



Christianity in Real Life-Part 3

When You're Not Satisfied

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Well, it should come as no surprise that I like to eat. I really like to eat, love to eat. I assume just like you like to eat, right—you like to eat. It's why we do it every day. Do it multiple times a day; some of us seem to do it all day long. We like to eat.

When I don't eat, I get hungry. I get hungry, I start thinking about food. My stomach grumbles, I seek to acquire food so that I can eat the food so that I can stop being hungry. Before you request your offering back and start calling me, you know, "Pastor, Master of the obvious," I want to let you know that kind of underscoring that very simple observation is very important. If we are going to understand the profundity and the significance of Christ's statements here in Luke chapter 6, we need to make a very clear observation before we read the text: that when we get hungry, we are experiencing some kind of lack in our lives that we want to make go away. We want to satisfy that. When I'm feeling empty, I want to feel full. When I'm hungry, I want to eat. When I, you know, don't have enough nourishment, I'm weak; I want nourishment. I want that satisfaction. That's the whole point of it all. That's why I feel hungry—because I have something going on that needs attention.

Feeling full is what we aim for—feeling satisfied, gratified, fulfilled. That's just very natural and normal. And that's a good thing. Being hungry is a bad thing. Being full is a good thing. We have websites and organizations that are all about "stopping hunger now" and "ending hunger," and hunger is bad. Full is good. Simple.

Let's read now Christ's second pairing of blessing and woe in Luke 6 in his sermon, as he speaks to us about what's important, what is blessed, and what should be warned of. Verse 21, verse 25—these come in pairings, as you know. We're looking at the second one. Last time we looked at—"blessed are you when you're poor." Let's look at this now, verse 21: "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." Blessed are you—that's a good thing, that you're hungry, huh? That's odd. Verse 25—here's the corresponding woe: "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry."

Just starting with that, and beginning with that simple observation, we understand the power of what he's trying to get our attention with—something that is counterintuitive. But obviously, there's truth and meaning in this. Now, we have to ask ourselves the question: in what sense can it be a blessing to be hungry? Hungry? Hunger is the enemy; we want to solve that problem. And he says, "No, no—blessed are the hungry. If you're hungry now, that's a good thing." In what sense is it good to be hungry?

And if you're a Sunday School graduate, your hand pops up, and you say, "Well, I know the answer to that. I mean, I've read the Sermon on the Mount over there in Matthew 5, and it helps us with the little cheat sheet which says, 'If you hunger and thirst for righteousness—blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness.'" So there is how it's good to be hungry—it's good to be hungry for righteousness. Why is that good? Because if I'm hungry for righteousness, then I will pursue righteousness and I'll do righteous things. And that's the good thing. And that's what's going on in the Sermon on the Mount, and that's fabulous.

Now, put your hand down. I don't have that clarification here. And I've mildly and gently begun to argue that the Sermon on the Plain here in Luke 6 is not the Sermon on the Mount. We can pick that up at another time. But you've got to admit that in this text, we don't have that clarification. And we certainly don't have the corresponding woe, because if that is the point of this, then you take the corresponding woe and you say, "Now wait a minute—to be full? If the object of the hunger is righteousness, then it makes no sense to earn a woe from God when I'm full." Would you agree with that? I'm hungry for righteousness—that's a good thing. Why? Because it's going to make me pursue righteousness and do righteous things. Now, if I do righteous things, all of a sudden I earn a woe from God? That's a bad thing. That's not it.

As a matter of fact, in the corresponding blessing and woe, there's a word added you don't see over there in the Sermon on the Mount—though the topics are similar and the conclusion of the sermon is similar—here we have in each one of these the word "now." That would be worth underscoring in verse 21 and 25: "Blessed are you who are hungry now." And this kind of paradigm that we're going to see in the whole list of corresponding blessings and woes—"now" and "then," "now" and "then," "now" and "shall be." The period now in which we live—if you're hungry now, that is a good thing because you're going to be satisfied later. And if you're satisfied now—you're not hungry, you're full—well, then that's a bad thing because you're going to be hungry later: "then you shall be hungry."

Well, then the question shifts a bit now. In what sense is it biblically commendable to be hungry—to lack? And that would be the question: when is it biblically commendable to be deprived? Or to put it in terms of my point here, let's word it this way—number one on your outline: we need to understand godly deprivation. When is that a godly thing—when I don't have what I want, when I am not getting what I desire? How is that good?

Well, here's the answer. Now, don't accuse me of being the master of the obvious when I say this, but it makes sense. If I'm asking the question, "When is it good when I don't get what I want?" it would be then, I suppose, when satisfying a desire is the wrong thing—if I'm desiring something that I shouldn't desire, or I'm desiring something that I'm attaining in the wrong way. If that's the case, well then I understand it: when satisfying desire is the wrong thing, well then being hungry is



the good thing. Get that? In other words, if I'm looking at something that I'm hungering for and it's not the right thing, it would be better for me to be hungry and not have that wrong thing because that would be wrong—godly deprivation.

If you want a summary of this that's not quite so, you know, terse and philosophical, a great explanation of this is in a text that, if you're reading through the Bible with us—and I wish that you would—we read yesterday: the last part of Hebrews 11 for our New Testament reading. Turn there and look at this, as explained in very normal terms, which is nothing other than an unpacking of the principle that I've just tried to describe to you: that there is a deprivation that is good and godly because the fulfilling of a desire would be wrong. And if you fulfilled the desire, the wrong would eventually surface; if you deny the desire, the good would eventually prevail.

Take a look at it in this example of Moses. Drop down to verse 24—we read this in our DBR yesterday—Hebrews 11:24. Hebrews 11:24: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Think about it. Now, he grew up in the palace—marble floors, nice sandals, good clothes. He was looking good. Everything was good—good meals, all taken care of. But he refused to be called that; he refused all that, and he chose—look at verse 25—"choosing rather to be mistreated." Let's take that phrase. I don't want to teach my kids to choose to be mistreated. We have websites against that. Not only regarding hunger—we certainly think, "Don't be a doormat, don't be mistreated, don't choose to be mistreated." Yet he chose to be mistreated. Why? Because he allied himself with the people of God, and they were despised by the Egyptians. He chose rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. To not ally with the people of God would not have been the will of God, as clearly articulated from the burning bush for him. So he chose to be mistreated with the people of God, incur the rejection of the Egyptian government, step out of all the luxury of fitting in. That was, according to verse 26, "the reproach of Christ." As anachronistic as that may be—I understand, not a New Testament text, this is an Old Testament text—but if you want to be philosophical or theologically deep about it, you could say the angel of the Lord speaking from the burning bush—perhaps this was the pre-incarnate Christ—calling him to step into the lion's den, if you will (to mix a metaphor), and to be able to put up with the rejection and mistreatment of the Egyptians because he was doing the will of Christ, doing the will of God.

He chose to be mistreated, which is not what he wanted, it's not what I want, not what I want for my kids—because he was going to ally himself with the people of God, which was the will of Christ. And Christ being reproached, as he always is, he was going to stand in solidarity with him instead of the fleeting pleasures of sin, knowing that standing with Christ was ultimately a greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. Oh, it would have been good to enjoy and indulge in the treasures of Egypt, but it would be better to have the wealth of standing with Christ. Though that may feel good in the inner part of my being, it's not coming now—it's future. And as he says, "for he was looking to the reward"—in the future.



He could have enjoyed disregarding the will of God, and he could have indulged the desires of his own life. It would have been pleasurable—I know we like to focus on the word “fleeting”—but see, sin is pleasurable. It’s like telling my kids, especially when they were younger, “Hey, we’re going to Disneyland, but we can only go for three hours.” Now, they may not be happy that it’s only three hours; they’d rather be three days, I understand. But three hours—it’s still three hours at Disneyland. And so it is with sin. If you break with the will of God to indulge and satisfy your cravings and desires, you meet that desire and you are full, but in the end that loses, because there is something to that, as we will see, that is a rip-off, as opposed to standing in solidarity with Christ, which leaves me in the category of mistreatment in this case—or to put it in the words of Christ: hungry, unmet desires. I’m not feeling what I want to feel and have—the satisfaction, gratification, fulfillment that I want. This is godly deprivation.

To put it in one section of the Bible in three verses, I suppose, in describing it in Moses’s life—let’s describe it in our lives. Turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 2. We’re not far from it. 1 Peter chapter 2. Let’s look at the text and, thinking through the categories of our lives, understand how this works. If I am going to qualify for this “blessed are the hungry,” what kind of hunger are we talking about? How in the world is this a blessing thing for me—not to be fulfilled?

Well, you could say, “If you’re talking about your core desires—we are fulfilled and we have that hunger for righteousness and reconciliation with God.” I’m not talking about your core desires as a regenerate person. We’re talking about you being a human being living on the planet and standing in solidarity with Christ.

Verse 11—1 Peter chapter 2, verse 11. 1 Peter 2:11 says, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from”—here’s the first word to highlight—“the passions of the flesh.” Passions. If you’ve been around church for a while, maybe you’ve heard this Greek word, you know, because it’s a unique and powerful word—*epithumia*. *Epithumia* is the Greek word for a craving. It fits well with the idea of hunger—appetite. I have an appetite, a craving—an *epithumia*—of my flesh, my humanity. And the Bible here tells me to abstain from that. It’s like having a great meal right in front of me. I’m hungry, I want it. When I’m hungry, I seek food; I eat the food so I’m not hungry. Here’s the food; it will give you some satisfaction—don’t eat it. Your flesh will crave it, you’ll want it, you’ll have a hunger for it, but say no to it.

And what is the problem? Well, there’s a lot of desires—*epithumiai*. There’s a lot of hunger in my flesh that are not in accordance with the will of God. And here’s how he defines it in verse 12—oh, I should say this, and you should underscore this—they “wage war against your soul.” They’re constantly saying, “You want that. You’ve got to have that. Get fulfillment here. Be gratified. Be happy.” I’ve got to say no to that, because—here’s how he defines it—“keeping your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.” The right thing—things that are in keeping with the will of God; things that are godly, biblical, biblically commendable.

So I know this in my life: as a Christian, I am called to—and it's a very unpopular sermon these days, but your grandparents used to hear it all the time in church—we need to be ready to be people of self-denial. Because there are appetites, desires, in my life I've just got to abstain from. Abstaining from it and pushing back, if you will, from the table is not going to make them go away. They will continue to wage war against my soul. I will be perpetually hungry in some ways in my life as a Christian. And I need to say, "That's a godly deprivation," or to put it in the words of Christ, "Blessed are you when you're hungry now."

That's not popular. Those are the themes of self-denial—you don't hear that much. But very important, very biblical. Our grandparents had it right in this regard. We shouldn't avoid clarity about the "downside" of Christianity, because it's such a central teaching in the New Testament. Is there fulfillment in Christ? Well, sure there is at some profound level in the inner being—of being a creation of God and being in fellowship again with our Creator. Great—there's satisfaction in that. But there's a lot more to my life than the core, regenerating desires of my heart. I mean, there's a lot in my life that's just me being a human being. A lot of things I want, a lot of things I desire, a lot of things I'm hungry for. And the Bible says, "Oh, those you can't. Don't." I'm going to have a battle in my life, and I will not be allowed to indulge all the thirsts and appetites of my flesh.

It's an important place to start, and it's a perpetual, chronic reality you and I just need to get used to. I know we want to go to church and have people say, "Hey, become a Christian—everything will be great; you'll feel good; you'll feel whole; you'll feel unique and validated and authentic," and all the rest. That's not the goal. And we've become very thin-skinned as Christians these days. But we've got to recognize there's a great deal of dissatisfaction you will have to live with if you're going to live according to the will of God, and receive—as this text says—the commendation of blessedness: "Blessed are those who are hungry now."

Now, look at the context of this in verse 11. It started with these words, which we just kind of read right over, and that is, "I urge you as sojourners and exiles." In other words, I'm going to be doing something relating to the appetites and desires of my flesh that will leave me hungry in my life, and I'm in a society that's digging in. They are different than me. I am the weirdo, I'm the out—I'm the outcast. I'm the one who's not like everyone else. I am the sojourner—don't belong here. I am the exile. Aliens and strangers, Paul says elsewhere. I don't fit in here. Which means not only can I not indulge my fleshly appetites, I can't indulge my culture's expectations. Think about that. It's a similar thing—one is internal in my heart, and I'm fighting that, and one is external in my life. I'd like to be, you know, in my neighborhood, the most, you know, agreeable guy on the cul-de-sac, but I can't be. Why? Because I'm allied with Christ.

Matter of fact, that's how this text starts—look back up at verse 4 (this is in 1 Peter chapter 2). He says, "As you come to him, a living stone"—you've come to Christ. He is the centerpiece of God's



redemptive work. Here's the problem: he's immediately described now as being "rejected by men." I live in a culture that rejects the biblical Christ—not the comic-book Christ, not the popular Christ of popular American culture—the real biblical Christ of the New Testament. I know we've made kind of a caricature of him, but the real Christ you read about in the Bible that talks about hell and judgment and righteousness and holiness and all that—that Jesus the world rejects. I've come to him. I'm embracing him in the sight of God, but I'm—verse 4—he's "chosen and precious," obviously; he's the centerpiece of God's redemptive work. And I, as I come to him, become a part of this organization that he's building—his living stone. It's like I'm being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood; I'm offering to God spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him through Christ.

"For it stands in Scripture"—now he quotes the Old Testament—"Behold, I'm laying in Zion a stone"—God's plan here—"a cornerstone," an indispensable part of this; "a chosen and precious cornerstone, and whoever believes in him"—you come to him, you trust in him—"will not be put to shame." That's a future promise. That's the reality: I'm going to come out vindicated one day. So the honor is for you who believe—great, I want that honor; I want to hang on to the thing that's important and chosen and precious in God's sight. Problem is, it's the stone—middle of verse 7—"that the builders rejected." Now, that's become the chief cornerstone, obviously, in God's economy, but it's "a stone of stumbling"—verse 8—"a rock of offense." They stumble over the real Christ because they disobey the word.

Now, I live as a Christian, clinging to Christ as the centerpiece of my life because he's the centerpiece of God's redemptive work in the world. It's the centerpiece of heaven—Jesus Christ. And I come to him in a world that rejects him—the real Christ. They stumble over him; they're offended by him. Why? Because they don't want to keep his word. You can read here Psalm 2: "I want the cords and bonds of the Christ, the King, the Messiah—I don't want that. I don't want constriction. I don't want him telling me I can't do what I want to do. I can't do what I feel I should do. I can't be authentic with my own desires. I want to do what I want." You're telling me Christ is saying, "No—abstain. Don't do those things." Yeah, well, that's how it is, as a fallen human being, in a body that has a lot of impulses, appetites, and desires that are not in keeping with the will of God. I have to exercise self-denial. I have to be hungry in many ways in this life—hungry now. That's the blessed life of Christianity. It doesn't feel all that "blessing." Matter of fact, it feels like I'm clinging to something that's important to me and important to God but not important to the world. They're offended by it; they stumble over it.

But don't forget verse 9: in reality, from God's perspective, you're "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession." You may seem like the underdog, the outcast now, and you're even called not to sit in a corner quietly but to make a difference as best you can. And though you'll be hated in many circles, you're "proclaiming the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The problem is we're in a very dark culture, so there's going to be conflict here. If you really don't want to upset the cart with the culture, you don't talk about light when they love darkness. "Once you weren't a people, now you are the people of God. Once you hadn't received mercy, now you have received mercy."



“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from those passions”—those hungers in your life—“that wage war against your soul.” That is a problem on two levels: in my flesh and in the world.

Speaking of your grandfather’s sermons from old, they used to talk about three categories. We’ve got a battle going on with the world, the flesh—what was the third one? Sunday School graduates—interactive, 11 o’clock crowd—the world, the flesh... maybe you didn’t go to your grandfather’s church. Three categories: world, flesh, and devil—the enemy, the spiritual enemy. If you think about that, that’s a good depiction of why we have the problem of deprivation in the Christian life. We have deprivation in the Christian life because I’m fighting a body—a humanity—that is wired to do things that God disapproves of, and to be godly I’ve got to say no to those things. I will be hungry even in my own heart. I will be hungry in my workplace. I’ll be hungry in my industry. I’ll be hungry at my kids’ Little League game. I’ll be hungry in my cul-de-sac in terms of not being able to indulge the expectations of the culture on my life, because I’m called out to be different—a sojourner, an exile.

And then the problem is—if you read the Bible—it seems like the enemy of God doesn’t pick on his own. Have you noticed that? There are consequences of sowing and reaping, but when Satan turns his focus and his energies against individuals, he doesn’t pick his own players. He picks the opponents. He picks the people that are standing out as exiles and sojourners, boldly proclaiming the excellencies of the one who called them out of darkness. Right—Job 1. Think Job 1: who does Satan go after? Job—who’s not like everybody else, who stands in fidelity to God and does what he asks.

So if you live a godly life, you’re going to be hungry—not only because you’re going to have to deny yourself; you can’t indulge your appetites; you can’t indulge all of the expectations of your culture—and then you’re going to have an enemy that is going to pit his energies against your life. And there will be things that God allows him to do in your life that go wrong, that leave you aching, hurting, unfulfilled, dissatisfied. And the Bible says that’s a kind of godly deprivation that you want to get used to. “Blessed are those who are hungry now.” That’s an important place for us to start—to understand the problems that we face as Christians.

The reason we ought to be comfortable with that—before we get to the bottom of the phrase in verse 21, let’s go to verse 25 and just put in the middle of our discussion the negative side of fulfilling the desires of the flesh or the expectations of our culture. Can’t do anything about the enemy—he’s going to do what he wants to do to throw stuff at me. But in terms of my own battle within and my battle in my environment, and not being able to do what everybody else does so I can be placated and be at peace and be satisfied, and I can’t even do what my body wants—I’ve got to say no to a lot of things in my own life—I need to understand why that’s a good arrangement for



me. Here's why: because if you choose to be full, according to verse 25—this is Luke 6:25—you should hear the woe and the warning: “for you shall be hungry.” Future. The passing pleasures of sin are pleasurable—the Bible is very clear about that. The problem is, on the other side of that, there's trouble.

And let me say this about being full: you can be full with the wrong things, and that's clearly sin when you do something that's completely out of bounds in the Christian life. But I want to add another dimension to this because a lot of the sin that we deal with in our Christian lives is not only the wrong thing—it's the wrong time, is it not? Think about that.

Let me illustrate. If I were talking about my appetites for food, I could say, “Well, you know what, I've got to confess—really what I want to have for lunch is Snickers bars. You know, that's what I want. And I want to drink chocolate syrup to wash it down. I mean, that's my ideal lunch, and I think I'm going to sneak off to my office after I preach the sermon. I just need Snickers bars and I'm going to drink chocolate syrup.” You say, “Oh, Pastor Mike, that's not good. Shouldn't do that. You need a healthy lunch.” And so we talk, and—I don't know, depending on how stringent you are on your nutritional guidelines—we come to an agreement on what a good lunch would be. And let's just indulge me a little bit in this: maybe the centerpiece would be like a four-inch-tall filet mignon from Ruth's Chris on a sizzling plate of butter, medium-well—and there it is. And, oh, you throw in your—I don't know, you health nuts—throw in your vegetables; I'll eat those too. So they're around it. I have all that, but I have that beautiful piece of protein there, and I've got my mashed potatoes. I'll even eat a salad. Will that make you happy? I'll eat a salad. So I got a salad. I got my bread. I've got the filet mignon. I've got it all.

I hate these food illustrations in the last service because it's time for lunch, but let's just follow with me—sorry. There it is, and we agree, “Okay, Mike, that'll work. That'll give you fuel for your life. It's good, and nothing wrong with that. It's well within the pale of good.” That's great.

Are there ways for me to get that meal that you would still agree are probably not appropriate for me? It may be okay that I have that. It may be, though, when you and I run up, you know, the freeway to Irvine, and we get into Ruth's Chris, and we have that and we enjoy it, and you and I had that great lunch and we sit back from the table—“So good. So good.” Then I lean forward, I say, “Let's go—let's beat it. Dine and dash. Come on.” And we dash out to the car. Me and Pastor Mike, we, you know, racked up a \$150 bill at lunch, and now we're dining and dashing. We may get in our cars as we're driving down the 405 going, “Oh, wasn't that good?” “Yeah, it was good.” But I don't know that I feel good about dining and dashing with the pastor at Ruth's Chris. That's not right. Now, God approves in terms of—he's made your stomach for filet mignon and salad and bread and vegetables, all of that—but you got it in a wrong way.



Or it couldn't be just that you did it with some thought of stealing it; it could just be the wrong time. It could be that you actually paid for everything that Ruth's Chris is going to provide for you in that lunch, but you had it delivered—you've been on your phone—and you've ordered it, and the Ruth's Chris guys are going to come down the aisle right now in the middle of my sermon and pass down a plate for you on a little tray, and you're going to start eating your lunch right here in the auditorium. It may be a great meal for you to eat, but I can assure you that's the wrong time for you to eat it. I would say it'd be sinful for you to eat a steak lunch during my sermon. It's not the time. This is a sacred time. We're studying God's word. Your preacher's preaching to you. This is sermon time. This is church time. It's not lunchtime. You start breaking out your lunch and putting up your napkin and you start eating your steak in the middle of church—sin, brother. It's wrong on a number of levels.

You understand—we have to recognize that there is an appetite in your life that you might justify in your own mind as the right thing because you've gotten past, "Well, that's the wrong thing, it's a prohibited thing, it's not the forbidden fruit." It's just the right fruit at the wrong time. I mean, think about sexual sin—having sex with your neighbor's wife—that is sin and prohibited. But an engaged couple having sex before marriage is also prohibited. That may be the right person, may be the right relationship; it may be all that—but it's the wrong timing. All of those, in God's word, are very important. The ethical, moral boundaries of God are not just, "You have a twisted desire that you're fulfilling." It could be a valid desire in the wrong context, at the wrong time. Who knows what it might be? But you have to recognize there are a million ways for us to be tempted to get full—whatever the desire is.

We need to understand—we understand the promise; it's a threat, actually—"Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry." Let me put it this way—number two on your outline, if you're taking notes: we need to get wise to temptation's lies. No cracks about that wording. I'm not trying to be pissy here—although, man, that's a pithy little second point, isn't it? I'm not trying to be cute—"get wise to temptation's lies." Didn't mean it for rhyme, and once in a while sometimes I put those cute little lines down and I don't want them to sound that way, but I couldn't come up with a way to improve that because that's the problem: you have a lie. That's what temptation is. We need to be smart about that when we see the offer of fulfillment and gratification—to know on the other side of that is a problem. It's a big problem.

Here's how James 1 puts it—remember the passage about our desires? We get lured away by our desires, and when that desire reaches fruition, it gives birth to—what's the biblical word?—death. Death. Here's the problem: I need to know that if it's out of time, out of place, out of context, or just the wrong desire, and I'm trying to seek fulfillment of that—if it's not within the boundaries of God's moral law—it's a rip-off. On the other side of it, there is death. It's a promise of satisfaction, and it's not going to satisfy. Oh, it may satisfy for a time, but on the other side there is what the Bible calls death in a variety of ways. It sounds very profound and philosophical, but there's a lot of death on the other side of every transgression of God's rule.

By the way, that passage I'm quoting—James 1:14–15—uses words that, at least in our minds, make us think of modern fishing, does it not? “To lure us away”—it's like that baiting of getting a fish to chomp down on the bait and get the hook in its mouth. In modern fishing—in their day they put nets out—but I think to myself about fishing, which I don't quite get the whole sport of all that, but let's picture that. I've been fishing before—not very often—but you put this bait on the hook, and here's this very sharp, barbed hook, which always gets my finger bleeding. And so—but I've got it on there, and I'm thinking to myself, I look at this and, “This is going to catch a fish.” I just think I want to talk to the fish a little bit about this: “Look at it, man. I mean, yeah, there's a worm there—whatever I'm putting on there—an anchovy or sardines or whatever, I got it. But there's a big old shiny, big, sharp hook. Can you not see that? Can you look a little closer before you eat your lunch today?” Not that I'm rooting for the fish when I'm out fishing, but I'm thinking to myself, “Wise up, man—not to mention, all your buddies keep disappearing all around you, getting yanked out of the water when they go after these little worms with just a shiny little glimmer sticking out of the top. Can't you recognize where this is headed? Can't you see it?”

And I think to myself the same thing when it comes to the sins of Christians. I think, “Can't you just look at it clearly? Look at what you're desiring to do. Take a hint. You even see the barbed, pointy, sharp thing in it. Don't you recognize?” And we like to—we like to “fall into sin.” We “fall in.” We like to get lured in—eyes a bit blurry: “I don't want to analyze it. I don't want any thinking. I don't want counsel on this.” We rush after something without even looking at it closely. Not to mention—talk about people getting yanked out of the school of fish that we're in—can't you just start thinking about the things that you're secretly desiring in your own life, whether it's some compromise with the culture or some giving in to an appetite of your flesh that you know is sinful? Look around at people that have done that. Can't you see what damage that causes? Don't you know that has ruined and wrecked lives? Don't you see the death on the other side of that decision? Oh, I know it looks like a tasty way to satisfy your desire—looks like a great way to move up in the company—looks like a great way for you to fit in with your neighbors. But can't you see the other side of that? Don't you listen to stories in small groups? Don't you hear the testimony of other Christians? It shouldn't take much for us to see the lies in temptation. But it seems like we're just somehow averse to even giving it a good look.

Let me show you one passage on this. If you go to the Old Testament book of Samuel—2 Samuel 13. 2 Samuel 13. I think this is a classic text for a number of reasons. It deals with sexual sin, which I think is one of the most, you know, profound cravings that lead to all kinds of sins. Obviously, there's an appropriate context. I think about the Garden—think about the Garden. If you just think about human appetite, the whole point was, “Hey, Eve, you've got a human appetite; it's a fine thing for you to want to have fulfillment. Here's all these trees—great—eat from them. But there's one tree here—I just say no to that one. I'm God and I say no.” And Eve gets to the place, with the tempter's work in her own heart, where she says this line: she realized it was good for food. She said, “Oh, this will satisfy me. I don't want to look carefully at the fact that it's on the prohibited list from God, but I want that.”

Okay, here's the story of Tamar and Amnon. Amnon—he's got a sex drive, I get that. There are lots of biblically sanctioned ways for you to have a fulfilled life in that regard. Instead, he falls in love with his half-sister, Tamar. By the way, you need to understand as we read the first line: "Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister"—which should be no surprise, by the way—"her name is Tamar." If you're the king, you can, you know—you get, especially in those days when you're collecting multiple wives—he's got the pick of the litter, if you will. He's marrying very attractive women. He starts, at least, with the mother of Absalom and Tamar—a princess from the Aramean kingdom, which is now like in the area of the Golan Heights in Syria—and he marries the king's daughter. King—Geshur. Well, I don't know what she looked like; the Bible doesn't say, but they have kids that the Bible goes to great lengths to describe how good they look—Absalom. And the Bible's not big on describing how men in the Bible look, but that guy's described at length: "Oh, he's so handsome—from the crown of his head to the heels of his feet—without defect." He's so—I don't know—whatever. You pick—he's some amazingly hawkish guy—Absalom. Well, here's his sister—Mom is the princess of Geshur, and her name is Tamar. So I get it—attractive, beautiful.

"Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar. And after a time, Amnon, David's son"—also David's son, different mom; this was his firstborn son—"he loved her." Read "very broad definition of love" here, right? Not love like honor and respect and all that—no. He just thought, "Wow"—totally enveloped in a desire and an attraction for this girl.

Now, Amnon—if you want to talk about hunger, underscore this line—was "so tormented." See, there are certain things that we can't overstate: you will have desires that will wage war against your soul, and just because you're a godly Christian doesn't mean you will not have a war waging in your heart. It doesn't have to be a sexual desire, although that one's pretty common. And in this case, he was tormented by this desire. He made himself ill over his sister Tamar. She was a virgin. "It seemed impossible for me to do anything to her." He thought about it all the time. He was tormented by it.

Verse 3: Amnon had a friend—a loser of a friend—a sinful friend named Jonadab, son of Shammah. And that was David's brother. Now, Jonadab was a very crafty man—a shrewd man. And he said to Amnon, "Oh, son of the king"—which might be worth underlining, because that's always how the temptation seems to go—"Oh, you've worked so hard, you've sacrificed so much—you deserve this. Oh, why would God want to keep from you something that you desire? And there's got to be a way for you to be fulfilled in this area." Whatever it is—it doesn't have to be sexual. There's this temporary temptation that gives you a sense that, "Come on—you deserve this. Oh, son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Why are you so hurt? Why are you so deprived? Why are you so hungry? Well, you're not telling me. Something's not right—you're not fulfilled, you're not happy." Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." Of course, that's not respectable, honorable love—lust, right? He craves her.



Jonadab said to him, “Well, I’ve got a plan. Lie down on your bed; pretend to be ill. Your father is going to come—David’s going to say, ‘What do you—what’s wrong with you?’ Tell your dad, ‘I want my sister Tamar to come and give me bread to eat; prepare food in my sight. I need her to nurse me back to health.’” So that’s exactly what he does. Verse 6—matter of fact, David—then you just keep glancing down the text—David does exactly what Jonadab said would happen. What are we going to do? Amnon has the room cleared when she gets there; she’s making him food. Let’s get to the drama here—verse 11: “When she brought the cakes that she had baked near to Amnon, Amnon took hold of Tamar and said to her, ‘Come lie with me, my sister.’” She said—she answered and said—“No, my brother, do not violate me. What are you doing? For such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing. As for me, where could I carry my shame—being the rape victim of my own brother? As for you”—now this is important—“you would be as one of the”—underline—“outrageous fools in Israel.” We talk about the clarity that the outsider has. “This is a stupid, outrageously foolish, selfish, self-serving, dumb, juvenile thing for you to do. You want something, so you’re just going to get it—you’re just going to go grab it; it doesn’t matter if it’s moral or upright or honorable.” Stupid.

Now look at this—talk about the compromise; it’s amazing: “Now therefore, please speak to the king; he will not withhold me from you.” Now, while this was unbiblical in terms of Leviticus’s law—not to marry your half-sister—they were doing it all the time. Half-sisters and half-brothers were getting married. And she even says, “Listen, if you can’t get over me, listen, I would even marry you—just do this right. You’ve got to—we’ve got to go about this the right way,” which isn’t really the right way, but it’s an allowable way, they suppose, that Dad would put up with. He wouldn’t listen to her. Being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her—which is a very biblical-sounding way to say, what?—rape.

Here’s the part I want you to highlight—verse 15: “Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.” This isn’t honorable love—this is lust and desire. The appetite for him to have her was now dwarfed by the anger and hatred and repulsion he has once he chomps into the bait, if you will. And he says—Amnon said to her—“Get up and get out—go.”

That is the clarity we often have after we get past this deceptive lie that “this will really be fulfilling for you.” Did he have his pleasurable moment? Oh, sure. And when it was done, the crashing reality of death set in—that sense of “This is wrong. I am an outrageous fool.” Self-loathing, self-despising—and despising the object of his lust: “Get out of here.”

I just want to say—and you’ve seen it a million times in other people’s lives; you’ve experienced some version of this in your own life—can you just realize this week, when you are tempted to do something you know is unbiblical, you know is outside the pale of God’s allowable—either the object or the thing, or whether it’s the timing or the means or the method or the context—can’t you say, “Listen, I know where this ends. I know there’s something that makes me think this will satisfy



me, but come on, man—you’ve got to know where this ends. There’s death behind this. There’s a sharp, pointy barb—it’s going to sink into my life.” “Then Amnon hated her with a great hatred... so that the hatred... was greater than the love with which he loved her.”

There’s sowing and reaping in the Bible that you can’t ignore. There’s an appointment that you have with the bēma seat of Christ. Just put those two things together in your mind: there are consequences for sin, and there’s an accountability—an answering before God—for every Christian. We’ve got to get wise to temptation’s lies that say, “Well, this will be good for you; this will make you happy; this will satisfy.”

“Blessed are the hungry.” Hey, I’d rather have Amnon—wouldn’t you?—be sexually frustrated for years, if that’s what it takes, than to be a rapist. Much happier with you being unhappy. Much more satisfied with you being unsatisfied. Much more content with you being discontent—and you will be too if you just realize the blessedness of being hungry if fulfilling your hunger is sin.

I didn’t want to end with that, as you can imagine, because then no one would come back next week. So I want to take you back up to verse 21 in Luke 6. The warning is there—it’s a woe; that’s what the woes are—they’re warnings. “Hey—woe to you. If you want to get all your fulfillment now, you’re going to go hungry.” We didn’t really touch on the last phrase in the first sentence of verse 21: “Blessed are you who are hungry now”—I get that; we need to understand godly deprivation, and we did, I trust—but here’s the promise: “for you shall be satisfied.” There’s a satisfaction coming to those who are willing to defer their gratification. There’s a lasting satisfaction, because that’s what God always provides when we’re willing, temporarily, to say no to what we desire if it’s unbiblical. To be frustrated in your life is good, because if you’re willing to be frustrated in your life and not fulfill the thing that you know you could do outside the will of God, the Bible says the fulfillment on that—the reward for that—is a kind of fulfillment way better than any temporary passing pleasure of sin.

Put it this way—number three on your outline: we need to anticipate lasting fulfillment. It always comes to those who are willing to defer their appetites and say no to their desires if and when those desires would have to be fulfilled in an unbiblical manner. Temporary deprivation—lasting satisfaction. That’s such a hard principle in our instant gratification culture. Would you agree with me? We want it now.

Parents, let’s talk. You’ve got a teenage kid—or, you know, however old they are when they first get that first credit card: “You’re approved!”—thing in the mail. Let’s think that through. “My son—wow, Dad, I’m qualified for a Visa card!” “Fantastic, son. Let’s go—let’s go use it. Let’s get a new stereo, man, for your bedroom. Let’s get new rims on your car. Let’s go—man, you’ve got a card—let’s go!” Is that what you do, parents? You’re a bad parent if you do that, right? That’s bad.



“Well, it says I’ve got a card here—look at the limits. I can spend money.” Yeah, you can spend money—and it’s really easy to give them the card at the automotive shop and get your new rims on your car. Here’s the problem: something happens at the end of every month when you have one of those cards. And then if you don’t pay it back, then they come at night and they steal your rims off your car and repossess your stuff and your credit goes bad, and then you go to apply for a loan and you can’t get it. This will mess your life up, kid.

I hope you’re a good parent and you teach your kid to learn deferred gratification. It’s better for you to save for weeks and months and even years, if you have to, to buy the thing that you desire, than to go out and get it now. Because getting it now often leads to all kinds of complications.

Now, think this through. You want to talk about the problem we’ve had in the last decade or so—talk about this as a recession. Here are some of the stats from the economists. Yes, personal debt has gone down in some cases—in many cases because of defaults and foreclosures. But with everyone saying—and here’s the statistic—the surveys say 90% of the people in this recent survey—we all say we’re trying to be more careful financially because it’s tough times; we’re in a recession. So we’re going to be careful with our spending—90% say they’re going to be more careful. Here’s the thing: through the entire period of time—and you could factor in inflation on this—consumer spending has continued to go up. Think this through now. It’s like everybody’s saying they’re on a diet, but the caloric intake goes up, you know, every month. You can say you’re on a diet, but in reality—even with that intention to say, “You know what? Yeah, we’re careful; we’re practicing self-denial when it comes to our spending”—the spending continues to creep up, and in some categories it shoots up.

Here’s two—just for fun, just to tell you: I’ve read this study—phone equipment. Think about that. It’s up 17%—phone equipment—for people that say, “I’m watching what I spend.” You know, here’s the thing—your old flip phone worked just fine if you want to talk to somebody, but we’ve got to have the latest and greatest because we want it. Pet supplies and pet accoutrements—right? I’m not opposed to having a pet—that’s great. But if you can’t afford pet stuff, you know—I don’t know what you buy for your pet: a pet gymnasium or whatever you’re going to buy at Petco... Listen, people are spending more on their pets than ever before in a time where they’re saying, “Well, we’re trying not to spend much.” And I’ve got to say—those are nonessential items: the latest iPhone and a pet gym... I don’t know what you buy for your pets—pet stuff—pet toys (there you go), pet vests. You don’t need that stuff.

All I’m saying is, we do live in a culture that I’m sitting up here preaching to, saying, “Delay your gratification,” and you may walk out saying, “I’m going to do that,” just like people say they’re going to diet and just like people say they’re going to be careful with their expenditures, and yet the reality is they keep spending more and they keep eating more. But just like with the bills, they eventually come due. And hopefully at some point you recognize, when you can’t fit into your pants anymore, you can say you’re on a diet, but in reality you keep eating more—there’s going to be a



price to pay. And so there will be for us—there will be a day when you stand before the bēma seat of Christ.

Now, I don't want to—"I thought you were going to end on a negative note." Let me flip this around, because this seems pretty negative—not only will we give an account, but here's what God keeps saying to his faithful kids: "I will reward you. I will reward you. I will bring reward to your life for every sacrifice you make."

Let me end with this. Turn to Revelation chapters 21 and 22—the end of the book, the end of the book of Revelation, and the end of the Bible. I want to show you the promise of lasting fulfillment. It's everywhere when it comes to the desires of the human being. I have desires; I have cravings; I have things I want—in terms of the world in which I live, the society, the circles in which I run—and even just living in my own body. I want things that the Bible says I'm going to have to do without. But "blessed are the hungry, for you shall be satisfied."

Reminds me, by the way—talking of sowing and reaping—you know the famous passage in Galatians 6: "You reap what you sow." It starts with this: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Now, you know that principle. Do you know the next verse that comes after that? Talks about "sow to the flesh"—from the flesh, corruption; "sow to the Spirit"—good things come. Here's how it ends: the very next verse says this (we're still in the sowing and reaping theme)—verse 9 of Galatians 6 is: "And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up." There's the promise—still talking about reaping. And the sowing in this context is not sowing to the flesh. If you don't satisfy the desires that are sinful—just keep doing good. Don't grow weary. Because in due season—which is not now—the reward is coming, and you will reap if you don't give up.

Well, even if you have to spend an entire lifetime frustrated and unfulfilled—let me read for you a little bit from Revelation chapter 21. The themes of satisfaction run through this text. I mean, verse 6 talks about the fact that "to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment." How much? "Have as much as you want." What does it cost? Nothing. Full fulfillment. Which—I like this: the thirsty. Yeah—does that not speak to what we just have been preaching on? Blessed are the hungry; blessed are the thirsty. We didn't get fulfillment here in a lot of things that we wanted, while the world in which we live said, "Hey, if it feels good, do it—just indulge," you know; and we're saying, "No, no, no—self-restraint, self-control, self-denial." To the thirsty, he's going to give satisfaction.

It may surprise you that you have that—the thirsty—"I thought no one in heaven was thirsty." I bet verse 4—you thought no one was crying either. We get there through many difficulties. This comes at the end of the book of Revelation, which depicts the worst tribulation ever. These people are



coming out of some very hard times. And it's not just the last generation—the first generation of Christians, Paul said to them, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

We keep wanting a theology—we want our church websites to talk about how great the Christian life is, and it'll be so wonderful and there'll be no deprivation in your life. That's just not true. The reality of the Christian life is you'll have to deny your impulses; you can't indulge your flesh; you can't indulge your desires in our culture and acquiesce to those things. You're going to be the target of the enemy—but at the end of it all, be faithful. You'll reap if you don't give up. He'll give to you whatever it takes to satisfy—in verse 6—"without payment."

Might as well contrast here in verse 7—to the one who conquers. Even that's a word people don't get, because it's a fight; it's a struggle. "Suffer hardship as good soldiers." He'll have this heritage: "I will be his God and he will be my son." But as for now—notice this, especially in our fight with the world—it's the righteous who are bold enough to stand apart as aliens and strangers. Look at this: it's the cowardly that are on the outside. I could be cowardly. I could just fit in—say what people want me to say. But that's the typification—that's the quintessential sinner: the coward, the faithless, the detestable, the murderers, the sexually immoral—all... If you think through all of those, any one of those—take the murderers. Why do people murder? Because they're mad at someone. What does the Bible say when I'm mad at someone? It says, "Don't take your own revenge." Why? "Be patient; leave room for the vengeance of God." Do you see all this? It's always about me denying my impulse. Sexually immoral—obviously a lot of things I may want, but refrain—self-control. Sorcerers—even, "I want information from the next world. I want information from beyond." Well, God's given—"Well, it's not enough. It's not the way I want it. I want it now. I want it this way." Idolaters. Liars. On it goes.

We got the water part. Look at chapter 22—Revelation 22—across the page. Starts again with the water: "The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal"—totally fulfilling—"flowing from the throne of God," able to drink from it—for free. Chapter 21 said that. "It goes through the middle of the street of the city—also, on either side"—verse 2 (this is Rev. 22:2)—"there is the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month." You get a variety of fulfillment. I mean, it's depicted here through the analogy of water quenching our thirst; food—fruit—satisfying our hungers; and "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

By the way, to end with the word Jesus started with in Luke 6, go down to verse 7: "Behold, I'm coming soon. Blessed"—there's our word; it's a good thing—"blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." And that's going to be hard—that's going to be self-deprivation and self-denial. But verse 12—you want to keep scanning down this chapter—"Behold, I'm coming soon, and my recompense"—the reaping, the payback—"is with me, and I'm going to repay each one according to what he's done." You do understand that every sacrifice you make to do what God has asked us to do will be richly rewarded. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied."



1970—there was a classic sociological study with four-year-olds. Now picture four-year-olds—four-year-olds—and it involved a table and a marshmallow and a bell. They sat the four-year-old behind the table; the experimenter, the tester, came in and said, “Now here’s the deal, little kid: got a marshmallow, got a bell. I’m going to leave the room. When I leave the room—just so you know—you can ring that bell anytime you’d like, and I’ll come back in the room, and when I come back in the room, you can eat the marshmallow. But here’s the catch: if you don’t ring the bell—if you just wait, wait for me to return on my own—I’ll bring you an extra marshmallow and you can have two marshmallows.” So then the tester walks out of the room.

Now, do you know what it’s like for a four-year-old to be in the presence of a marshmallow and not be able to eat it? But he can eat it—oh good—who’s ringing the bell? So four-year-old after four-year-old after four-year-old came in, and they tested these four-year-olds to see how long they would sit there. A lot of four-year-olds couldn’t last fifteen seconds. I mean, the shadow of the tester had barely left the doorway and—ding!—they’re ringing. He turns around—“Yes?” “Okay, you can eat the marshmallow.” And then they just waited out these four-year-olds to see how long they would last. Some lasted a minute; some lasted three, four minutes; some went as long as fifteen minutes—sitting there, looking at the marshmallow. Tough. Torturous. Why did they wait? Those kids waited because they wanted two marshmallows.

Our ambition for satisfaction is not the problem. As C. S. Lewis often pointed out, I want fulfillment; I want gratification; I want satisfaction. It is good for me not to be hungry. The question is whether I’m going to rush the plan of God and stuff my life with the “satisfaction,” quote-unquote, that’s nothing more than a lie of the things that the world says will satisfy me, or whether I’m willing to wait for the return of Christ to bring satisfaction to me in a way that will be lasting and far better than anything I’ve ever experienced here on earth.

By the way, the real test was not that fifteen minutes. The real test was that those researchers tracked those kids from 1970 on to watch how they lived their lives. You can anticipate the correlation, can you not? Those that had the lowest times ended up being the biggest problems—children: more problems in school; a lot of them kicked out of school, suspended; a lot of them got into drugs and crime, dropped out; they had the notoriously bad life. Those that went the longest in their study correlated with kids that did the best in school, who got the best LSAT scores, who went to the best colleges, who landed the best jobs, who made the most money, had the highest salaries. See, instant gratification is never a good thing—not only in this life, but certainly in the life to come. We need to recognize that if we want the impulsive characteristics of the people in this world, it’s a losing proposition.

I guess the question for us is whether it’s going to be one marshmallow or two. Am I going to live this week as though I want one or two? Do I want the blessing of the next life and the satisfaction



that comes through delayed gratification, or do I just want it now? I hope we can learn, if for nothing else, by looking around, that those who live that way—it's never good. To speak in the spiritual realm—those that are taking the bait of instant gratification—they're getting their jaws hooked with a pointy barb. It's a lie.

I'm concerned about the Christian church these days—so thin-skinned, so complaining about being hurt and struggling—and we've got to toughen up. We've got to suffer hardship as good soldiers. We've got to recognize—to enter the kingdom of God, it'll come through many tribulations, even in peacetime, in the mess of the American Western church. I want to commend you to think differently about this and recognize that when you're hungry, dissatisfied, you don't feel fulfilled—then “blessed are the hungry,” if you're holding out because it's a biblical thing. “Blessed are the hungry, for you shall be satisfied.”

Why don't you stand with me—I'll let you go. Let's pray together.

Let's pray. God, we know that you are not putting us in some lab as a tester and just experimenting with us and torturing us by making us wait. There's a real problem here with the fall of mankind, the curse. You're playing out this world not to torture us but to—as it says in 2 Peter 3—to give opportunity for salvation. The patience of the Lord is not trying to make us hurt for longer, not to protract our suffering, but it's so that we can see more and more people saved. And so, God, we'll wait—until the trumpet sounds, until the end of this life—to realize that some of us will live in disappointing situations at work, or difficult marriages, or struggling with unmet desires in our lives. We're okay with that—that's a blessed state for us to be in. Because filling ourselves with this impulsive kind of “I've got to have it now” is a losing proposition. In the end, that's hunger. Real satisfaction comes from living according to your will. Let us, like Moses, be willing to stand with Christ, to ally ourselves with the will of God—even if that means mistreatment, difficulty, deprivation of some kind.

And I pray, we would toughen up. I don't mean to chide our culture, but I've read way too many Christian books that are trying to coddle our emotions, when in reality, there's no way around the difficulties of the Christian life, because we live in sinful bodies in a sinful culture. And until Christ comes, it's going to be a struggle. Let us not get down about that. Matter of fact, the examples are not to sit around saying, “Woe is me,” and being that kind of—that typified martyr that sits in the corner feeling so terrible all the time. It's pictures of prisoners in shackles and dungeons in Philippi—they're singing songs, because they recognize they look toward their reward.

So, God, let us—that great Greek word “California”—let us look down upon the shame. Let us look past our cross to the crown. Let us look past all the frustration and the deprivation and the hunger to the end of it all, where you're going to bring us great satisfaction. Without faith it's



impossible to please God, and we certainly are never going to continue on this path unless we trust you and your promise that it's good for us to follow your will for our lives, even if it means I can't be happy right now.

God, we know there are profound things in our lives that you fulfill that no one can understand—the joy and contentment of knowing our Creator, of being forgiven. Those are profound joys. But the whole of our person—just being a human being in this world—we're going to have to do without in many ways. But that's okay. God, give us a real sense of confidence that all of this is worth it.

God, dismiss our church now, I pray, with a real sense of resolve to live for you in this world—suffering hardship where necessary, enduring and persevering where it's called for—knowing that, in the end, you're a great, rich, generous, wonderful God who dispenses great things on those who are faithful.

God, thanks so much for forgiveness—we didn't even address that today. But many read stories of sexual immorality in the Bible or compromise and are struck with pangs of guilt. Let us be thankful that because of Christ and the cross of Christ, our confession brings forgiveness and cleansing; and though our sins are like scarlet, because of what Christ has done, they can be white as snow. Thanks that you want us to get up—even if yesterday was the biggest day of compromise and instant gratification we've ever had. We can march into the rest of Sunday with a willingness to do whatever it takes to be faithful, to walk with you, to do without, to not coddle every whim and desire of our heart.

So, God, get this army ready to live in this world for you, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.