

SUBJECT: CONTENTMENT AND PEACE IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:10-13
From The Sermon File of Dr. Doyce H. Nolan

Introduction

Horatio Spafford was born in 1828 and became a successful lawyer and businessman. He was active in his church as a Sunday School teacher and volunteer leader teaching young men in the YMCA.

Beginning in the 1870s, Spafford's faith was tested by a series of tragic events.

- 1) *In 1871, the Great Chicago Fire* destroyed real estate that he owned and made up a tremendous portion of the Spafford's investments.

- 2) *In 1873, a doctor informed him of his wife's health*, told Horatio that he'd better take his family on a vacation for Mrs. Spafford's health and the family's well-being. Knowing that a dear friend, Dwight L. Moody would be preaching at a series of evangelistic meetings in England, the Spaffords decided to take their vacation in England and meet up with Mr. Moody.

- 3) *But just before they were to leave by ship, something happened in one of Horatio's business ventures* that required him to stay in the United States for a few more weeks. So, he packed up his family including his wife and four daughters and took them to New York where they boarded a ship for England.

On November 22, 1873, during it's voyage to England, just off the coast of Newfoundland, was struck in the bow by an English ship. Their ship sank in twelve minutes. Two hundred and twenty-six lives were lost, including the Spaffords' four daughters. After hours of floating in the turbulent waters, Mrs. Spafford was rescued by some of the crew members of the other ship. She was taken to a hospital in Wales. When she arrived, she sent a telegram to Horatio, with the message, "Saved alone."

Upon receiving this horrifying news, Spafford left immediately to join his wife on board the first ship he could get on that was sailing out of New York. As the ship set sail, Horatio asked the captain to let him know when they approached the approximate area where the ship caring his family went down. When the captain let him know, Spafford went up on the deck and peered out into the waters and prayed, thanking God for the time he had been given with his four girls, and that his wife had been spared. Then he went down to his cabin, and began writing the words of the following hymn. Page 493 It Is Well With My Soul.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

Thou Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come, Let this blest assurance control, That
Christ has regarded my helpless estate, And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin... O, the bliss of this glorious thought, My sin, not in part but the whole, Is nailed
to the cross and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, The clouds be rolled back as a
scroll, The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend, "Even so" - it is well with my
soul. It is well with my soul It is well, it is well with my soul."

What was it that allowed Horatio Spafford to write those powerful words of hope and faith in the midst of business failures, personal tragedy, and terrible circumstances?

Every one of us would love to find peace in the middle of the hard times of life. **Is peace in the midst of tough times, possible?**

The answer is, "Yes". Horatio Spafford discovered it, and the apostle Paul wrote about it in the verses that we're going to look at this morning. **Paul is going to show us three truths** that we must believe in order to have peace and contentment in the middle of difficult times. *We must understand that...*

I. WHAT WE HAVE ISN'T WHO WE ARE (12a) I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound..

1. Many people today think that their self-worth is defined by what they have. That may be true financially, but it's not true in reality. You see, when we talk about reality, we're talking about who you really are...you're character. *Jesus said in ...*

Luke 12:15 Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

2. What you possess and who you are, are two different things. Sometimes those things that you think you own, may end up owning you. That's why Jesus warns us to be on our guard against greed. Money can be very seductive. It will make you do things you don't want to do. *We need to understand that...*

3. We are not someone special because we have material things. We are special because we are created in the image of God. And we have all been blessed with more than we deserve. *Look what Paul wrote to the young pastor, Timothy...*

1 Timothy 6:6-8 Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content

4. Timothy needs to remember what's really important in this life. Nothing we have is permanent. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. If we have the basics, food and clothing, we are fortunate. We have more than many people in this world have right now.

Listen to me! God cares more about your thoughts and actions than he does about what you have. Thoughts and actions is what forms your character.

That's what counts. That's the true you. *The second thing to remember is that....*

II. CIRCUMSTANCES DON'T RULE, GOD DOES (11-12). Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

1. Life is about change. Nothing stays the same. And if you expect it to stay the same, then you'll always be frustrated. Don't let circumstances rule your life!

Circumstances control a lot of people. When things are going well, they're happy. When things are going poorly, they're unhappy, even depressed.

2. Paul says be content whatever the circumstances, whatever the situation, whatever the place, he had learned to be content. He was in prison, with little hope of getting out, he had been beaten, shipwrecked, left for dead, stoned, bitten by a scorpion, tortured, falsely accused.

3. Paul looked at more than just the circumstances of his life. In fact, he looked through the circumstances. Paul knew that God was sovereign, and that God was in control. He knew that God loved him unconditionally. He knew that God was at work in the midst of every trying circumstance to bring about His purposes through Paul's life.

God is at work in every situation, good or bad, to bring about His good purposes.

Before you label something good or bad, Ask yourself what is God doing in that circumstance? Ask yourself what is God trying to teach me through this circumstance?

4. Many things are out of our control. But how we respond to those things IS in our control. We can choose to sing the blues, or we can choose to trust God's love and His perfect plan as our "why". We don't have to let our circumstances control us. God is at work in each and every circumstance for our good and His glory. *Always...*

III. RELY ON THE POWER OF GOD THAT'S IN YOU (13) I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

1. Paul is talking about dealing with the difficulties of life. What he's saying is that he can deal with any situation through the power of Christ. There is no trouble, or conflict, or difficulty that cannot be overcome by the power of Jesus Christ in a Christian's life. *Paul wrote in the book of Galatians...*

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me. Our challenge, in difficult times, is to focus on Jesus, rather than our problems.

Illustration: Vance Havner, a Southern Baptist evangelist and preacher from North Carolina, once told a story about a pastor who was meeting with his deacons. They were trying to find the solution to some problem in the church, and the pastor suggested that they stop and take time to pray about it. At that suggestion, one of the older deacons responded by saying, "Has it come to that!"

Vance Havner then said, "It ought to begin with that! God ought not to be our last resort. He ought to be our first thought-- our first consideration." *Just remember...*

2. We have already been given all we need in Jesus Christ. Through faith we can tap into the very power of God and be filled with His power in our inner being so that we can live above and beyond the circumstances of our lives. We can't do that in our own power. It takes the power of God.

Conclusion

1. The bottom line is that Jesus Christ is the key. He is the key to our contentment. He is the key to our peace, and He is the key to our being able to weather the storms of life without being swept away by its winds and waves.

2. Paul had learned that what he had wasn't who he was; He knew that circumstances don't rule, God does, and he knew to rely on the power of God that was in him.

3. God is prepared for everything and anything that happens in your life. And He will be with you every step of the way. Even when you can't see the next step, He will be your guide. Jesus is everything you need.