

Thanksgiving Eve, Wednesday, November 24, 2021

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No Comparison!

Philippians 4:6–20

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

From prison, St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi: **“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me”** (vv 10–13).

We all know the story of how the Grinch (tried) to steal Christmas. But do you know the story who tries to steal Thanksgiving? No, I’m not talking about this as some kind of culture war or political divide. And, no, I’m not talking about someone literally running off with the turkey under one arm, the stuffing under another, and a pie in each hand. I mean the kind of thief who creeps in, leaves your precious stuff untouched, but sucks the thankfulness straight from your soul. He doesn’t care how much or how little you have as long as you don’t enjoy any of it. His chief delight is in making you grumpy, bitter, and discontent.

If this thief were writing to the Philippians, he would’ve said it this way: *“Not that I am speaking of being satisfied—certainly not!—for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be discontent. I know how to remain unhappy whether brought low or abounding. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need with bitterness. I can do nothing, enjoy nothing, receive nothing without strong resentment.”*

Who is this thief? It’s comparison. Comparison is the Thanksgiving thief. By nature, we are people who like to compare. We tend to compare ourselves and our stuff to others. We compare especially external, quantifiable, objective things with the things they have: homes, cars, educational and work pedigrees, salaries, electronics, vacation destinations, physical characteristics, spouses and families, and so on. If it exists, they can find a way to compare it in some fashion. We can make a comparison out of anything.

And what happens when we begin to compare things with others? Well, you know how it is. As we make comparisons, we see all the flaws and defects in the things that we have. We know every ding and scratch in the car we drive, but the car the other person drives—it looks pristine. We want what the other person has, and we become dissatisfied with what we have. It's obvious with children. A child may have five toys in their arms but throw a fit over the toy held by another a child. So we adults don't throw those fits anymore, but way too often we're still children on the inside. Comparing ourselves with others not only makes us unhappy, discontent, and bitter. It ruins what we do have. Trying to be the Joneses will ruin the Gregorys . . . or anyone else.

Tonight—for Thanksgiving—we are invited to step away from comparison, to put away our cell phones and Facebook scrolling, instead we are invited to step into the gifts our Lord has for us. We are invited to receive our blessings not with comparison but rather with thanksgiving. This is true no matter what our lives may look like today or what they may have been like over the last year. For some, the past year has been a year of success. For others, the past year has been a year of painful finances. For some, it has been a year of good health. For others, it has been a year of struggles and trials. So how can we be content?

Consider St. Paul. If you want a comparison, then let's look at him. We're all pretty well off compared to him. When St. Paul was writing to the Christians in Philippi, he was writing from prison. And he had already been in prison for some time. It may not have been shackles all the time, but he was limited in where he could go, who he could see, and what he could do. His life was not his own. Not only that, St. Paul's life was also nearing its end. When he writes this letter, it's not long before he'll be hauled before Caesar and his head will be taken off for being a Christian. Anyone want to trade places with him now?

And yet St. Paul is the one who speaks not out of bitterness, discontent, or unhappiness. He speaks out of contentment—contentment found in Christ: **“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content (even in prison). 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me”** (vv 11–13). Through *Him* who strengthens me.

St. Paul had learned the secret of being content, because he had his eyes fixed not on the neighbor and what the neighbor has but fixed on his Lord. He looked to Jesus Christ, the One who **though He was, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich** (2 Cor 8:9). Our Lord thought nothing of having it all and leaving it behind for your sake, so that you might be His and belong to Him. Our Lord

knew the struggle we would have with comparison and desire for what others have. He knew that envy would often took root in our hearts. So He came among us. He even took on Himself what we deserve and died on the cross. Our Lord Jesus Christ was content to take your sins and mine, to take your death and mine, to take your hell and mine—and to bear it all for us. St. Paul was looking to Him.

Tonight we look to Him as well. When we look to our Lord and compare ourselves to Him, we find that everything belonging to Him is given to us—the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. With this we can be content. We can carry on. We can live and be grateful through Him who strengthens us. He gives us the strength to live and to work and to love, no matter how little or how much we have.

As we look at our lives, we remember that the things we have all come from God in the first place. He created the heavens and the earth. He created man and woman and put them at the center. He provided them with food. Even after the fall into sin, God has continued to provide, to care, and to give us what we need for our daily lives. This is why Jesus says that we don't need to worry about what we will eat or what we will wear (Matthew 6:25–34). Indeed, most, if not all of us, already know what and where we'll be eating tomorrow. There will be no lack. God has created and sustained us. Life in this world remains a good gift from Him, even at times when life is a struggle or a burden, even when finances are challenging and health isn't great. Still, we have Christ. And because we have Christ, we are lacking in nothing.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, don't allow the thief comparison to come today or tomorrow or in the days ahead and rob you of the joy of thanksgiving. Instead, as you receive your turkey, your stuffing, your pumpkin pie, or whatever the Lord gives you tomorrow, receive it with thanksgiving. Receive it in humility. Receive it with joy. Receive it as gifts that come from the creation that God made for you and as gifts that come through the sacrifice Christ made also for you.

So tonight we gather to thank and praise God for what He gives. We gather looking to Christ. We gather as brothers and sisters in Christ, not to look at or compare with one another, but to rejoice in our Lord.

As St. Paul said, **“My God will supply every need of yours, according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”** (v 19). And no one can steal that from us.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
