

Date: July 17, 2022  
Scripture: Luke 15:20-32

Subject: "Famine Or Feast"  
Pastor: Larry Kirk

## "Famine Or Feast"

Every since I first started to actually pay attention to Jesus and his teachings, I have been struck by the radically different vision he has for life and fulfillment. The evidence for his authority to speak about life is compelling. From the ancient prophecies undeniably fulfilled by him to his exemplary life, his uniquely profound teachings and his personal impact for good in the lives of his followers, and, of course, the historical proofs of his resurrection from the dead, all of that comes together to say *listen to him!* When you do listen to him, what you hear him say – basically – is that most people are doing life wrong. All of us are in danger of doing life wrong and ending up dissatisfied and angry, empty and full of self-pity.

If you believe that Jesus is Lord and he is the one who not only saves your soul but shows you where life is truly found, what is it that he shows you? What are some ways we tend to get it wrong, and what do we need to do to get it right? Well, this story of *The Prodigal Son* in **Luke 15** is full of important truths related to those very themes. We've spent weeks looking at this, and we've learned a lot. Today we are going to reflect on some of the lessons we've learned and press into them a little bit further in terms of application to our lives. One truth we're going to look at in this message is an idea and an illustration that runs all through the whole story. It is the idea that ***God alone provides that for which we most deeply hunger, so we have to learn to find life's deepest satisfaction in him.***

The image of food and contrast between famine and feasting runs all through the story. The younger brother runs off to find himself in wild living. In **verses 14-17**, the theme of hunger is central. *And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.* <sup>15</sup> *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.* <sup>16</sup> *And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.* <sup>17</sup> *But when he came to himself, he said, 'How*

*many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! When he comes home, the father, in **verse 23**, what does the father say? "Bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate."* When the elder brother gets mad and refuses to come to the feast, the Father goes out and pleads with him to come in. The Father is providing a feast, and he wants all of his children to come celebrate with him and be glad. *This is not just an incidental part of the story. It is an important way that God illustrates what he offers us in life.* The picture of a banquet of grace provided by God describes the ability of God -- the ability which is only God's to satisfy the human heart and soul with his presence, his promises, his grace and love.

*What if the greatest shift, change of mind, you could ever make in life is to simply begin to truly believe in what the father offers.*

## **I. GOD TELLS US THAT WHAT HE OFFERS US IS LIKE A FEAST FOR OUR SOULS.**

**1. This imagery is not just helpful. It is crucial.** Spiritually, the language of food, famine, eating, nourishment, and emptiness fills the Bible. In the first book in the Bible, **Genesis**, the first temptation and sin was to not be satisfied with and grateful for all that God provided but to insist on tasting the forbidden fruit. In one of the earliest books of the Bible, **Deuteronomy 8:4** says, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.* In the early chapters of the gospel of Luke, **Luke 4**, when Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness to satisfy his own hunger, Jesus quotes that verse from Deuteronomy and says, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.* The imagery is found all through the Psalms. **Psalm 23**, *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

**2. What is this feast that the Father offers us? What does the picture, picture? Psalm 34:8** *Taste and see that the Lord is good.* Ultimately we have to see that it is in a relationship with God himself, the compassionate Father that we find our heart's hungers satisfied. You see that idea running all through the story of the Prodigal. Neither son is finding relationship or joy and fulfillment in the one who stands out at the center of the story: the compassionate Father. C.S. Lewis

said in the Psalms God is the “*all satisfying*” object. **Psalm 63:1-6** is a great example, *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. <sup>2</sup> So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. <sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. <sup>4</sup> So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name, I will lift up my hands. <sup>5</sup> My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, <sup>6</sup> when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night.*

In his book, *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer said: *God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that He can, without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is.*

The brothers in the prodigal story picture two ways we often find ourselves doing life wrong. We think of God, if we think of him at all, as the one who can help us get the things we think will make us happy. We fail to see that the father himself is the greatest of all gifts and the true source of satisfaction. Jesus is not saying the Father wants us to give up the desire for happiness and joylessly serve him. He is saying God wants you to renounce the ancient lie that he isn't enough and put him at the heart of your search for happiness.

**2. The Father pleads with us to take his offer to heart.** In **verse 22** He says, *bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.* In **verse 28**, the Father goes out and pleads with the angry son urging him to come into the banquet. The pleading Father brings to mind **Isaiah 55:1-3** where God says: *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.”*

### **3. What the Father offers us is the best and more than enough!**

Look at the Isaiah passage again in **verse 1**. Water refreshes and renews life. Wine is exhilarating and intoxicating. Milk nourishes and strengthens. The last part of **verse 2** says *Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*

All of this is echoed in the prodigal son story. In **verse 17**, the prodigal says, *'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!* The lowest servants in the household have *more than enough*. At the story's end, the Father calls for the *fattened calf* to be offered. Most cattle were range fed, but the fattened calf would be especially grain fed. I'm not sure what kind of cattle were common in Israel in the days of Jesus, but a 5-6-month-old fattened calf, depending on the breed, could weigh anywhere from 300 to over 500 pounds. Do we believe in the lavish goodness of God? **God alone provides that for which we most deeply hunger. So we have to learn to find life's deepest satisfaction in him.**

### **4. What the Father offers is offered freely. Isaiah 55:1** He says:

*"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.*

### **5. What the Father offers will not be found elsewhere. Verse 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.*

### **6. What the Father offers does not depend on circumstances.**

Although there was a famine in the far country, the prodigal was confident there would be more than enough in the father's house.

All of Scripture tells us there is in a relationship with God a source of soul satisfaction that remains constant no matter what the circumstances. We sing, *When peace like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say it is well, it is well with my soul.* There is a peace that passes understanding. There is a contentment in God and in His love and his plan and his presence and the assurance that in the end, all things will be made right. There is all of that, and *in* all of that, food for the inner

person that not only sustains us but settles and satisfies us. God offers a satisfaction that can coexist with many troubles and disappointments. Jesus, and for the matter, the Scriptures as a whole do not tell us that none of our outward circumstances matter or they should never affect us. They teach us our circumstances do not have to control us. They are not irrelevant, but they aren't ultimate either. What we have in Christ and in relationship to the Father is so great it can nourish, sustain us and even delight us in the midst of many other painful disappointments and difficulties.

**7. What the Father offers is cause for celebration and joy.** The last verse in the story, **Luke 15:32**, says, *It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.*" What happens in redemption, for others and for ourselves and for the Father also, is so great it is a fitting cause to celebrate and be glad. That's why Scripture doesn't tell us to Rejoice always and give things in everything.

Three Christian couples decided to go out together for dinner. When they arrived at the steak house, they were given a number, sent to a crowded, noisy room, and told to wait until their number was called. As they waited, a cocktail waitress came by and said, "Welcome to happy hour. What would you like to drink?" The three couples graciously declined anything from the bar. "Just waiting for a table," they said. Fifteen minutes later, the waitress came by again with the same "happy hour pitch." Again, the group said, "*No thanks – just waiting for a table.*" Five minutes later, she returned. One of the men had mentioned to one of the women that their table was probably being delayed in hopes that they would order something from the bar first. So when the girl came by with her "Welcome to happy hour" speech again, the woman said: "*Girl, we are all Christians, and this is as happy as we're going to get. Just tell them to get us a table!*" I'm afraid the reason that story is kind of funny is because of its punch line.

If you are a Christian struggling with a lot of unsatisfied desires and even hunger in this world, you need to know that God does not tell you that he himself can be a source of comfort, growth, delight, and even pleasure for you just to condemn you. He tells you to give you hope, to

point you to his purpose for your life, and to assure you that your satisfaction in him is his desire for you and one of the ways you glorify him. John Piper is right to say; *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.* So God invites you to come and be filled.

*But you know...*

## **II. WE CAN NOT DELIGHT IN THE FEAST GOD OFFERS UNLESS WE BELIEVE GOD'S GOODNESS FOR AND TOWARDS US.**

In one sense, what Jesus does with these two is show us two very different ways that we can fail to take the Father's offer to heart!

### **A. Sometimes, like the younger brother, the prodigal in the story, we turn our back on the Father and go our own way**

***We are seduced by the invitations of the world. We believe the lie that God cannot satisfy us, but the world can.*** When -- in your mind and heart -- you break free from God, it feels free at first -- like skydiving feels free -- until you realize you don't have a parachute.

Billie Eilish is an incredibly successful and talented singer, songwriter, and actress. Last year she won five Grammy awards, went multiplatinum eight times, released the new James Bond theme, and was set for a six-month world tour which she ended up having to cancel because of continuing concerns about Covid. Then she turned 19. Her songs are as undeniably popular as they are heartbreakingly sad because so many young people especially live in that place of sadness. Last December, I was interested to see that she did an interview in which she said she started watching porn when she was eleven years old. It became an addiction. Eilish explained that at the time, watching so much porn made her feel cool and like "one of the guys," but in the long run, it had a substantial negative impact on her. She said this: *I used to watch a lot of porn. To be honest, I think it really destroyed my brain, and I feel incredibly devastated that I was exposed to so much porn. I'm so angry that porn is so loved, and I'm so angry at myself for thinking that it was OK.* She also stated that porn had a significant impact on how she viewed herself, sex, and relationships in general. That's a particular and perhaps, for some of