

Isaiah 25:6-9(ESV) ⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Psalms 23:1(ESV) ¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Matthew 22:1-14(ESV) ¹And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.’ ⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Rev. Gary Lewis Hendrickson

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Situational Contentment

Philippians 4:4-13(ESV) ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brothers, 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, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰I 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. ¹¹Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to

be content. ¹²I 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. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Stories of intrigue about members of royal families have been told since the earliest of days. People seem to have a fascination about these chosen few who, for one reason or another, were selected to rule over not only their country's government—but its citizens as well. Somehow there was the common expectation that among these highborn members of the ruling family that their everyday behavior would be exemplary. It was scandalous when one of them acted much like the common folk they ruled. Although there are many fine-sounding stories about any number of monarchies, we are going to examine a more true-to-life story about a certain prince. His name was AB.

AB came from an extremely large royal family, but he was second in line to the throne—right after his older brother. The two of them got along all right during their growing up years, but the situation changed as they became young men. The older brother molested a girl, whom AB loved. Even though AB could not do anything about it at the time, he began to plot revenge on his older brother. For two long years, AB acted as though nothing was wrong. Then an appropriate event came along where AB believed that he could carry out his vengeful plot. He invited his older brother to this event, and while he was there—AB had his servants kill the older brother—the heir-apparent to the throne.

Even for a prince of the realm, cold-blooded murder was not acceptable—especially since he had killed the next obvious king of the land. So, AB left his homeland and took refuge in a nearby country. He stayed there for three years. Meanwhile back at the kingly court, AB's father missed him terribly. The king had already lost his oldest son, and with AB in exile—he had lost his second oldest as well. Perhaps the king reasoned that AB had murdered his brother because the king had not punished the older son at all for mistreating that girl years before. If that was the king's thinking, maybe he rationalized that he was in part responsible for AB's foul deed. Still he could not let a royal murder go completely unpunished. So, the king sent word that AB could return home, but he would have no access to the king himself.

The young prince accepted the offer and returned home, but he stayed out of the king's presence for two years. Finally, AB decided that it was time to see his father, the king, and asked for a personal audience. When it was granted, AB came to the palace and bowed respectfully and humbly before the king. A father's love was immediately rekindled, and he was moved to express that love to his wayward son. The king kissed him—and all was forgiven.

An outsider might view this story and see some very possible underlying motives behind AB's murderous act. Was it really the mistreatment of the girl that prompted AB's evil deed—or was AB simply using that act as an excuse to eliminate his competition to the throne? After all, with the older brother dead, it was reasonable to assume that AB would one day be the king. After committing the treacherous act, all the young prince had to do was to get the old king to forgive him and then wait for his father to die. AB knew his father well. He could probably predict that his father would not stay mad at him forever. Was he counting on his father's love? Was it simple, justified vengeance—or was it a very clever ploy, on AB's part, to become king?

Well, we are never going to know, because AB never revealed his true motives. Yet, there is more to the story. Possibly that might lead us to a conclusion. AB decided not to wait until old age

took its final toll on his father. Instead of waiting like an obedient son, he tried to get the people to follow him while the aging king was still alive. A goodly portion of the people did follow AB, and civil war broke out across the land. For a time, it appeared that AB had succeeded in wresting the throne away from his father. But in the end, it was the old king's extensive experience in war that prevailed. AB was killed in the final battle, and his father, the king, had the throne safely back under his control. AB's shenanigans and trickery never did bring him the coveted crown of the kingdom. Instead, one of his much younger brothers became king after the old king died.

Perhaps, by now, you recognize the story I have told you is true. It comes right out of the Bible. AB is Absalom, the son of King David. The older brother, actually a half-brother, who was killed, was Amnon. The young prince killed him because he had violated Absalom's sister, Tamar. The younger brother, who eventually did become king was Solomon. Without much examination, we find many lessons in this story. We see one sinful act paid-in-full by another; we see the result of a father failing properly to discipline his sons by administering proper justice. And we observe, firsthand, a young man, a prince of the Israelites, who was not content to be second in line to the throne. Perhaps it was David's failure to punish Amnon that pushed Absalom along in his quest to set things right—while getting what he wanted all the time: to be king. Situational Contentment is not something that young Absalom had as a strong point in his life. He was not happy about his station in life; so, he attempted to change it—using whatever means were necessary to achieve the contentment he sought.

Within this story, we discover many similarities to ourselves. We can relate to David's love for his sons and his unwillingness to dispense necessary corrective justice when they did wrong. David could not correct the wrong already done; so, he chose to forgive and love his sons. Still, this loving act may have been the force that propelled Absalom toward sinful vengeance and contributed to the death of the older son. David's apparent unwillingness to discipline his sons could have been the factor Absalom counted on to get away with the murder of his brother. The softness of David's love was interpreted by Absalom as weakness as the prince tried to replace him as king.

As parents, we know how hard it is to discipline our children—especially when the discipline deserved should be severe. It is often much easier on us parents to let something like that slide by—no matter how much we know that proper discipline is required for our children to grow up to be responsible adults. As present or one-time children, we know what it is like to take advantage of the love that our parents have or had for us. Our sinful natures seem to compel us to try to get away with everything we can as we attempt to attain our selfish level of personal contentment.

We have all had encounters with unfairness in our lives. Something happens, that does not seem fair, and we appear powerless to rectify it. "This shouldn't have happened to us," we reason. And that provides the initial justification for some sort of sinful rebellion on our part. We lose our job through no fault of our own; the crop we worked so hard for doesn't produce; a loved one dies unexpectedly; a thief steals something we desperately need; an act of nature destroys our home; or some other unforeseen tragedy strikes us down. Our immediate situation has changed—for the worse, we believe. It all seems to be so unfair. We rationalize that we must do something—sinful or not—to restore our level of contentment.

To feelings and realities like this, Paul tells us to rejoice in the Lord always. Regardless of any situation we find ourselves in, we are to rejoice that we are connected in faith to the Lord of our salvation: Jesus Christ. Our redemption is guaranteed by the Resurrected One! Sinful actions, behavior, or thinking are never the right answer when our personal contentment has been disrupted. Paul shares

one of the things he has learned in his years as a believer: the secret of contentment. And that secret is that our contentment is not to hinge upon the situations we find ourselves in; rather, it is to be firmly rooted in our relationship with Christ. Bad situations are to be expected, but our contentment level need not be disrupted.

Absalom thought murdering his brother and trying to overthrow his father's throne would bring him the contentment he desired. Perhaps David reasoned that because he himself had succumbed to temptation with Bathsheba, which eventually led to the murdering of her husband, Uriah, that his sons had committed no worse sins than he himself had already done. Perhaps that explains why he took no corrective action with them. Perchance we have felt justified when we have retaliated with sin when new situations adversely affected our contentment level. Situational Contentment cannot be derived from what is happening around us; rather it comes only through our personal relationship with Jesus. No matter what our situation in life, contentment does not have to be left behind. Because, like Paul, we can state confidently, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."