Sermon Series: Words of Wisdom in a Whacked-Out World
Sermon Title: Recognizing the Goodness of God

Text: Proverbs 15:16-17 -- Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it; Proverbs 17:1 -- Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife; Proverbs 19:23 -- The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.

Introduction: In *Our Daily Bread*, **Philip Parham** tells the story of a rich industrialist who was disturbed to find a fisherman sitting lazily beside his boat. "**Why aren't you out there fishing?**" he asked. "**Because I've caught enough fish for today**," said the fisherman. "**Why don't you catch more?**" the rich man asked. "**What would I do with them?**" "**You could sell them, earn more money, buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch even more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and be rich just like me**." The fisherman asked, "**Then what would I do?**" "**You could kick back and enjoy life**," said the industrialist. "**What do you think I'm doing now?**" the fisherman replied.

This is the 11th message in our series, "**Words of Wisdom for a Whacked-Out, Crazy World**." I want to talk to you today about the matter of contentment. ***'Contentment' is defined in the Random House Dictionary as 'A MODEST SATISFACTION***.' That's an okay definition. However, when we look at what the Bible says about it, **contentment is more in line with realizing how much you already have, how much God has already given you AND BEING SATISFIED WITH IT**. **Or to put it another way, people who are content are satisfied with what they have and not disgruntled with what they don't have**.

Here's what the book of Proverbs says about contentment:

- **Proverbs 12:9 -- Better to be lowly and have a servant than to play the great man and lack bread.** This proverb is saying that if you're not wealthy, but have enough money so that your needs are met, you're far better off than someone who boasts of being rich yet cannot afford even the necessities of life. **This makes sense, doesn't it?**
- **Proverbs 15:16 -- Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it. Here, Solomon is saying that right priorities (fearing the Lord) have a more positive impact on a person's life than does great wealth. This is something that we, Americans, don't seem to understand.** Studies show that most Americans believe that the more money a person has, the greater his happiness. But that's not always the case. In fact, for many people the more wealth one acquires the greater the anxiety he or she experiences. Writing in the ***Atlantic,*** author and researcher **Arthur C. Brooks** says, **"Money is one of the things Americans worry about most in the world**." One survey found that even when the US economy is thriving more than half of us felt anxious or insecure about money sometimes, often, or all the time. And during the COVID pandemic, another survey found that workers were almost **five times more likely** to worry about money than their health. **But many of us really don't need to worry about money. Only 11 percent of Americans live in poverty**. And yet, according to a recent survey, more than half of **Millennials** with a net worth greater than $1 million **feared losing their wealth** "a great deal" or "somewhat," as did more than a third of similarly wealthy **Baby Boomers**. Brooks concludes, "**For millions of people, then, worrying**

about money is not a reflection of whether their basic needs are being met. In fact, this anxiety reflects deeper concerns that money can't solve."

- **Proverbs 15:17 -- Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.** Here's what this means. It is better to eat Ramen Noodles in a small, dingy apartment with someone you love than steak and lobster at an exclusive restaurant with someone you truly dislike. I don't need to say any more about that.
- **Proverbs 16:8 -- Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.** It is better to do the right thing and have only a little to show for it, than to do the wrong thing and have great wealth. A while back I read a book about the gangsters of the prohibition era. They robbed banks and acquired a great deal of money for themselves. Yet, these people were miserable because they couldn't enjoy it. They spent all their time hiding out from the police in dilapidated houses. Almost all of them, died young. Not a really good trade off, was it?
- **Proverbs 16:19 -- Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the meek and poor than to divide the spoil with the proud (Amplified Bible).** The key word here is "spoil." It means booty or prey. It refers to what is forcefully taken from someone. Today, we might call it ill-gotten gain about which **Proverbs 10:2** says brings no profit.
- **Proverbs 17:1 -- Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.** For some families, this is what Thanksgiving and Christmas are like. They gather together to eat a sumptuous meal with all the trimmings, yet can't stand the company they keep when they do. Far better to have a small meal with a few people with whom you are at peace.
- **Proverbs 28:6 -- Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways.** **How much is a guilt-free conscience worth to you? Listen to this from Ben Cost of the New York Post.** He writes: Amid the increasing number of self-service check-out stations cropping up at grocery stores and other vendors, companies have devised a unique measure to deter potential shoplifters—mirrors. Initially people assumed it was used to ensure shoppers "look good" before checking out, **these reflective devices are actually there to make prospective pilferers feel guilty**. This might sound ineffective on its face as robbers would presumably just steal with no one monitoring their actions. However, mirrors are psychologically proven to make people feel guilty. According to a study in the journal "**Letters on Behavioral Evolutionary Science**," people who are in a "**self-aware**" situation such as in front of a mirror are less likely to engage in "**antinormative behavior**" like stealing or cheating than those who are not. Why? Because they're confronted with their GUILT! **NOW LET'S TURN TO ANOTHER BOOK OF THE BIBLE TO LEARN THE SECRET TO CONTENTMENT**.

The secret to contentment. In Philippians 4:10-13, the Apostle Paul writes about his contentment in Christ. Like every other Christian I know, this is something he had to learn for himself **(4:11 -- for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content).** It wasn't always this way for him. He had to be taught by our Lord how to find his satisfaction in Christ alone. Now, we know that he did, because of what he wrote in **Philippians 3:7-8 -- But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. Those are the words of a contented man!** Paul learned that nothing else in life compares with having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. **He is the only One who can satisfy the deep longings of the soul**. This is how it changed him. **Paul learned to ...**

- **Give thanks for the blessings of Christ. He cultivated the habit of making more of his joys than he did of his sorrows.** Though he wrote this letter from prison, probably in Rome, he talked about the joy that he experienced because the gospel was going forth with great effectiveness in spite of the fact that he was imprisoned **(Philippians 1:12-18 -- I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice). Instead of airing his grievances to God in prayer, Paul learned to give thanks for his trials** (See Philippians 4:6-7). **Instead of thinking about all the things that troubled him, he learned to think on …whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise (4:8).** This may come as a surprise to some of us, but the way we learn to be content is usually by being placed in situations where most people would be malcontent and then trusting God enough to give thanks for our circumstances. **Harry Ironside** once said, "**We would worry less if we praised more. Thanksgiving is the enemy of discontent and dissatisfaction**." Paul learned to give thanks for the blessings of Christ.
- **Trust in the sufficiency of Christ** (**Philippians 4:12-13 -- 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). Pastor Colin Smith** says, **"Contentment does not mean that you are indifferent to your circumstance, but that you are not controlled by your circumstances." Paul talks about how he learned this lesson in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.** He had been given a "**thorn in the flesh**" because of some revelations he had received from God that might have caused him to think more highly of himself than he ought. Paul referred to this thorn as "**a messenger of Satan**." Three times he asked the Lord to remove it, and three times the answer came back as "**no.**" **What conclusion did he deduce from this?** God's grace was sufficient for him because God's power is made perfect in human weakness. Once that lesson sunk in, Paul said, "**Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me**" – **2 Corinthians 12:9**. Listen: Jesus is all you need, but you won't learn it until He's all you got. That's when you come to fully realize that His strength is sufficient for any challenge we face in life. (**Review: GIVE THANKS FOR THE BLESSINGS OF CHRIST; TRUST IN THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST**)
- **Cling to the supremacy of Christ. This is what happens when we put Christ first in our lives over everything else. Paul said it so well in Philippians 1:21 -- For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones taught that if we want to feel as Paul felt (contentment), we have to live as Paul lived**. We will never find contentment in the things of this world. They will only lead us to anger, frustration and anxiety. If you want real peace and satisfaction, you must put Christ first in everything.

If you're lacking contentment in your life …

- **Identify the areas that you are angry, frustrated or anxious about.**
- **Give thanks to the Lord for the many blessings in your life.**
- **Tell God that you trust him and that will not be controlled by these things.**
- **Reaffirm that Christ is Lord over your life.** There is no other!

Conclusion: A rich man named Carl loved to ride his horse through his vast estate to congratulate himself on his wealth. One day on such a ride, he came upon **Hans**, an old tenant farmer, who had sat down to eat his lunch in the shade of a great oak tree. Hans' head was bowed as he prayed. When he looked up, he said, "**Oh, excuse me, sir. I didn't see you. I was giving thanks for my food**." "**Humph!**" snorted Carl, noticing the coarse dark bread and cheese constituting the old man's lunch. "**If that were all I had to eat, I don't think I would feel like giving thanks.**" "**Oh**," replied Hans, "**it is quite sufficient. But it is remarkable that you should come by today, sir. I...I feel I should tell you, I had a strange dream just before awakening this morning.**" "**And what did you dream?**" Carl asked with an amused smile. "**I dreamed of a beautiful place where a voice kept saying, 'The richest man in the valley will die tonight.'** " "**Dreams!**" cried the landowner. "**Nonsense!**" And he turned and galloped away. "**Lord, have mercy on his soul if he really is to die so soon,**" Hans prayed as he watched horse and rider disappear. Carl could not somehow put the conversation from his mind and that evening he called his doctor. When the doctor arrived, Carl told him the whole story. "**Sounds like a lot of nonsense to me**," the doctor said, "**but for your peace of mind, let's examine you**." A little later, his examination complete, the doctor assured Carl that he was strong and healthy. "**There's no way you're going to die tonight**." Carl thanked his friend and told him how foolish he felt for being upset by an old man's dream. They next day about 9 a.m. Carl rode out to tell the old man about the foolishness of his dream. When he arrived at the great oak tree, he saw another man where the old man had sat to eat his lunch the day before. "**Where is old Hans**?" he asked. The man said. "**Oh, you didn't hear? He died last night in his sleep**." **Those with the best life, the richest life, are content with the Lord's blessings.**