

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, November 21, 1993, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

MATTHEW 5:6 (Phillips)

“Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for true goodness, for they will be fully satisfied.”

THE SECRET OF SATISFACTION

In America most of us don't know much about hunger and thirst. I mean, our idea of hunger is a “Big Mac” attack! The popular idea of thirst is “Miller Time.” Mother Teresa says that in India people are starving physically, but in America they're starving emotionally.

You see, we all have a spiritual hunger inside us, although we don't call it that. We use phrases like, “My life is empty”; “I'm bored; I'm restless; something seems to be missing in my life... There must be more to life than this.”

The “Rolling Stones” gave us a theme song for the baby boom generation, “I Can't Get No Satisfaction.” Why is it that so many people are dissatisfied? The Bible says it's because they're looking in the wrong place.

1. You don't find lasting satisfaction in PLEASURE. You know, “If I could just take a cruise, relax in luxury; travel the world; then I'd be happy!” But the Bible says in Eccl. 1:8 (LB), “No matter how much we see, we're never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are never content.”

Ours is a pleasure-crazed generation. Liberty gives way to license in the often-heard remark, “If it feels good, do it.” But pleasure, no matter how feverishly sought after, can never satisfy. Was that talented young actor, River Phoenix, happy when he unwittingly overdosed on drugs, and suffered a fatal seizure outside a California nightclub?

Thousands upon thousands of teenagers die by suicide every year because they've tried everything that pleasure can offer, and it turns to ashes in their mouth.

Lord Byron, the famous nineteenth century poet, after leading an unspeakably dissolute life, wrote a poem with the somber title, “On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year.” In it are these wistful lines —

“My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker and the grief
Are mine alone!”

A few months later he was dead at age thirty-seven. Pleasure never satisfies the hungry heart.

2. You don't find lasting satisfaction in PERFORMANCE. Workaholics eventually learn this. The Bible says in Eccl. 2:23 (LB), "What does a man get for all his hard work? Days full of sorrow and grief and restless, bitter nights. It is all utterly ridiculous." Isn't that the truth?

Here is a good verse to scotch tape on your boss's door at work — "You work for something with all your wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then you have to leave it all to someone who hasn't had to work for it." (Eccl. 2:21 GN) You see, there's a myth that says, "Success produces satisfaction"; and that's just not true. Many, many successful people are still very dissatisfied inside; and after the thrill of winning a whole lot, comes the emptiness that tells you that the most important things are not there. The Bible says in Eccl. 4:8 (GN), "Man is always working, but never satisfied..."

You don't find lasting satisfaction in pleasure; and you don't find it in performance; and,

3. You don't find lasting satisfaction in POSSESSIONS. Today there are more products available than ever before, and they all say "Satisfaction guaranteed!" Do you know that there are twice as many products on the market today as there were ten years ago? Are people twice as happy? Of course not.

A fellow pastor told me recently about a lady who said to him, "Pastor, even when I get what I want, it's not what I want!" Ecclesiastes 5:10 (LB) says, "He who loves money will never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness!"

Poor people say, "When I get enough money, then all my problems will be solved." At least, the poor people have hope! But the rich people know that's not where happiness is found.

What then is the secret of satisfaction? Read with me Ps. 37:4, "Seek your happiness in the Lord, and He will give you your heart's desire." Notice, he says here, "Don't seek happiness: Seek God." Happiness is a by-product of seeking God. If you make happiness your goal in life, you're going to miss it, because you don't find it in just looking for it. You find it in seeking God, and strangely enough, that is the last place people usually look!

How do you experience real satisfaction? Three things:

1. Recognize your real hunger. "What is it that is missing in my life?" Many people simply don't know what they want in life. The Bible says that "made in the image of God," we are spiritual beings. And God made us to know Him and to love Him and to be loved by Him. Our deepest hunger is for God; and the sooner we recognize that the better.

You remember St. Augustine's beautiful prayer: "Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee."

Now, how does God give us a hunger for Himself? Look at what the Bible says in Deuteronomy 8:3 (LB), "God humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with

manna... He did this to help you realize that food isn't everything, and that real life comes by obeying every command of God."

You remember the story of the children of Israel. Charlton Heston led them across the Red Sea(!) over into the desert, and there they were, wandering around for 40 years. Folks, there are no McDonalds in the Sinai! So, they got hungry, and God provided manna. Now notice it says, "God let them go hungry," so that they would recognize their need for Him and depend on Him.

Folks, God lets us get hungry. He allows problems in your life in order to get your attention; to help you see that you really need Him. You remember the man who was beating his stubborn mule over the head with a two-by-four. Someone said, "You shouldn't do that to your mule; you'll hurt him." And the man said, "I'm just trying to get his attention"! God uses problems in your life to get your attention, and to say, "Look, what you need in life is not really pleasure or performance or possessions: It's ME. I made you with a God-shaped vacuum, and I want to meet your need." Happy are the hungry, for God is getting ready to do something in your life.

Look again at what it says, "God humbled you..." Hungry people are humble people. When you meet a hungry man down on skid row, he doesn't want you to set him at a table with china and silver and linen napkins. He says, "Gimme food!"

Now, hunger is painful, but it motivates us. Have you got a problem? Congratulations! God wants you to recognize your real hunger. The satisfaction of that hunger is to know Him.

2. Stop eating junk food! Stop looking for things in life that don't provide true spiritual nourishment. Isaiah 55:2 says, "Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" He's saying, "What you should really be looking for is GOD."

Now speaking of junk food, in a goldfish eating contest in Oakland, California, Leonard McMahan swallowed 501 goldfish in 4 hours, to smash the Guinness world record of 300 set by John Parker in 1984. Now for this feat, he won a 240-gallon aquarium! I can imagine him going home, filling the tank, putting his finger down his throat, and stocking the aquarium with fish instantly!

There's a plant called the nardu plant that grows in Australia, and the spores of this clover fern can be made into bread or porridge; but they contain no protein, carbohydrates or vitamins that are essential for sustaining life. Those aborigines who depend upon it for food will have their stomachs filled, but they will eventually die of malnutrition.

There's a lot of spiritual junk food, folks. Do you know the difference between being filled and being satisfied? People pass from one pleasure to another; from one fad to another; and it just doesn't last; it's just a temporary "high".

It's interesting to me that our appetites are very much influenced by our associations. If you get around hungry people, you'll soon feel hungry! One of your children comes into the

kitchen and shouts, “Mom, I’m hungry.” Instantly all his brothers and sisters shout, “Me too!” Now, young people, whoever you hang out with is what you hunger for. If you hang out with people who like the world’s junk food, that’s what you’re going to be into. But if you want to have an appetite for godly things, get around people who have a godly appetite, because it’s contagious. Do you want to be more hungry for the things of God? Then get around people who love to get into the Word of God in a small group.

When I go to our church headquarters in Detroit for meetings, the kind folk up there put fruit and sugar-coated buns, exotic pastries, and crackers and cheeses of all colors and kinds on the tables in front of us, to snack on. And everybody does it! Do you think I abstain, and don’t take advantage of such hospitality?! I come home a couple of pounds heavier, and then have to starve for a day or two; which just proves that when you’re in “Big Bear,” you’ll eat like a big bear!

If you get around people who are always seeing the latest movies and videos and hearing the latest records and reading second-rate modern novels, that’s what you’re going to get into. That does not satisfy. It is just stuffing. It may fill you, but it does not satisfy. So, stop eating all the junk food the world offers.

3. Start looking to CHRIST for satisfaction. Look at John 6:35 and 51, “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the Bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.’” Now that’s what I call “Wonder Bread”! Folks, bread is the basic essential of life. A man could live on bread and water indefinitely.

Whenever there is famine somewhere and aid is sent, the first items unloaded are sacks of flour to make bread. So, when Jesus calls Himself “the Bread of life,” He’s saying, “I’m it! What you really need in order to live is ME. I can meet your needs. You’re looking for the satisfaction of your spiritual hunger everywhere else, but I’m the Bread of life. I’m what you need to live the satisfied, victorious life. You need ME, and you can’t do without ME!”

By the way, one of the things the New Age movement says is, “Find satisfaction in yourself.” Have you ever heard that nonsense? Shirley MacLaine, the high priestess of this heretical cult says, “Find happiness within.” That is so stupid. Folks, when you are physically hungry, do you say to your stomach, “Feed yourself”? Does that work? Not for me! You have to go to some outside source to get the food you need. Now, when there’s a spiritual vacuum in your life, you don’t say to yourself, “I’ll be my own god.” That leaves you just as empty as before. We need Jesus!

He is the Bread of life. But look at these verses, John 4:13-14 (GN), “Jesus said, ‘Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give him, will never be thirsty again... it will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water...’”

Now, water is even more essential than food to your life. You can go several weeks without food, but you can’t go more than 3 or 4 days without water. You know, of course, that

about 70 percent of your body is water! Every cell in your body needs water to survive. So, Jesus says, “It isn’t just that you want Me: You need ME! You can’t survive without ME.”

A friend of mine was crossing the California desert some years ago, and the air—conditioning in his car went out. It was about 125 degrees, and he was dying of thirst. He pulled off the road at one of these “stop and rob” places; and of course, they didn’t have a drinking fountain because they wanted you to buy their soft drinks. So, he got a can of Coke, and the price was \$3. He said later, “Do you think I bought it? Without a doubt I bought it!” You see, when you’re thirsty, cost is immaterial. He had to have that Coke to quench his thirst.

Now this is what it means to hunger and thirst for God. You see, there are really three stages in the life of a Christian:

Stage one — “I want God in my life.”

Stage two — “I need God in my life.”

Stage three — “I’ve got to have God in my life because I can’t make it without Him.”

I want to know the answers to the basic questions in life: “Who am I? Where did I come from? What’s the purpose of my being on this planet? And what’s going to happen to me when I die?” You don’t get answers to these questions from anything the wisdom of this world can tell you. Only the hunger to know God can place you in a position to find the answers to those ultimate questions.

Now, on these verses on your outline I want you to circle three words. In John 6:35 circle the word “comes” where Jesus says, “He who comes to Me will never go hungry.” Then circle the word “believes” where He says, “He who believes in me will never be thirsty.” And then in John 4:13, circle the word “drinks” — “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty again.” These are the three crucial words — come; believe and drink. Now, here’s the point — appetites are not satisfied until you do something about it. When you’re spiritually hungry, you need to do three things — come; believe; and drink. That’s how you find satisfaction in life. Jesus says, “First you come to Me; second, you believe in Me — you trust Me as your personal Savior; and third, you drink of the water I offer you.”

Now perhaps some of you this morning have never really done this — you have never entered into this saving personal relationship with the living Christ. If that is true, then let me ask you this — Do you feel that something very important is missing in your life? God is creating a hunger and a thirst in your life to know Him. What a tragedy it would be if you were to miss out on the greatest thing in life!

When you were born, God gave you a physical appetite to keep you alive. He also gave you a spiritual appetite to know him. Folks, only Jesus can satisfy that hunger: Only He can produce ultimate satisfaction in your life. Money, home, family, friends, a good education — you name it — none of these things can produce ultimate and lasting satisfaction because it is a spiritual need that only Christ can fill.

So, what do I do? I take these three steps — I come; I believe; and I drink. Now notice

the promise, “Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for true goodness, for they will be fully satisfied.” Now that means “Satisfaction guaranteed!” If God can’t guarantee it, nobody can. Your hunger for true happiness is met in knowing God and loving Him and developing a relationship with Him through faith in Christ; thus, finding out the purpose for which you were put on this earth.

Now, I know that most of you have come to Christ and believed in Christ, and you’ve drunk of Christ. My question to you is this — How is your spiritual appetite? Do you hunger and thirst for the things of God? Do you really want to know Him better? Do you want all that He has to offer? The fact is — you are as close to God as you want to be. If He seems far away, that’s not His fault.

You know, a loss of appetite indicates illness. When a sick person is getting better, his appetite returns. How is your spiritual appetite this morning? Do you delight in studying God’s Word, and in prayer and in getting to know God better?

It’s no wonder that people who fill themselves with all the junk food the world offers, have no appetite for the things that really count in life. Jesus says, “Happy are the people who want all of God there is!” So, don’t be satisfied just to have a little blessing here and there. Make Christ the center of your life — aim to feed on everything God wants to give you — and then, and only then, will you be fully satisfied!

AMEN.