

## Commandments 10: Full Contentment

10/16/2022

Exodus 20:17

Matthew 5:1-12

I am the youngest of three boys. So, like it or not, I grew up in my brothers' shadows. I learned to respond when their names were called out by teachers that had them before having me. I grew up seeing my eldest brother's academic success and how proud it made my parents, feeling like I needed to be as successful as him to make my parents proud. I grew up seeing my middle brother's musical and theatrical success and how proud my parents were of him, feeling like I had to be as successful to earn my parents' love and pride. In short, I grew up envying them, wanting so bad to be as good as, if not better than, them. To a certain extent, it's still true. My eldest brother is now head of the neonatology department in the Henry Ford Healthcare System and was recently interviewed by a major news station in the Detroit area. My middle brother has two masters degrees and a doctoral degree in music, has run the Boston Marathon for the last three or four years now, and makes a living brewing beer. I grew up seeing their successes, wanting only to have that level of success and fulfillment for myself, not realizing until my seminary career that my value in my parents' eyes and my own eyes doesn't come from being like them.

Sure, they're both "Dr. Rito," but I'm the only "Rev. Rito." Sure, I envy their success vocationally and recreationally, but neither of them has done what I've done writing wise. Three novels, two unpublished and one up for five different Book Excellence Awards, and a book of 305 love poems all dedicated to my wife as a wedding gift; neither of them can make that claim. It's true, I may envy them of their successes, but chances are there's something about me they envy as well, whether it's my faith or my patience to creatively write. Knowing that my brothers might envy me, their baby brother, has admittedly helped me to feel more content with who I am and what I have, but then again, maybe that's just classic sibling rivalry at work. Regardless of which it is, such a level of contentment is what today's commandment calls us to have.

Today's commandment is one explicitly forbidding envy and jealousy of our neighbors. In other words, we are not to "covet" or long to possess what our neighbor has but we don't. Many of us have played the lottery, hoping our ticket has the winning numbers, and we envy those people who have won it already. We watch the Olympics and professional sports, and we wonder what it would be like to be an Olympian or a professional athlete who makes seven figures a year. Whatever it may be, whoever it might be that we envy, each of us has had someone we've been envious of for some reason, and not just for physical possessions either.

This commandment is as much about tangible possessions as intangible ones. On top of envying someone's money, house, car, spouse, we also envy those things like their fame, their success, their level of faith, and the like. I have friends who, while we were in seminary together, I wished I had the faith that they did, that I could do devotionals and morning scripture readings like they did, not realizing that I had my own spiritual practice in playing piano, that my spirituality wasn't lacking; it was just different. No matter what it is, such envy is an expression of our not being content with where we are and what we have. It's a silent message that, regardless of what God has given to us in life, it's not enough; we want more. It's a silent criticism that, regardless of what we have accomplished in life, it's not enough; we should have amounted to more at this point. So, what must we do then to not insult God and to find contentment?

The answer is to hold fast to the Beatitudes. It's important to note that Jesus here is not blessing the powerful, those with vast monetary and materialistic wealth. Jesus is not blessing those that society deems successful for whatever reason. Rather, he blesses the lowly, those that people would as much spit upon as verbally degrade. Those who are poor in spirit rather than those who do five devotionals a morning, they are the ones who are blessed. Those who are mourning rather than those who are chipper and appear emotionally strong, they are the ones who are blessed. The meek and the lowly rather than the rich, the famous, the powerful, they are the ones Jesus blesses. Those who hunger and thirst, who feel a need to be filled rather than those who feel filled, they are blessed by Jesus in this passage. Those who are merciful rather than those who judge others and lead others to judge their neighbors, these and more are the ones Jesus blesses.

It's important to notice this because, in a manner of speaking, Jesus is blessing the envious. Those who are poor in spirit would envy those who are rich in spirit. Those who are mourning, whose burdens are heavy, would envy those whose burdens are light and who are cheerful. Those who are lowly, who have no power, would envy those with power and authority. Those who are judged would envy the stature held by those who cast judgment against them. However, despite their jealousy of those who are "greater than them" according to the status quo, they are blessed, right where they're at. They are told that, despite what the status quo and societal norms say, they are blessed for who they are and for where they're at in life, and therefore, they should not covet the success, the power, the possessions of others, because those things don't matter.

In the end, this commandment teaches us that we must be content with where we are and what we have. While we might seek after getting into the best schools, getting the highest degree, and the highest paying jobs in our culture, climbing those ranks and being "top dog" among our peers changes nothing about where and who we are in God's eyes. All persons, regardless of income or education, are equal in God's eyes. What really matters comes from God, and it comes not from having it all or being all things to all people, but rather from being who God calls us to be and being content with that. Very truly, full-contentment in life comes not from achieving more and having more, but from saying, "I have what God needs me to have, I am who God needs me to be, and if it's good enough for God, it's good enough for me." So, I ask: How content are you?