

SATISFACTION



IN JESUS

“And they all ate and were satisfied.”

- Mark 6v.42

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Recently, I asked a small group of Christians sitting in my living room, *'How would you describe to a person, who perhaps has never even heard of Jesus or the gospel, the satisfaction that comes from trusting Him?'* As you might imagine, the responses (there were about twenty of us in the room) varied greatly. Words like 'joy,' 'peace,' 'fulfilled,' 'content,' (and other synonyms for satisfaction) were tossed about. They were all perfectly fine responses – it certainly wasn't a test – but what stood out to me as I sat there listening, is that I wasn't hearing anything distinctly Christian in any of our descriptions. What they were describing were all experiences, or feelings, that I've heard yoga enthusiasts, Buddhists, Bahá'ís, Mormons, etc. also use to describe various versions of emotional experiences within their own cultural/spiritual framework. Of course, I have no desire to disparage the faith or spiritual experiences of others. My intention in sharing this is to simply point out the fact that among Christians (at least among the ones in my living room that night), there is an apparent disconnect, or at least an inability to articulate the difference, between our occasional felt experiences as disciples of Jesus and the actual satisfaction that he himself promised to those who would take up their cross and follow him. Of course, one's expectations and actual experience of 'satisfaction' may very well coalesce – and I hope they do – but the question still remains: *How should we describe the satisfaction that comes from trusting Jesus?* Or more even more to the point, *What does Jesus promise us in way of satisfaction? What sort of satisfaction should we expect to experience when we respond to Jesus' call to trust and obey him?*

And... *Why is does this even matter?* Why spend ten whole minutes of your life even attempting to answer the question? Why should we think hard about what it means to find *satisfaction in Jesus*? Well, 1) because everyone's looking for it (i.e., satisfaction in *something*), and 2) because Christians (and would-be Christians) need to know what it is, and what it is *not*. Misaligned expectations will only ever leave people disillusioned, or simply bored (at best). Therefore, my desire is for us to understand accurately the satisfaction that Jesus promises to a world that's looking everywhere for it, and to make sure that the brothers and sisters in my own congregation are growing deeply satisfied in Jesus, as opposed to merely taking up space, disillusioned and bored - like far too many before us.

So here's the plan... It'll probably take you around ten minutes to read through this little booklet. Along the way, we'll be exploring three simple things: 1) various aspects of the kind of satisfaction Jesus offers to those who will follow him, 2) by what means we might experience such satisfaction (i.e., what does the process of experiencing satisfaction actually entail?), and 3) the discipleship applications of living a life satisfied in Him.

WHO? – THE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY WILL BE SATISFIED

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be *satisfied*.’ (Matt.5:6//Lk.6:21//Ps.37) Both in Matthew and Luke, early on in each gospel, Jesus promises satisfaction to those who ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness,’ and this is where we shall start. Shortly, we will look at exactly *what* this ‘satisfaction’ means, or feels like, but before

that, let's consider *who* this satisfaction is for. Jesus offers people a kind of satisfaction that's seemingly better than anything else our world has to offer, a satisfaction that fulfils one's one's hunger and thirst for 'righteousness.' Two simple points here: 1) Jesus does *not* promise to satisfy just any desire, but rather specifically, a desire for righteousness – for things to be set right, for justice to be done, for relationships, and even creation itself to be put as they ought, and 2) Assuming one's desires are for righteousness (as opposed to desiring wickedness or harm), Jesus promises satisfaction for those who are *hungry* and *thirsty* for said righteousness. Of course, much more could be said about the meaning of δικαιοσύνη, particularly as Jesus is using the word in the context of his 'sermon on the mount,' but that would take us well beyond the scope of this little essay. Here, I want to simply emphasize the 'prerequisite' to satisfaction – that is, to *hunger* and *thirst* for righteousness. In other words Jesus is saying that the satisfaction he's offering can only be *experienced* by those who are truly starved for something more, or rather for something that only God himself can offer.

Two quick examples: 1) The 'rich young man' who came to Jesus asking him what he must do to have 'eternal life.' The young man was obviously desiring *something*, but his problem was that that something – whatever he was hoping 'eternal life' meant – clearly wasn't a life he was *starving* for. For him, eternal life may have been the next, or even final step on his journey of spiritual progress, but it wasn't the request of a hungry and thirsty man. Because in the end, 'he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.' (Matt.19:22//Mk.10:22//Lk.18:23) He wanted to

learn, grow, advance, succeed, take the next step in his ‘spiritual journey,’ but he wasn’t a truly hungry man. He had way too much *stuff* to be genuinely hungry. So he left unsatisfied.

2) The parable of the ‘prodigal son.’ (Lk.15:14-17) Unlike the appetite of the rich young man, in this story, Jesus described a son who had lost everything. After squandering his inheritance, he found himself literally alone and starving. We’re told that one day he finally woke up, came to his senses, and decided to begin his journey home, in hope of setting things right between him and his father. Despite the young man’s shame and sense of worthlessness, as he began approaching home, he suddenly found himself engulfed in the loving embrace of his unfathomably gracious father. He was hungry and thirsty and longing to put things right. And the hungry son was satisfied. ‘For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.’ (Ps.107:9)

WHAT? – THE ESSENCE OF SATISFACTION AND A LOVE STORY

‘And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up multiple baskets full of the broken pieces left over.’ (Matt.14:20//Mk.6:42//Lk.9:17 //John 6:12) As impressive a miracle as it is, it’s safe to say that not all four gospel writers were compelled to record this moment merely for the sake of bolstering Jesus’s already staggering miracle résumé. The feeding of the 5000 (and 4000) is a theologically packed demonstration of the kind of satisfaction that only Jesus can truly offer.

I’ve yet to come across this connection in any of the more popular commentaries I’ve read, but I’m proposing that all four gospel accounts of

this bread-multiplying, mass-feeding event are actually evoking the Old Testament story of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth, you'll recall, was the Moabite widow who had travelled far from home to live in Israel with her also widowed mother-in-law, Naomi. Both Ruth and Naomi would have been considered virtually worthless in their tragic state – Naomi, an elderly widow, and Ruth, the widowed foreigner. Their only hope of salvaging any kind of real life was if Ruth was somehow able to wed one of Naomi's dead husband's relatives, and thus, *perhaps*, be given a chance to start over. As the story goes, per her mother-in-law's instructions, Ruth went to glean in the field after the reapers, which is where she met (and eventually married) Boaz, the Bethlehemite, their kinsman redeemer. It's a beautiful story of redemption, new life, and God's faithfulness towards widows and orphans. And I believe it's also an interpretative key to understanding our theme of satisfaction in the Lord.

In Ruth 2:14, it says, 'At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. *And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.*' The echo is so clear. In the gospels, the writers aren't merely telling us the story of miracle loaf multiplication (although, that's an awesome demonstration of the Lord's power) – they're wanting us to connect the dots, to understand that just as Boaz fed and eventually even redeemed Ruth, so was Jesus preparing to love and to redeem the world. And just as Boaz paid the price to redeem and marry 'worthless' Ruth, so too would Jesus pay the price to redeem and marry

his bride, us, the church. This takes us to the heart of satisfaction, as we look to *our* provider and Bethlehemite redeemer, King Jesus.

The memory of Ruth's own redemption story offers us wonderful insights into the essence of the satisfaction that Jesus, like Boaz, truly offers *us* himself. There are several points to be made here, as we draw the parallel between stories:

1) Ruth was given a new identity. In a moment, she went from being an essentially worthless Moabite widow, with no name, no status, no value to speak of, to becoming the wife of Boaz, the respected landowner of the tribe of Judah. *Satisfaction in Jesus means being given a new identity, a new name, one of royal value.*

2) Ruth was given a new family. She wasn't merely given a green card or certificate of freedom. She became the bride of Boaz, which meant that she and Naomi were no longer alone. They had been welcomed into the family. *Satisfaction in Jesus means you are no longer alone in the universe. You have been adopted into God's family.*

3) Along with a new name and new family, also came hope. After being wed to Boaz, Ruth was given a new future to look forward to. Before that, Ruth and Naomi were essentially just waiting to die. Without a husband in the picture, their family line was obsolete. This was simply reality in their ancient world. They had no real reason to go on scraping by. In fact, this is why originally, Naomi had insisted her two daughters-in-law leave her – she knew she had no future in Israel. But Boaz gave Ruth (and Naomi) their future back. He gave them a future to look forward to. *Satisfaction in Jesus means being given hope in the midst of difficult circumstances.*

4) The story of Ruth ends with a short genealogy, from Perez to David. As it turns out, Ruth would become the great grandmother of King David.

Which means, not only was she given a new identity, a new family, a new hope and a future, but Ruth was also given a purpose, an incredible role to play in the story of God. Ruth would help raise the future king of Israel, and ultimately even get to participate in the family line that would bear the Messiah, the king of world! *Satisfaction in Jesus means having purpose, having a significant role to play in God's plan for the world.*

5) Finally, in both the story of Ruth and the 5000, hungry people were *actually* fed. Meaning, that although there was clearly theological symbolism embedded within the story, in both cases, there was also in fact, hungry people literally being fed. God takes care of his people.

Satisfaction in Jesus also means having your basic needs provided for.
(Phil.4:19)

I have no doubt that much more could be said about the unfathomable depths of satisfaction available to us in relationship with Jesus. The love, the joy, the peace, the freedom – a tome could be written on the vast range of experiences that we might point to as examples of what it means to be satisfied in Jesus. Yet I find Ruth's depiction of satisfaction particularly compelling because the story of Ruth and Boaz is a love story – it's satisfaction within the context of a relationship, one that seems to profoundly resonate with the deepest longings of both God's heart and our own creaturely souls as well. As the psalmist wrote:

Satisfy us in the morning
with your steadfast love,

That we may rejoice and

be glad all our days. (Ps.90:14)

How can we experience such gladness? How might we wake up satisfied each morning, even rejoicing, in the steadfast love of our redeemer's fold?

ANOTHER LOVE STORY

Before we move on to answer the question, *how*, or *by what means we can experience satisfaction in Jesus*, I want to look briefly at one more gospel story. In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman who's come to draw water from Jacob's old well. After a brief exchange, Jesus proceeds to offer the woman 'living water.' (v.10) Jesus tells her, *'Everyone who drinks of this [well] water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'* (v.13-14) The woman replies, *Yes, please!* So Jesus responds, *'Go, call you husband, and come here.'* (v.16)

This woman, without a husband (either divorced or widowed five times), and who's now living out of wedlock – no name, no family, no security, no future, no love – is the archetype of a person who's been searching, but clearly failing, to find even a semblance of satisfaction in their life. Until... Jesus offers her 'living water.' Jesus offers the woman 'living water,' *but* how he draws it, as John tells us, calls for a bold move on Jesus's part. In their conversation, Jesus almost immediately leads the woman to a point of honest, and probably quite painful, disclosure. Jesus directly addresses the woman's relational brokenness, and the woman,

perceiving Jesus's prophetic powers, suddenly realizes – at least to some degree – what kind of thirst he was *actually* offering to satisfy. Only a chapter later, John would recount Jesus's words on the last day of the Feast of Booths, where again, he invites those who 'thirst' to come to him and receive 'living water.' Only this time, John clarifies for the reader that Jesus was in fact talking about the Spirit, who believers would eventually receive, once Jesus had been glorified. (John 7:37-39)

John, of course, much more than the other gospel writers, goes to great lengths to recount and unpack Jesus's teachings on the role of the Holy Spirit. (Another subject all together!) But what is relevant to our subject within this encounter is, specifically, Jesus's response to the thirsty woman when she asks to receive 'living water.' He responds by telling her to 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' (John 4:16) *Why?* Because the water that Jesus is offering her – the water that will eternally satisfy – has to do with the longing of a person with no name, no value, no hope, no family, no purpose, etc. Jesus is offering to satisfy the thirsty woman, but again, the satisfaction he offers concerns the deepest longings of the Samaritan woman's soul. This is Ruth meets Boaz all over. What happens next, we will come back to shortly. Because as soon as the woman leaves to tell her village of the 'well' she's found, Jesus experiences satisfaction himself. There's a twist in the story.

HOW? – THE WAY TO EXPERIENCING SATISFACTION IN JESUS

Coming back to the 5000... In all three of the Synoptic Gospels, after the people were fed and satisfied, we're told that Jesus instructed his

disciples to get in the boat and cross the sea, while he ascended the mountain to pray. What happened that night on the boat, as the disciples labored to cross the chaotic waters, gives us significant insight into the ‘lesson of the loaves.’ Mark tells us that at about the fourth watch of the night, Jesus could see his disciples ‘straining at the oars, because the wind was against them, [so] he came to them, walking on the sea.’ (Mk.6:48) The disciples were terrified, for they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus immediately spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.’ (v.50) He then got into the boat, calmed the wind (and their hearts), and brought them safely to where he had commanded them to go. ‘And they were utterly astounded, *for they did not understand about the loaves*, but their hearts were hardened.’ (v.52)

Jesus had just satisfied the 5000 (including the twelve), then sent his disciples on a simple, routine boat ride, that they/we might ‘understand about the loaves.’ And this is the lesson of the loaves: Jesus asks his disciples to give more than they’ve got. He sends them to go where they’re unable to arrive. And he calls them to cross depths where only the Spirit can take them across. Jesus commands his disciples to go, where only he himself is able to take them. What does this mean? The life of satisfaction that ensues from trusting Jesus comes about as we’re led to the end of ourselves – that we might look up and cry out. They were satisfied on the shore – for a moment – but they failed to understand the much weightier implications of the loaves that satisfy. Jesus sent them into the middle of the storm and then came walking to them, seemingly about to pass them

by, so that they might finally come to their senses, be confronted with their weakness, and in their weakness cry out.

I would add here as well that Matthew and Mark's precise account of Jesus ascending the mountain to pray (Ex.24:12), only then to later come to the disciples as a 'ghost' hovering over the water (Gen.1:2), is an allusion to Jesus's ultimate post-resurrection ascension followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Like their evocation of Ruth's story, the evangelists are drawing from, and even foreshadowing, other key moments in the overarching story of God.

At this point, I need to clarify that this 'way' of experiencing satisfaction in Jesus is in fact also the way of Jesus himself – *this* is the way of the cross, the way of 'working,' not for the food that perishes (i.e., the loaves) – not 'straining at the oars' – but for the 'food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.' (i.e., the Spirit who descended and remained upon him.) (John 6:26-27) Those are the words of Jesus recorded in John's retelling of the events immediately following the feeding of the 5000 and his subsequent 'walk' across the water. It would seem that John wants to make sure that we, in contrast to the twelve, *do* understand about the loaves, in that the satisfaction we're longing for, or the righteousness we're hungering and thirsting for – that of Ruth, the Samaritan woman, and the lost son come home – comes from feasting on the 'true bread from heaven.' (v.32) And it is found only in so far as we've come to the utter

and terrifying end of ourselves. Because we must be hungry. We must be starving, virtually to the point of dying to self.

As a deer pants for flowing streams,

so pants my soul for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God,

for the living God. (Ps.42:1-2)

BACK AT JACOB'S WELL

The Samaritan woman left Jesus (presumably, to go tell everyone back in the village about the man she just met), whereupon his disciples returned and began urging him to eat something. And Jesus responded, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' And 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.' (John 4:32&34)

With a sudden twist, the one who had offered to satisfy the woman had himself been satisfied. Despite his disciples urging – because they knew he hadn't eaten for some time – Jesus declined their offer, for he had been fed in doing the will of his Father. Jesus was satisfied as he labored to feed another. He then in turn invited his disciples to join in the feast, exclaiming, 'Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.'

The way to experience satisfaction in Jesus is therefore at least twofold: 1) By coming to the end of oneself. Like the disciples straining at the oars out over the deep, Jesus sends us *to* and meets us *in* our weakness, and *there* he satisfies our souls. And 2) by pouring out oneself for the sake of others. 'You give them something to eat,' Jesus said to his disciples.

And indulge in the food – the deep satisfaction – of doing the will of *your* Father. Jesus rescues us from starvation (cross) and then calls us to participate in feeding others (kingdom). He is the one who meets our deepest longings. And he is the one who offers us purpose, as we, *like him*, pour out our lives for others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? What do you long for more than anything else?
2. Which story resonates with you the most? The hungry crowd of 5000? The fearful disciples, straining at the oars, getting nowhere, caught in a storm? The story of Ruth meets Boaz, her noble kinsmen redeemer? Or the woman at the well? They were all looking for *something*. Which character/s do you identify with the most? And why?
3. Have you ever experienced a moment of deep satisfaction in Jesus? What happened? Was it short-lived? Has it continued to last? Describe your own personal experience/s of finding satisfaction in Jesus.
4. What might it look like to ‘step into the story of Ruth?’ If that love story gives us a picture of satisfaction in our Redeemer, then practically, what might it look like to live out that narrative in your own life and various circumstances.

RECOMMENDED READING

Wright, *How God Became King*

Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*