

“GET REAL! (#5): THE JESUS WHO SATISFIES”

(Isaiah 55:1-3)

© 2011 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[NEED PROP: COTTON CANDY]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 8-28-11]

–I–

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Isaiah 55:1-3 and Pray.
2. How many of you like Cotton Candy? ...I happen to have some here... [HOLD UP SOME...]

A–It’s colorful, enticing, and looks *so good* to eat... [BEGIN EATING...]

B–In fact, it IS good! *Very* tasty! [CONTINUE EATING...] The problem is... [EAST REST OF COTTON CANDY...] it doesn’t last very long! [SHOW EMPTY HAND...]

1–It *looks* like there’s a lot, but all that volume is mostly just air.

2–So, if we’re really looking for something substantial to fill us up, then Cotton Candy ends up as a big disappointment, because it can’t fully satisfy our needs if we’re *really* hungry.

3. Now, the Bible actually talks about hunger and fulfillment in much the same way.

A–So, as we wrap our sermon series “Get Real” (in which we’ve been learning how we can become more genuine and authentic in our relationships with ourselves, others and God), I want to talk about our deepest human longings and needs, and where the Bible says we can find ultimate fulfillment for these.

B–Let’s look at today’s scripture from Isaiah 55 as one example. [Contemp. Service ONLY: Read MSG version of Isaiah 55:1-3...] – here we find at least **three things that we all need to know and understand about ultimate human need and its solution.**

(*Read Bulletin notes...*)

–II–

4. The first thing we learn is that **WE AS HUMAN BEINGS HAVE BEEN CREATED WITH CERTAIN LONGINGS AND NEEDS IN LIFE.**

A–In Verse 1, God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to people who are “*thirsty*” and hungry, and invites them to come and experience fulfillment/satisfaction.

B–Now remember, of course, that while Isaiah is using the *literal* language of *physical* hunger and thirst in this passage, but he’s using it in *metaphorical* ways.

1–He’s saying that the “*thirst*” and hunger referred to in these verses are merely *metaphors* for the deep needs and longings of our soul – ...

2—...That each of us has *inner emotional* and *spiritual* needs that most often *drive* our *outward physical* needs ¹ – things like...

- (a) Our need for emotional intimacy and connection...
- (b) Our need for acceptance and respect...
- (c) Our need to be loved and cared for unconditionally...
- (d) And our need to find meaning and purpose in life.

3—And Isaiah is saying that all of us *have* these core needs as human beings because we were *created* by God to have them – they’re a natural part of who we are. ²

5. But he’s also saying that as human beings, many of us are either *unaware* of these needs, or we just choose to ignore them anyway.

A—Like many people who Jesus ministered to, many of us are so busy with the outward *tasks* of our lives – e.g., with our jobs (or our search for one), or with what’s happening with our 401ks, or how we’re going to juggle our kids’ activities – that we’re not cognizant of our own spiritual “hunger” and “thirst.”

1—Quite frankly, some of us are just “too busy” to deal with God; too preoccupied with egotistic agendas, weekly schedules, and worldly issues to be “bothered” by taking time for spiritual things.

2—And so, religion and spirituality take a back burner – it becomes something that we address only when it’s convenient, and doesn’t interfere with “*real life*.”

B—But the problem is that *ignoring* these needs & longings does *not* make them go away. ³

–III–

6. Instead, it tricks us into doing the second thing that today’s scripture teaches: which is that **WE HUMANS OFTEN TRY TO SATISFY THESE DEEP LONGINGS and CORE NEEDS IN OUR OWN SELFISH, UNHEALTHY WAYS**

A—That’s essentially what Verse 2 says, where God rhetorically asks: (MSG) “*Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?* (NRSV) “*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*” – implying, of course, that we humans quite often do precisely this!

1—Instead, of seeking *legitimate* ways that God provides to meet our spiritual, emotional, and physical needs, you and I instead too often seek and use *our own* unhealthy strategies and tools to meet them. ⁴

2—We turn to the *misuse* of things like work, food, alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, exercise, or even an obsessive relationship to find fulfillment for our core needs. ⁵

3–In one of his books, Christian counselor Jeff VanVonderen names these things as “*addiction*”, which he defines as “*the result of an attempt to meet inner needs with external substances or activities*”⁶ – and many of us do just this!

B–But you say, “*Well, what’s wrong with meeting our own needs? Why not pursue a little self-gratification every once in a while? Don’t we deserve it?*”

1–Well, first let me say that I’m not being a “fuddy-dud” by saying that we don’t ever need or deserve to have fun – No. God is the *author* of fun, and He created it so that we could *enjoy* life!

2–What I *am* saying, though, is that the *worldly ways* that you and I often choose to meet these deep life needs and longings rarely “deliver the goods” that they promise, because they’re merely *counterfeits* of the real thing!

3–Many of our “harmless” diversions are not so harmless – they’re like cotton candy for the soul: ...they may *look* colorful and enticing, and can taste good for the moment; but in the end they often leave us either wanting more, or with a stomach-ache, feeling guilty for having tried them in the first place!

4–So, for example, we may dabble in drugs, or illicit sex, or misuse of alcohol, or over-eating, or smoking to make us feel better & “take the edge off,” and for a time it *does!* But it never lasts, it’s never enough, and we’re left empty & unsatisfied.⁷

–IV–

7. And that leads us to the third teaching from today’s scripture – ***GOD’S solution*** to these things – which is that **YOU AND I WERE CREATED WITH THESE NEEDS AND LONGINGS SO THAT THEY WOULD DRIVE US TO NEED GOD.**⁸

A–In Verses 1 & 3 God puts it this way: (MSG) “*All who are thirsty, come to the water! Are you penniless? Come anyway – buy and eat!... everything’s free!... Pay attention, come close now, listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words. I’m making a lasting covenant commitment with you...*” (NRSV) “*Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! ... Come to me... so that you may live, [for] I will make with you an everlasting covenant.*”

B–You see, this passage (and others like it throughout the Bible) are saying that you & I have been invited into a loving, personal relationship with the *only* one who can *actually meet* the deep longings and core needs of our lives⁹ – our spouses can’t; our children can’t; our friends can’t; only God can.

1–1700 years ago, the great Christian leader Augustine put it this way: “*We were made for you, O God; and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*”

2—And you know, what I’ve found in my own life is that – instead of pursuing *worldly* strategies to find “rest” – if I first “*rest in God*” by allowing his son Jesus to meet my *inner*, core needs for intimate love, acceptance, and purpose, then He also will take care of my *outward* needs, as well.¹⁰

3—In other words, true satisfaction and fulfillment in life works from the *inside out*, NOT from the *outside in* – we first have to allow God to meet our *inward* needs, and *that* then allows Him to help us fulfill our *outward* needs.¹¹

C—Maybe you’ve heard it before: “*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*” [REPEAT].¹²

–V–

8. So, what *outward* issue, habit, or challenge is it that you are struggling with today?

A—Whatever it is, it’s probably just the *symptom* of something inward and spiritual that you need to address, and it may very well be that today, God is inviting you to do just that!

B—So, as you and I seek true fulfillment and contentment for the deep needs and longings of our lives, my prayer is that we’ll open ourselves to discovering and giving our hearts and lives daily to “*The Jesus Who Satisfies*” – ...

C—...For in doing so, we’ll find “rest” for our souls, and become more “real” in our relationships with ourselves, others and God.

9. [PRAYER: “*O Jesus, we confess that too often we try to meet our deep longings and needs in things other than you. But today, we ask that you enable us to find ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment only in YOU. For that to happen, though, we first need to have a living relationship with you. So, for those here today who need to know you, help them to be willing to pray a simple prayer, like this: Lord Jesus, forgive me of my sin and come into my heart to live forever. Give me your Holy Spirit so that I can walk with you faithfully from this day on.... And for those who have prayed that prayer before, help us to renew it daily, so that you can be for us not only our Savior but also our Lord – the one who satisfies all the deepest longings and core needs of all our lives. We pray this in your holy name, Amen.*”]

10. [HOLY COMMUNION]

11. [Closing Music: UMH#469, “Jesus Is All The World To Me” OR... “Enough”]

ENDNOTES:

1. I’ve heard it said that if it’s true for the body, then it’s also true for the soul – if we have physical needs (such as a need for food, water, shelter, clothing, etc.), then we most likely have emotional and spiritual needs that correspond with those (such as our need for intimacy, love, acceptance, connection, and purpose). I should point out, too, that the deep inner longings and core needs I speak of here should be differentiated from mere “wants.”

2. Furthermore, the fact that we have any need at all as human beings implies that there are things which can actually meet those needs. For instance, the existence of hunger implies the existence of food which can meet

it. Our experience of thirst implies the existence of water which can meet it. But “if it’s true for the body then it’s true for the soul.” So, in the same way, our human need for emotional intimacy implies the existence of a God who can *be* emotionally intimate with us. Our human need for purpose and meaning implies the existence of a purpose and meaning that *can be found* in life (with God’s help). Our human need for love implies the existence of a true, genuine divine love which can meet that need.

3. So, it’s important for us to face and deal with the inner longings and needs of our lives. As Christian psychologist and author Larry Crabb writes, “*When the thirsts of our souls are neither understood nor embraced, love is violated in many ways that typically go unnoticed and therefore unresolved*” (Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*, p. 107). In fact, more than simply “outward” and “inner” needs, Crabb says that we as human beings are created to have THREE categories of longings and needs (Read generally Crabb, pp. 87-96):

(#1) “**Crucial longings**” – to live in relationship with one who is always faithful and accepting and loving of us, enabling us to discover and claim our purpose in the world. Without this relationship, Crabb says, life is profoundly empty. Of this category of need, He goes on to explain that “*nothing can satisfy our crucial longings except the kind of relationship that God offers*” (Crabb, p. 87), and that therefore “*the consequence of living with no satisfaction of our crucial longings is the beginning of hell*” (Crabb, p. 89).

(#2) “**Critical longings**” – what Crabb calls “*the legitimate and importance desires for quality relationships that add immeasurably to the enjoyment of living*” (Crabb, p. 87). This could include being loved and respected by our mate, the longing we have for friends who are there for us when we need them, etc. He says that when we don’t have our critical longings met, we experience an “*immobilizing lostness*” that for a time “*empties our soul of energy to continue*” (Crabb, p. 89).

(#3) “**Casual longings**” – this refers to all other desires, from the trivial to the significant, as well as to our “wants”. When these longings are not satisfied, he says we experience “*manageable discomfort*” (Crabb, p. 88), but that life itself need not stop.

Notice from today’s text, too, that God does not condemn us for being “thirsty” or hungry – the problem is NOT our thirst or our needs. Instead, the problem is what you and I do with those feelings of “hunger and thirst.”

4. Instead of allowing God to satisfy our the deep thirst and hunger of life, our human independence and self-sufficiency too often prompts us to do it *all by ourselves!* Larry Crabb says that “*As fallen people who have declared our intention to find life apart from God, we devise foolish, ineffective, and immoral strategies to provide for our own satisfaction*” (Crabb, p. 69). He goes on to say that “*people who don’t know what it means to depend on Christ to satisfy their inmost being will experience an ache in their souls that relentlessly drives them toward immediate relief. ...[Their] only recourse is to use handle the pain on [their] own... to use the resources under out own control to numb our pain*” (Crabb, pp. 100-101).

Another scripture passage indicating this fact of human nature is Jeremiah 2:13, where God says that “*My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.*” Larry Crabb explains it this way, “*When Adam joined [Eve] in looking for life outside of God’s revealed will, he infected all [human beings] with the disease of self-management. Now no one seeks after God in an effort to find life. [Instead], the most natural thing for us to do is to develop strategies for finding life that reflect our commitment to depending on our own resources. Simple trust [in God] is out of fashion. Self-protection has become the norm*” (Crabb, p. 58).

5. VanVonderen says that addiction is “*Simply the end of a course of action designed to fill inner spiritual emptiness with something that can’t fill it.... People can become addicted to many things. If a person believes that money, work, food, diet, chemicals, religion, exercise, a relationship, or a ministry has the power to meet [our] needs and make [us] a more valuable, acceptable person, [we] will set out on whatever course is required to obtain it. [We] may pay dearly in other areas of life to have it – [we] might sacrifice money, sleep, meals, integrity, relationships, or time with others in order to possess... or attain [that thing]. But once we’ve invested so much... life energy in its pursuit,... [we’re] not likely to let it go without a fight*” (Jeff VanVonderen, *Tired of Trying to Measure Up*, pp. 54-55).

This is precisely why overcoming habitual sin is such a hard thing to do, even for Christians (for

example, read about the struggles of the Apostle Paul in Romans 6-8, especially Romans 7:14-24) – because we’ve invested so much in our unhealthy strategies to quench our desires and “thirsts” that it’s too uncomfortable to let go! Crabb notes that “*whatever generates pleasure seems so right. Pleasures of the body (such as sex or eating) and of the mind (such as power or applause) can be marvelous counterfeits of real life... Their insidious appeal lies in their power to give quick relief from groaning, relief that feels more than good – it feels like life [when all that our pain makes us feel is dead]*” (Crabb, p. 105).

6. VanVonderen, p. 54.

7. “*Sins in behavior... are [merely] symptoms of a deeper problem*” (Crabb, p. 196). This is why Verse 3 implies that if we pursue these *worldly* things long enough, it will lead us to spiritual, emotional, and physical death – the reference to “life” in this verse implies that if one does not “*pay attention to/incline their ear*” to this advice, the opposite effect of life (death) will result.

8. We were created with what today’s scripture calls “thirst” and hunger *not* to frustrate us or drive us crazy, but so that we would recognize and acknowledge our inability to meet our own needs successfully by ourselves. As Crabb explains it, “*frustration, properly handled, can drive us towards God*” (Crabb, p. 93), who is that only one who can meet our needs anyway. “*The experience of pain has the power to either harden us in our self-protective style or to drive us to deeper trust in God*” (Crabb, p. 197). “*Every effort to change must involve at its core a shift in direction away from dependence on one’s own resources for life to dependence on God.*” (Crabb, p. 211).

9. Two other prime passages that speak of God satisfying our needs are:

(#1) Psalm 107:4-9 – “*Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.*”

(#2) John 4:13-14 – “*Everyone who drinks of... [physical] water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty*” (Jesus, speaking to the Woman at the Well).

10. Crabb says that there are 2 approaches to having our needs satisfied (See generally Crabb, pp. 92-93):

(#1) “**Outside In**”: we seek material and physical pleasures (casual longings) to hopefully help us experience the joy of true relationships with others (critical longings), so that we can hopefully one day experience total satisfaction in who we are (crucial longing). The problem is that this path to satisfaction can’t “deliver the goods.”

(#2) “**Inside Out**” (the way God intends): we seek God FIRST as the ultimate relationship (crucial longing), through whose relationship with Him will enable us to live in fellowship with others (meeting our critical longings), which then enables us to find and meet many of our casual longings, as well. For one biblical support of this approach, read Matthew 6:33.

11. And what’s more is that Verses 1b, 1c and 3b indicate that this relationship with God is *absolutely free* (those verses state that we have “*no money*” to “*buy*” it with anyway!). It’s not merit-driven: we don’t have to do anything to earn it, but when we enter into it, we can experience spiritual, emotional and physical “*life*” (Verse 3b).

12. John Piper, Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist (Multnomah Publications, 1996), found online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/dg/id1.htm>.