

Your mind has a particular way of viewing the world. Your point of view affects how you see and understand the world. Most of the time, we don't notice this. But, at times, we miss something important. We miss it because our mind, with its way of viewing the world, is not expecting it. And if it's not expected, if it's the OPPOSITE of what we expect, we tend to miss it completely. Our mind automatically tunes it out.

I'd guess that most of our minds tuned out part of the epistle lesson this morning. It goes against the way that our country sees the world; and so we tend to miss it completely: it's the last thing we'd expect. But then again, maybe you did catch it. In these verses Paul talks about contentment. He writes: I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. And he tells us the secret: I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Contentment comes through Christ Jesus, and His strength; we are content when we rest in Him, are strengthened by Him, prepared by Him to face life's challenges.

But what are those challenges? Here is where our minds probably filtered half of them out. We think of challenges as struggles. And so when Paul says he has learned to be content in need and hunger, we hear him at once. Ah yes; that is when we need the Lord; that is when we would be discontent—when we are struggling, when things are scarce, when we are brought low. I'd guess most of us missed the other half. This same secret applies to life's other challenges: when we abound, when we have plenty; when we have an abundance. When things are going great and we have far more than we need.

Abundance and plenty: how is this a challenge? Who is not content when he has an abundance? When we are prosperous, of course we are content; life is easy . . . right? That's not how Paul sees it. In our prosperity we need to learn how to be content just as much as in our

need. This is illustrated by the people in Jesus' parable. Let's consider the parable to see how they struggle in their prosperity.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king, hosting a great wedding feast for his son. He sends his servants to call those invited: Come to the feast, but they do not come. The king sends more servants. The king says: tell the people: I have prepared my dinner; the steak is ready, along with everything else. Come to the feast.

And how do the people respond? They pay no attention; they have other, more important things to do. One goes to his farm, another to his business. Too much work to do; no time for the feast. Others abuse the servants, even murdering them! The people cannot handle their prosperity properly. They are so wrapped up in their abundance, that they have no time for their king and his gracious invitation.

The king is angry, and destroys those citizens. He kills them and burns their city. He tells his servants: those invited were not worthy. They will not enter my feast. Go instead, and invite all whom you find, that they may come to the feast. The servants do as they are bid; they bring in many people to the feast.

The parable is about the kingdom of heaven. It is a kingdom of grace and mercy; where God the King does all. He prepares His great wedding banquet and invites man to Come to the feast. Come, He bids; eat my food, drink my wine. Come for the food of immortality, given to you without price, without cost, without you earning it. My Son has died to win forgiveness and salvation for you. Come, receive this blessed gift of life as my free gift to you. Come where this gift is granted: in my Word, in my Sacraments.

And what do we say? How many times aren't we lost in prosperity! We are so wrapped up in the things and stuff of our lives that we have no time for God. We go off, like the people in

the parable, to our farm, to our business; work consumes the hours given to us, and none are left for God. Gotta get ahead, we think; gotta earn more money. Never asking if we already have enough, just aiming for more. Of course, “more” is a moving target and we are forever restless pursuing it.

Or maybe it’s not work and money. Maybe it’s leisure. No time for church—gotta rest on the weekends. Work all week; here’s my chance to have fun and sleep late. Recreation of any sort—outdoors, indoors, television, books—leaves no time for the Lord.

Or maybe it’s family. Kids need to go to so many things, can’t get to church; can’t take them to church. Their schedule is full and there’s no time left for them to learn God’s Word. Whatever it is, how easily the hours of the week fill up, and we find ourselves with no time for church, no time for devotions, no time for God’s Word.

No big deal, we think. So I miss church, so I skip Bible class, so I don’t spend any time in devotions. What does that matter? Jesus’ parable tells us: THIS IS A BIG DEAL! Think of those who ignore the king’s gracious invitation. Like us, they had too much stuff. No time for the king and his feast. They ignore him. And we can do the same thing—how easy it is! We can crowd God and His Word right out of our lives. And it’s no matter, we tell ourselves. It’s not like we’re killing, or stealing, or committing some sin.

Ah—but that is where we are dead wrong. Despising God’s Word is a sin. A terrible sin. A sin that leads to condemnation. A sin for which the Lord says: You, sinner, shall die for your sin. That’s where the people in the parable end up: destroyed by the wrath and judgment of the king. Ignoring God’s Word, Luther writes, is a worse sin than murder, adultery, and stealing. Why worse? Because it cuts off from the only way to salvation and life. It takes God’s gracious invitation and throws it back in His face: Don’t need that, don’t need you, God. That is the

challenge of prosperity: How easy to forget the Lord; how easy to get so wrapped up in the things of our lives that we ignore the Lord.

And how easy to rationalize: I don't have time. Actually, you do. Everybody has time. Everybody has the exact same amount. What you do with your time—that's a different matter. If you reason: I don't have time for church, then realize that you are choosing to spend your time on other things. And if those things crowd the Lord out of the picture, they have become your gods. You are loving them more than the Lord.

That is spiritually dangerous. It makes you an easy victim for Satan to snatch away from the Lord. If you find yourself thinking you have no time for church, or no need for God's Word, stop immediately. Repent, and pray to the Lord for strength to stand against temptation. Then turn to the Lord, hear His gracious invitation: Come to the feast.

He invites you for your good. He invites you to come where His forgiveness is found. Come, that your sins may be washed away. Come, that you may be forgiven for all the wrongs you have done—and all the rights you have left undone; come to be cleansed from every time you despised God's Word; come to be forgiven for every time something was more important than God's Word. That cleansing, that forgiveness is given to you by our Lord, at the feast He has prepared for you. Here is true blessing; here is true peace. Here is contentment in every circumstance—contentment when we are lacking; contentment when we are abounding. Even then, contentment is elusive. Even then, especially then, God gives us contentment and peace in the life and forgiveness given freely in His feast.

Come then, to His feast! It is prepared for you. His body, His blood, given to you to eat and to drink. Come, humble and penitent; come, instructed and prepared that you may know what you are receiving, and receive it as a blessing. Come then, to receive the body and blood of

Christ in His meal. What blessings He gives: forgiveness, life and salvation. Here your sins are cleansed by His blood. Here His life is given to you anew; here you are delivered from death and condemnation. Here you have a foretaste of heaven itself—a brief taste of the eternal wedding feast that awaits us at the Lord's table.

Come to His feast! It is prepared for you. In God's Word the eternal, saving blessings are spread out for you, to be given to you through that powerful Word. That Word bids you come, then delivers the medicine of immortality. That Word, pleasing as honey to the mouth, grants you forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ. Hear that Word, for through it the Lord guards and sustains your faith. Feast on that Word here, together as God's church. Feast on that Word at home, daily hearing, learning, and meditating on these words. By this Word the Lord deepens your knowledge of Him, your faith in Him, your love towards others, your hope of eternal life. In that Word the Lord grants you contentment and peace.

Come to His feast! It is prepared for you. The Lord has reserved your place at His eternal wedding feast. Come to the feast laid before you here that you may feast with your Lord eternally. Hear and heed His invitation. Come where His Word is proclaimed, where His body and blood are given. Learn His Word, marveling at the rich and new treasures found every time you hear that Word. Feast as your Lord invites you now, that you may feast with Him eternally. Amen.