

Gospel and the Bread of Life

Outline

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4. Gospel and the Bread of Life

1. The Search for Lasting Contentment and Fulfillment.

We all have a desire for something deep within our hearts. You may call it happiness, success, fame, or fortune. But eventually, most of us long for something that gives us **lasting contentment and fulfilment** and deeply satisfies our hearts (and our hearts are bottomless). When you're young, you think that if you get the right career, the right spouse, and make money, you will have lasting contentment. You dream about it. But as years pass, those who achieve a promising career, good marriage, and make money — instead of deep and lasting contentment, still find something missing. What is missing, something they can't define or name is the sense of an **unknown emptiness** in their heart. And unless they fill that emptiness, they will not find lasting contentment and fulfilment. Though there are times when people experience pleasure and satisfaction, they cannot hold on to it. And that makes them long for something lasting that they could keep.

2. Two Types of People, their search for lasting contentment and fulfilment

Type (A) thinks lasting contentment and fulfilment are still out there.

Type (B) thinks lasting contentment and fulfilment don't exist.

Type (A) thinks lasting contentment and fulfilment are still out there. There are four approaches:

- iii. The optimistic approach of youth: They start with dreams, ideas, and confidence that they will **make it in life**. They don't even think of lasting contentment. They don't even know what that is and don't even care whether it exists.
- iv. The driven approach of the young adult: These people are not youth anymore but still young. They have attained some success in their life. But they think there's more in life, so they drive themselves to find lasting contentment & fulfilment. If they only work harder, they think they will find it. They take risks; they change jobs; they change countries. But they still can't find contentment that lasts. Yet they don't give up. They continue to drive themselves and drive others as well.
- v. The angry approach of the frustrated: As people move on, many realise that they can't find lasting contentment & fulfilment. And some get angry and blame two things:
 - Society is prejudiced against them or won't allow them to do what they like.
 - Other people are against them. They often blame their spouse for being negative or discouraging, their bosses or business partners for betrayal etc.

Some of the reasons may be partly true. Still, instead of thinking that their search is defective, angry people must blame others for this or that. But remember, blaming others has an expiry date. But they don't stop being angry. They take their anger to the grave and become destructive along the way.

- vi. The despair approach of the defeated: These people don't find lasting contentment & fulfilment but blame themselves. They say, "I'm stupid, I'm a loser, I'm just not good enough". These people often suffer from depression.

Type (B) that thinks lasting contentment & fulfilment doesn't exist.

There are three approaches here:

- i. The cynical approach of those who have seen it all and realise lasting contentment & fulfilment doesn't exist. These people started life with optimism, but as they became around 50 years old, they concluded that lasting contentment & fulfilment never existed in the first place. They even suppose love is temporary. So, they harden their hearts and laugh at lovers because they believe love will not last. But love is what makes us human. And when you stop believing in love, you stop being human inside. You die inside. Many old couples are like that.
- ii. The Buddhist approach (many Hindus, too, believe in this approach). These people say you are so unhappy because you attach your heart to things and people; they are all temporary. You will eventually lose them. If you live long enough, you will lose your spouse to death and often even your children, either because they marry and leave you or they too may die before you die. **So, this part is true.** Then they say, so detach yourself from things and people. Remind yourself that, in time, you will lose everything you love. So, detach yourself from everything. Don't love anything or any person too much. **Now, this part will not help you** —because to love is essentially being human.
- iii. The caring, unselfish approach: These people don't believe lasting contentment & fulfilment exist in the running after things in this world (money, houses, careers etc.). To find meaning in life, they go the opposite way by working for charity and justice in a very caring, unselfish way. But you must have a tremendous spiritual inner contentment because you will find that the many people you are helping don't want to change. Then your charity work becomes so complex and unsatisfying that you could lose your vision. Many people who work for Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) start well but then lose their vision. Then some switch their search for lasting contentment & fulfilment just like other people in Type A. or become like Type B.

3. Our Heart needs Transformation

The Bible teaches in Prov 4:23 that *"above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."* So, the decisions we make in our lives follow what we love most in our heart and do not follow what we reason in our minds. If we love making money more than we love justice, we will tend to underpay our workers even though we know it's wrong. If we find our identity only in our career, we will neglect the family we love, causing them to suffer. Now, to love making money or to love a career are not wrong in themselves, but the order of love in our hearts is wrong. **The proper order** should be to love justice more than love making money. And the love for family should be more than our love for identity in a career. Jesus gives us two commands, which, if we obey, will reset the proper order for our life and love.

Matt 22:37 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

Matt 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

God is relational: Christianity teaches that God is Three Persons in One God (Trinity) — essentially, God is relational. God created us in His image, so we are relational. He made us for a loving relationship with Him and with each other. The Cynical or Buddhist approach of detachment is not of God. It's not God's design

for us. It's not the solution to finding lasting contentment and fulfilment. The proper human way to find that inner lasting contentment and fulfilment that we search for is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It means to love God more than anything else. However, suppose you love anything more than God; then anything else won't be big enough to fill your heart, and it won't last. In that case, it is not permanent, and you will lose it and be disappointed. But if you love God supremely, He is the only one whom no one can take from you — He is permanent. And when you love God supremely instead of other things or people as your most profound source of contentment, you can enjoy those other things for what they are. Your money, your career, your gifts etc., becomes a great way to be a blessing to your family and others around you. They don't become the source of your contentment and identity. And if you lose them, you will still find God there for you to fill up whatever is temporarily lacking. The psalmist says, *"I always keep my eyes on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure (Ps 16:8-9).*

The problem with our heart. God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, to love Him and enjoy all creation. But they disobeyed God and turned their hearts to love created things more than love God. In doing so, they turned away from the source of spiritual food that would give them lasting contentment and fulfilment. Since then, all humans have been born with a heart to love creation more than the Creator. All humans are spiritually empty even though they don't know it. And our actions follow what we love most in our heart, not what we think is right in our mind (Prov 4:23). Our selfish and independent hearts love things and people of this world more than we love God. And because all created things will not last, they cannot give us fulfilment and lasting contentment. Our hearts can only be fed and satisfied by God. Our hearts need transformation.

4. Gospel and the Bread of Life (Read John 6:25-35).

Background: Jesus had fed 5000 people with just five loaves and two fish. Having seen the miracle, the people wanted to make Him king (John 6:1-15). But He withdrew and, unknown to them, crossed over the other side of the lake. They eventually found Him. But Jesus said they were looking for Him because He fed them, and He added, **don't work for food that spoils** but work for food that gives eternal life, which only He can give (v27).

Bread (roti) is the staple food in most countries, including North India and the Middle East. We need to eat bread to live. When Moses led the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land in Palestine, they travelled through the hot desert in Exodus 16; God fed them with "manna" from heaven every morning. It looked like dew on the ground, but they could gather it and make it bread.

Food that spoils: Jesus uses this example to show us that we all hunger for lasting contentment but look for it in the wrong places — in creation rather than the Creator. We look for contentment in things and relationships in this world. But just like food that eventually spoils and doesn't last, so do everything, including relationships, which will also ultimately spoil and not last. Things and relationships may be good, but they don't last. Like beauty and strength, they fade away as years go by.

Bread of Life: God fed Israelites with manna from heaven when Moses led them through the desert. However, the Israelites eventually died as all people died. But Jesus says in John 6:35, "I AM the Bread of Life", that His Father sent to give eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. (This is the first of seven great I AM in John's Gospel referring to God's Name in Exod 3:14. The others are John 8:12, 10:7,9, 10:11,14, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1,5)

Everything we eat (except for salt and a few minerals) comes from things that must die to provide us with physical life. Plants (vegetables) must die to give us food to eat. Grains must be crushed and die to make bread to give us food to eat—for physical life. God sent His Son Jesus to be crushed and die on the cross to pay for the sin of loving creation more than loving the Creator. And He came to turn our hearts back to God, to satisfy our spiritual hunger for contentment that lasts for eternity. Jesus died to make God's love real and tangible to us so we could see how much He loved us and turn our hearts back to Him. He paid for our sins by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. He is alive forever, reaching out to us, offering the

Bread of Life to fill our unknown inner emptiness and give us everlasting contentment and fulfilment. This is the gospel.

Read John 6:35-59

John 6:49–50 Jesus contrasts two breads (vv. 30–33): eating manna resulted in dying, and “eating” Jesus, the bread from heaven, results in not dying (i.e., eternal life).

John 6:51: **Bread of Life.** (Jesus repeats vv 33,35,47,48) Jesus refers to His coming sacrifice on the cross. Jesus voluntarily lays down His life for sinful humanity.

John 6:52: **The crowd argues** because they don’t understand the spiritual significance (as in John 3:4, 4:15). The Law forbids drinking blood and eating meat with blood on it (Lev 17:10–14; Dt 12:16; Ac 15:29). The crowd is unable to go beyond the physical perspective.

John 6:53–58 **eat . . . drink.** Jesus’ point has spiritual, rather than literal, significance. Just as eating and drinking are necessary for physical life, so is belief in His sacrificial death on the cross required for eternal life. The eating of His flesh and drinking His blood symbolise the need to accept Jesus’ work on the cross. The flesh signifies giving His life, and the blood signifies His death on the cross for our sins. Jesus’ reference here to eating and drinking was not referring to the Holy Communion for two significant reasons: (a) Holy Communion was not instituted yet, and (b) if Jesus were referring to Holy Communion, then it would teach that anyone partaking of Holy Communion would receive eternal life.

John 6:37 Whoever comes to me I will never cast out implies that people should never think, “Maybe I am not chosen by God, and therefore maybe Jesus will reject me when I come to Him.” Jesus promises to receive everyone who comes to Him and trusts Him for salvation. Yet, in John 6:44, Jesus states another truth: once people come to Jesus, they will realise that behind their willing decision to come and believe lies the mysterious, invisible work of the Father who all along was drawing them to Christ.