

“Are You Satisfied?”

Introduction: As the summer Olympic Games draw closer, one of the more amazing performances has already taken place: Swimmer Michael Phelps has qualified for his fifth Olympic games! He began at age 16 and is coming up on the ripe old age of 32. Incredibly, before his fifth games even begin, Phelps is already the most decorated athlete in Olympic history, having earned 22 medals, a staggering 18 of which are gold. But what has also emerged as his story has come back into the public eye in recent weeks is that his life hasn't been as satisfying as we might imagine from achieving all those medals. In fact, two years ago, he seemed to hit a dead end, finally entering a drug and alcohol rehab program in AZ. As his coach put it, “After 2012 [Michael] had no idea what do to with the rest of his life. I remember one day I said, ‘Michael, you have all the money that anybody your age could ever want or need; you have a profound influence in the world; you have free time—and you’re the most miserable person I know. What’s up with that?’”

What was up with that was expressed by Phelps in the following way: “It’s like we dreamed the biggest dream we could possibly dream and we got there. What do we do now?” Part of the problem was that to get there, Phelps became so self-absorbed that he didn’t even know the names of all his Olympic teammates, he became so driven that he and his coach had frequent verbal and physical altercations, and became so singularly focused that the development of his personality and character took a back seat to the development of his swimming talents. Phelps achieved great success alright,, but when he got there, as many find, the view wasn’t as satisfying and fulfilling as he thought it would be.

Fortunately, he now seems to be in a much better place. His stay in rehab gave him the freedom to become vulnerable, for the first time. He even began to read “The Purpose Driven Life” right before the trials began, he’s enjoying the challenges and joy of being a father, and his father, with whom he had become estranged at an early age, is now back in his life. The point of all this is not to pick on Phelps; it’s simply to help us ask the question: Are you satisfied? Or, do you have that nagging feeling that there might be something more?

To help us consider these questions, we pick up this morning with Beatitude #4. We’ve called these blessings with which Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount descriptions of the good life as Jesus sees it. They are not ways that we earn favor with God, but ways in which real life begins to emerge in us, kingdom of God life, as the good news of the gospel takes hold of us and Jesus, by his Spirit, begins to walk with us. They are also statements that turn the thinking of the world upside down. So, as it comes to satisfaction, the beatitude of the world might run something like this: “Blessed are those who shop, eat, and achieve, for they will find happiness.” But Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” What is the righteousness we are to crave? How will it satisfy us? How might we cultivate such craving?

I. Craving Right Relationships

A. Righteousness is a relational term. It signifies right-relatedness. It means to be in right relationship. The Christian Story reveals that the fundamental nature of reality is relationship because all things have been brought into existence by a triune God. God, in other words, exists as a relational being. Being made in his image means we are relational as well and the opening chapters of the Bible reveal four basic relationships for which we were created: a relationship with God, with our self, with others, and with the rest of creation. To parse this out a bit, we are spiritual creatures, designed for trusting, obeying, loving, and delighting in God. We are psychological creatures, designed to embrace ourselves as beloved by God. We are social creatures, designed to live in community and fellowship with others. And we are physical

creatures, whose well-being is tied up with the welfare of the earth we were put here to care for. Living in right relationship in these four areas is what it means to live righteously.

B. But with the entrance of sin into the world, our wires got crossed and each of these primary relationships shorted out. Our intimacy with God was replaced with fear. Our understanding of our self became characterized by guilt and shame. Our relationship with others became dominated by self-interest. Our relationship with the earth became one of abuse. The affects of this spread throughout our life. Our cravings for food and intimacy and success, none of them bad when rightly ordered, have become compulsive, obsessive, and even addictive. Economic systems have become exclusive and discriminatory. Political systems have become oppressive and unjust.

C. Fortunately, by his grace, God has broken into our world in the person of his son who came, as we heard Paul describe it in his letter to the Colossians, to reconcile all things (Col. 2:16). Jesus has come to re-wire our disordered hungers and thirsts, to set us in the right direction again, the path of righteousness, the way of right relationships. As we follow him, he reforms our appetites. So, quite simply, to hunger and thirst for righteousness means to crave right relationships, with God, self, others, and the earth.

## II. Getting Satisfaction

A. Such hunger and thirst means not just to have a snack from time to time, but to passionately pursue the full course meal that is righteousness. And that passionate pursuit of those right relationships, promises Jesus, is what will lead us toward satisfaction. Such satisfaction will be ours in full on that day when the kingdom of God breaks through all the way and the re-wiring job of Jesus has been completed. But because he has already come, and is present by his Spirit among us, our hunger and thirst can begin to be met now as we allow him to heal our relationship with him, self, others, and the earth.

B. Part of Michael Phelps' problem, again not to pick on him but just to illustrate, is that his life had become all about him, standing all alone really, on the top of a medals podium, and you just "can't get no satisfaction" if it's all about you! And of course it's interesting to note that a song by that name, written and sung by the Rolling Stones in 1965, became a #1 hit in the U.S., and is considered by *Rolling Stone* (the magazine) to be the second greatest song of all time. Not only is the tune catchy, but the lyrics reveal that what the world has to offer, from what we hear on the radio, or see on television, or even in the girls that walk by (not to be sexist, that's just what the band wrote!) is not satisfying, no matter how hard we try, try, try, try.

C. The lyrics tap into something deep within us, and that is that we were wired for satisfaction by God. God, actually, has been preaching this for a long, long time. Centuries ago, God identified our problem with this image (Jeremiah (2:13)):

[My people] have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, cisterns that cannot hold water.

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## III. Cultivating Right Craving

A. So how can we start to crave rightly? How might we cultivate a good and proper hunger and thirst? We can come at it from two sides. First, we can pay attention to what we are pursuing. Where are we spending most of our time and money? Where is it taking us? Where do we find ourselves dissatisfied? Where have the cisterns we have dug for ourselves become cracked? How are we dissatisfied? As philosopher Peter Kreeft puts it, when talking about satisfaction: "Dissatisfaction is the second best thing there is, because it dissolves the glue that entraps us to false satisfactions, and drives us to God, the only true satisfaction" (*For Heaven's Sake*, 160)..

B. From the other side, we can make sure that we are drinking deeply and daily from the well of God's grace, where we find the living water that will change our appetites. The Ten Commandments provide a helpful model for us to think about this. Each of these commandments has something to do with right relationships, beginning with God, then moving on to our relationship with the rhythm of time, then our relationships within our family, and finally our relationships with others, including what belongs to them. But as we've noticed before, these Ten are not a list of do's and don'ts that we must obey in order to enter into relationship with God. Rather, they are a picture of the righteousness, the right-relatedness, that flows from God's grace. We hear this grace declared before the commandments even begin: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). As God then goes on to give the Ten, it's as if he's saying: "Now that I have rescued you from this awful, distorted, twisted, enslaved way of living, here's how things are going to look in the new relationship we have begun."

What God didn't say to the Israelites was, "Get your act together and I'll think about rescuing you and helping you re-order your life." Rather, he simply bent down to them and tenderly enveloped them with unrelenting, irrational love (Elizabeth Nagel, *Give Us This Day*, p. 45). Time and time again, especially when they found themselves off the path of righteousness, they were called back to this truth of the God who had come to their rescue and who desired the very best for them. The more we live from this unrelenting, irrational love, the more we will cultivate the desire that this love be present in all of our other relationships.