

The Hunger Game

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[0 : 00] And I start to feel myself getting all worked up because I'm hungry and when I get hungry I get angry. So lots of people have that excuse for anger in their life, don't they?

I'm hungry. I need something to eat and I better get it right now. And we're driven by all kinds of hungers in life. Hunger for fulfillment, hunger for food, hunger for success, hunger for happiness, hunger for a better job, for better friends.

There's so many things in life that make us feel needy and that drive us forward. And we're always searching, always wanting more, always pushing to get more and often very upset because we don't really have what we want in life.

And so what I want us to look at tonight is the story about Jesus, the miracle of the 5,000 here. In verse 17 it says that everybody who ate was satisfied.

And so there's this theme here in the passage in Scripture that in Jesus we can all be satisfied, that that driving hunger can somehow be fulfilled.

[1 : 22] And so the first thing that I want to point to tonight in the passage is this, that Jesus is the bread of life, the one that we all need to make life satisfying.

So Jesus is the bread of life, the one we all need to make life satisfying. That's the first thing. I don't know if you love Netflix or loath Netflix, if you have Netflix or you don't, but I have Netflix and I love it.

It's fantastic. I can watch all kinds of programs whenever I want to. But one of the things about having so much TV on demand is that I've watched lots of movies that I might never otherwise have seen.

So here's one of them. It's called Stuck in Love. I don't have any of these scenes stuck in love. But it's an American film about a family being torn apart.

There's a dad, there's the mum, there's a daughter, there's a son. Dad's a famous acclaimed novelist and the family has lots of money and they live in a very exclusive house on the beach.

[2 : 29] And they should really have the perfect idyllic life. But the whole family has actually been torn apart because mum has left the family home to go and live with her lover.

And that causes the family to disintegrate, the children, especially the daughter, Sam, to become really cynical about love and about life.

And the film kind of portrays her going along just using people, but never trusting them. This is what she says, the hopeless romantic becomes convinced that God put them on earth to be with that one person.

But there is no God and life is only as meaningful as you fool yourself into thinking it. Just avoid love at all costs. That's my motto. If love is setting a place at the table for someone that's never coming home, I think I'll pass.

So that's the dilemma the film puts up to us, is how do we deal with life when so often it's either empty or it's bitter, when everything seems uncertain?

[3 : 36] Where's the answer? Well, the answer isn't money because this family of lots of money is not having a more beautiful home because they've got the most beautiful house you can imagine.

It's not success because they're all very successful. The father's a great novelist, the daughter gets her first book published. They've got everything they might humanly want, but everything still feels painful.

So the movie has a moral, as most movies do, and it's this, that we have to learn to love again. Isn't that nice?

You have to learn to love again. No matter how cynical you feel, no matter how fearful you feel, you have to trust again and find that one person. Commit yourself to them. It's painful, but it's worth it.

So that's the kind of Hollywood ending that there's one perfect person out there for everyone. One perfect love that will make you complete and happy and fulfilled, who will make every morning sunny and beautiful.

[4 : 44] Now, is there anything true about that? Is there even a ribbon of truth behind that dream that there is one perfect person for all of us?

Well, not in the way that Hollywood teaches us to expect, but what we see in this story is this, that although there's no perfect romance for all of us, there's no human being who can ever satisfy every need, that Jesus actually is the one person who can provide perfectly for every single one of us.

If there's one thing you need in life, if there's one person you need in life, then that is Jesus Christ. The feeding of the 5,000 is there to tell us that it's Jesus who makes life fulfilling.

It's Jesus that makes life joyful. It's Jesus who brings us perfect love. Knowing Him is better than any kind of daydream.

It's better than having the perfect family, the perfect home on the perfect beach. With Jesus, we can walk through life as it really is.

[6 : 05] Peers, heartache, illness, loss, financial struggles, pain. We all go through that. That's what real life feels like. It doesn't feel like Hollywood.

It feels sore and hurtful a lot of the time. But what we learn here is this, that you can live life in a very real way with all its struggles and its battles, you can still be happy and you can still be hopeful because of Jesus.

Here, out in a wilderness, far from all the resources that were needed, Jesus, the Son of God, provides perfectly.

5,000 hungry men are fed and have more than enough left over. That's saying to us that in the wilderness, in our lives, when things are difficult and when life is bitter, then God is able to provide perfectly for every need you have.

That's the reality of the feeding of the 5,000. In John's Gospel, after he teaches this story, Jesus has to explain to people very clearly, listen, you've seen this great miracle, you've seen all that I've provided.

[7 : 33] Don't just start wondering about after me in the hope that somehow I'll keep filling the shopping basket every week. He says to them this, he says, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. He's saying this, it's me that you need.

What's the most important thing that Jesus can give you tonight? The most important thing that Jesus can give you tonight is himself.

That's the great gift of the Gospel, isn't it, that God gives himself to us in Jesus Christ. We can spend an awful lot of our lives discontented, wishing for things that we're never going to have.

But instead, God says you can live your life joyfully. You can live your life thankfully. You can live your life happily and hopefully, because even if you don't have much in the eyes of others, if you've got Jesus, you've got everything you need.

[8 : 49] That is such an important lesson to learn about contentment in life and about ambition. Even if we don't have much in the eyes of others, if we have Jesus, we have everything we need.

Luther had a saying which goes like this, he who has all the world plus Jesus has no more than he who has Jesus alone.

He who has all the world plus Jesus has no more than he who has Jesus alone. If you have Jesus, then you have everything.

And if you don't have Jesus, then in the end, of course, you have nothing. All the things you pursue, all the dreams you go after, all that you try to possess in life, it will all turn to nothing in the end without Jesus.

So that's the first point I wanted to kind of make to you this evening is just this. He is the bread of life, that's what the miracle speaks to us of. And he's the one that we need if life is to be fulfilling and satisfying.

[10 : 06] Is he the bread of your life? Is he the one you go to every day that he will feed you and he will fulfill you? Now for that to happen, you need to know Jesus in a real and personal way.

He can't just be an idea, he has to be a reality. Someone you know, someone you speak to, someone you listen to, someone you turn to, someone you ask for things from.

That's the Jesus you need to know. The second thing is this, that knowing Jesus allows us to live with joy and generosity.

So if Jesus is able to satisfy us completely, do you know what? We become much less needy people. And if we're less needy, then we can be more generous.

If we're less needy, then we're going to be more joyful. So you might have questions about Jesus. Some of you are Christians, I know that. Some of you probably aren't Christians.

[11 : 10] You might just be trying to figure out what is Christianity? Is this something I want to believe in and explore further? Who was Jesus anyway? So we can have a lot of questions about Jesus.

Who was he really? Who did he claim to be? And sometimes figuring Jesus out can be tricky. It might even seem like an impossible process.

Now we read from Luke's Gospel, chapter 9. And what we find actually, as we read Luke chapter 9, are people trying to figure this same thing out?

Who was Jesus? And they find it equally tricky. So we find a Judean king called Herod. He's heard about everything that Jesus is doing and his disciples.

How's he getting on with it? He's actually perplexed, it says in verse 7. Why is he perplexed? Well, people are saying all kinds of things about Jesus. Some are saying that he's John the Baptist, a well-known New Testament figure back from the dead.

[12 : 10] Some are saying that he's an Old Testament figure called Elijah, who's reappeared. Others, some other kind of prophet. So there's this puzzling over Jesus.

Who is he? Everybody's trying to fit Jesus into some kind of category that makes sense to them, but they can't.

So the question is raised in verses 7 to 9 in the passage. And then it's raised again later on. So we read further down in Luke chapter 9. If you look at it, if you've got your Bible there, go down a little bit further to verse 18.

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And now Jesus asks the question, who am I? Who do the crowds say that I am?

And again, it's the same confused answers. People try to fit Jesus into some kind of box, some kind of category that makes sense. John the Baptist or Elijah are one of the prophets of old who has risen.

[13 : 14] And then Jesus asks them, he makes it much more direct, much more personal, but who do you say that I am? And Peter answers the Christ of God.

Now that's a very profound answer. And it's actually a very surprising answer coming from a Jewish male. You're God's anointed Savior, you're the rescuer of the world. That's an incredible answer.

This is a sort of moment of insight from Peter that's never been seen previously. So the way Luke structures his narrative is this.

When Peter got in front of us, there's the question, who is Jesus? Nobody seems to know. Then there's the feeding of the 5,000. And then again, the question, who is Jesus?

But this time Peter says he's the Christ of God. So in other words, the feeding of the 5,000 is something that God uses to help identify Jesus as the Messiah.

[14 : 16] And this miracle God is confirming, Jesus is my son, my son that I have sent to this world in order to rescue his people from brokenness and from sin.

So you may have the question in your heart or in your mind, who is Jesus? Who is Jesus? And what I want to ask you is, who do you think he is?

Who do you say Jesus is? What I want to ask all of us and myself included is, who is Jesus to you tonight?

Is he really your savior? Do you truly recognize him as the son of God? Is he the person in whom you are resting all your hope and trust for salvation?

Because through the miracle God is saying, here he is, my son, your savior, who is able to do everything that you need.

[15 : 22] How is it that this miracle of feeding 5,000 people speaks so clearly of Jesus as Messiah? Well, it does so because it's a direct echo of an Old Testament prophecy.

So in the earlier part of the Bible known as the Old Testament, we have records of what many prophets spoke. And one of them was a man called Isaiah who said this. He said, on this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, the finest of wines.

So that's known as the Messianic Feast of Abundance. It's from Isaiah chapter 25. So it's a picture of God in a mountainside just providing the juiciest steaks, the best vintage wines, the greatest feast you could ever imagine, a life of absolute plenty and pleasure.

And when Jesus feeds 5,000 people on the mountainside, He is giving us a real true echo of what was promised in Isaiah.

He's saying, this is the Messiah. I'm the Messiah. I'm doing what you would expect the Messiah to be doing. I'm providing a feast in the mountain for my people.

[16 : 49] I'm the one who's come to save, to bless. So that's part of what's going on here. It's an identifying miracle.

It identifies Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah. God is saying, this is who Jesus is. You can trust Him. He's saying that to you tonight as you ponder that question.

But the feeding of the 5,000 as it echoes Isaiah's prophecy from the past of a mountain and a feast, is also pointing them to the future.

It's anticipating something else. It's previewing something else. And what is previewing is the new creation. Sometimes people think that the story of the Bible kind of ends with heaven, and heaven's out there somewhere. You grab a cloud, a heart, a pair of wings.

You float off into the ethereal blue yonder, and that's heaven. But really, that's not how the Bible speaks about our future at all. The Bible always speaks about the future of God's people in very concrete, earthy terms.

[18 : 01] And we call that the new creation, that at the end of time, when God judges the world, when the dead rise, we enter into a new creation, which is this world, renewed, recreated, and perfected.

A beautiful place full of abundance, like the feast that Jesus provides. So in the Bible, there's a story going on. The beginning of the story is right back in Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

God creates a perfect garden. The garden is a place of abundance, beauty, lots of food. It's a joyful place. It's a place of relationship and friendship and happiness.

The garden is the perfect human dwelling place. But because of Adam's sin, the garden becomes a wilderness.

And now what we read is Jesus coming to the wilderness with the promise that one day he'll turn it back into a garden. That's the hope he's giving, that one day we'll live in the garden again, a perfect world full of beauty, joy, and hope.

[19 : 13] That's the story of the feeding of the 5,000, that God is saying. Increasingly, he will provide more and more. That the story of our life, though it may have dark chapters, will have a happy ending.

Because it ends not in the wilderness, but in the garden. Where God will be present with us, where we'll be able to relax, to enjoy life, to in all its fullness.

So here we have a perfect saviour who promises a perfect future and who promises that even in the present struggles, he'll be right beside us.

And because that is so real, it's a source of joy, a real source of joy. If Jesus is your life, if Jesus is the one who satisfies you beyond everything else in life, then you can be joyful even when things are brutally difficult in your life.

Paul, the apostle, the Christian apostle in a letter that he wrote to the church in Philippi, he's in prison, he's in chains for Jesus Christ.

[20 : 36] But what does he say? He says this, for me to live is Christ. See it? For me to live is Christ. That can be joyfully says in my circumstances.

Because my joy doesn't depend on my circumstances. My joy is Jesus. Often we find our happiness in the circumstances of our life.

Then the circumstances change and our happiness goes. Our relationship breaks, our health breaks, our job is taken from us, whatever it is, we fail in some way.

Or others fail us, circumstances change. But if Jesus is your joy, then circumstances may change, but your joy endures.

That's what Jesus is offering and promising in the feeding of the 5,000. That's what he's offering and promising tonight in the gospel. So we can be joyful.

[21 : 38] And if we're joyful, we can be generous. We don't need to be needy. We don't need to be selfish. We can be generous. Often we're afraid to be generous because we worry we don't have enough.

But here in this miracle, Jesus is saying, I'll give you enough and more. You will eat and you will be satisfied. And at the end of the miracle, there's more than they had to begin with.

In the beginning, they've got 5 loaves and 2 tiny wee fish. At the end, they've got 12 baskets full of food. It's a picture of increasing provision and abundance.

And so we believe that God will increasingly provide more and more everything we need in life. He will give us Himself. And so no matter our circumstances, we can be joyful and we can be generous.

Paul taught the Philippian church all about joy. And later on, he was able to write about them and to say, they're overflowing joy. They're extreme poverty well up in rich generosity.

[22 : 46] Poor people, but joyful people can be generous people. Because they're not afraid of having nothing. They're not afraid of giving everything away.

Because they're not depending on material things. They're depending on Jesus. And we want to be those people, don't we? We want to be that kind of person, generous and joyful.

So often Christians are just as selfish and just as grumpy as everyone else. Why is that? Well, surely you don't have a very real Jesus when you're being grumpy and mean.

Because when Jesus is real, you're joyful and generous. And so we need to know the real Jesus. The Jesus who we know provides everything.

And who gives us Himself. That's a very hard thing sometimes for us. Sometimes we try hard to be generous. Sometimes we think we have to really give a good effort.

[23 : 51] Sometimes we try hard not to be grumpy. But we're Scottish, we can't help ourselves, can we? So you see, there we go. So how do we break the grumpy Scotsman and turn him into a joyful citizen of the world?

How do we make our little mean selfish hearts giving and generous? We can't do it in our own, can we?

We need Jesus to change our hearts. How does Jesus change our hearts? Well, this is how He puts it. The Son of Man must suffer many things.

Be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scholars and be killed. And on the third day raised, that's the next verse we didn't read earlier.

How does Jesus change us? He is killed. He suffers many things. He dies and He rises.

[24 : 53] How does that change us? Because it says this, He loved me and He gave Himself for me.

And what breaks a proud heart and a greedy heart and a hard heart and a selfish heart, what breaks that heart is to know that God's Son died.

And that He loved us for all that sin. That He loved us and took our sin to Himself.

It's a phrase from its power. It's only when we know we're loved in this way that we're able to love in this way.

And so, if you find it hard to be happy, if you find it hard to be joyful, if you find it hard to be generous, then you need to come back to Jesus, to the cross, and to see that there He gives Himself fully and completely for you, for your salvation, out of love.

[26 : 23] And it's that love that makes our lives full and joyful. So that's the feeding of the 5,000. I want to leave that with you.

I just want to ask each of you that you look to the cross of Jesus tonight and ask for you will see how much God loves you and how much God wants to change you and how completely God can meet your every need.

I'm going to pray briefly and then we will come and sing one more song. Lord God, we want to just ask that you will give us Yourself tonight. We pray we'd be satisfied with nothing else.

We pray for the people here who are being satisfied with too little right now who think that a better job or a bit more cash in the bank or a nicer house or the right girlfriend, boyfriend, partner, whatever it is, it's just going to make life so much greater.

Well, we thank you that many of these things are a blessing to us, but we know that none of them ultimately are what we need. And so, may you show us inescapably every one of us tonight that we need Jesus and may we see just as clearly that Jesus is present here for us tonight, that He is here, that He is with us, that He stands before us tonight and offers Himself to us as our Savior and our God.

[27 : 58] He offers to meet our every need. He offers to turn our story around and to make it a story with a happy ending.

So, may we know Jesus as Lord and Savior, each of us tonight. May we pray and cry out to Him now in the quietness of our own hearts. May we call on you, Lord.

May we ask you, Lord, that you would be our God and our Savior. Amen.