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**Content and Confident in Crisis**  
**Hebrews 13: 5-6**

The topic this morning is crisis and how we react to it, which is one of the best tests of a person's character. Do we react with peace or panic, fear or faith, assurance or anxiety?

***One of my favorite stories, which some of you've heard before, comes from the pen Chuck Swindoll who tells about Edith, a mother of 8, who lives with her family in Darlington, Maryland. He writes, "Coming home from a neighbor's house one Saturday afternoon, things seemed too quiet as she walked across their front yard to the porch. Curious to see what they were doing, she peeked through the screen door and noticed her 5 youngest children huddled together looking at something.***

***As she crept closer to discover the object of their interest, she couldn't believe her eyes. Smack dab in the center of the circle were 5 baby skunks. Edith screamed at the top of her voice, "Quick children, run!" So each kid grabbed a skunk and ran.***

Unfortunately, not every crisis is so easily resolved. I did a mental survey of the Bible this week, and here are just a few of the crises I found. I found poverty and persecution, battle and betrayal, sin and sickness, famine and infidelity. In fact, it was a little disheartening, because according to my rough estimate, problems outnumber pleasure 3 to 1 in the Bible, which I share not to make you paranoid or pessimistic but to save us from being starry-eyed romantics incapable of dealing with life in a broken world. Jesus warned, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, the world hates you. Remember what I told you! 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Hudson Taylor, the missionary to China, who endured so many difficult things for Christ—illness, civil war, the death of his wife and children, and for that reason, I'm going to quote him several times this morning—he issued this warning to would-be followers of Jesus: "There are not two Christs, an easy-going one for easy-going Christians and a suffering one for exceptional believers. There is only one Christ." And then he asked: "Are you willing to abide in Him and bear much fruit?" But this life isn't without comfort, because Jesus went on to say in the same passage, "These things I have said to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

This morning we're going to take a look at what some of those troubles are, with this understanding: Our God is all-good and all-powerful never allowing even one thing to enter our lives without His divine permission and our eternal good in mind. But how to tap into His power, so we not only survive our trials, but enjoy His peace and presence in the midst of them—that's the prize that often eludes us. But if the Bible is true, and I believe it is, then there's a way to do both things. And if you'll open your Bible to the book of Hebrews, we'll see what the answer is. We're taking a break from the book of Luke for a couple of Sundays to learn how to develop confidence and contentment in a time of crisis. But before we get to the answers, I want to look at the crises the Hebrew Christians had to weather. It's in Hebrews 10, if you'd turn there with me please.

## 1. Crisis

Listen as I read starting in verse 32. Better yet, read it with me, please. “Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”

Life was dangerous for believers in the first century. Once a year those living under the banner of Rome were required to burn incense on Caesar’s altar declaring him to be Lord, after which you were issued a certificate for doing so. But if you refused, as all faithful Christians did and you were found with-out a certificate, you could have your property confiscated and be thrown in prison. That’s something the “10%-ers” made sure of! Who were the “10%-ers”? According to Roman Law, when someone was turned in for being a Christian, the informant automatically received 10% of the victim’s property as a reward, which made it difficult for Christians to find anywhere to hide. Nero, who was emperor at the time, was known for covering Christians with pitch and setting them on fire as torches to light his garden parties. He also sewed them in animal skins and let his hunting dogs tear them to pieces.

***But according to historian, H. B. Workman, that was only the beginning of suffering. He writes: "For 200 years, from Nero on, Christians were branded as anarchists and atheists and hated accordingly. For 200 years, to become a Christian meant joining a despised and persecuted sect, swimming against the tide of popular prejudice, coming under the ban of the Empire, and facing the possibility of prison and death in its most fearful forms. For 200 years, the mere profession of Christ could mean the rack, the blazing shirt of pitch, the lion, the panther, or in the case of maidens, an infamy worse than death."***

And like you, I thank God that there are still laws in place guaranteeing our religious freedom and protecting us from suffering like that! So does that mean that those who follow Christ today can expect to escape hardship and live a life free of suffering? No. We’re living in denial if we think that because the Bible is clear. The same spirit who inspired persecution in the first century is at work today trying to destroy our faith and witness as well! So if he can’t do that through official government persecution, though you can bet he’s going to do everything he can to change that if he can, then what other methods does he and will use against us? Let me list just a few crises of faith I’ve seen in my few short years on the earth. I’ve seen him use illnesses that go unhealed, though we’ve prayed long and hard for God’s intervention. I’ve seen him use business failures, job losses, debt, divorce, death of children, and unethical and immoral behavior on the part of Christians which leaves us disillusioned and wondering, “Is there anyone who’s real?” The crises orchestrated by the persecutor of our souls are no less difficult, even if it isn’t the government doing it! So how do we turn the tables on him, so that they make us better rather than bitter? Of course, the answer is: We do it the same way believers in the first century did it—by tapping into the supernatural contentment and confidence that’s available in Christ! Let’s begin with the contentment which is ours in Christ—

## 2. Contentment

Turn over a page or two in your Bible and listen as I read Hebrews 13, verse 5. The writer encourages us like this. He says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for He has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” Some translations put it like this: “Let your lives be free of covetousness, and be content with what you have, for He has said, “I will never desert you or fail you.” The phrase is one word in Greek ( -φιλ- ργυρος) which literally means **no loving silver**, which was the basis of all buying and selling in that day. Why is covetousness or love of money a problem? By the way, don’t misread this. It doesn’t say there’s anything wrong with having money. It says it’s wrong to love money. Why is that? There are several reasons for it, some of which we’ll get to next week but here are 3 quick flash forwards for you: 1) Love of money is founded on an illusion, promising us security, if we get enough of it, when in fact it’s powerless to give us good health, love, or save us from tragedy and death. 2) Love of money tends to make a person selfish and open to wrong ways of getting it, which lead to shame and sorrow in the end.

3) Love of money is a desire that’s never satisfied because no matter how much we have, we always want what? Just a little bit more. So Epicurus, the Greek sage, warned, “To whom little is not enough, nothing is enough. Add not to a man’s possessions, but take away from his desires.” This is also the reason I consider the health and wealth movement, as well as the signs and wonders movement, a danger to believers today because neither one of them encourages us to be content in Christ. They encourage us to keeping asking for more money, better health, and more excitement in our Christian lives—not that there’s anything wrong with those things, if God gives them to you. But according to the Bible, the goal of the Christian life is contentment, and that comes not from a bigger bank account, perfect health and fitness, or more exciting spiritual experiences! The truth is if you expect those things to bring you contentment, you’ll never be content because life is never going to line up the way you want it. As Paul tells us in another place, “Godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Therefore, having food and clothing, let us be content.” But you say, “How’s that possible? Who could be content with that?” Actually, some of the happiest people I’ve ever met have learned to be content with these things! Only a few of them live in this country. Most of them live in Honduras, Nicaragua, or Romania on very little money and with little in the way of possessions, grateful just to have clothes on their backs, people to love, and enough food for one day at a time. Maybe you’ve met some of them. If you have, you know their secret. It’s found right here in verse 5, “For He has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

He’s saying the source of contentment doesn’t come from anything the world gives us. It’s a supernatural inner quality that comes from the Holy Spirit, just like the other fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. These don’t come from the world or our own superhuman efforts to conjure them up. These are spiritual qualities that come from the person of Christ living within us, who has promised us that no matter what the crisis is, He’ll be right here with us, never leaving or forsaking us but giving us all the inner resources we need until the trouble subsides. In fact, I know it’s counterintuitive, but crisis actually provides us with an opportunity to draw closer to Christ and know Him at a deeper level than we ever have before. To quote Hudson Taylor again, here’s how he described the difficulties he was facing in China. “My path is far from easy, but

doubtless it is well that it be this way. Difficulties afford a platform upon which He can show Himself to us. Without them, we'd never know how tender, faithful, and almighty our God is." Then he added, "It really doesn't matter how great the pressure is. It only matters where the pressure lies. See that it never comes between you and the Lord. That way the greater the pressure, the more it will press you to His breast."

But you say, "That just isn't me! I've never been a person who's is good at handling stress." That may be, but the Bible says you can learn it. Listen to how Paul puts it writing from his jail cell in Philippi. "For I have learned," he says. It didn't come to him naturally. He says, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, in plenty or want. I can do all things through Him who gives me the strength." You see, it's really a question of who you're going to trust. Will you believe the false promises of the world and chase after something that can never give you what you need? Or will you turn to Christ the moment heartache and disappointment begin, saying, "Lord, something is bothering me, but I believe you can replace it with your peace. Please fill me with the contentment of your Holy Spirit." John Piper says the difference is this: "Covetousness is desiring something so much it causes you to lose your contentment in God. Or losing your contentment in God so you start to seek it in something else," which according to the Bible is idolatry, for "thou shalt have no other gods before me," the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment says, and the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment says almost the same thing. "Thou shalt not covet," which is a powerful, destructive force, but the good news is we don't have to be enslaved by it anymore! We can enjoy the contentment of the Holy Spirit, and the only thing we have to do is ask for it. Will you do that with that desire that's been nagging you for so long or maybe it started just this week. Then take a moment to tell the Lord about it right now. Say, "Lord Jesus, there's something tugging at me again, but I don't want to give into it anymore. I want to enjoy the good things you have for me. So please fill me with the contentment of your Holy Spirit. And there's also a second thing He gives us in crisis—not only contentment, but also—

### **3. Confidence**

Verse 6 continues, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have for He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' so that we may confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" And if you're like me, you're probably thinking, "Wait a minute! What do you mean, 'What can man do to me?' Man can do a lot of things to me! He can rob me, beat me, lie about me, and even kill me! Isn't that what we were just talking about—Christians betrayed by their neighbors, thrown into prison, and torn apart by wild beasts? There are lots of things man can do to hurt me!" And that may be true, but that isn't the point. The point isn't what man can or can't do to me. It's who God is and what He will do for me. He's the all-wise, all-kind, and all-powerful Controller of my life and future who loves me so much He gave His only Son to die for me, watches over me so carefully that He knows the exact number of hairs on my head at any given moment, and promises that nothing will ever be able to touch me without His permission. So I don't have to be afraid. I can say with confidence, "The Lord is my Helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Some of you may remember Abraham, who the Bible calls the father of faith, hearing that his nephew Lot had been captured in battle, couldn't just stand by and do nothing. So he courageously put

together a makeshift SWAT unit composed of 300 servants, chased them down, rescued Lot, and returned home exhausted, concerned that the enemy might strike back while he was still weak and recovering, at which point God appeared to him, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and exceeding great reward." Wasn't that good of God? That's what makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world. Our God isn't a distant god like the god of Islam or an unfeeling, impersonal force like the god of Buddhism. Our God is a loving Father and Helper who does what? What do helpers do for us? They help us, right? And that's the second great truth of Christianity! We don't have to be strong and courageous to serve Him, because the courage and strength do not come from us. They come from Him! Because He is God and we are not! That was Paul's point earlier in Philippians 4:13, where he said, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." But that made me want to ask him, "How!" But then he went on to tell us, didn't he? He said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." A helper, then, is someone who gives us the strength to do what we could never do on our own.

Now a quick word to the women among us who have never liked the way the way the Bible describes your role as wife and mother because it sounds so inferior compared to that of the men. You know the passage I'm talking about, don't you? Genesis 2:18—"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' So He took a rib from the man's side, fashioned it into a woman, and brought her to the man, who said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.'" And that sounds unimportant and inferior until you realize that that's the same word used of God here in Hebrews 13:6—"so that we may confidently say, 'The Lord is my Helper! I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" And my point is: That big strong guy you're married to who acts like he doesn't need you—don't believe it for a moment because the truth is: You're the one who gives him the courage and strength to do what he could never do otherwise. And the same thing is true of Jesus Christ! He is the One who gives us the courage and confidence to do what we could never do on our own. Amen?

***Here's one last quote from Hudson Taylor who at one point in his ministry was so overcome by difficulties and discouragement that he wrote, "I cannot read. I cannot pray. I can scarcely even think, but I can trust." Maybe you've been there—so beaten up by life that the only thing you had strength to do was to cling to Christ by faith! Then you did the right thing, because it was at that point in his life he said he finally understood what faith is: "Not a striving to have faith, but looking away to the Faithful One is all we need; resting in the One we love for time and eternity."***

So let me take a few more minutes to do a little pastoral prying and ask you, "In what area of your life do you need more confidence and contentment?" And there are several areas I could touch on but the one that seems to be hitting people the hardest right now is money, which has always been true. Otherwise, Jesus wouldn't have talked so much about it in His ministry. Did you know He talked more about money than any other single topic? But it's especially hard right now, given the economic conditions we're facing. So let me ask you a few hard questions just to make sure you're getting every-thing out of this promise that you can. First, are you in debt? If you are, is it due to some unforeseen tragedy that's hit your family, or is it because you haven't been content with what God has given you and you've been spend-ing more than you earn in an effort to ease the emptiness you feel? In that case, it isn't really a money problem; it's a problem of discontentment which is only

cured by spending lots of time in God's presence letting Him comfort you from His Word. Or maybe you're out of work and getting down on your-self because no matter how hard you try, it seems like nobody wants to hire you. In that case, there are 3 things you need to do: 1) Be willing to start at the bottom. The reason most successful people are successful is because they're willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. No job is beneath them. 2) Meet with a job counselor to make sure you don't have blind spots that are keeping people from wanting to hire you. 3) Don't give up! Believe that God really is your Helper and keep knocking until the door is opened.

And one more money matter before I finish, and that's giving. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that we were going to make these cards available again this year as a way of planning ahead about how much you're going to give to the Lord in the year ahead, not so much to help us we plan the church budget for the year ahead, because we've already prayed about it and trusted the Lord to help us do that. In fact, we agreed this past week that we aren't even going to ask you to turn these in, because they aren't meant to help us. They're meant to help you plan your giving for the coming year. "Is that Biblical?" you say. Absolutely! 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Let each one give as he has purposed (planned) in his own heart." One of our elders said he posted his card on the refrigerator door last year and forgot about it until halfway through the year when money started getting tight. Then he saw it and it reminded him of his commitment to the Lord, and together he and his wife decided, "We can't give up now. We need to trust the Lord to help us do this." And He has! So when you get one of these cards next week, read it over, pray about it, and then fill it out as your commitment to the Lord and post it someplace where you'll see it as a reminder of your commitment to the Lord. And one more thing we've done to help in the area of giving. If you're computer literate, we've now made it possible to do your giving online either with your debit card or by setting up an automatic withdrawal from your checking account, so you're able to give the same amount every month. You can check that out on our website, if you want. But of course, the most important thing we can do for one another as a church family is pray. So that's what I want us to do as we close our service this morning—