

A Heart Full of Jesus 11-19-06

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² 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. Philippians 4:11-12 (NIV)

⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 (NIV)

I started writing a Thanksgiving message. I was about 2/3rds through it when I realized the Lord had something else for us. I was preparing to share with you how our gratitude should be based on the unchanging character of God. It is a perfectly valid message that we need to hear someday, but today is not that day. It was a message that challenged us to think as new creatures and not as the world thinks. That idea does carry over into this message I am about to share with you. I feel as if the Lord is challenging us to take some bigger steps. I don't know about you, but in the last month or two I have felt the Spirit of God picking up the pace in our spiritual growth. I have seen the hand of God moving, encouraging us, and challenging us.

Big steps forward in our spiritual life are somewhat frightening because they require us to have faith in the unseen. They require us to let go of natural means of security and trust in an all-powerful God. God has been challenging us with the testimony of Enoch and Noah. He's been challenging us to walk with God, to hear His voice, and step out in faithful obedience to do all that He directs.

As we enter this week of Thanksgiving, we often think of all the physical blessings. The physical, after all, is a sign of the goodness of God. But I believe the Lord wants to take us deeper than that, beyond things and conditions to what matters eternally. Is your heart filled with the wonder of God, with a daily relationship with Him?

Recently a leader in the church at large was discovered to have had an illicit relationship and used drugs. What happened? How could someone who spoke the word of God so effectively have been so hypocritical? The same way any of us can come to church and hear the word of God and claim to be a Christian and yet be searching for things to fill the emptiness in our heart. It isn't just the allure of sin, it's that we haven't found complete contentment in Jesus. We aren't letting our relationship with Him meet our longings. That's why we try to fill the emptiness with something else. If you are trying to find joy in something other than Jesus and what

He has for you, eventually you will end up disappointed and looking for something else.

What man typically does is compartmentalize life into the practical, like business and daily necessities, leisure and the spiritual. The spiritual is Sunday morning or maybe a Bible class or an hour of devotional thought and prayer each day. The rest of the time we claim as ours, for our gratification. We can't really relate to dying to the world. We have to think a bit abstractly to count ourselves a living sacrifice. And then we wonder why we don't feel fulfilled. You can't serve two masters! (Matthew 6:24) That isn't a place you find joy, it's a place of confusion. And so we wonder around day to day trying to make these two worlds come together and we aren't really grateful for either one.

Commented [notes1]: 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Matt 6:24 (NIV)

Many of you have discovered the joy of living for and with Jesus in your daily life. You wouldn't trade it for anything. Every day is an adventure. You are being changed. You are so content that you can't imagine trying to fill your heart with anything else. Temptation is still all around you, but it has lost its power. Your life is no longer about you; it's about Jesus. Money and things and circumstances are only tools for what God is doing in and through you. That's freedom. The disease of affluenza has met its cure in abandonment to Christ. (Colossians 3:1-3)

Commented [notes2]: 1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.
Col 3:1-3 (NIV)

In our scripture passages today, you will notice that the Apostle Paul found a secret. He could be in need or have more than he needed, and either way, he was perfectly content. It's because his contentment was in his relationship with Jesus. The author of Hebrews wrote that the reason we should be content is because God will never leave or forsake us. Do you need anything more than all-powerful, all-knowing God?

The last verse above, written to the Corinthians, tells us what drove the Apostle Paul. It was the love relationship he had with Jesus Christ. He found a love so great it was worth abandoning his life to. That love is the one thing that can satisfy the human heart. I dare to say that without it you cannot know the depths of thankfulness. Oh, you can appreciate things, but a heart filled with gratitude comes from finding this relationship.

I want to share with you a true story that happened recently in North Korea and China. You may have read it in *Voice of the Martyrs*. It's about people who have nothing but are thankful because they found the love that satisfied the need in them. They found something not just good enough to live for, but something worth dying for. (As told by P. Todd Nettleton Voice of the Martyrs October 2006 issue)

The four North Korean young men chose the names Pencil, Eraser, Pen and Paper Clip; the Korean equivalent of Bob, John or Tom wouldn't do for these creative teenagers. "Andrew," a Christian worker in China, provided food, shelter and encouragement for them. It was his idea they use false names, in case Chinese police or North Korean agents discovered them. As he began to share the gospel and disciple the young men, three of them showed enthusiasm and potential. But the one called Pencil never paid attention. When Andrew was trying to teach, Pencil was sketching on a paper or staring off into space. After several months of discipleship, Andrew presented three of the young men with the idea of going back to North

Korea, carrying the gospel message to their countrymen. But Andrew didn't think Pencil was ready for such a mission, and didn't ask him.

However, the three weren't going anywhere without their friend. Together, the four crossed the Tumen River back into North Korea. Before they left, Andrew told them, "No matter what you do, or what trouble you're in, you can come back here and I'll try to help you." Months passed and Andrew wondered if they had safely crossed the river.

Six months after crossing, Eraser, Pen and Paper Clip were arrested by North Korean police. Pencil hid and watched their arrest, frozen in fear as his friends were beaten for sharing Christ. Police threw them into vehicles and drove out of sight. Pencil ran. He heard later his friends were taken to a concentration camp, but he never saw them again.

Pencil was afraid police were looking for him, so he lived in fear as a beggar. Pencil thought a lot about how his friends had shared the gospel. They would speak of Christ at every opportunity and share how He had brought hope into their lives. But when Pencil tried to share about Jesus, his mouth became dry, his hands shook and he couldn't seem to get the words out. Even when other beggars noticed, "You look different. You don't even look like a North Korean," Pencil was unable to tell them that the difference came from inside of him, where Christ lived.

One day Pencil remembered Andrew's words: "You can come back here and I'll try to help you." But would he? Pencil had spent most of the time ignoring the Christian's training. He decided to cross the river back into China and seek out Andrew. It had been eight months since the four young men crossed the Tumen River; now only one was left to retrace their steps.

With tears in his eyes, Pencil told Andrew the fate of his three friends. He shared how they had been bold witnesses for Christ and how he had hid in fear as his best friends were taken away.

"What do you want to do with the rest of your life?" Andrew asked the teen.

"I want to learn how to be brave like my friends and unafraid to share Jesus."

Andrew spent two months intensely discipling Pencil. He could see the young man's faith growing and commitment deepening as they studied and prayed together. The boy whose mind always seemed to wander was now a young man completely committed to Christ. When Pencil was ready to return to North Korea, Andrew asked him "What more do you need?" Pencil looked into the eyes of his friend and mentor and said, "I need nothing more."

Andrew helped Pencil connect with a Christian couple inside North Korea, and the three of them began to share the gospel with the poorest of the poor.

"Where did you get this mysterious story?" some asked. One beggar came up to Pencil and confided that he also was a Christian. Others pleaded with him to tell more of the story, or to start at the beginning and tell it again. For five months they continued, planting seeds and then watering, praying and watering again.

One day, the three Christians were sharing with a small group of beggars and gave them some tracts and a Bible. One of the young beggars when home and proudly showed the Bible to his mother, telling her about the kind people who had given it to him.

The mother knew this book was a religious book and that it had to be illegal. Was someone trying to frame her son? Would the whole family be arrested? She

grabbed the book and headed to the police station. The police listened to her story; then questioned her son. Pencil was arrested, and later the Christian couple was also.

At the police station, the questions quickly turned into interrogation, then torture. The police demanded to know where Pencil had gotten the Bible. They offered to let him walk out the door if he would renounce Jesus. Pencil steadfastly refused.

"I have invited Jesus into my heart," he told them. "I cannot deny Him."

He told the police about Pen, Eraser, and Paper Clip – their witness for Christ, the fearless way they followed Him.

"There was a time when I couldn't be like them," he said. "I was too afraid. But now I can be, since Jesus is with me."

Wanting to break the teenager, and insulted by his lack of fear, the police beat him severely. The beating didn't change his stand for Christ.

"We are big sinners here in North Korea because we do not believe in God," Pencil told them. "If you kill me, someday you will become a Christian."

This made the police even more enraged. One by one, they pulled out Pencil's fingernails. Beaten, bleeding and barely alive, the young man was sent to a labor camp. Orders were given that Pencil not be allowed any food, yet his labor quota was the same as other prisoners.

Each day, Pencil told the other prisoners, and even the guards, "Jesus is the reason I am able to go on." Because of his endurance and the way he shared the love of Jesus, many in the camp turned to Christ.

After two months in the camp, Pencil died. He never saw his 20th birthday. His body was removed from the camp, but the fruit of his short ministry there lived on.

Shortly after Pencil's death, the Christian couple was sent to the same prison camp. They were surprised to find believers there who told them of Pencil's death. They were there only a few days when the camp's top officer, "Rhee," ordered their release.

Back home a few days later, the couple heard knocking on their door. It was the prison officer, Rhee. He wanted to talk to them further. "I have tortured and killed many people," he told them, "but since the death of this young man I have been troubled." Rhee told them the story of their friend's courage and cheerful spirit, even as his body was failing.

The couple told Rhee he needed to get down on his knees while they told him why Pencil was different. They introduced him to Jesus. When they finished sharing and praying together, Rhee invited them to come home with him.

Inside Rhee's large home, eight family members were gathered, as well as several other soldiers who worked at the prison camp and their families. They listened intently as the young couple presented Jesus' love, his death on the cross and the gospel plan of salvation. Many of the listeners wept quietly.

Rhee was shocked when his own mother stepped forward and admitted that for 50 years she had been a secret Christian. "I am no longer ashamed of my faith," she said, then turned to the rest of the people gathered in the room. "Who wants to have Jesus in their heart?" she asked. Everyone in the room raised their hand. Each of them was baptized that night.

Pencil found the same contentment and joy that the Apostle Paul found. He learned that even without food and under constant duress he could be thankful that Christ lived in him. Pencil shined so brightly that even the hardened guards could see that he had found something they did not possess. Perhaps it speaks to us of something we do or do not possess. With all our wealth and excess aren't we looking for what makes people like Pencil shine, for the reason someone could possess such peace and joy, such a heart of gratitude that no condition on earth could touch it?

When I consider this testimony, it strikes me that real Thanksgiving is not about things or conditions, but about an eternal relationship. It's not about the things God gives or circumstances we covet, but about the heart of the One from whom all things come. It not about what we have to live for, but about what is good enough to die for. I've heard it said that one never really lives until they find something for which they are willing to die. Perhaps that is why Jesus invites us to give our lives as a living sacrifice, to take up our cross and follow Him. (Romans 12:1,2) (Mark 8:34)

He doesn't ask us to do what He hasn't already done. (John 13:15) He decided that you were worth living and dying for. Pencil was just following in His footsteps. In doing so, he found contentment in the reality of Jesus' presence in Him.

I think many of us probably feel like Pencil when he first returned to North Korea. We are fine with watching other people share Jesus with others, but we want to take a back seat and just watch. But the desire in us to share will grow and grow by the presence of the Holy Spirit. God will lead us to someone who can mentor us like Andrew did for Pencil. The love of Christ compels us to.

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 (NIV)

As I think about this season of Thanksgiving, I'm beginning to realize that the things I am most often grateful for are physical things, but the greatest gift of all is a heart full of Jesus. If I receive that gift of the fullness of Christ in me, like Pencil, all the physical blessings fade in insignificance. (Galatians 4:19) If we have that gift, whether we have things or nothing won't really matter. The joy of that fullness will shine through us and touch other lives. ...he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. Don't you desire the fullness of Christ in you to the extent that nothing else really matters? Isn't it time we lived for something other than our self?

Commented [notes3]: 1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.
2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Mark 8:34 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. John 13:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, Gal 4:19 (NIV)