Heart of a Pilgrim.*
  - 2. *A Personal Sense of Destiny.*
  - 3. *Spiritual Consistency.*
  - 4. *Unwavering Loyalty (God's loyalty to you first...)*
  - 5. *Complaint-Free Waiting.*
  - 6. *Confidence in the Success of God.*
  - 7. *Closure for the Unfinished Business of your Past.*
  - and
  - 8. *Divine Viewpoint Thinking.* This is where we pick it up today in Genesis 45.

## III. Divine Viewpoint Thinking

- A. Let me set up the scene. I won't review the whole story today.
- B. In this scene eleven brothers have been busted. The sons of Jacob have been caught red-handed stealing from the mighty ruler of Egypt.
- C. Actually, they have been framed, but that doesn't mean they're innocent. 22 years ago, ten of these brother sold their little brother, Joseph, into slavery. They've held the secret all this time and now they fear the hammer of God is about to fall.
- D. What they don't know is that the ruler of Egypt they bow before is none other than their long-lost brother, Joseph, who has suffered so much. Joseph, who's gone through hell and back and is now the ruler in Egypt.
- E. Here, in Genesis 45, Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers.

## IV. Genesis 45

- A. *"Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, 'Make everyone go out from me!' So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; does my father still live?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come near to me.' So they came near. Then he said: 'I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.'" Genesis 45:1-4, NKJV*
  - 1. I have to comment on the writing. It is powerful, simple and beautiful. The author has drawn out the drama like an archer draws out a bow. When we thought we could take no more, he drew it farther. Now, finally, he lets it fly and it's glorious.
  - 2. Imagine that moment, when the frightened brothers hear the words, "I am Joseph."
  - 3. I gotta believe in that moment everything shifted into slow-motion. They blanked out. They went numb. They scratched their heads. Remember, they're bowing before Joseph. But, I'm sure they were looking at one another.

4. Did you hear what I just heard? Did he say what I thought he said?
  5. Then it began to sink in. Joseph, the brother they hated, beat up, threw into a pit and sold into slavery.
  6. I can't imagine the confusion those guys felt.
  7. But, that's okay. Because confusion quickly gave way to unspeakable panic.
  8. The brothers couldn't answer him. The Bible politely says, "For they were dismayed in his presence."
  9. The Hebrew word here refers to the terrifying "emotional disturbance" of someone who "is confronted with something unexpected, threatening, or disastrous." (TWOT, v. 1 #207)
  10. I'd say so. We have been messing with Joseph? What a bombshell! What a jolt!
  11. I love how the story goes. Joseph asks, "Is my father still alive?" Nobody can move, they're frozen in place.
  12. So he invites them near. "Come near," he says and he repeats himself. "I am Joseph." This time he adds, "Your brother. The one you sold into Egypt."
  13. If ever you need a tangible picture of the love of God for guilty sinners, look right here at Genesis 45.
  14. If you ever want to listen to the words of a manly man, read what Joseph says next.
- B. *"But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting."* Genesis 45:5, 6, NKJV
1. What would you have said to those brothers? I would have let them have it. Then I would have gotten my guys—I'm Italian, so I have some guys—and exacted some kind of excruciating revenge.
  2. But, with Joseph, there's nothing like that at all. No revenge, hatred, punishment or bitterness. Nothing.
  3. In fact, he completely lets his guilty brothers off the hook.
  4. Now I want to tread carefully here. Because, like Joseph, all of us can point to people who have wounded us. The last thing I want to suggest is that you make up some fiction and pretend everything's okay or that nothing bad happens.
  5. That is not the point. We always have to deal with reality.
  6. Joseph does. He doesn't varnish the facts of the case. "You sold me into Egypt. You sold me."
  7. But Joseph has learned another secret of contentment and I think it is the most spiritually advanced secret of all.
  8. Joseph interpreted his life from the perspective of heaven. It's as if he sat next to God and looked down on his life. He saw his losses, joys, dreams, suffering, dangers, pain, heartbreaks, tears, grief and agony. His purpose, strengths, his life's meaning. He saw it all from the perspective of heaven.
  9. The 9th secret of a highly contented life is Divine Viewpoint Thinking. What would God say about the journey of your life? What is His perception? His perspective?
  10. Notice what Joseph says in verse 5. "God sent me here before you to preserve life."
  11. Wait a minute. Who sent him to Egypt? His brothers, right? So how can he say God sent him?
  12. He could say that because his years of solitude in prison and in slavery, his years of sitting alone in the throne room because the Egyptians wouldn't eat with a Jew, all those years forced him into communion with God. Fellowship with God. God was his community.
  13. The stronger that bond became, the more it dawned on Joseph that, with God on his side, Joseph was ultimately nobody's victim.
  14. Neither are you.
  15. Let that sink in.
- C. Providence
1. Let me pause to talk about providence. I'm giving you meat today, not milk. I hope you're ready for it.
  2. Providence is one of the highest teachings of the Bible. It simply states that God actively shepherds the universe and all its details to its God-ordained ends.
  3. Here's a technical definition
    - a) *"God's continuous work of preserving, creating, and cooperating with subordinate powers in all that comes to pass, and directing all things to their God-appointed ends."* (Berkhof)
  4. God rules. God is in control. Even when bad things happen, God is in control. We believe in Providence, not luck, not fate, not chance, not karma, not what will be will be. We believe in a personal agent, named God, who is standing behind all things that come to pass.
  5. There are no surprises to God, even though some teachers in Bible colleges in the midwest say otherwise. They are teaching that God can be surprised. Open Theism, it's called. It's a false teaching.
  6. One of the elements of Providence is a teaching called concurrence (a.k.a. cooperation).
  7. In concurrence, also termed *cooperation*, God acts to permit the *activity* of each creature. Concurrence is *"the cooperation of the divine power with all subordinate powers, according to the pre-established laws of their operation, causing them to act and to act precisely as they do"* (Berkhof, *op cit*).
  8. Here's an example: Why does the sun shine? The sun shines because it is the nature of the sun to shine AND because God continues to empower nature to do what it does. This is concurrence. We do not say that it is God who shines (pantheism). Nor do we say that the sun shines independently of God (atheism). Rather, God concurs (agrees, cooperates) with the nature of the sun and causes it to act as it does.
  9. When those brothers sold Joseph into slavery, God concurred and Joseph came to understand it.

10. Does that mean God was guilty of evil? No. The brothers did the evil, not God. God cannot, will not and has not done evil, nor has He tempted anybody to do evil.
  11. If God were to stop us every time we chose evil, the world would be empty of inhabitants.
  12. I'm not going any farther with this except to stick to Joseph's words.
    - a) "God sent me here before you to preserve life."
  13. If God had stopped the brothers from selling Joseph into slavery, hundreds of thousands of people would have died of starvation.
  14. Did God cause the evil? No. But he used it to bring about a greater good.
  15. But the real danger was even greater than people dying of starvation.
- D. *"And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."* Genesis 45:7, 8, NKJV
1. The word "posterity" is often translated "remnant."
  2. Who were these brothers that Joseph saved?
  3. They were the line of the Seed of the Woman, the Seed of Abraham, the coming Messiah, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ.
  4. They faced two fatal dangers and never even realized it.
  5. First, they faced the danger of assimilating with the evil culture around them. Remember Genesis 38 and Hirah, Judah and Tamar and Onan? There was a genuine danger that, through intermarriage and religious compromise, the physical and spiritual bloodline of the Savior would be wiped out. Extinguished like a candle.
  6. The second fatal danger was that they would not survive the coming famine that swept the known world.
  7. So God, in His Providence, had a master plan. He strategically positioned Joseph in that place, at that time, to preserve the remnant of the Jews and to save many lives.
  8. By choosing Egypt, God chose the one nation on earth that wouldn't intermingle with the Jews. The Jews would keep their faith in God intact. God had to get them into Egypt to preserve their spiritual bloodline. He had to preserve the remnant.
  9. Joseph got it. He saw it all. He saw his life from the divine perspective. He didn't see himself as a victim of evil men, blind luck or mindless fate.
  10. He didn't let other people yank his chain. He was nobody's victim. He didn't go passive. He didn't define himself by the losses of his past, but rather by God's promise for his future.
  11. "You didn't send me here," Joseph said, "God did." Amazing! This is the kind of guy you'd want in your foxhole.
  12. Joseph continues, "He (God) sent me as a father to Pharaoh and Lord of all his house."
  13. Joseph saw himself as a man with a destiny, a man blessed beyond what he deserved. A man with a purpose and a man whose life was held safely in the hand of an all-wise, almighty God who loved him and poured out grace on him wherever he went.
  14. That is Joseph.
  15. That is a contented man.
  16. You can be that kind of man; that kind of woman.
  17. What will it take? I want to spend some time explaining how to develop divine viewpoint thinking. But first, go back to those brothers.
  18. In one minute, their lives have been totally turned topsy-turvy. Their mental engines had to be smoking, redlining.
  19. Joseph's not dead, he's alive and he's ruler of all Egypt. Our dad's heart will not be broken. Benjamin isn't in trouble. We're not in trouble.
  20. And here's the big one.
    - a) **FOR THE LAST 22 YEARS WE HAVE CARRIED A GUILT AND SHAME WE DID NOT NEED TO CARRY.**
    - b) We have lived in unreality.
  21. That, right there, is the difference between earthly viewpoint thinking and divine viewpoint thinking. You will either see your life from a fallen human perspective or from a glorious divine perspective.
  22. Look at what Joseph says in verse.
- E. *"So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here."* Genesis 45:13, NKJV
1. Go get dad and tell him of all my glory in Egypt.
  2. Christian, if you can't talk about your glory in a grateful, grace-filled way, you have a lot of growing up to do.
  3. You better get going on your Personal Life Map, right?
    - a) [<http://www.ncrediting.com/LifeMap.html>]
  4. You are intended for glory, dignity, respect and a purpose that staggers the imaginations of angels. C.S. Lewis wrote that if we could see the glory God has woven into every Christian, if the veil that shrouded

- your glory could be lifted away, we'd be tempted to fall down and worship you.
- 5. That is your true glory, Christian. That is the real you. Your task, as a Christian, is to unearth that glory. Let it shine.
- 6. That's when you can be content. That's when it doesn't matter if you have a big house, little house, money, cars, status, fame or popularity.
- 7. You have something money can't buy. You have the everlasting arms of God upholding you on a day by day basis, moment by moment. You are satisfied wherever He leads.
- 8. The chapter ends with a really tender episode between Joseph and his brothers.

F. *"Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him."* Genesis 45:14, 15, NKJV

- 1. Peace. After 22 years of guilt, conspiracy, deception, betrayal, silence and not being able to look each other in the eye.
- 2. Peace. Absolution. Grace.
- 3. They got a glimpse of a bigger reality.
- 4. Reality as God sees it. His perspective. The divine perspective on life.
- 5. How do you develop it?

#### V. Developing the Divine Perspective Mindset

##### A. *Set your mind on Scripture.*

- 1. Scripture is the mind of Christ. It is the thinking of God. You will never see your life or your world as God sees it without time in the Word.
- 2. I don't mean the baby food in the word. I mean solid food, the meat of the Word, the deep things of God, the whole counsel of God.
- 3. You do not understand your life until you can interpret it through the lens of Scripture.

##### B. *Quit questioning the ways of God.*

- 1. Actually, God isn't bothered. He can handle your complaints, your doubts and your questions. A lot of us remember our college days when we'd sit up all hours debating predestination, free will, theology and what is true.
- 2. That is enormously good and healthy.
- 3. But there comes a time when your repeated questions are a subtle form of rebellion.
- 4. Let's all take a breath.
  - a) *"Destruction is certain for those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot ever argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, 'Stop, you are doing it wrong!' Does the pot exclaim, 'How clumsy can you be!'"* Isaiah 45:9, NLT
- 5. It is human nature to scramble the jets and keep flying around and around a point of pain, confusion or hurt in your life.
- 6. There comes a time when that focus will do nothing but hurt you. Accept the ways of God in His mighty providence. Trust that He is bringing you through for a great purpose and get on with your life.
- 7. As long as your life orbits your loss, you can't help but define yourself as a victim.
- 8. Break the orbit, acknowledged the pain, grieve the loss. Take the time you need. Deal with reality.
- 9. But never forget the bigger, mightier, ultimate reality of a throne above and God who wipes away every tear and has done all things well.

##### C. *Expect God's best.*

- 1. You do not know God if you expect His worse. That's not my God. That's not the God of Scripture.
- 2. When your brothers sell you into slavery or your boss' wife frames you for sexual assault or a friend you helped forgets about you in prison.
- 3. Something inside you has to say, "God has something better planned."
- 4. If you doubt it, look at Jesus. Consider His death, think about His resurrection.
- 5. Realize He understands pain, He gets loss, He has not stood aloof and indifferent.
- 6. He conquered evil. But we don't see the end of evil yet. That day is coming. Expect God's best.
- 7. A mature Christian sees life from God's perspective. Divine viewpoint thinking.
- 8. *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."* Colossians 3:1, 2, NKJV
- 9. Jesus is on your side. Expect God's best.
- 10. While you're waiting, be content.