

The Scottish Premier Football League transfer window closed at the end of the January, and I'm always interested to see who leaves football clubs and who arrives. But the aspect of transferring footballers that really interests me is the contracts they sign, and their reason for moving clubs. It amazes me when I read about football players salaries that are often in the millions, and then when asked why they are moving to another club they say 'It's not about the money, I've always wanted to play for this club.' Call me cynical but when they say it isn't about the money, it's always about the money!

This attitude of grabbing all you can get isn't limited to the football world, it's part of the fabric of our society. Everyone wants more; more money or a better car or larger house. It seems that contentment only comes through the acquisition of more and more material things. And this is nothing new as we discover in Paul's first letter to Timothy. ***Paul is giving his final instructions to his young friend, he talks about developing an attitude that will open the door to contentment.*** Paul has experience of life and he speaks from personal example. He begins by saying that contentment begins with an attitude.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul said *I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* Paul's happiness comes from his faith in Jesus. Paul rejoiced when he was in prison because he knows God is with him. He endured much in his life but Paul always purpose in his life. He knows that his future is in Christ and that through Christ, he has the victory. This reminds me of Jesus' words about our treasures in **Matthew 6:19. *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal.*** How many of us have been disappointed by worldly possessions?

Jesus said to store up your treasure in heaven then you will find your heart and your hope. Paul's focus was on heaven and this helped him not to worry about worldly things. He decided to have a positive attitude and be happy with the adventures God brought his way. Even when imprisoned in Rome, he applied his Christ-like attitude and found a reason to be happy in that situation. We can learn from Paul and this is what he was telling Timothy. Although life isn't perfect we can still praise God and experience joy. We just need to change our attitude to look at life a little differently. The truth is that if we rely on worldly circumstances for our happiness then there'll always be something that gets in the way of contentment.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:33: *But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* It is our relationship with God which brings contentment, and nothing else can take His place.

A second point Paul makes in his letter is that thankful people are happy people. I know a minister who keeps a list of things he's thankful to God for every day and includes it in his prayers. The list is often the same and he never misses a day. He's someone who is good to be with because his personality is joyous, and his joy is infectious. I asked him about his list and he said the list reminds him of his blessings and this keeps him positive and faithful. Contrast this with someone who's always sharing his woes, whenever he entered the room it felt like the air was being let out of a balloon. Sadly, people avoided him because he brought them down.

People suggest that we're born as optimists or pessimists and there is nothing we can do about it but I disagree. Our outlook on life comes from learned behaviour which is informed by the environment in which we grow up. But just because we've experienced negativity doesn't mean that's all we should expect. We are born again in Christ and our attitude should be to look for the blessings and give God thanks.

The Americans have a day they call Thanksgivings, which I think is a great idea. In the middle of the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln called on the nation to mark a day of *thanksgiving*. The nation was at war with itself and everything was falling apart around Lincoln. Yet he knew instinctively that this was a way to begin healing old wounds, thanksgiving was a way to turn the focus off what was wrong with his country; and onto what was good about it. Even today, in our secular society; thanksgiving reminds us of our God of provision and it helps us focus on our blessings. It's easy to focus on all that we don't have, but where does that get us?

Paul reminds us that we need to keep looking up. We need to recognize where everything comes from. James tells us *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights*. That's why we can say with the psalmist *This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it*. It's good Christian witness for us to demonstrate an attitude of happiness and contentment because we have a God who cares. He has created us and the world we inhabit. He has blessed us beyond our wildest dreams and out of the gratitude we feel toward God for all His faithful goodness, we should want to share these blessings.

That brings us to our third point. ***Paul suggests to Timothy that we need to have an attitude of generosity if we are to live a blessed life.*** There was an article in National Geographic a couple of years ago titled *What Good Is a Tree?* The story said that a certain kind of fungus grows in the ground that allows the roots of the trees, even different kinds of trees, to come together. If one tree has access to water, another to nutrients, and a third to sunlight, the trees have a way to share with one another. And so it is with us. We are stronger individually if we are willing to share what we have with others. Too often people think that if they cling to what they have, they will be able to take care of their own needs, but and if they give what they have away they may leave themselves in a predicament.

I like the story told of Elijah and his visit to the widow of Zarephath. When he arrived to visit her she had very little to eat in her house, yet she fed Elijah. She was a little reluctant but she shared it anyway and miraculously, there was enough food for them all for many days. She learned to trust God and her trust was rewarded. God kept providing for her as long as she shared what she had with Elijah. Then the story takes a twist. Her son gets sick and dies and she's overcome by grief. Elijah goes to the boy and brings him back from the dead. The boy is alive and the woman sings God's praise. God works in mysterious ways. When we share with others, we find that our generosity always comes back to us in a blessing. The blessing may not be monetary and it may not be in kind because in God's wisdom, the blessing comes in a form that makes our hearts glad. I don't think I've ever seen a generous person lost in despair, and they're often the happiest people I know. God keeps blessing them as fast as they can share what they have with others.

A colleague told me about someone in his congregation who'd accepted Christ and said they were going to start tithing. They figured out ten percent of their income and wrote out a check to the church. That first week his check bounced and the person was embarrassed but they made it good. The person continued writing out checks for ten percent of their income and it was clear that his giving sometimes caused him difficulty but he continued to faithfully tithe. And then the man got promoted at work with an increased salary and he was left a legacy by a wealthy relative, so he gave away even more. He started funnelling some of his newfound wealth into the youth ministry at church. One day, he told his pastor that the scriptures were true when they said you cannot out-give God. He tried and God kept blessing him, not only with added wealth but also in the joy he had in seeing a ministry grow.

Paul's lesson to Timothy can be summarised: Happiness is never about money and possessions. It's to do with finding your place in life and living it. When we walk in the light of God's Word, we'll always find peace and joy and we'll develop a glad attitude.

Amen.

(1713 words)