

## What is Salvation?

### Sermon 5– Healing of our Appetites

Passages: Psalm 42

Romans 9:1–5

Matthew 14:13–21

The Bible talks a lot about salvation. In fact, it tells us that we all need to be ‘saved’. And it tells us that there is only one name given under heaven by which we can be saved...the name of Jesus. He is ‘our Saviour’!

But what does He save us from? What is the object of His salvation?

Most of us tend to think of salvation as something in the future. We speak of Jesus one day saving us from hell, from God’s wrath and judgment. Salvation is about ‘getting into heaven when we die’. But what about ‘now’? Isn’t there anything that Jesus saves us from in the present?

It’s interesting, when you start examining the NT Scriptures, just how much the Biblical focus of salvation involves the present! This is borne out by the fact that the Greek word for ‘salvation’ (sozo) is the exact same word used for healing! In the ancient mind, salvation and healing were strongly connected to each other. And so, **the early church was not only aware** that Jesus would perfectly heal them from the brokenness of sin when they were finally with Him in heaven; **they also knew** that, even now, Christ’s salvation was working in them, healing them from the brokenness of sin in their present life.

That’s why we are currently undertaking a series of sermons entitled, “**What is salvation?**” I want to show you how much Jesus’ salvation is meant to be worked out and experienced in the present.

Today, we are going to look at the present work of God in the salvation (or healing) of our **appetites**.

## Let's pray.

What do I mean when I say that Jesus wants to heal our appetites? It's really quite simple: Have you ever been sick with a heavy flu or an upset stomach? Tell me—When you are sick, do you have an appetite?

In the early days of 1980, I got sick with hepatitis—It was just after Kim and I got engaged, and I was sick for three months...flat on my back, with absolutely no APPETITE! I lost 15 kilos!

You know, the one thing that a sick person wants is to regain their appetite. Indeed, a healthy appetite is generally the sign of good health.

Now, I say that because, when God created the human race, we were healthy, with a healthy appetite. He placed in each of us a desire...a passion... a hunger to live in union with Him. The more we pursued that passion and grew in our union with God, the more we would gain a passion for life itself. That's because a person who is in union with God (the Creator of life) gains a greater appreciation for the world that He has given to us. Indeed, in union with God, all of life was meant to be pursued **with a passion**...an unquenchable desire to know and understand and experience the life so generously given to us by God.

Sin, of course, ruined all that! When sin entered the world in our ancestors, Adam and Eve, one of the greatest tragedies was that they lost their **passion for life**. Instead of pursuing God, they hid from him. Instead of looking for a way to learn from their mistake, they ran the other way in self-centred shame. Sin caused them to turn inwards; to focus on themselves and not on God and His amazing world.

Listen to the way John Eldridge describes the Fall: "In that tragedy, we (not only) lost Paradise. We got used to it! We accepted the idea that that this is just the way things are. The people who walk in darkness have adjusted their eyes!" In other

words, we have all succumbed to a certain weariness of spirit... a heaviness of heart...an inertia that seems to hold us all back from getting passionate for life. Sure, from time to time, that original passion for life does bubble up within us—maybe we’ve been to a concert, or seen a great play or movie; or perhaps we’ve just had a baby or held our grandchild; or been on holidays and seen some amazing part of the world -- and for that moment (at least) we know that life is good! But how quickly that passion seems to subside as we get back into the routine of life and the pressures of living!

Can anything on earth re-energise our hunger for God? Is there anything that can cause human beings to long again for life in all its fullness? Is there anyone who can heal our appetites?

Today’s Gospel reading from Matthew 14 is known as ‘The Feeding of the 5000’. But, you know, the feeding of the 5000 is only half the story! The main story is not about physical hunger at all, but about how the presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, stirred up such a spiritual hunger...a hunger for life... that over 5000 Jewish men that they willingly followed Him into the desert, just to hear Him preach and heal the sick! Their renewed hunger, you see, was a hunger for God’s touch...for God’s guidance...for God’s love. And what is so amazing is that, because of their new-found hunger for God, they all forgot about their physical hunger! They were being filled with manna from heaven!

Indeed, you can almost hear them singing Psalm 42 as they sit at Jesus’ feet in this desolate place– **“As the deer pants for stream of water, so my soul pants for you, O God! My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God?”** Not only has Jesus stimulated their hunger for God, but they soon realise that He is the only One who can satisfy their hunger for life itself!

You know, this may come as a surprise to some of you, but Christianity was never meant to be an invitation to become a

better person. Rather, **it's an invitation to become hungry-- hungry for union with God—to regain our appetite to know the Creator,** the appetite that we were always meant to have! That's why Jesus came— **“I have come that they might have life abundantly!”**

Indeed, when we turn to chapter 15 of Matthew's Gospel, the amazing thing is that, in the course of one chapter, Jesus has moved from stimulating the spiritual appetites of 5000 Jewish men to stimulating them in 4000 Gentile men...men who may have never even heard of God! Now, He's outside of Israel, feeding anyone He meets with manna from heaven!

Of course, taking people into the desert is not the only way that Jesus gets people to hunger for God! You may remember that with the woman at the well, Jesus simply needed to help her open up and let her discover her own need deep inside. That gives Him the opportunity to say to her, **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But, whoever drinks the water that I give will never thirst again.”** “Lord, give me this water!” she cries.

On another occasion, Jesus went into the temple in Jerusalem. It was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus, knowing how dry and lifeless the Temple worship has become, cried out: **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”**

CS Lewis was right! Either this man was a liar, a lunatic, or He is the Lord—**the healer of our appetite!** There are no other options. Jesus, you see, is audacious enough to announce that He is the One who fulfils the Old Testament promise of Isaiah 55 about the coming Messiah: **“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost! Why spend money on is not bread, and your labour on what**

**does not satisfy? Listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.**"

Once you get this idea firmly in your mind, you'll start to see the funny side of today's passage in Matthew 14! Think about it-- All day long, 5000 men (plus their wives and children) are in the wilderness where there is no food. And yet, for a whole day, the people have been filled with the bread of heaven. All day long they have delighted in the Word of God and have shared in a feast of God's provision... without a single complaint about physical hunger!

But look what happens next-- At nightfall, the disciples ask Jesus to chase the crowd away, saying... **"This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."**

Do you see the irony, here? I mean, **which is the greater miracle** — to multiply loaves and fishes to satisfy the physical hunger of those who are alive **or** to cause people who are spiritually dead to come alive and hunger for God? Jesus knows that He has already done the impossible, so he turns to His disciples and says: **"You give them something to eat!"** It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "I've done enough miracles for today! Now, IT'S YOUR TURN!" Of course, as the story tells us, what Jesus really wants is for His disciples to work with Him and learn from Him, even as He feeds the 5000.

Let me stress this again—the greater miracle of this passage is getting people who are spiritually dead...people with no spiritual hunger... to become hungry for God! It's a sad commentary on us that we too often think that physically feeding them with bread is more important!

Listen to the words of John Piper in his book, "A Hunger for God". "The more deeply you walk with Christ, the hungrier you get for Christ...the more you want all the fullness of God...the more you want to be done with sin...the more you want the Bridegroom to

come again...the more you want the Church revived and purified with the beauty of Jesus...the more you want a great awakening to take hold of your friends and relatives...the more you want to see the light of the gospel of the glory of God to penetrate the darkness of this fallen world...the more you want to see pain relieved and tears wiped away and death destroyed... the more you long for every wrong to be made right and the justice of God and grace of god to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.”

This is exactly what drives the Apostle Paul crazy in **Romans 9!** He is baffled by the fact that his fellow kinsmen, the Jews, **God’s chosen people**... the ones who have beheld God’s glory, received His covenant promises, experienced His presence in the Temple worship, and heard God’s voice through the Mosaic Law...**have now lost all their hunger for God!** Instead of pursuing union with Him through Christ, they’ve settled for mere religion... mere formality...a life of following a legalistic moral code laced with endless man-made rituals! At his wits end, Paul finally cries; “I could wish that I was accursed and cut off from Christ...if only they would be stirred again to desire Him!!”

So... **Where did their hunger for God go?** It’s not that they had drunk deeply of God’s glory that they were now so fully satisfied and could sit back for a breather! The question of why they had lost their appetite for God has only two answers:

1. Either the virus of sin had taken away their hunger! They were sick!
2. Or, they were turning elsewhere for their food, filling themselves with the small things of this world so that there was no more room for the great!

I can only imagine that both of these answers were correct! Jesus came to heal their appetites but they rejected Him. What about us? **Jesus has come to heal our appetites!** Whether sin has taken it away or we are filled with the wrong things, **Jesus’ mission is to make you well again**...to restore you to the way God originally created you to be.

Do you want your appetite to be healed?

Listen to one final Scripture from the Book of Revelation 3:20  
—**“Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”**

Let’s pray.