

A Basket Full of Tranquility

Text: Acts 9:20-25; II Corinthians 11:16-33; Philippians 4:11,12

Tranquility has been defined as the quality of state of being calm; an untroubled state; free from disturbances; a disposition free from stress; the epitome of serenity. Our word has Latin roots. The Latin *trans* means “exceedingly” and *quies* means “rest” or “quiet”. Tranquil, therefore, brings one to a state of mind that is exceedingly quiet or restful, i.e., a peaceful, calm state without noise, violence or worry.

We have heard the expression, “He or she or I am just a basket case.” In Paul’s ministry he had the occasion to truly admit that on one occasion, he quite literally was a basket case. In that basket being lowered to the ground was a man with the very threat of death on his life, but that basket was full of the tranquility that only God can give.

How can one enter and live the life of tranquility? I Corinthians 15:58 gives us Paul’s advice on what it means to go beyond surviving to thriving in the work of the Lord, which in turn creates a life of tranquility: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Let’s break this verse down and discover the truth hiding in plain view:

1. BE SETTLED.

I Corinthians 15:58a: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast...” The “therefore” that the apostle puts at the beginning of this great verse is reflective of the subject of the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, which is about the resurrection of Jesus and of ourselves. I Corinthians 15:57 says, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In I Corinthians 15:17-19 we read, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” Because our sins are forgiven, because Christ is risen from the dead, because we, too, look forward to resurrection, we should therefore be stedfast.

I love this definition of stedfast: unwavering or loyal. One of the dictionaries I consulted used this as an example sentence: “A dog’s undying devotion to his master is an example of something that would be described as stedfast.” It is interesting to note that this English definition coincides with the original languages in which the Bible was written. Psalm 95:6: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.” The word worship comes to us from the Hebrew word *shachah* - “to depress, i.e. prostrate in homage to God, bow down, crouch, fall down flat, humbly beseech, do make obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship.”

John 4:24: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” The word *worship* comes to us from the Greek word,

Proskuneo - "meaning to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand, to fawn or crouch to, homage, do reverence to, adore."

Tranquility flows in the wake of worship. Years ago we had an Old English Sheep dog named Fluffy. I remember when we picked her out she was the most outgoing of her litter. Later I figured out why when she jumped out of the basket and the other puppies followed. She was the alpha. Even an ordinary dog is hard work to break; the alpha is even more difficult. Before Fluffy was broken, she was rambunctious, hard to control. I got some professional advice from an experienced dog trainer and I took the time and effort to train Fluffy in obedience. I have to tell you, I was amazed at her behavior afterwards. She was calm, useful and affectionate. When I would come home in the evening, she would nuzzle my feet until I would lift them, and then she would rest beneath my feet like the softest footstool. I could give her a one-word command and she would obey immediately. I learned much about dogs from Fluffy. When a dog learns obedience, he or she is the happiest (and so is the owner). The steady loyalty of a Christian who worships the Savior is a tranquil Christian.

2. BE STRONG.

I Corinthians 15:58b: "...unmovable..." Unmovable means "not changed in one's purpose or intention." God's word teaches us in Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." In three seasons of prayer, Paul prayed earnestly that he might be delivered from the thorn in his flesh. God did not deliver him, but instead gave him great grace. Housed within the perimeters of grace is tranquility. II Corinthians 12:9, 10: "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Philippians 2:13: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The old spiritual comes to mind: "Oh I, shall not be, I shall not be moved; I shall not be, I shall not be moved. Just like a tree planted by the water, I shall not be moved." Jeremiah 17:8: "For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." The unmovable Christian is a tranquil Christian.

3. BE STRIVING.

I Corinthians 15:58c: "...always abounding in the work of the Lord..." The word abound is taken from the Greek word *perisseuo*, which means to superabound and be in excess, be superfluous; exceed, excel, increase, redound, remain over and above. The apostle Paul, exercising the strength he receives from the Lord, says in Colossians 1:29, "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." This is the tranquil man!

When two or more bodies of water meet, a confluence is formed. From this union comes a larger, stronger river. I think the best example I have seen of this is in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania where the Monongahela and Allegheny join to form the mighty Ohio River. Abraham Lincoln gave a speech to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois on January 27, 1838, titled "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions." In this speech he said, "Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Bonaparte or a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years. At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer. If it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time or die by suicide." His could be most prophetic of our situation today, but the point I wish to make is that the strength of two rivers can form a most formidable, stronger river when joined. And when God's people join together, we become also a force that even Hell itself cannot defeat this unit called the church. Philippians 1:27: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Herein is our tranquility multiplied!

4. BE SURE.

I Corinthians 15:58d: "...forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." "Only one life 'twil soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." This statement is not merely some cliché; it is the absolute truth. Knowing that what we do for Christ will last beyond our lifetime creates a great sense of tranquility. Jim Elliot said shortly before he died a martyr's death, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." This understanding will give you tranquility under every possible circumstance.

Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were chained together on the morning of October 16, 1555. The pyre of wood was kindled. At the sight of the flame, the older of the two men gave utterance to the noblest and shortest sermon he ever gave in his long life of preaching. "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out." And the English reformation was begun and not only did Latimer and Ridley's testimony burn brightly in the halls of Heaven, but they did indeed kindle a fire that began one of the greatest efforts of world evangelism and missions the church has ever experienced.

You can be sure your life given wholly and completely to God will bring tranquility that in and of itself will be a taste of Heaven on Earth.

-Pastor Pope-