

December 28/29, 2002

Hungry No More

Psalm 63

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Every day he would come to the town square and there he would fast. He was known as the hunger artist and that's how he made his living. He would fast for 10 days, 20 days, 30 days...up to 40 days. When the people would come to the town square they were entertained and somewhat amused, and they would put money in his container. That's how he lived. He would reach 40 days and then they would haul him off and nurse him back to health. Then he would go back to the town square and he'd do it again.

But after a period of time, people tired of the hunger artist. It no longer was entertaining. They quit putting money into his container, so he had to figure out some other way to make a living. But that was all he knew. So he joined the circus as the hunger artist and they put him in a cage next to the lions and tigers. People would come by and they'd look at the animals; they'd look at him; and then they would move on. While he would sit on a bed of hay and fast, he would watch as they would bring these large plates of food to the other animals—and they would feed and he would fast.

Well, he was not very entertaining and the people who ran the circus lost track of counting days. So he went beyond 40 days, until finally one day they found him almost unconscious on the bed of straw. They opened up the cage door and went in and lifted him up. With his dying breath he said, "I want you to know that if I could have found food that satisfies, I would have gladly eaten like anyone else." And with those words, he died.

It's a parable that was written by a German atheist by the name of Franz Kafka, and really what Kafka was telling was his own story. He understood that as an atheist his soul was dying. But he could not find food that satisfied and he feared he would ultimately die, having never found the food that would satisfy his soul.

All of us feel that restlessness in our soul. It is that longing for something that will satisfy—something that is so real and so authentic that ultimately when we find it, our soul is at rest.

But we live in a very restless and dissatisfied culture. It is evident in any number of ways. It is the job of the advertisers and the marketeers to, in a sense, prey on that dissatisfaction. Their job is to continually remind us that we *are* dissatisfied. They tell us we need to be dissatisfied with the car we drive. We need to be dissatisfied with how we smell. We need to be dissatisfied with how we look. We need to be dissatisfied with our friends. They tell us that if we do this or buy this, then somehow that will make life better—so they keep driving in us this sense of dissatisfaction.

It's seen in the fact that people run up these enormous credit card bills. I think that's a symptom of dissatisfaction. People are spending money they don't have. They're buying houses and cars they can't afford.

We've just come through the lottery season and it's been in the news about a recent big winner. I've mentioned many times that there's a great deception with the lottery. Again, I don't think the deception is about the winning. I think people understand that. The deception is that people think that if they did happen to win, that it would make them happy—that it

would finally give them what they've been looking for. But that just simply isn't true. If you aren't happy today, you wouldn't be happy if you won the lottery tomorrow. That just doesn't satisfy.

I think this dissatisfaction is seen in the pace of our culture. We live in a very busy culture. We think if we're busy, we're accomplishing something—which isn't necessarily true. We think if we're busy then somehow we're going to find some sort of meaning or satisfaction in life.

But I think the reason we maintain this busy pace in our culture is because people don't want to look inside. They don't want to look in the mirror. And if they can just keep a fast-enough pace, they don't have to really look at who they are and what they've become. So they just stay busy. It's a symptom of dissatisfaction.

I think it's seen in the morality of our culture. We live in a very immoral culture. People are involved in all kinds of sexual relationships, trying to find something that will satisfy—some sort of meaning or purpose. I think there is this explosion of internet pornography because people have this insatiable appetite to find something that satisfies. But it doesn't work. So they keep pursuing it and going down this path of destruction.

I think it's seen in the drugs and the alcohol abuse in our culture. There is this numbing effect where people think that if they just get enough alcohol or drug in their system, then somehow they don't feel how dissatisfied they really are.

This isn't anything new; this has been a problem for thousands of years. You go all the way back to King Solomon, who literally had everything this world had to offer at his disposal. He had power and unlimited wealth. He had all the pleasures of the world, and He tried to use those things to satisfy the restlessness in his soul. He tells his own story in the Book of Ecclesiastes, about how he tried to use those things to satisfy his life. He said it was just vanity and vanity, which means it was empty—it didn't do anything. And it's not until the very end of the Book of Ecclesiastes that he finally said, "This is what I've found that satisfied my soul."

Solomon learned that the hard way. He learned it through trial and error and through a lot of pain. The sad part is that he didn't have to learn it that way—because his father knew what it takes to be satisfied and he wrote it in Psalm 63.

Psalm 63 was a psalm written by King David, who was the father of Solomon. In this psalm he talks about what it is that ultimately satisfies. As we look at this psalm, think back to 2002—to this year that we have just lived—and ask yourself: What did I really live for? I'm not asking you what *should* you have lived for. I'm not asking you what you think the right answer is. I'm asking you: What did you live for? What was really your passion? If I were to ask your spouse or your children or your friends what you lived for, what seemed to be the passion of your heart, what would they say? And how did that satisfy? Do you find yourself today with a very restful, satisfied heart? Or is there still a sense of restlessness?

The fact is, all of us have time for that which we think is important. Every one of us lived for what we ultimately thought would satisfy this past year. We need to assess whether or not that's true. Now, we can't go back and relive 2002, but we can give some serious thought to, *What am I going to live for in 2003?* It really should have to do with, *What is*

ultimately going to satisfy? What is really going to put my soul at rest? And that's what this psalm is about.

Most people believe this psalm was written while David was fleeing for his life from his son Absalom. David was king of Israel; but his son staged a coup and basically chased David off the throne and was trying to kill his father. David is living in the wilderness—he's living and sleeping in caves. He has had all that the world has to offer as king. But now he has nothing. It's in this very difficult situation, where his own son is trying to kill him and he's living in caves like an animal, that David writes what it is that satisfies him.

In verse 1 he says, "O GOD, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly." Now we're familiar with that kind of language, especially in the new covenant. But you have to understand, in the ancient world people did not view their relationship with their god as a relationship of intimacy. The god was someone that you wanted to appease. It was the god that you feared; it was the god that was "out there" somewhere. In the ancient world they had no concept of a personal god.

It made the Hebrew people very unique, because they believed they really could have some sort of a personal, intimate relationship with their God. And David reflects that in his opening statement, "O GOD, Thou art *my* God."

"I shall seek thee earnestly" could be translated "I shall seek thee early." I think it means the same thing. It's either earnestly, which means with all my heart, or early—meaning it's the first thing I think about in the day. It's my priority. We would probably say today that it was his passion. It's really what David lived for. He was saying, "That's the first thing I think about; that's the passion of my heart."

The question is: why? Why has David made his relationship with God the passion or focus of his life? That is answered in the rest of this psalm. David uses six images or metaphors to try and communicate why God has become the passion, the focal point, of his life.

The first one is found in the second half of verse 1. He says, "My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." The first metaphor is the metaphor of thirst. Now David was undoubtedly experiencing a physical thirst. He would have been living in a very dry wilderness, and going to water would have been very dangerous. So probably he was in a perpetual state of thirst. And in the process of that, he's thinking about that as a picture of his spiritual thirst—of his soul's longing to be satisfied by God.

I think it's fascinating to think about all the ways God has created this world in order to draw our attention constantly to Him. One of the questions we would ask ourselves is: why do we get thirsty? Now I understand the physiological explanation of that, but all that's doing is explaining how we are created. The spirit beings don't get thirsty. I mean, God could have made us so that we don't thirst. But he hardwired us that way because He wants that metaphor, in a sense, to constantly be before our attention. I am constantly thirsty, so I drink and that thirst is satisfied. But it's always satisfied temporarily; soon I am thirsty again. I am constantly in this state of being thirsty and trying to find something to satisfy that.

That, of course, set the stage for Jesus to come on the scene in the first century and say, "I am the water of life. He who drinks from Me shall never thirst again." In other words, the

physical thirst that we have is never fully satisfied; it's constantly this cycle. But there is a satisfaction to my spiritual thirst that can be satisfied forever—found in the person of Jesus Christ.

When David talks about being thirsty in a dry and weary land, it seems to me that's a very good imagery of the culture we live in. We live in a culture where people are very thirsty spiritually. But they're having trouble finding something that satisfies. They look out into the culture and they find something that looks very good. It looks like it's going to satisfy, but it doesn't. Pretty soon they're thirsty again.

Imagine if you were dying of thirst and you came upon this enormous body of water, and you concluded in your mind, *Finally I have found more water than I could possibly drink for a lifetime*. Your thirst has been quenched for good. The problem is this body of water that looks so good is the ocean; and the ocean contains seven times more salt than your body can digest. So when you drink it you actually begin to dehydrate, because your kidneys are trying to flush that salt out of your system. And while it looks like it will satisfy, the more you drink, the more dehydrated you become until you finally die of thirst.

That's a very accurate picture of the culture in which we live, as people look around them at these things they think are going to satisfy. They start drinking of those things, but really what's happening is that their thirst becomes greater and greater—which takes them down a continual path of destruction.

David has found what satisfies, and he talks about it in verse 2: “Thus I have beheld Thee in the sanctuary, to see Thy power and Thy glory.” He says “Thus [*or therefore*] I have beheld.” He is saying that because his soul is so thirsty for God, he has met God in His sanctuary. I think David is talking about the fact that just in the very presence of God he's entered in and found that which satisfies his thirsty soul.

The second imagery is in verse 3, and I think it's the imagery of life. He says, “Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee.” Now that's an interesting imagery when you think about it. We tend to think that the most important thing is *life*. We have a very strong self-preservation mode. We believe that if we don't have life, then we can't really enjoy anything else, because we have to stay alive. We tend to be pretty focused on our life, so we focus on this life and this world and what we're doing in the here and now.

But David says, “You know, I've found something that is better than life, and that is the lovingkindness of God”—meaning the character or the person of God. He says the person of God is better than life.

Now you have to remember the fact that David is literally fleeing for his life. At any moment he could be captured and put to death, so he's thinking about this pretty intensely. It's very similar to a person who has a terminal illness who might have, all their life, thought the most important thing is life. But now when they realize they're losing their life, they start to think about the fact that there is something more important than that. Because life is temporal, at best. Life is here for a season—it comes and it goes. And in that moment, they start to think about that which transcends life—that which lasts forever. It's often at that moment that a lot of people turn to God, because they realize that which is eternal is better than life.

There have been thousands of Christian martyrs who have clearly understood this. When they were faced with a decision to either give up their faith or to die, they understood, *There's something better to life and I'm going to hold onto that. And as a result of that, then I must die.* And so they did.

We tend to think of martyrs as being back in the first century. But it's important to remind ourselves that more Christians have been martyred in the 20th century than in the previous 19 centuries combined. So it is a big deal today. What it comes down to is, people who understand there is something better than life and they hold onto that, even if means they give up their life in return.

Now that's exactly what David says in verse 4: "So I will bless Thee as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Thy name." David is basically saying, "I will focus my attention on God as long as I live."

If it's true that there's something better than life, then that should be the focus of our attention while we live out this life. Where we get into trouble is when we start to believe that this life is the most important thing. When I believe that this life is where it's at, then that's what I live for. I start to try and use the stuff of this world to satisfy, and it never works.

But when I start to believe that there is something better than life, which is found in this relationship with God, then that's what I begin to focus on. That's what I begin to live for. So the focus of this life is on that which is better than life, and that begins to bring that which satisfies.

The third metaphor is found in verse 5, and I think it's the metaphor of hunger. He says, "My soul is satisfied [*of course that's what we're talking about*] as with marrow and fatness. And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips." "Marrow and fatness" could be translated "fat and fatness." It's really talking about the choice cuts of meat. Of course David, as the king of Israel, dined at the king's table and had eaten of the very best that the world had to offer. That would be described as that fat and fatness (marrow and fatness). He is saying, "When I was hungry, it was the finest cuts of meat that satisfied my hunger."

Of course, hunger is like thirst. God has made us that way so that we're constantly aware of our need for food—and food satisfies only temporarily, but never more than that. Then along comes Jesus who says, "I am the bread of life. Eat from Me and you'll be satisfied forever."

So David is thinking about that hunger and the days gone by when he was dining at the king's table, and what it was that ultimately satisfied. We would say in our culture today that David is saying when you're really hungry, junk food doesn't cut it. Junk food doesn't satisfy. We must give the body what it really longs for—what it really needs.

The same thing is true spiritually. There are too many people who are trying to satisfy their soul with spiritual junk food. There are no short cuts. There are no 1,2,3 steps and we're spiritually satisfied. There's no way to be satisfied other than that which is ultimately good—which is a lifelong passionate, intimate relationship with God. That's the "choice cut of meat." That's what our soul longs for.

David says so much so, that what comes from his lips is joy. Now remember that he's living in a cave. His own son is trying to kill him. He's the dethroned king of Israel and yet

he says that what's coming off his lips is joy. He's happy in the midst of very difficult circumstances because he's found what satisfies that hunger.

In verse 6, I think he's still talking about this same imagery. He says, "When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches." That word "meditate" is still a food term. It basically was a term used to describe a cow chewing its cud. In the book of Isaiah it was used to describe a lion pawing and growling over a piece of meat. Really it's the imagery of being satisfied. Meditating means to continue to chew on and to process that which we've eaten. David says, "When I can't sleep at night and when I'm out on guard duty—when I have the night watch and there's not a lot to do and I'm just thinking—what I think about is God. God is the one that satisfies. God is the one that puts my soul at rest."

When you have time to think—when you can't sleep at night or you're driving somewhere—what do you think about? Do you think about all your problems? Do you think about all your troubles? Do you think about your bank account or your stock portfolio? What do you think about? David says, "What I think about is God—because God's the one that satisfies me. God's that choice piece of meat that has satisfied my hunger; and that's what I think about when I have time to think."

In verse 7 we find the fourth metaphor—the metaphor of touching. David is fleeing for his life; he is in grave danger. He definitely needs protection. He says, "For Thou has been my help, and in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy." The word "help" there is often used to describe an ally in battle. David says, "I need help; I need an ally."

When he's talking about "the shadow of Thy wings" he's of course talking about a mother bird that opens up her wings and draws in the baby birds. They find protection and safety in the shadow of her wings. And David says, "That's who God is to me." He's hiding in the caves and fleeing for his life, but ultimately he says, "God is my place of refuge. I go under God's wing and there I feel safe, and there my soul is at rest." He says, "So much so, that I sing for joy." Again, he is fleeing for his life and his own son is trying to kill him—and what is he doing? He's singing for joy because he's under the shadow of God's wings, which is what satisfies. Even in the midst of very difficult circumstances he says it's okay, because God is his protection.

In verse 8 is the fifth imagery, and I think it's the imagery of marriage or intimacy. He says, "My soul clings to Thee; Thy right hand upholds me." That word "clings" is a word we're familiar with from Genesis chapter 2, where it says a man shall leave his father and mother and cling (or cleave) to his wife. It's the same Hebrew word and it means to glue together. In the Genesis passage it's a reference to the sexual intimacy between a husband and wife, when they are glued together and become one flesh. David picks up that word, that imagery, and says that he cleaves or clings—he glues himself to God—with that same type of intimacy, because that's what satisfies his soul.

There are many people who are using a sexual relationship to try to somehow satisfy the restlessness in their soul. They're trying to generate love. They're trying to find some sort of meaning and purpose, and it just doesn't work, because God didn't design it for that. We need to understand even as married people, that our spouse can never fully satisfy us—God made it that way. We just get a taste of what it means to be intimate and it's enough to cause us to want more. And the *more* is found in a relationship with God. So ultimately that's the place where our soul is satisfied.

David pulls up that imagery and says, “I cling to God; I cleave to God” just like a husband to his wife. And then God responds. “Thy right hand upholds me.” It’s a picture of God being a responsive lover and embracing David—that they have this beautiful, intimate relationship.

Then finally in verses 9, 10 and 11, I think the imagery is one of winners and losers. Now we live in somewhat of an odd culture. We just don’t want to admit that there are winners and losers. We’ve got soccer games now where they don’t keep score, because if somebody wins, then it’ll affect the self-esteem of the losers, and we just don’t know how to handle all that. Well, that’s all kind of goofy, if you ask me. We have to face the fact that in this life, but more so for eternity, there are winners and losers. There are those who will win forever and there are those who will lose forever. That is a fact.

That’s what David is talking about. He starts off talking about the losers. Verse 9: “But those who seek my life, to destroy it, will go into the depths of the earth. They will be delivered over to the power of the sword; they will be a prey for foxes [*or maybe better translated for jackals*].” David is saying because he is God’s anointed, when they attack him they are attacking God. Those who fight against God ultimately lose.

For the Hebrew people, what happened to your body when you died was very, very important. The absolute worst-case scenario would be if you died and your body was just left somewhere, and the jackals consumed it. That would be the ultimate humiliation. And that’s exactly what David says—that ultimately those who fight against God, their bodies will be consumed; they will be food for the jackals. It’s very strong imagery.

The winners are seen in verse 11: “But the king [*meaning himself*] will rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him will glory, for the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped.” Those who seek after God will be the winners—they will experience the glory of God.

David uses six pictures—six images—to try to communicate why he seeks after God earnestly, early, passionately. It’s because God ultimately satisfies his every need. Now if David had written this psalm while he was king on the throne and he had available to him all the power and all the wealth and all the pleasure of the throne, it might be harder to accept this psalm. But that isn’t the case. David is fleeing for his life; his own son wants to kill him; he’s living in caves. David is writing this amidst the most difficult circumstances. And yet, in the midst of all of that, he says, “I’m joyful; I’m happy; I’m satisfied.” Because he knows what it is that satisfies him—that relationship with God made possible through Jesus Christ.

What you choose to live for in 2003 will strongly reflect what you believe will make you happy and what you believe will ultimately satisfy. As I said before, we all have time for the things we think are important. So what we invest our lives in are those things we think will make us happy.

But if David is right, I have to tell you: for you to be satisfied in 2003, you don’t need a different marriage partner. You don’t need a marriage partner. You don’t need a different job. You don’t need more money. You don’t need that physical illness to go away. You don’t need anything in your circumstances to change. You just need to understand what it means to be intimate with God. You need for God to become the passion of your life.

The reality is that every single person has an equal opportunity to that which satisfies. Therefore, you have to accept the fact that if, at the end of the year, your soul is still restless, and if at the end of the year you really aren't satisfied, that is because you have made that choice. So don't blame it on your circumstances. Don't blame it on anybody else. Because what you need to be satisfied—it's there. It's made available. It's yours for the taking...if you so choose.

Sometimes the mindset that gets us into trouble could be illustrated with a picture of a pie. I've seen this often, where you have a pie divided into pieces, and every one of those pieces represents a different component of our lives. So you have the emotional, the physical, the intellectual, the social, and then you have the spiritual. And what's implied by that illustration is that God is just one piece of the pie. So you have to come and get your God-fix, but you also have to address these other areas of your life.

If that's your thinking you'll never be satisfied, because that picture is completely incorrect. God is not one piece of your pie. God is the whole pie. God, in a sense, is the pie filling—no matter how you cut it, God's got to be in the middle of it. God penetrates the physical...the social...the intellectual. Every part of that life, God has to penetrate. God becomes your passion. God becomes your focus. God really becomes everything that you live for. That's what David means when he says, "I will seek You earnestly; I will seek You early; I will seek You passionately."

If you are willing to seek God passionately and earnestly, and He becomes the focal point of your life, then you will know what it means to have a soul at rest. You will experience what it means to be *hungry no more*.

Our Father, we are thankful that You have made it possible for every single one of us to have a soul at rest. Lord, not one of us really needs to have our circumstances changed. We just simply need to focus our eyes upon You.

Lord, we're thankful that through Jesus Christ and His death on the cross we can taste of the water that quenches our thirst forever. We can eat of the bread of life that satisfies our hunger forever. We're thankful that through that personal, intimate relationship with You, our souls can be at rest. Lord, for this, we thank You in Jesus' name, Amen.