

“An Invitation to Satisfaction”

Isaiah 55:1-13

Be finding your place in the 55th chapter of Isaiah. Last summer, the world was shocked to learn of the tragic death of Anthony Bourdain. He was a celebrity chef, a successful author, and host of the highly popular travel show, “Parts Unknown.” He was widely considered to be one of the most influential chefs in the world. Which is why it came as such a shock to hear that on June 8 of last year, he took his own life while filming in France.

A close chef friend of his believed he may have died from a ‘broken heart.’ Daniel Boulud, told Us Weekly that, “His heart was broken, I think. I don’t know exactly but I know...I know that what he did was something that was a shock to everyone, absolutely.”

Another close friend, food TV personality Andrew Zimmern, said he had a surprising final conversation with Bourdain. “He was telling me about pursuing my own happiness and he gave me his long sort of speech about it, that I deserved to be happy and I was like, ‘That is so great, where did you get that little nugget?’” he told People. “I had said the same thing to him about five years earlier, which is great because sometimes you even know things yourself but you need to have a friend repeat it back to you...Everyone wanted to be around him and he was just a symphony of a human being.”

Anthony Bourdain seemed to have it all—fame and fortune, popularity and a highly successful career. Unbeknownst to others, he also had a void in his soul that nothing could quite fill, and he saw no other alternative but to end his life.

For the next few weeks, I want us to consider the subject of happiness and contentment—what does it mean, why is it important, and where do you find it.

There are plenty of synonyms for the word in the English language, words such as happiness, joy, satisfaction, pleasure. Perhaps contentment is the best word because it is descriptive of the state of your heart more than it is the state of your emotions. Our emotions may fluctuate given our circumstances, but our contentment level in life certainly doesn't have to.

Happiness is a universal longing in every human heart, and yet it seems to be so very elusive. Many people spend their entire lives trying to be happy, only to come up short time and time again. We convince ourselves into thinking, "If I only I could find the right person...lose some weight...find a better job...make more money—then I'd be happy!"

Would you describe yourself as a person who is truly satisfied in life, someone who is truly content? Or, are you someone who is always on some quest for 'more?'

I know we've talked a lot about him recently, but Tom Brady sat down with 60 Minutes for an interview back in 2005 after his third Super Bowl, and here's what he said:

"Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what is important.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think to myself, there's got to be more than this.' I mean this isn't what it's all cracked up to be."

This quest for 'more' is fundamental to the way that our economy works. We live in a consumer based society, and big name brands know that if they can somehow tap into the psyche of the average American, they'll sell their product. And so they appeal to the innate desire within the human heart for more and

somehow manage to convince us that if we lack their product, our life is not going to be as satisfied as it could be. We can buy happiness!

McDonald's introduced the 'Happy Meal' in 1979 and has convinced a generation of kids that they can't be happy without one. (By the way, you ever wondered why their clown always has a grin on its face? 20 billion Happy Meals sold, that's why!)

What does it take to make a person **happy**? All of us have a desire to be happy. There isn't a single person in this room that wants to be miserable. Does God want me to be a happy person? Now, I'm not talking about a shallow bliss that is dependent upon the right circumstances. Nor am I talking about pasting on a fake smile in the midst of life's heartaches. Rather, I'm describing an abiding happiness in Christ, a deep-seated contentment in Him that transcends our circumstances. The joy of the Lord is our strength!

I know that you've heard this statement before—"God isn't concerned about your happiness, He's concerned about your holiness!" While it is certainly true that God desires for us to be truly holy, it is also true that he desires for us to be truly satisfied. The two aren't at odds with one another. Christ alone can make us both holy and happy.

Randy Alcorn — *"When we seek holiness at the expense of happiness or happiness at the expense of holiness, we lose both the joy of being holy and happiness birthed by obedience. God commands holiness, knowing that when we follow His plan, we'll be happy. He also commands happiness, which makes obeying Him not only my duty, but also [my delight]."*

Alcorn goes on to say that 'the human deficiency of both holiness and happiness points to our separation from God.' Though people don't intuitively realize their

desperate need for redemption, they do instinctively know that they want to be happy—and they're troubled when they aren't. And so this universal longing for contentment is evidence we've been made in the image of God. There's a God-shaped hole in every person that only God Himself can fill.

That's why I want to take some time and trace the subject as we find it presented in the Bible. What is contentment, true happiness, and what is the secret to our possessing it?

With this in mind, let's begin by taking a look at **Isaiah 55**.

Isaiah lived during a time of decline and under the shadow of Assyria. His sixty year long ministry (740-680 B.C.) was centered around Jerusalem and he was a prophet to Judah during the reigns of four kings:

- Uzziah (Called 'Azariah' in 2 Kings 15)
- Jotham
- Ahaz
- Hezekiah

Uzziah was one of the longest reigning kings in Judah's history. For some 52 years, he led the southern kingdom in a time of prosperity. Yet as the nation prospered materially, they also declined spiritually. **Ironically, the more that the people had, the less that they trusted in God.** They placed their trust in military alliances and in their own strength. Toward the end of his reign, King Uzziah became proud and attempted to assume the privileges of the priest and burn incense on the altar of the temple. He was judged for it and became a leper until the day of his death.

Jotham, his son, became king in his father's place. During his 16 years on the throne, Assyria began to emerge as a world power under Tiglath-Pileser.

Compromise and spiritual apathy continued to be widespread, and Isaiah cried out against the empty rituals that God's people were going through, all while giving their hearts to idols at the same time.

King Jotham died as a relatively young man, and his son Ahaz became his successor. Ahaz was one of the most wicked kings to ever reign over the southern kingdom.

2 Kings 16:2-3—“And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, and his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.”

Hezekiah becomes king after Ahaz and reigns for 29 years. The Bible says that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and trusted in the Lord to such a degree that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah before or after him.

2 Kings 18:6-7—“For he held fast to the Lord. He did not depart from following Him, but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered.”

But even Hezekiah's influence wasn't enough to keep the people of Judah from plunging headlong into idolatry. His son Manasseh becomes one of the most evil kings in their history and reigns for some 55 years.

What I want you to see is that it was during these days of material prosperity, compromise, and idolatry that Isaiah lifted up his voice in prophetic warning. By failing to be content in God, they were destroying themselves. Isaiah preached God's Word to a people who refused to listen to his warning, and disaster loomed on the horizon. He cried out against the empty ritualism that the worship of God had been reduced to. He called upon people to turn from their incessant pursuit of idols and to seek the Lord while He may be found, to call upon Him while He is near. Because He is the only One who can truly satisfy the heart.

1. A common THIRST (55:1)

The Lord presents us with a universal reality in verse 1 as he refers to 'everyone who thirsts.' Water was a precious commodity in biblical times. Yet it also is a picture of soul satisfaction. Within each human heart, there is a restlessness, a thirst, an ache if you will. Where does the desire for satisfaction come from? Is it a product of the fall? Seeking satisfaction in things other than God is certainly a product of the fall, but a longing for contentment is evidence that we're made in God's image.

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden, He created them to be perfectly content and complete. They didn't lack anything. Adam walked with God in the cool of the day, which is an image that invokes contentment and satisfaction. Adam was content because God is content.

Have you ever thought about God being content? Before we can even begin to talk about contentment in our own lives, we need to remember that we've been created by a God who is perfectly content in Himself. Because He is content in Himself, He shows us in Scripture that the only way to find contentment is in Him.

A perfectly content God creates a perfectly content couple:

Genesis 1:28-31 — “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”

God says, “I have given,” and it was all ‘very good.’

Adam didn’t need anything else to satisfy his heart! He was made to be happy and content in God, and God was glorified as Adam was satisfied in Him. Adam was created to enjoy God and God’s gifts. The world was custom made for the glory of God and the happiness of God’s creatures.

Even though the world is very different now, you still can find evidence of God’s design everywhere you look. For instance, why did God make our taste buds for us to enjoy food, or wire our brain with pleasure centers?

God has given us the ability to find joy and happiness in something as simple as a cool drink on a hot summer day, or an early morning walk along the beach at sunrise.

God doesn’t create and place man in the garden without also providing for man’s contentment. Which by the way, some people confuse being content with being complacent. There is a huge difference. God gave Adam a job. He gave him

the responsibility of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over creation. And it was satisfying.

Genesis 2:15-17—“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

When God made man in His image in the very beginning, He made him to be content as a worshiper and image bearer. He was created to be perfectly satisfied in the God who satisfies. Adam had all that he needed.

Which is why his sin is so heinous. Adam chose to seek satisfaction outside of God and thereby plunged the entire creation into sin and death. He latches on to the forbidden fruit, buying into the lie that in some way the fruit provided him with something that God had not.

We've been latching on to the forbidden fruit ever since, still thinking that in some measure, it will provide us with the satisfaction that we lack.

Not only is there a common thirst, but notice also...

2. An empty LIFE (55:2)

Notice there in verse 2 to how the Lord describes the foolish pursuit of God-substitutes. He says, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” In other words, “Why go after that which doesn’t fill the void in your soul? Why work so hard for that which only widens the chasm?”

Sin leads us to seek satisfaction anywhere other than God. It produces an unholy discontentment within the heart.

The world is full of desperate people who are thirsty for something that they can't articulate. And so they drink from contaminated wells surrounded by flashing signs that are advertising happiness. But it is an illusion.

C.S. Lewis—*“What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could ‘be like God’...be their own masters, invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.”*

Every sin we commit in some way is an attempt to be happy through a God-substitute. This is what idolatry is.

Jeremiah 2:13—**“My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water.”**

It was true in Isaiah's day, and it's the same in our day.

The brokenness that now is descriptive of our world comes as the result of humanity's refusal to find satisfaction in God. Sin leads us to seek happiness in everything else but the only One in whom it can truly be found. We take what is secondary and make it primary. Everyone wants the good life, yet no one knows where to find it, even though plenty of 'gurus' tell us how they think it's found.

The Word of God says that the good life—the one that truly satisfies—exists only when we stop wanting a better one. As long as our eyes are scanning the

horizon for the next big thing that we think will bring us true happiness, the very happiness we long for will remain elusive. The insatiable lust for more is a virus that drains our souls of contentment. The more you have, the more you want, and the more you want, the less you have. It is a vicious never-ending cycle.

Have you noticed this pattern in your own life? No matter what a man earns, he never earns enough. No matter how beautiful a woman is, she is never beautiful enough. Clothes are never fashionable enough. Cars are never nice enough. Gadgets are never modern enough. Houses are never big enough. Relationships are never romantic enough. Life is never full enough.

The reason is that the heart hasn't found contentment in God, the only One who can fill the void. Make no mistake, God desires for you and me to be content, to be happy, to be satisfied—but that satisfaction can only be found in Him.

Augustine — *“Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”*

I read where a popular fashion model recently said:

Aimee Mullins — *“Life is about making your own happiness and living by your own rules.”*

Really? The first man and woman chose to go that route and the results have been disastrous for humanity.

C.S. Lewis — *“If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”*

Our text describes a common thirst and an empty life, but notice also that God has extended...

3. An open INVITATION (55:3-9)

Are you thirsty for a drink that satisfies? Are you tired of a life that is empty of meaning? Then hear the Word of the Lord—words of mercy and words of grace and words of open invitation to all who are weary and frustrated in their empty pursuit of that which doesn't satisfy! If it is true and lasting happiness you desire, then look no further:

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.”

How can anyone buy anything if they have no money?

They had no currency to give. They had spent all of their resources worshipping idols and giving God lip service. Sin had left them high and dry, but God is extending to them an open invitation to come to the waters, to buy wine and milk all without money and price. How is it possible?

The only way is if it is something that has been purchased by Another! In His grace, God Himself would pay the price.

Look at what He goes on to say in verse 3:

*“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. Behold, I made him a witness to the people, a leader and a commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you. **Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, for He will abundantly pardon.** For My thoughts are not your thoughts,*

neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

True happiness and satisfaction isn't something that comes from the outside in; it only comes from the inside out. It is found only in God—His grace, His life, and His gifts. That's why Jesus said:

John 10:10—“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (word means excessive, over and above)

Matthew 11:28—“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

John 14:6—“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

We talk a whole lot more about Jesus being the way and the truth than we do about Him being the life. A Christian is someone who has come to possess the life of Christ. He takes up residence in your heart. It is no longer you who live, but it is Christ who lives in you. If Christ lives in me, how could I ever lack anything? (see Philippians 4:11-13)

In all of their material wealth and prosperity, the nation of Judah could not find satisfaction. And unfortunately, it would take the judgment of God in the form of Assyrian bondage before they would realize just how foolish and empty their pursuits had been.

What might it take for God to really get your attention?

There's one final thing in the text that I want you to see. A common thirst, an empty life, an open invitation, and...

4. A satisfied HEART (55:10-13)

My problem is that God's thoughts are not my thoughts, nor are His ways my ways. So what does He do? Listen:

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

What will God accomplish by means of His Word?

*"For you shall go out in **joy** and be led forth in **peace**; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into **singing**, and all the trees of the field shall **clap** their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."*

The last two verses describe the joy that God's people will experience under the reign of the coming Messiah. God will accomplish His purposes for His people by means of His Word, and His Word will not return to Him void.

His Word brings happiness to the heart that receives it. The Bible shows us how Jesus fulfills this promise:

John 1:14—“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

Many of us believe that Christ has the power to save, but I'm not so sure that we believe He is sufficient to satisfy.

There are a whole lot of Christians who live under a cloud that doesn't seem to go away. Whether it be sadness, or loneliness, restless discontentment in life, they've given in to the belief that these feelings are inevitable given their circumstances. We forfeit our joy far too easily.

Randy Alcorn — *“Research indicates that there is little correlation between the circumstances of people's lives and how happy they are. Yet when people respond to the question, ‘Why aren't you happy?’ they tend to focus on their current difficult circumstances. In our fallen world, troubles and challenges are constants. Happy people look beyond their circumstances to Someone so big that by His grace, even great difficulties become manageable—and provide opportunities for a deeper kind of happiness.”*

We can live our lives in one of two ways. On the one hand, we can live only for the here and now, focusing all of our attention and affections on the immediate. On the other hand, we can live with eternity in mind and seek Christ first and foremost above all else.

Better yet, how much happier we will be if we learn to rejoice in what the Lord is doing now, every day, every hour, and every minute of our lives.

Psalm 118:24—**“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”**

Philippians 4:4—**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.”**

Hebrews 13:5-6—**“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”**

If you are having a hard time being content, then I want to encourage you to try a little exercise. Make a list of everything you have that you don't deserve, and then make a list of everything you deserve that you don't have. When you realize how kind and gracious God has been to you, then I guarantee you'll begin to see things with a proper perspective.

Anything less than Hell is cause for celebration!

"Father, I rejoice in Your salvation. You are the God who saves, and You are the God who satisfies. As the Fountain of living water, Jesus Christ alone can quench my thirsty heart! Amen."