

Why Spend on What Does Not Satisfy?

Series: What God Wants to Know
Brad Bailey – November 23, 2014

Intro...

What will your Christmas list look like?

I have found that **with each year**...there is **less sense of any real ‘want’** that leaps onto a list. Healthy...natural... but a little bit of a loss...no yearning...no anticipation. So we may wonder...is there something I needsomething that should be on my list?

Today... as we prepare to go through the coming week of Thanksgiving... reflect upon gratitude...and **then the holidays that include gift giving (which includes gift getting)...**
God has a question for us...

Context...

The invitation is **found in the book of Isaiah**. The prophet was looking forward to a time when the nation would be in exile. The people would be in defeat, their spirit broken. They would feel like God's promises to them had been irreparably broken and forgotten. They would be tempted to settle for Babylon and all that it offered. **They would not be satisfied**, but they could hope for no more. **To these people, and to us today, God has a question...and an invitation...and it comes in Isaiah 55:1-6**

Isaiah 55:1-6 (NIV)

¹ "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. ⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. ⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor." ⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

Here we have a **profound invitation**... and it comes with a **profound question**:

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Are we buying into what cannot ultimately satisfy us?

It's a rather **timely question**.

This week we will all enter the strange season in which we will try to celebrate Thanksgiving... I say "try"...because despite all the time and attention given to the holiday...the very nature of gratitude can elude us. And then suddenly we face the ultimate shopping season... inaugurated by a **new holiday called Black Friday**.

How do we navigate the underlying conflict between **gratitude** and **greed**...between **contentment** and **consumerism**?

We might feel that the question which God asks...suggests that we just need to denounce and renounce material goods.

Many have simply separated the spiritual and material and assumed that the material world is the enemy of the spiritual... and so we

Shortly after college...I spent some **time in India**...and during that time had an opportunity to engage some remarkable lives.

I remember **hiking through the Himalayas to meet with a man** who had renounced much of material life. He had lived in a cave for many years. He no longer spoke. He was following the idea that to become truly spiritual was to renounce the material. One was good and the other bad...or at least an illusion to be shed.

We also had the **privilege of meeting at the Dalai Lam's home** for two days of dialogue with the highest monks of Tibetan Buddhism. They too shared some of the desire to transcend the illusion of a material world. In many regards we found a lot of common ground in values and virtues. Last day... they noted...that what they realized and respected about the Biblical view of life...is that it didn't dismiss the material world...and as such it was Christians who lead the way on feeding the poor.

> The **material world is not simply something to denounce**. It is not bad.
(It's okay to want something for Christmas.)

In a similar way I would suggest that many may do well in becoming less materialistic. You may be one who really **doesn't have much want**. You may be one who has **become disciplined** about sensual pleasures.

That is good.... Really good.

Discipline is good...but it is not an end in itself.

Simply saying no to material pleasures doesn't bring deep satisfaction.

God's question is not simply a matter of renunciation...but of invitation.

God is calling us to re-evaluate what satisfies.

What God is calling out...is not renunciation but re-evaluation.

It's no secret that we live in a **consumer culture**.

Someone once said: The only reason a great many American families don't own an elephant is that they have never been offered an elephant for a dollar down and easy weekly payments.

Our problem is not with material goods in themselves...it's **the oversell**.

Consumerism promises, that we will not only have our basic needs satiated, we are told that we will **find our true selves**

How many commercials are try to make correlation between their product and ... the women so into the guy with the car... the parents with happy kids apparently because of the toothpaste they use. And of course, if you drink Dos Equis beer...you can be like the most interesting man in the world... the center of everyone's amazement. And then he tells you to stay thirsty.

> I can enjoy a Dos Equis ...but it's a barley drink...it doesn't define how amazing anyone is...or how many people will love you. And I appreciate the call to "stay thirsty" ...but I don't think it will satisfy my deepest thirst.

My sense is that most of us hear something of needed truth.... We know we are drawn to some things that really don't satisfy as much as they claim.

We've **bought enough stuff in life that is now set aside**... to know

Would everybody who is able please stand up? I am going to name some things...and if one applies to you...then please sit down. [1]

"If you...sit down"

- bought a car that you didn't like within a year
- bought something at a yard sale that you later sold at a yard sale.
- own more than 10 books you have never read
- have a box of things in your home that you haven't opened in more than five years
- have anything in your closet more than a year old with the tags still on it...or should because you haven't worn it more than once
- own a power tool you have never actually used on a project
- have ever needed a vacation from your vacation
- left Costco with things you never planned on buying...and probably didn't need to
- Can recall a time in your adult life when you owned less but recall being happier.

All of these experiences say something about the need to re-evaluate what we hope in...to reassess what matters most. **I think we all have some sense that there are many things we can want...that don't prove as satisfying as we hoped.**

How is it that we have become so consumed with buying more and more things that neither feed nor ultimately satisfy us?

Is it **because we have believed the lie that things make us happy?**

We may do well to consider what some of the wealthiest have faced...

John D. **Rockefeller** admitted, ***"I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness."***

Henry **Ford** confessed after becoming a multi-millionaire, ***"I was happier doing a mechanic's job."***

Brad **Pitt**, movie star and not a bad-looking guy, says:

"I'm telling you, once you've got everything, then you're just left with yourself. I've said it before and I'll say it again: it doesn't help you sleep any better, and you don't wake up any better because of it."

It's estimated that **we, who live in North America**, enjoy a **higher standard of living than 99.4 percent of the 80 billion human beings who've ever lived. Yet we're not content.**

“It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness.”

Charles Spurgeon

Isaiah 55:1-2

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Notice that God is not denouncing material good...but suggesting that there is something more satisfying than what we may be seeking.

God is not speaking about basic material needs. He is **using the symbols** of the most satisfying of food staples...to speak of even deeper needs.

So he speaks of...

the waters—In the East, water is a precious ingredient; and an abundance of water is a special blessing. Water brings refreshment.

wine, milk, and bread—Wine, milk, and bread were staples of the Jewish diet, and the primary source of nourishment.

The invitation to buy wine and milk and bread indicate that the **people were living on substitutes** that did not nourish them

As in Isaiah's day, many are living on substitutes that do not nourish them

We are both **material** beings and **spiritual** beings. They are **not opposites** and they **are not enemies**. But if we are cut off from our spiritual longings...we will try to satisfy the deeper spiritual desires with material things.

When we are simply operating out of sensory pursuit of pleasure...we will find... discontent.

Because sensory pleasure doesn't evaluate satisfaction on a deeper level.

It's strange how we can begin to think about the latest upgrades to our phones. When the iPhone 6 came out... so many just "had" to have it. What new feature would be so life changing? It's the iPhone SIX!

Our senses always want more and don't have a great sense of perspective.

We read in the Scriptures...

Hell and Destruction are never full; So the eyes of man are never satisfied. (Prov. 27:20)

No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. (Eccl. 1:8)

Neither is his eye satisfied with riches. (Eccl. 4:8)

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also *is* vanity. (Eccl 5:10)

God is calling us to awaken from the vanity of becoming mechanically led by sensory pleasure...and to a thirst that is deeper...to a hunger of soul.

It is an invitation to ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY...hungry...and don't have money to buy.

Is this an invitation for you?

You may think...well I have money...nice clothes. If it's simply a material statement...we might not be sure.

> But the one calling out is calling us out... out from the coverings that really don't satisfy.

But we do not belong to the very source of our life... of love. We are playing cover up... pretending our lives are meaningful... that we belong.

Martin Luther scratched it down on a piece of paper, nearly 500 years ago, just before he died. The great Reformer, who stood up for the Word of God, and led a Reformation that forever changed the Christian church, pointing it ever more clearly to the cross of Jesus Christ, penned these dying words: ***"We are beggars all, this is true."*** What Luther was saying, is the knowledge that before God, we have nothing to bring, nothing to offer. We're the ones who come with no money, but thirsty and hungry. What could we possibly bring to God? Nothing. We are beggars all, this is true.

Here we may feel a dilemma. If we feel a loss which we long for God to satisfy... we may fear allowing ourselves to feel such needs... **fearing that such a focus will only lead to despair.** "I don't want to get any more in touch with the emptiness in my life... dark and depressing."

"If I want to be happy I should avoid what makes me feel sad."

> **Jesus has no intention of leaving us in despair... he is simply stating the nature of hunger... that hunger is by nature a pain that leads to pleasure.** Hunger is the sensation that allows us to connect with food. **We should value our spiritual hunger as we do our physical hunger...** not as something bad... and to be ignored... but as something good... **as necessary for life. What happens when we ignore our physical hunger? We grow weak... disoriented...** then, most dangerously of all, we **lose our appetite altogether.**

The challenge we face in staying connected to God involves staying connected to our most fundamental longings. We are so over stimulated by our outer senses that we can hardly hear our inner soul.

"The **tragedy of modern man** is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it **bothers him less and less.**" – Vaclav Havel, Letters to Olga

God is calling us to re-engage what satisfies.

" It was a word of hope. God was telling them that he still rules and is in control of events in Babylon. He's a God whose purposes are way beyond the grasp of mere humans. He knows precisely what he's doing and he is willing to transform their circumstances.

The exiles were in despair. They believed that they were doomed to remain in exile and that all was lost. But the word from the Lord through Isaiah spoke of a new beginning. There was, after all, a future for them.

**This is an invitation to come...
Come...Come... Buy...Eat.**

COME...

"Come" implies that the thirsty man is not yet where the water is, and he must come to that place.

It is a call to movement....from where you are towards what is offered.

God is redirecting them and us to what does satisfy on a deeper and lasting level.... Covenant with Him.

"...your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

"Hear me", says God, "that your soul may live." This would be secured by an "everlasting covenant" as promised "to David". The prophecy was wonderfully fulfilled and made possible by the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, "great David's greater son". He is the mediator and trustee of the new covenant. All believers in Jesus are members of God's royal family.

That covenant...the one with David...was now being extended.

Chapter 53 had introduced us to the suffering servant who would give his life ...and then reign.

That Suffering Servant... enters into human history... and says to us:

John 7:37-38

'On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

John 6:48-51

I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

God is calling us to re-engage...to come.

When God says we must seek Him with our whole heart...He **isn't referring to some sort of game**... in which He's hidden and avoiding us... in fact He's stating that any one of us will enjoy Him if we really desire Him. **It's like many desires I may have**... a desire to locate a certain book... travel to a certain place... get together with a certain friend... all are possible but **many will never happen because I simply don't feel led or choose to pursue them with my whole heart.**

CONCLUSION:

We can all bemoan the consumerism of the holidays... and feel we should not want anything.

I don't think it will change us much to refuse gifts in some rigid way... but rather we need to want what is more.

This is about our souls....rather than our senses.

Whether you have no list at all...or a long list.....I want to encourage you... put one thing on your list. (Others in pencil...this one bold in permanent marker):

Let your soul enjoy the covenant of love that has been made.

Resources: Drew descriptions related to the generosity from Owen Bourgaize, "An Invitation not to be refused"; David Kruger regarding substitution

Notes:

1. Adapted from Ann Robertson