

## *The Starving Church*

In the midst of plenty, the church of Jesus Christ is starving.

And this should be the cause of the greatest concern.

It is not that many are not eating. It is that they are eating spiritual junk food or worse! So their hunger remains unfilled. They are spiritually unsatisfied.

We've all read articles exposing the harm being done our bodies - especially those of our youth ... by making today's junk food a steady diet.

God accused his Old Testament people of feeding on ashes and wind (Isaiah 44:20 and Hos. 12:1). No nourishment there! No satisfaction. No wonder it's a rarity to find a spiritually satisfied Christian.



It is not my wish now to denounce the junk food garbage of television or movies, though that may be highly appropriate. I have one point to make: We are starving because we are not hungering and thirsting after God.

The most important prayer we can pray is: "God give me a holy hunger for yourself." We will remain spiritually unsatisfied, spiritually starved, until we are filled with - satisfied with - God Himself.

### **SATISFIED WITH GOD HIMSELF ALONE**

There is a great mistake made in regard to the fullness of the Spirit. And it has settled as a curse on the body of Christ. The fullness of the Spirit is conceived of as "it". "Do you have it?" we are asked.

What an awful affront to the almighty God. The fullness of the Spirit has been mistakenly relegated to a one-time experience. It is clearly not so in the book of Ephesians where we are commanded to "be filled with the Spirit." And I will explain why in a moment.

But first let me remind you of our purpose that we may no longer be spiritually starved children of God, but that we may feast at His heavenly banquet table where His banner over us is love (Song of Solomon 2:4).

Then let me assure you that I am in no way belittling your experience of the Holy Spirit. But to last a lifetime, we simply must learn that no experience of God is sufficient.

Too many people who have had a special experience of God or His Spirit return to a state of spiritual dissatisfaction.

## HE NATURALLY FILLS ALL

Now, let me take just a moment to deal with "fullness" in the book of Ephesians and then go on to show how our hunger and thirst can be fully and perpetually satisfied.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that they "might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, "that they "might be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19).

Paul points out that God gave the church elders "for the perfecting of the church," ... "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature (greatness) of the fullness of Christ" (4:11-13).

And the previous verse (10) says of this same Christ, "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." Oh my, how I feel like shouting "glory!"

The God, who in His three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit wants to fill us full of Himself, is the same God who fills all things. The only thing He doesn't fill is the rebellious human thing - with the rebellious demons and the areas they control in their open rebellion against Him.

And He so loves this human creation of His that He chooses for a time to permit this rebellion to continue while He woos them back to Himself and His love so that once again He can fill them too as He does all things else.

## NOT RELIGION BUT RELATIONSHIP

He is the Great I AM who is the center and circumference of all things and the fullness too, and without whom there is no rightness, no completeness, no fullness, no satisfaction, no rest, no peace, no joy, no love.

But, here is where we get off track. We treat Him as an "it," a something. HE IS NOT!!! HE IS THE GREAT ETERNAL PERFECT SOMEONE!! He is a living, loving, feeling, caring, compassionate, hurting, hearing, longing, wanting, and giving PERSON! He is the PERSON who gave humans personality to reflect His PERSON. So, Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship. An intimate, personal relationship between persons: God and you.

The beatitudes say: "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). But Paul reminds us in I

Cor. 1:30 that it is Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

It is clear from the entire New Testament that there is no righteousness for us apart from Jesus. He is "the Lord, our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6; 33:16).

It is He we are to hunger after! There is a dearth in the church of teaching the need of seeking after God, of hungering and thirsting for Him, of longing to get to know our God, our Lord, our Savior in an intimate personal relationship of love.

No wonder we are starving to death; no wonder we are dying of thirst spiritually speaking.

Jesus said He is the Bread of Life. He called Himself the Living Water. He said, He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

## **STARVING CHRISTIANS**

What a curse has our theology become! We have it all pigeon-holed that this means that a person born again of the Spirit, a child of God will never hunger or thirst.

My dear friend, if this were so, we would have to conclude that most professedly born again Christians are not so, for their lives are patently filled with dissatisfaction.

Their thirst is not even largely quenched or their hunger largely satisfied.

You see, Jesus Christ is the Door and the Way not merely to the new birth but to everything thereafter that belongs to the Christian.

And, my dear friend, you starve that newborn baby, and he'll become a chronic crier ... remind you of some Christians?

It does remind me of a circumstance in our oldest daughter's life. We'd moved half way across the continent when Sherrie was about six weeks old. A few weeks later, she started to cry almost perpetually.

When we took her to the doctor, he said, "There's nothing wrong with this child, except you're starving her."

The "formula" she was on hadn't been changed, and it just wasn't strong enough any longer to meet her increased needs.

What about you? Are you getting enough spiritual nourishment?

I think I know what you anticipate next: a nice neat admonition to more Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and Christian fellowship.

You can, my dear friend, do all that and live still in a perpetually starving state.

## **HUNGER FOR GOD**

What I am going to direct you to is two-fold. First, pray specifically that God will give you a holy hunger for Himself. Second, begin spending just as much time alone in fellowship with the Lord as you can bring yourself to do, and expand it just as much as you can without undue pressure. Now, what could be simpler?

A few years ago as I drove along I remember asking God from day to day, oh so clearly, that He would give me love, joy, and holiness.

And you know what?

He sent me some of the most pressing trials in my thirty years of frequently beset ministry.

But, you know what else?

He sent me, through them, what I had not asked for: Himself.

And because He sent me Himself, He sent me more love and joy and holiness than I had ever ~now. And more.

#### **MORE "PRAYER" TIME**

He sent me peace and rest and faith.

And He's even sent me a little of those other fruits of the spirit that I was so sure could never characterize this aggressive, impatient, often thoughtless and prideful human: -longsuffering, gentleness, goodness and meekness.

How did He do it?

Well, because He knew both my willfulness and that I meant what I prayed; He chose to get my attention by sending me trials.

Then He led me to double, then triple, then quadruple my "prayer time."

Then He forced me to change my "prayer time" to "love time": to stop worrying and begging Him for things and learn to love and worship and rest in Him.

Then He began teaching me about myself and Himself: me my problem, Him my answer. ME nothing. Him everything.

Then He taught me to love Him and worship and praise and thank and adore Him just for Himself, not for any benefit.

Then He taught me He is totally trustworthy. He does all things well.

I need not fear or doubt or mistrust Him in any circumstance. I can trust Him with, and in, the "very worst" circumstance of life.

Now He's begun to teach me all over again how to pray, in rest and trust and simple elemental faith in Him.

Notice, please, I did say begun.

But this can be yours and more - so much more.

First, ask God to give you a holy hunger for Himself.

Second, spend just as much time as needed to searching the Word, not for intellectual truth but for God Himself.

**Feed on Him. Long for Him. Seek Him. Lose your will in His will.**

**Admit any rebellion or sin or disobedience. Confess and seek to forsake it. But spend little time on yourself, much time on Him.**

### **ABIDE IN HIM**

**As you abide in the vine, your branch will thrive by the process of osmosis. Changes will be almost imperceptible, perhaps, but dynamic and God glorifying.**

**Your delights may be delayed. Patience may be necessary. But ultimately those delights in your Master will overflow.**

**You will know the truth of John 4:14, 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst - a well of water springing up!'**

**And, my dear friend, the sure way to make people hungry for Jesus, is for you to be hungering and thirsting for Him and letting show to your world how He satisfies that hunger and that thirst.**

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