

"BALANCING OUR OUTLOOK"

TEXT: "FOR I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT, WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES MAY BE. I AM READY FOR ANYTHING THROUGH THE STRENGTH OF HIM WHO LIVES WITHIN ME." Philippians 4:11, 13.
Reading from the J. B. Phillips Translation

A weatherman in St. Louis, Missouri, once said, in making a long range weather prediction:

"There will be days that will be fair and foul, cold and hot. There will be weather that will make you sad, and there will be weather that will make you sing. On each day, if it doesn't rain or snow, the weather will be clear....."

There's something about that weather forecast that reminds me of life. There are times when life is kind to us, and our days are sunny and serene. And there are times when the sky gets dark and cloudy, and our hearts become unhappy and helpless. If we're not careful, life becomes lop sided and twisted. We loose our perspective so easily. Our outlook on things becomes unbalanced.

I think that most of us have a mature attitude toward the weather. To be sure, there are times when we complain about the heat, the cold, the rain and the snow. But by and large, we have learned to prepare for it, to accept it as it comes, and to use it. And so it is that we need to develop a mature attitude toward life. We must prepare for it. We must accept it as it comes. We must use it. We need to develop a sense of balance if we are not to be overcome by the shifting climates of life.

This sense of balance which I speak of is essential to our mental health and to our spiritual well being. This idea of balance is basically Christian too. The Apostle Paul certainly had it. He experienced the rough weather of life, and yet he managed to remain poised, effective and unruffled. Somewhere along the line, he discovered the secret of a life that is balanced on a pivotal faith in God. He refers to it in the letter that he wrote to the people of Philippi:

"For I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be. For I know now how to live when things are difficult. I know now how to live when things are prosperous. I have learned the secret of facing either poverty or plenty. I am ready for anything through the strength of Him who lives within me....."

Thrilling words. We have here the spiritual biography of a man who possessed a strong and healthy mind. His outlook was balanced. And we can have the same well balanced outlook if we follow his advice. Concentrate on the things that are true and good and pure. Be steadfast in faith. Rejoice in the Lord. Learn to be content wherever you are. And then he adds this word of assurance:

"And the peace of God which passes all human understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus....."

That's the art of balance. And as Christians we would do well to learn from Paul this technique of living a balanced life!

OVERCOMING SELF PITY BY ENLARGING THE HORIZONS OF LIFE

One thing that keeps many people from living a normal balanced life is self-pity. It prevents many a person from becoming an effective person. We overcome self-pity by enlarging the horizons of life.

The 17th century philosopher, Francis Bacon, in one of his works refers to three types of scientists which may well be three types of people. The first type of scientist is like the ant. He only collects things. The second type of scientist is like the spider. He collects things, and spins them into his own little web of living. The third type of scientist is like the bee. The bee gathers material from the flowers of the field and then transforms and digests the material into something beautiful, sweet and useful for others. We all know of people who are like the ant and the spider. They live in their own little ant hill. They spin little webs of self-centeredness. ~~Their minds are not well balanced because they're caught up in a web of self-pity and self interest.~~

Now I think the Apostle Paul would challenge the ant people and the spider people to become bee people. He would have them discover the far flung fields of service and would have them use their talents and their treasures to sweeten the ways of men. In plain language, one reason why our minds become sour and bitter is that we're too selfish. The mind has to get off dead center if it is to be an effective, well balanced mind.

Elizabeth Barrett injured her spine in a fall from a pony when she was fifteen years of age. She recovered from her injury, but remained an invalid for nearly twenty years. Her mother died, and her father, a harsh, puritanical tyrant, prayed earnestly for her recovery. But she received little love from him and from her brothers and her sisters. And so it was that her ill health served as a convenient retreat for her. She was waited on and catered to by everyone in the family. They pitied her and she pitied herself. But then one day Robert Browning came along and fell desparately in love with her. Everything changed. She soon forgot that she was an invalid. She got married at forty. She went mountain climbing at forty one. And she had a baby at the age of forty-three, much to the amazement of her prim and proper friends. She threw away her symptoms. Her self pity and self interest disappeared as her horizon was pushed back by the power of a love that took her mind of herself.

Self-pity and self interest can be dangerous. They lead to unhappiness. We should never fall into the habit of feeling sorry for ourselves. We need to counter balance self pity with a real concern for others. We need to overcome self interest by enlarging our horizons. Unless we take this positive step, we'll be lonely and unhappy.

OVERCOMING BOREDOM BY DEVELOPING INNER RESOURCES.

Self-pity is one thing which throws us off balance. A second factor which keeps us from maintaining perfect balance is boredom. Life has gone stale for many people. It's not that we're afraid or insecure. It's just that we're bored to death by the ordinary. And we try to get new thrills by accumulating things. We're trying to build our lives on outward satisfactions rather than on inner resources and spiritual values.

We're like the King of Siam. When he was crowned king, he sat on a throne of figwood under a seven tiered white umbrella of State to receive many tokens of office from the High Priest. These are some of the things that he was presented with:

The Great Crown of Victory, The Brahman Girdle, The Golden Tablet of Style and Title, The Girdle of the Nine Gems, The Scepter, The Fan, The Diamond Ring, The Whisk of a Yak's Tail, The Whisk of an Elephant's Tail, The Slippers, the Stick, The Bettelnut Set, the Water Urn, the Hostage Sword, the Discus, the Diamond Spear, and the Long Handled Sword.

We all know of people like the King of Siam. People that just love to decorate life with crowns, swords, and scepters. People whose lives are overbalanced with too many clothes, cars, lovers, pleasures, houses, jobs, and titles. Their lives are not properly balanced. Although rich in things, it is in things only in which they are usually rich. They usually lack the inner resources of faith, and love, and hope. There must be nothing more boring than to have the wherewithal to enjoy life, and yet lack the capacity and the technique of knowing how to really live. The mature person makes his own climate. He finds inner strength in companionship with God. He learns to live from day to day on good terms with himself. His mental health and happiness is not linked to outward satisfactions. His thoughts are upon the clean and strong things.

As we become equipped with spiritual furnishings and insights, we begin to challenge the dullness of life. This is what happened to Paul. He was a tent maker, he tells us, by trade. And probably he was bored to death with the routine of his job. It was after he really found God that a new dimension of life began to open up for him. It brought him excitement, and glory and deep personal satisfaction. You see it's the inner attitude - the interior of life that counts in keeping a balanced out look.

On one occasion Mark Twain made a trip to Europe with his wife and little eleven year old daughter. While they were there, kings and nobles vied with each other to entertain Mark Twain and his family. Universities conferred honorary degrees upon him. At the end of the trip, as they were on the train which was taking them to the port where they were to sail for America, Mark Twain made a list of all the important people that had entertained them. After reading the list to his family, his little girl looked up and said: "Gee Daddy....you know everyone worth knowing except God!"

I'm afraid that there are times when we're tempted to leave God out of the list of our acquaintances. As we do come to know Him, we'll discover that our lives will take on a richness that surpasses all earthly treasure. If our lives have grown dull and stale, it's our own fault. But this boredom can be overcome by developing inner resources. And this takes place as we come to know God.

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION BY LEARNING THE WAYS OF CONTENTMENT.

Not all of us are caught up in webs of self pity. Few of us are bored with life. But there are many people who are depressed by the circumstances that are beyond their own choosing. I know that some of you have come here today out of very

need hoping above all else that there may be some word of strength and encouragement. To those of you who are burdened with cares and worries, may I suggest that you try to overcome your depression by learning the way of contentment. There are times when life seems very unreasonable. But in such situations, the mature Christian, learns as Paul did, to find contentment where he is. Dr. Bertha Van Hoosen, in the Petticoat Surgeon offers this bit of advice:

"My favorite hypothesis is - EVERY HOUR BRINGS LIGHT. This slogan was introduced to me in medical school by two of my classmates. I remarked to them on one occasion, 'I find it difficult to make a decision'. Whereupon one of them replied: 'Never waste time in decisions. Jack and I tried for a year never to make any decisions, unless it was absolutely necessary. Our slogan was EVERY HOUR BRINGS LIGHT. During the year, I made one decision, and Jack never made any. When the decisive moment came, there was only one thing to do and I did it."

We don't want to push this idea too far, but it does give us something to think about. It's not the counself of weak submission. Rather it is the attitude of intelligent cooperation with the main currents of life. It is the mark of a fundamental trust in the loving providence of God. The trouble with many of us is that we fight life too much. We stew and we fret and we fume if things don't go our way. We want to tell God how to run things. And we think our way is the only way. No wonder our minds get sick and tired. We need to learn to listen. God may be trying to speak to us, and yet in the hustle and the bustle of life we don't bother to stop to listen. ~~If we have the patience to be still, we will understand and learn.~~ Life can be unreasonable, but unless we learn to take "no" for an occasional answer, we're likely to beat our brains out against the brick walls of life.

Victor Hugo was at the peak of his career when Napoleon III sent him into exile. It appeared to be the end of everything for Victor Hugo. But he came to discover that the possibilities of patience far outweighed the discouragements of exile. In fact, his biographer made this observation: "Books that were far stronger than anything that had gone before came from his hand." And he goes to say that Victor Hugo became twice the size of the man that he had been before the exile.

"For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances may be. I am ready for anything through the strength of Him who lives with me."

In this counself of contentment, Paul is simply reminding us that we can use our full powers to great advantage wherever we are. He is giving us the assurance that if our motives are honest, if our efforts are sincere, if our objectives are high, that God is not going to desert us. If we trust Him, we will discover that even in the times of deepest depression, he will lead us from darkness to light, from confusion to balance. I am convinced that we have in our religion the basic resources for balanced living - faith through worship, sincere prayer, fellowship with Christian people, service to others. All of these you see have been the key to balanced living for generations. And what was true in the time of Paul is equally true today.

"Have no anxiety 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 passes all human understanding, shall keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

LET US PRAY:

Our Father and Our God, help us to overcome our self pity by enlarging our horizons. Help us to overcome the dullness of life, developing strong inner resources. And help us to overcome the dark moods of life by learning to be content wherever we are, in whatever we are doing. Amen.