

# Satisfaction

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and being satisfied with God's goodness as the foundation of the Christian life.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 63:1, Psalm 63:5, Jeremiah 31:14, Acts 15:26, Galatians 5:22, 2 Timothy 1:12, 1 Peter 2:9-10, 1 Peter 2:23, 1 Peter 4:19

**Topics:** "Divine Goodness", "Christlikeness"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the Apostle Paul's desire for believers to grasp the abundant blessings freely given by God, emphasizing the spiritual enlightenment needed to perceive the grace available in Christ. The sermon explores the concept of divine goodness, highlighting the importance of embodying God's goodness in our lives through ethical and beautiful works. It challenges believers to seek Christlikeness, a blend of strength and sympathy, righteousness, and love, as the highest form of goodness. The message underscores the significance of being satisfied with God's goodness, emphasizing the divine standard of complete soul satisfaction found in Christ alone.

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## Transcript

The Apostle Paul desired that those to whom he wrote might know the things that were freely given to them of God. In his prayers in the Epistle to the Ephesians we have, perhaps, the highest revelation of his conception of the Christian life. He prayed in the first of the two prayers that believers might have a spiritual illumination, that the eyes of their heart might be opened to see the wealth of grace stored up for them in Christ and made available for them. Now the prophet Jeremiah, foretelling something of the great future, is concerned with a similar subject, the possibilities and realities of a Divine life in a personal experience.

He utters a magnificent promise and assurance: "My people shall be satisfied with My goodness " (31:14). Although, of course, we know that this whole section has its primary and still future interpretation in regard to God's people Israel, there is no reason, as we have already seen, why we may not look at the words in a secondary, spiritual application, and think of them as intended for us. The Christian life surely means this, if it means nothing else, that we may be led to understand as much as possible of those things that are provided for us of God; and many a passage, as, for example, the outburst of praise from the lips of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 1), is altogether concerned with those wonderful realities of grace that have been brought near to us in Christ Jesus.

So it will be well to strike this note of encouragement, and to give this word of promise to every believer, "My people shall be satisfied with My goodness." We will look at the Divine side of the Christian life, at the provision which God has made for us, in order that we may realize afresh, and by His grace enter into the life that He desires us to live. I. First of all, we notice the divine splendour - "My goodness". This is God's character, than which there is nothing higher.

"My people shall be satisfied with My goodness" - not greatness, but goodness; not glory, but goodness; not grandeur, but goodness. This goodness of God is seen in Nature. "The goodness of God endureth yet daily," says the Psalmist. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness." But still more, the goodness of God is seen in revelation: "I will make all My goodness pass before thee." "The Lord God ... abundant in goodness." "They shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house."

"The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." This Divine character of goodness is intended to be ours, for "the fruit of the Spirit is ... goodness." It is said of Barnabas that "he was a good man." This is in the past tense, and reads as though he were dead at the time; but whether it is intended as an epitaph or not, it expresses his character, than which there is nothing finer. "He was a good man." People often discuss their clergy and talk very freely of them. They say, "Yes, when he comes to see me, he hasn't much to say, but then, he is such a good man!"

"When we go to church he's somewhat dull in the pulpit, but then, he is such a good man!" Well, while we are sorry for all uninteresting people in the pulpit, and also sorry for the man who has not much conversational power in pastoral visitation; yet if it can be said of a clergyman that he is a good man, we may well thank God that it is so, for we have the finest treasure in this world in goodness. We can understand, therefore, the emphasis laid by the New Testament on good works, because good works are the outcome of goodness.

There are two words rendered "good" in the New Testament and applied to works. The one means that which is inwardly and intrinsically good; the other means that which is outwardly beautiful, and for the most part, in the Pastoral Epistles, the phrase translated "good works" might be rendered "beautiful works". There is a similar distinction between the righteous man and the good man in Romans 5, and our works are intended to be at once ethical and beautiful. The two words are often associated with God Himself.

God is, of course, essential goodness, but it is helpful sometimes to remember that our Lord said, "I am the Beautiful Shepherd," the Shepherd who is outwardly attractive as well as inwardly good. It is just here where our goodness often fails - it is not beautiful. Yet if our goodness is not at once ethical and beautiful, it fails at a crucial point. There is a story that when someone said of another, "She is the salt of the earth," the reply was, "Salt? Why, she is mustard and pepper and the whole cruet!"

Yes, that is the sad meaning of unlovely goodness. We often emphasize particular virtues to the detriment of other virtues. There are some who emphasize thrift, and sacrifice everything to economy. There are others who emphasize generosity, and do not pay their debts! There are yet others who emphasize humility, and have not an atom of force in their character. There are still others who emphasize individuality, and are very much put out if they do not get the chief places in the synagogues.

We emphasize one virtue at the expense of another. There are men who pride themselves on their candour, and it degenerates into brutality. One of such men said to John Wesley once, "Mr. Wesley, I pride myself on speaking my mind; that is my talent" "Well," said John Wesley, "the Lord wouldn't mind if

you buried that!" We need that characteristic of Christian ethics which is only found in Christianity, that indefinable something which is called Christlikeness. It is the one quality in Christianity which marks off the ethic of the Gospel from every other ethic in the world, the combination of strength and sympathy, the blend of tenderness and force, the association of righteousness and love.

There is nothing higher than this - beautiful goodness. It is something for us to be able to know; it is something to be able to do; but it is infinitely more to be. Wisdom in God is great; power, perhaps, is greater, but goodness is greatest of all. In the definition of the Deity in the first Article of the Church of England, He is described as "infinite in wisdom, power and goodness." And now abide these three, wisdom, power, goodness; but the greatest of these is goodness.

II. When we look at the passage again, we observe the divine standard. "My people shall be satisfied," and the word "satisfied" at once compels us to think. Satisfaction; is this possible; is this true; is this God's will? The ordinary view of the Christian life is for us to have enough, but with no thought of absolute and complete satisfaction. The worldling is quite content with his ease; the Pharisee is thankful that he is not as other men; the Stoic is indifferent to all these things; the selfish man pays no regard to others; while the conventional believer is quite content with his low standard of morality.

The trouble is that we are content with so little. In one of the Anglican Collects for Good Friday we read that our Lord Jesus Christ "was contented to be betrayed." The word has changed its meaning. When nowadays I say "I am content," I mean that I am barely ready, or I am just ready. I cannot very well avoid it, but I will put up with the difficulty. "I am content." But in the old English the word "content" meant "contained". "He was contained (i.e., He was full of readiness) to be betrayed."

The same old English word is found in the Prayer Book Version of Psalm 40, "Lo I come to do Thy will: yea, I am content to do it," that is, "I am contained by it." The will of God filled up the whole of our Lord's life, and the Master was "contained" by His desire to do the will of God. That is the meaning here; and the right view of Christian privilege is not merely bread enough, but "bread enough and to spare". As Scripture promises, "I will satiate the soul of the priests."

Some may not have noticed the figures of speech used in the Bible to express this spiritual satisfaction. Think of the river in this connection, "Peace as a river". "Drink of the river of Thy pleasures." "Out of Him shall flow rivers of living water." Remember the symbol in Ezekiel of the waters to the ankles, then to the knees, then to the loins, and then to swim in. Notice St. Paul's three metaphors, with his nouns and adjectives, "full," "abundant," "rich" - the fullness, the abundance, and the wealth of God's grace.

This is the standard. God can satisfy and God does satisfy our life. He satisfies the past with forgiveness, the present with grace, and the future with glory. He satisfies the past with justification, the present with sanctification, and the future with glorification. He satisfies the past with pardon, the present with power, and the future with peace. So we have, in the familiar phrase, "Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment". Let us mark it as it appears in the Word of God, especially in the Psalms.

Bible students should notice the word "satisfied" as it is found in the Psalter. One or two of these will enable us to see the force of what God intends for us here and now. "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness." "Satisfied with the goodness of Thy house." "With honey out of the rock would I have satisfied thee." "The meek shall eat and be satisfied." "O satisfy us with Thy mercy." "In the days of famine they shall be satisfied." "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things."

"I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." "He satisfieth the longing soul." "With long life will I satisfy him." No wonder that Isaiah takes up the word and tells us that we shall be satisfied in the time of drought. Now when Christianity is understood aright, it is intended to lead to soul-satisfaction. Let us be very clear and very careful as to what we mean. Are we satisfied? We reply, "Satisfied with what?" Satisfied with our attainments? "God forbid!" Satisfied with knowledge?

"Far from it." Satisfied with our experience? "Oh, no." What is really meant and the Lord is asking it of each one, Are you satisfied with Christ? We remember the wonderful word in Psalm 63, "My soul thirsteth," and then "My soul shall be satisfied." Are we satisfied with Christ? It is so easy to sing: "Thou, O Christ, art all I want," and then to go out and find some part of our satisfaction outside Christ. So here is the truth for the Christian life of everyone. It matters not how long we have been Christians.

Nor is the question how much we know of our Bible. It is not even a question as to how much we have in heart and mind of orthodoxy, but this one question is supreme: Am I satisfied with Jesus Christ? Is there any part of my life into which He does not enter, intellectual life, social life, recreative life, hopes, ambitions, aspirations, and even physical life? Is there any part of life that finds its satisfaction elsewhere? This is the real test; and this is why we need to ask God's Holy Spirit to convict us of any dissatisfaction, anything in our life that is causing spiritual concern at this moment.

It is a sure and certain test that at any time, under all circumstances, we can gauge our own spiritual life by asking this one question, "What is Jesus Christ to me now?" Am I satisfied with Christ? "My soul shall be satisfied." III. We look again at the promise and notice in it the divine secret. "My people shall be satisfied with My goodness." The Divine Splendour, "My goodness"; the Divine Standard, "Shall be satisfied"; the Divine Secret, "My people". Now again and again in the Word of God we find a phrase something like this, "I will be their God and they shall be My people."

There is no doubt whatever that it is only with a true and full understanding of what "My people" means that we shall find what spiritual satisfaction is in our personal experience. What then is it? What is it to be the people of God? "My people." It means, first and foremost, Pardon. In 1 Peter 2:10 God's people are described as those who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. If anyone is not certain on this point, all else will count for nothing until and unless we have received God's pardon, for we never can be one of the people of God until we are pardoned.

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." "Ye are all the children of God" - how? "By faith in Christ Jesus." It is only too possible for people who do not know this to desire the Christian life. We have to take for granted the fact of forgiveness, the consciousness of pardon, as the first requirement of the Christian life. But if by any possibility there is any reader who does not know this, the way is simple and clear, and "as old as the hills," as we say.

It is the way of trust, the way of simple acceptance, and we enter into the number of the people of God as the result of obtaining mercy. The next mark of the people of God is His Possession. In 1 Peter 2:9 they are called "a peculiar people". The word "peculiar" does not mean strange, but specially His own. It does not mean as in our modern sense eccentric or singular; it means God's own property, His peculium, a people particularly His own. First, Pardon, then, Possession; we belong to God, and He is able to say "My people" if we belong to Him.

The third mark is Purity. We are told more than once of those who have to "come out" and to "be separate," and to put away the unclean thing in order that God may be our God and that we may be His

people. He is purifying to Himself a people specially His own. It is another of the marks of God's people, purity; purity of thought, of motive, of desire, of will, of conscience, and of action. The last of these marks is Praise. "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise."

Pardon, Possession, Purity, Praise. These are the four infallible marks of the people of God. Now comes the question, How can all this be ours? It can at once be answered. It is by a threefold way. There must be separation from all known sin; there must be surrender to God; and the outcome of surrender will be service for God. George Eliot once said, "There are many who are living far below their possibilities because they are continually handing over their individualities to others."

There are many who are living below their possibilities because they have handed over their individualities to a priest; and as long as they do that they will continue to live below their possibilities. There are others who are living below their possibilities because they have handed over their individualities to a clergyman, and he takes the place of the priest. Although he is only a pastor, they are so dependent upon him that they are living below their possibilities. There are others who are living below their possibilities because they have handed over their individualities to a favourite devotional author.

They read and read and read this man's books, imbibing his thoughts and appropriating his ideas for their life, and all the while they are living below their possibilities. And there are others who are liable to live far below their possibilities because they have handed over their individualities to a special speaker. As long as they do that, they will never realize what God intended them to be and to do. Let every reader ask himself, Am I handing over my individuality to any man?

If this is so - whatever form it may take, then the individuality will never be what it ought to be. Handing it over to someone else will be the destruction of personality and the utter failure to realize its full and proper possibility. But now let us notice this. There are many who are living far below their possibilities because they are not continually handing over their individualities to Christ. What we dare not do with man, we must do with Christ. If you and I do not hand over our individualities to Christ, we shall always remain on a lower level of possibility.

That is the secret of the Gospel. "Not I, but Christ liveth in me." This is found in connection with grace. "Not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Whether for life or for service, "Not I but Christ," "Not I, but the grace of God." There happen to be two words in the New Testament which go to the very heart of the matter. They may be given in the Greek, and then in the English. One word is παραδίδωμι, "I hand over," and the other is παρατίθημι, "I commit," "I deposit."

Now if we look at Acts 15:26 we find Paul and Barnabas described as men "who have handed over their lives on behalf of the name" - not "hazarded," there is nothing of "hazard" in the word. "Handed over their lives for the sake of the name." That is the secret of the power in their lives; they had handed themselves over for the sake of the name. We also find the word in connection with our Lord, who "kept on committing Himself to Him that judgeth righteously," "kept on depositing Himself with Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

The other word is used of Christians. "And let them that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls (deposit themselves) in well-doing unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). Well may the Apostle Paul say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep my deposit, that which I have handed over, committed unto Him, against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). This is the New Testament message. You and I, if we would realize our possibilities, must hand over our individualities to Jesus

Christ.

This must be the language of our lips and of our hearts, "Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto Thee." Then we shall begin to possess our possessions, to be satisfied with God's goodness, and lip and life will say: Blessed be the God and Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with such blessings, all uncounted, all unpriced. Let our high and holy calling, and our strong salvation be, Theme of never-ending praises, God of sovereign grace to Thee." - F. R. Havergal.

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