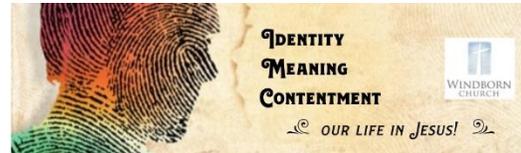


Lent 2018 ✠ Intro

*Jesus, Himself, Is Enough*



My grandpa is my hero. I had a great bond and closeness with him. Truth be told, all my cousins would say the same thing. But for me, it's because he fell out of an avocado tree. He jacked-up his shoulder around the time I was born, and the doctors told him to carry around a ten-pound weight to rehab. So he carried me around for several weeks. We were always close and I always looked up to him. He worked hard and taught me my work ethic. He was faithful to church and Bible study. He loved Jesus and everyone else! He was giving and supportive. He is my hero.

In the last conversation we had before he died, he was sharing Scripture he had just memorized. For about an hour with my wife and girls and grandpa, we were quoting Bible verses. Even on his deathbed, he was hiding God's word in his heart. When he died, we found a note in his Bible that read, "Contentment is not for possessing everything, but giving thanks for everything you possess." On the bottom of the piece of paper was another note—"A world in despair needs Christians who care." Grandpa lived that out. Because he was content, he shared and gave to everyone.

When I reflect on the legacy of grace and hospitality my grandpa and grandma extended to me, I'm left asking myself, "Do I live a life of contentment?" If I am honest with myself, it is far too easy for me to live a selfish life for my own comfort and ease. But if Jesus' grace and forgiveness has impacted my life, then I should live with a mindset of gratitude more often than I do. So much more than sufficient, am I happy, am I pleased? So much more than adequate, am I content? If we as followers of Jesus are honest with ourselves, why is it so easy for us...if Jesus died for our sins, if we are experiencing his love...why is it so easy for us to get caught up with the Joneses, wanting more stuff?

Living in contentment is to live in Jesus' abundant life. Being content is greater than something just being okay. Your flight was okay. There wasn't that much turbulence. Well, you were average, you got a "C," that's okay. No, contentment is to have a quiet joy, a filling of gratitude, and a sense of completeness, even in the reality of difficulties and loss. Let's evaluate our lives—do we have joy, are we content? However, we cannot

live as content beings unless we know who we are, unless we know where our identity comes from.

There are a bunch of places you can start on this journey of “what does it mean to be content?” I’m tempted to start with John 15.5—Jesus is our life. He is the vine, we are the branches. His life has to flow through us. When we live like Jesus is actually our life and we don’t just give it lip service but we actually live it, that’s pretty powerful. But let’s start with a simple verse with profound impact on contentment.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” 2 Peter 1.3

His divine power has given us everything that we need for life. Who he is, in his divine power, has given us everything we need—His divine power and not our abilities.

Though, like little toddlers running out in the street because we want something shiny on the other side, we spend so much time and energy trying to live our own life. But his divine power has given us everything we need for our life and godliness. And how does that come? Through our knowledge of him--the more that we know about who God is, the more we know about his character, the more we know about his holiness, his love and his graciousness, and notice that we know him and what he has done. He has called us. He has called us to his own glory and goodness. It’s a truth that’s so easy to brush over. Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, called us to be in a love relationship with him.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Corinthians 5.17

So if you are in Christ, you are new when you have your Romans 10:9 moment. When we say, “Yes, Jesus, you died on the cross for my sins, you rose again, you have forgiven me, and your life fills me,” you are born again. There are several things that happen to us at that moment. We are justified. Being justified means that he puts his stamp of approval on us. “Dustin’s mine, he belongs to me, he’s justified.” I’ve got a mark on my life, if you will. Think of justification as something that happens externally. It’s something that happens outside of oneself. God puts his mark of approval on me. Then he marks us internally, in our hearts. So that now, after one’s Romans 10.9 moment, the one who was as an enemy of God can actually have a relationship with God. That’s part

of the calling that 2 Peter talks about. The internal reality to enable this reconciliation is regeneration. This is such an important part of following Jesus that we often don't talk about. Regeneration is the idea that he actually makes me new. That who I was, my sin nature, my propensity of selfness and following after my own pleasure, died with him on the cross and is buried with him in the empty tomb. Ezekiel 36 describes the coming new covenant in which God takes our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (read also, Romans 6).

When I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose again, I am believing that my sin nature is gone, it's dead, it's not who I am anymore. Sin still "pops up." Ultimately, the "popping up" of sin is mental insanity because we forget who we are now that we have trusted in Jesus. Taking my Identity from Jesus' change of me is so important to contentment. To know who we are in Christ. To know that we are in Christ, to know that is what he has made us to be. If we know our identity in Christ and we actually live it, then we can enjoy the value of the things that give meaning in our life. But if we live for purpose, if we live for things that give us meaning, then all joy is fleeting as those "happineses" come and go. They come and go in different life seasons. They come and go because things change. They come and go because people let us down.

I love preaching! I love it! I love the sermon prep; I love the standing up and giving the message. I could go to the doctor tomorrow, learn I have throat cancer and lose my voice. That thing of meaning would then be gone. But I could find contentment because being a preacher is not my identity. I am a child of the King of kings. I love being a father and a husband. God forbid, my family could have a car crash today and die. That element of meaning would now be taken away and I would no longer have that role. But I am still a child of the King of kings—Justified, Reconciled, Redeemed and Regenerated. This is not to minimize hurt and pain in this world, nor trivialize injustice; it is to say, though, that contentment is possible in every circumstance. My identity is in Jesus because in Jesus I am made new; nothing can take that away.

Consider these questions: Do you find your meaning and purpose from what you do? If someone asks who you are or what you do, you're expected to tell them your job. That's not who you are, though. The same is true spiritually. Do you take your identity from what you do in the kingdom, or from Jesus? It is foolish to take our identity from using our spiritual gifts or even roles in the church. Yes, those things provide meaning, but

they are not who I am! What gives meaning comes and goes in ebbs and flows in life. We have to take our identity in Christ. There are so many Christians that are busy for Jesus but not content—ironically, because they are living for what they think gives them meaning and purpose by doing God’s work, it feeds discontentedness, because they are not designed, not saved, to take their identity from their work.

It’s easy to live in the flesh. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live in Spirit and in truth (John 4). When we live for meaning in ourselves and do not take our life from Jesus Christ, we are not worshiping him, we have set up an idol—even if we call that God’s work! When I can take my identity from Christ, I confess he alone is my life. Otherwise, we minimize the power of grace’s forgiveness and identity-altering change of who we are. We are born with a passion for sin. That’s who we are in a sinful fallen nature. Jesus replaces that passion for himself, so that I no longer find the life on my own. That’s what Adam and Eve did in the Garden that created this mess. They looked for life on their own, though they knew better.

The temptation is to manage the Christian walk by knowing the correct doctrine and doing the right things, while avoiding sinful things. Nasty is the temptation to be a legalist Pharisee. It is growing in churches and pastors who are consumed by being correct in doctrine, which is a great and noble pursuit. However, they have taken their identity from believing and preaching the gospel, not the *Jesus* of the gospel. They carry themselves with pompous arrogance because they think everyone else is wrong. Naturally, they are really good at finger-pointing, focusing on themselves and pointing out everyone else's sin.

The insidious nature of this modern legalistic Pharisaical sin is that they believe in orthodoxy; but this attitude is 180 degrees away from Jesus’ heartbeat. They are not gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11.29). Their focus is not on Jesus; it’s doctrine about Jesus, or how to pragmatically building a church. The overt focus on justification leads to neglecting reconciliation and regeneration. When you only focus on justification and being okay with God (or minimize the gospel to only praying the sinner's prayer), you have to prove it and measure it. So it becomes easy to finger-point and isolate oneself from the world. It’s easy to bar the pagans at the gate. Whereas if we really understand we are given a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5), our prayer should be for the Holy Spirit to draw people to Jesus through us.

We probably know people or we probably see it in ourselves in certain circumstances, where all of a sudden this ugly comes out. Or we know people who are so driven, they are like a whirlwind, leaving “bodies” in their wake. There is a reason why Scripture over and over and over again talks about being still before the Lord and leading a quiet life, because that “whirlwind” is ugly and a symptom of being focused on meaning and not identity. I can just guarantee that that person isn’t content. You cover it up with sarcasm, but that’s living in the flesh and not in the spirit. I don’t have to push myself out front. I don’t have to push my agenda. I don’t have to fight for my rights. I don’t have to force others to recognize my power or my authority or my role. I don’t have to be consumed with wanting more materialism (fill in the blank). Even with nothing I can be content. In a dire situation where I could lose my life and die, I still have everything I need for life in godliness, my knowledge of him who has called me by his glory and goodness.

If I find my life in Jesus, I can still enjoy the things of life, but I don’t worship them. It doesn’t become an all-consuming focus. As I take my identity from Jesus’ redemptive power, I can hold loosely what provides meaning in my life, and live contentedly. There is great freedom in a correctly drawn identity, the freedom to appreciate the things of meaning and to be content. The point of impact is: Do we really understand what it means to be new in Christ Jesus? We cannot live an abiding life in Jesus if we do not understand. Only in the abundance of Jesus’ grace can we enjoy what provides meaning in this life—but what is meaningful is not our identity. With an identity that is drawn from Jesus’ life, I realize I cannot save myself and I need grace to live each day. That will lead to contentment.