

Satisfied in God **Matthew 13.44-45**

Next week we're going to kick off a series called Faith with Hands and Feet that will take us through the book of James and let us learn about what he calls the royal law of love, and what living a life of love looks like in really practical terms

But before we come to that, though, I felt prompted to share a message for the new year that comes out of what God has been stirring in me.

Comes out of lots of reading and praying and reflecting I've been doing, including in my time with the Lord each morning

Some of you know that for the past ten years or so I have started my daily time with the Lord almost without fail by quoting Deuteronomy 33.12

Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him,
for he will shield him all day long,
and the one the Lord loves will dwell between his shoulders.

Every morning I read one of the psalms, plus a chapter from the Old Testament, a chapter from one of the gospels, and a chapter from somewhere else in the New Testament.

This fall, I began to notice a theme coming up consistently in the psalms I was reading each morning.

Psalm 62.1
My soul finds rest in God alone.

Psalm 63.5

You satisfy me more than the richest feast.
I will praise you with songs of joy.

Psalm 90.14

Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love,
so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.

Psalm 91.1

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalm 131.2

My soul has become calm, quiet, and contented in You.

Those lines became the things I began praying for each member of my family, and because you are my family, they are the things I've been praying for you as well.

Part of why those verses stood out is because of where God had me, walking through several unexpected health challenges, needing to trust God with the direction and leading of the church when I was in and out of commission.

But it also spoke to me because of how it wove together with and echoed some reading I was doing this fall.

I've been reading four related books recently:

I just listened again to Phillip Cary's audio class called *Augustine, Philosopher and Saint*, which gives an overview of Augustine's understanding of love.

I'm also been part of a couple of groups that are reading through and having some really rich discussion about David Naugle's book, *Reordered Loves, Reordered Lives*, which is rooted in Augustine's writing.

I've also started reading Catherine of Sienna's *Dialogue* in my devotional time, which constantly echoes Augustine's teachings.

And I also just finished reading Hannah Arendt's book *Love and Saint Augustine*, which is an incredible overview of Augustine's understanding of what it means to love God and our neighbor.

All four of carried me back to the writings of Augustine, which I've also been reading in a great compilation of some of his most important writing called *Late Have I Loved Thee: Selected Writings of Saint Augustine on Love*, edited by John Thornton and Susan Varenne

As you may know, Augustine was a pastor and theologian who lived in the late 300s and early 400s. It's safe to say that his writings shaped the thinking of the church more than any other person outside of the pages of scripture.

But most of us only encounter Augustine indirectly, through the writings of others whose thinking has been shaped by his.

Between these psalms, which constantly speak of finding rest and satisfaction in God, and then this immersion in the writings of Augustine on the same theme, it feels like a map of the human heart and its desires and affections has been unrolling in front of me and its contours getting filled.

Let me give you a quick tour of the way Augustine frames in a biblical understanding about love and longing. If I were to give you the lay of the land, I'd say these are the most important ideas.

I think you'll be able to see not only how they all fit together, but also how incredibly relevant they are for us as we think about our own relationship with God and with the people and things he's surrounded us with as we head into the new year.

1. We were created by God and we exist for God. He made us for himself.

Revelation 4.13

You created all things,
and for your pleasure they were created
and have their being.

2. By implication, that means, as ones created by God, God knows the best way for us to live and love. Our feelings aren't necessarily a reliable guide in this regard.

I love the line from Psalm 119 that says

Psalms 119:73

You made me; you created me.
Now give me the sense to follow your commands.

3. What's true about us is also true about everything else we will ever look on in this world.

God surrounded us with other things and other people that were also created by God and also exist for God, and God has given them to us as gifts to be enjoyed.

I Timothy 6.17

God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

4. We were created by God with a profound and driving desire, a craving, a hunger and a thirst – craving to enjoy, to find satisfaction and fulfillment in, to find rest in, to have and to hold, some great object of our great desire, and the human experience is dominated by our pursuit of that satisfaction.

Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 3-5

There is within us a fundamental dis-ease, an unquenchable fire that renders us incapable, in this life, of ever coming to full peace.

This desire lies at the center of our lives. We are not easeful people who occasionally get restless. The reverse is true. We are congenitally dis-eased, only experiencing occasional peace. . . .

At the heart of all great literature, poetry, art, philosophy, psychology and religion lies the naming and analyzing of this desire. . . . Whatever the expression, everyone is ultimately talking about the same thing – an unquenchable fire, a restlessness, a longing, a disquiet, a hunger, a loneliness, a gnawing nostalgia, a wildness that cannot be tamed, an all-embracing ache that lies at the center of the human experience and is the ultimate force that drives everything else. The dis-ease is universal.

Spirituality is, ultimately, about what we do with that desire.

5. Our craving, our desire, our thirst has some object that corresponds to it and will satisfy it. It's part of the way God made us and made the surrounding world to correspond to us.

Thirst is answered by water, hunger is answered by food, weariness is answered by sleep

There is some something that corresponds to every deep craving and desire in us/

6. God alone can satisfy that deepest of all desires, that deepest hunger and thirst.

Psalm 62.1

My soul finds rest in God alone.

As Blaise Pascal write in his incredible book, *The Pensées*:

What else does [his] craving . . . proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is [an] empty trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him . . . though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite [] object; in other words by God himself. (VII, 425)

Nothing else can satisfy that hunger – whatever it is

spouse, work, children, parents, money, health, sports accomplishments, awards and recognition, fitness, friends, travel, possessions, creation, nation, school, home

Everything else will always disappoint us. It will never last, and it was never made to satisfy us in the first place.

Psalm 62.1

My soul finds rest in God *alone*.

Confessions, Augustine

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

8. Where all that leads for Augustine . . .

Augustine on Rightly Ordered Loves

Love for God	Love for All Else
Desiring and enjoying God for who He is Finding our rest and satisfaction in Him Quenching our thirst Having and holding him forever	Seeing all else with reference to God Loving people and things for His sake Leaving us thirsting Having and holding temporarily

. . . is here. Just as there are two objects of our affection – God, who alone who can satisfy us, and all the rest, which God intends for us to enjoy but is incapable of bringing rest and satisfaction to our souls – so we are called to two different kinds of loves:

We are to love God by enjoying him, finding our rest and satisfaction in him, having and holding him eternally.

And . . . we are to love all else *with reference to God and for the sake of God*, not with reference to ourselves and for our sake, receiving it as gift from God but never elevating it to the place of God in our lives.

Some of you may know the Greek myth of Tantalus, which is where we get our word *tantalize*.

Tantalus in his pride stole ambrosia and nectar from the gods, so Zeus sentenced him to suffer forever in the underworld.

He had him put in a pool of water up to his neck, and planted a tree right next to him, with a branch laden with ripe fruit hanging right over him. But every time in his hunger that he tried to reach for the fruit, the branch pulled away, and every time in his thirst that he tried to bend down and get a drink, the water receded. So he was condemned to hunger and thirst forever.

According to Augustine, if we fail to look to God as the satisfaction for our deepest desire, or if we look elsewhere for satisfaction and rest, we, like Tantalus, will be condemned to a life in which we are always tantalized, never satisfied.

Some questions:

Where are you looking for rest and satisfaction?

What have you landed on as the object of your desire?

Your husband or wife, children, parents, work, health or fitness, sports accomplishments, awards and recognition, fitness, friends, travel, possessions, beauty, wealth, nation, school, home?

How capable is that object of your affection able to satisfy you?

One of my favorite parables is also one of the shortest and most mysterious and provocative ones.

Matthew 13.44

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

This is our family treasure box. Each time our grandkids come to our house – five year old Shepherd, two year old Rosie, even six week old Eli – we put a small gift in it for each of them and then we hide it somewhere in the house: in the hall closet, in the dryer, behind pillows on the couch, under a chair.

When they walk in the door, usually before they even take off their coats and shoes, off they go on their hunt to find it, playing warmer and colder with us until they finally unearth it.

Matthew 13.44 is about a similar treasure hunt.

Just three quick things to notice.

First, about the kingdom of heaven. This isn't the same thing as heaven. It's not speaking of a place. It's referring to a relationship, a unique relationship between Jesus as king and us as his subjects. Jesus says entering into that relationship is like finding hidden treasure. It is the greatest thing that can ever happen to us.

Second, about hiding the treasure again and then going and buying the field. Because of the way we think about property law that sounds like some pretty unethical behavior. But according to property law in the ancient world, where the finders keepers rule was a real thing, this man is actually going out of his way to be ethical and fair, instead of just walking off with the treasure he found.

Third, the point of the parable: "in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field." This is *not* the story of sacrifice and loss and hardship. This is the story of absurd good fortune, as he comes into great riches and abundance and experiences incredible and lasting joy.

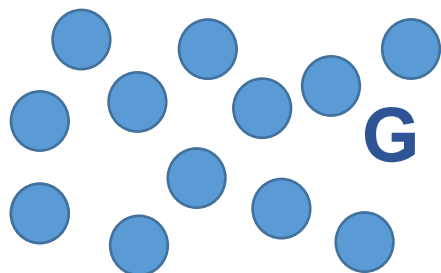
It's obvious in the way the story unfolds that this man thinks he got an incredible deal. Why? Because he finally found the one thing what would actually satisfy his desire.

Nothing else will satisfy like this will.
 So everything else is less important than it is.
 And having it is having real and lasting joy.

And Jesus says that treasure, that one of a kind source of joy and satisfaction, is a relationship with him.

I think it's easy for us to go through life seeing the treasure box jutting out of the ground but letting it stay there and letting it be just one thing among many things that we look to for satisfaction, other people, other things, other pursuits and causes.

How We Typically View Life



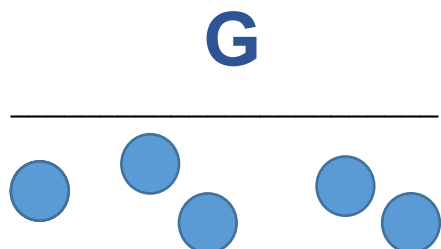
We go through life with indiscriminate desire, and we seek its fulfillment indiscriminately in all that surrounds us, God included. God is just one of many loves of our heart and objects of our affection. But these psalms and this parable press and the biblical insights of Augustine press us to rethink how we view the place of God in our lives.

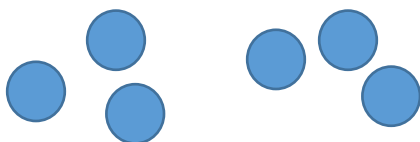
In a letter to a woman named Proba. Augustine summed up his view in this way:

We love God for what he is in himself, and we love ourselves and our neighbors for his sake. (Letter to Proba)

According to Jesus, and the scriptures, this is how God would have us reorder our lives and our loves.

How God Would Have Us View Life





What place does God occupy in your life?

In his Confessions Augustine writes

How noble is each rational creature you have made, for nothing less than yourself can suffice to give it any measure of blessed rest, nor indeed can it be its own satisfaction. For it is you, Lord, who will light up our darkness. Give me yourself, O my God, give yourself to me.

We were made for him.
Nothing else will satisfy us.
My soul finds rest in God alone.

Think for a moment about your own life.

What have you attached your affection to?
What do you look to for satisfaction and rest?
What is the object of your deepest desire?
What's the treasure on which you've bet all that you have?
What's the thing in your treasure box?

What do you hear God saying to you this morning?

I'm going to close with two great prayers, one from Julian of Norwich, writing in the 1300s, the other from Moses, in Psalm 90.

As I do, make them your own prayer this morning.

Revelations of Divine Love, Julian of Norwich (1342-c1416)

God, of your goodness, give me yourself. You are enough for me. And if I ask anything that is less, I shall always lack something, but in you alone I have everything.

Psalm 90.14

Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love,
so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.