

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA November 4, 2012

Proverbs 28:19-20

What's the Secret?

1. *I Wish I Was Like That!*
2. *Proverbs Sheds Light on the Secret*
3. *The Secret: Focus Your Eyes and Hearts on God!*

Hymns: 242 – 477 – 158 – 421
Closing: 316

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

As a child, I can remember listening to great Bible stories or hearing about great Bible characters and being filled with absolute fascination. As an adult, I still hear Biblical accounts like the one we heard last week about the three men and the fiery furnace and feel that same child-like amazement. Yet, now, as I gain life experiences, another feeling often comes when I look to these heroes of faith or hear the remarkable tales of God's delivering hand. Listening to Bible stories often makes me long for the same spiritual gifts or blessings that I see given to the men and women of the Bible.

As a pastor, I hear about Moses and can't help but wish that I could lead like him. I watch Paul as he meets new people in new cities and I can't help but wish that I could speak about my Savior like him. I listen to Peter speak boldly and I can't help but wish that I could guard God's truth with that kind of conviction. Perhaps you hear and read Bible stories and have similar thoughts go through your heads, "I wish I was like that!" or, "I wish that would happen to me!"

The truth is that God gives tremendous spiritual blessings to each and every one of us. However, often we have our eyes so focused on what others have that we don't see exactly what it is that has been given to us; and the great amounts in which it has been given.

Now, if it is that way with spiritual gifts, how much more does that affliction ail us when it comes to the things of this world. Our eyes constantly wander to see what other people have, to see what more we can have. Companies wouldn't spend millions of dollars on commercials if that weren't the case. Certainly, our money doesn't always follow,

but we are surrounded by so much in this world that it might lead us to question whether it is possible to be truly content in this materialistic world.

With that thought in our minds, we then come to church and hear the words that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. What did he say in our second lesson? "*I have found the secret to being content in any and every situation.*" Of course he has. Another Biblical figure about whom I can say, "I wish I was like that." So, what's the secret? Well, Paul doesn't really expound too much on that idea as he spoke to the Philippians.

However, as we seek to open that secret, I think we can find some light given in the Book of Proverbs. In Proverbs, we have the insight of the wise King Solomon wrapped up for us succinctly. Each pair of verses is a neatly wrapped package of wisdom. And in the little package of wisdom before us today, Solomon lets us in on the secret to contentment.

Here is what Solomon says, "*Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty. A faithful person will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.*"

As we look at that first verse, we are given two thoughts about contentment. Solomon begins by telling us that content Christians do the work God sets before them! The key word in that first verse is "their." Solomon does not say that abundant food will come to those who are constantly looking to what others have done, no abundant food will be given to those who work *their* land.

Think about it this way: God has blessed you with a plot of land. God has given you a job, a task, a duty to perform in your life; it might be putting in 60hrs/week at work, it might be taking care of your kids at home, or it might be helping out in some way around the church. Whatever it is, that is not important. This is: Your duty is to perform that task faithfully. And as you do that, you will find happiness and you will find contentment.

Yet, what do we often do? So often, we "chase fantasies" as Solomon puts it. In our lives, we very often have this thought that the other thing is the better thing. We look to others and say, "If only that was my life." Or perhaps we think that the next thing will be the best thing. The next thing will be the lucrative thing. The next thing will be the ticket to the good life.

And our society certainly gives us plenty of encouragement to hold onto those fantasies. 1) Think of how many people pour money into lottery tickets hoping to strike it rich. 2) Think of all the employees who constantly seek new jobs and promotions hoping to find their big break. 3) Consider all the people who pile up debt trying to buy a life of luxury. *It is easy to chase success rather than simply doing the work*

that God has set before us and allowing him to take us where he wants us to go in life.

And as we do that, we also miss out on the second secret to contentment; and it is this: Content Christians enjoy the riches that God gives! With this second package of wisdom, Solomon forces us to look at how our measure of success is defined.

Our sinful flesh, which is fed by the standards of the world, does not like the idea of being rich with “God’s riches.” And that is because God does not make it a priority to satisfy our human nature when he gives to us. And so, our human nature works hard to have us see success in the way that the world views success. 1) A successful life is built on money and possessions. 2) A successful life is built on what we do. 3) A successful life is whatever gives us a chance to have an easy life.

Our sinful nature has us longing for what we want more than what we need. It leads us to desire things in our life that might even be sinful. It urges and convinces us that we should never be satisfied, no matter how much we have been given. With that measure of success, who of us could ever be content? Solomon actually takes this chase a step further, saying that such a person, a person ***“who is eager to get rich, (they) will not go unpunished.”***

Instead of finding our success in the satisfying of our flesh, Solomon says that our measure of success is found in a very different place. ***“A faithful person will be richly blessed.”*** Our measure of success is not found in what we have, but in how we live and work. More specifically, success is found in how we live for the Lord. God wants us to be faithful to the duties he sets before us.

And, as we carry on in that faithful work, God promises us results. He promises to bless our faithfulness in that work. With these words, God wants us to remember that it is he who blesses and gives success. It is not our work that earns these blessings. He will give all that we need in this earthly life. He will even give us more than we need, things that allow us to enjoy our lives and which allow us to find rest from our work. But to find that success, we need to trust that God’s measure of success is best for us. We need to trust that this godly contentment is what is good.

When Solomon says it, it sounds so good, doesn’t it? It sounds so simple. The secret to contentment is to do the work set before you and to enjoy the results that God gives to that faithful work. That makes sense. It sounds like wisdom that we could all live by.

But for people who are plagued daily by a discontent sinful nature, words of wisdom are not enough. If we simply say, “I’m going to start living that way. I know I can do it.” We will fail. Our sinful nature is too strong for us to overcome on our own.

And so, while words of wisdom are beneficial, the true secret to contentment begins with Christ. It is him alone who can free us from that covetous sinful nature. It is him alone who could die and pay for our selfish and wandering ways. And he has done so, and for that reason, we are able to live according to this Biblical wisdom. By Christ’s work, we are free to live contently, happy in the means that God has given to us. And that is why Paul says, “We can do all things through him who gives us strength.”

As you think about all that this world has to offer, as you think about what will take the priority in your lives, focus your eyes and your hearts on God. He will make you content. He will give success to your work. He will provide true riches, in your life right now, but more importantly, forever in heaven. Amen.

To him who is able to give us immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory, forever and ever. Amen.