

Filling the void!

Let's open this morning message with these words from the Apostle Paul.

Philippians 3:7-8 "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ"

The year was 1996. I was a 26-year-old public high school teacher. I was teaching what I loved to teach: computer graphics! Fun stuff! Photoshop, Illustrator, Animation, 3-D modeling, video editing, silk-screening all those fun things that go along with it.

I had a great job. I had a family who loved me, I had the sports car of my dreams, I even had a girlfriend who never argued with me (not even once). Everything was seemingly perfect. I had everything I always thought I wanted, but I was missing the one thing that I needed! The problem was I didn't know what that one thing was. It was as if my whole life I heard a little voice saying to me that I needed to get this or achieve that in order to be content, fulfilled, and happy. No, it wasn't an audible voice. It's just that thought that kind of pops into your head that doesn't seem to come from you, do you know what I mean?

For example when I was a kid that voice began to whisper, "you have to be good at sports so that you will be accepted and everyone will like you." One problem... When I was a kid I was terrible at sports! Each year I would want to sign up for the baseball team and my mom would ask, "are you sure you want to sign up for the baseball team?" She knew that I was terrible and that all the other kids would make fun of me because of it. The problem was I had these huge feet that I hadn't grown into yet which made me very uncoordinated! But eventually I grew into those feet and with the help of my older brother, who used to beat me up every day, I actually became pretty strong from trying to defend myself and pretty fast from running for my life day after day. Before I knew it I had become the team captain for the high school wrestling and football teams. I became very popular and was even voted the class cutie, if you can believe that! But guess what, all those achievements only left me emptier than I was before.

Have you ever gotten your hopes up so high for something, only to be disappointed because it wasn't what you had hoped it to be? Well that was me! Those accolades did not bring lasting contentment to my life. They only left me questioning, "what's next?" So once again the little voice inside my head would say, "Joseph you need to go to college and graduate and become successful." My mother was a single mom and couldn't offer me very much help financially. She made me a deal and said as long as I was going to college I could live at the house for free. But! If I didn't go to school, then I would have to get a job and pay rent. Well, my mother couldn't help me with tuition so either way... I had to pay! I ended up working three jobs and finally graduated from college eight years later. But it was all worth it! Because it allowed me to become a high school teacher. Which was great! But I was still empty!

I had listened to the voice that promised me happiness and contentment. However, achievement after achievement, I realized that those promises were simply not true! They did not, nor ever could, fulfill the void in my life.

I had everything I thought I wanted but was still missing the one thing that I needed. But what was it? What was next?

What was it that I needed to strive to achieve that would bring me the happiness and contentment that I so longed for?

I remember being at a nightclub on a Friday night. I was with my girlfriend, who never argued with me, I had my nice clothes, the sports car of my dreams out in the parking lot, I had muscles, I even had hair.

If someone would have asked me how everything was going at that point in my life, I would've said, "everything is going great, I couldn't ask for anything more!" But the reason why I couldn't ask for anything more is because I didn't know what to ask for.

I remember looking around at the people in the nightclub that Friday night. I saw a couple dancing they looked really happy having a lot of fun. But all of a sudden, for some reason, it was like those movies or TV shows when they cut back to the reality of their life behind the scenes. I saw them miserable, arguing and fighting. Then it cut back to the scene here where they were dancing and drinking and just trying to forget about their miserable life for just one night.

And then I looked at the next couple and saw another screen shot into their personal life and they were miserable at their work. They hated their jobs! Another person was stressed, another lonely.

And so on and so in with practically every person in that room who "looked" like they were so happy! But... if they were so happy...why did they need to come and dance and drink to begin with? Well, as I continued to look around the room I turned around and saw this guy standing right in front of me. He had a big old smile on his face, nice clothes, a beautiful girl on his side, big muscles, nice hair. Etc... But as I looked at this guy who seemed to have it all, I soon realized that he was the most miserable of them all!!! How did I know? I was looking in the mirror!

I thought to myself once again, "what's next?" And once again I heard that little voice say to me, "what you need next is a yacht (a fancy sail boat)." I thought to myself, a yacht? What am I going to do with a yacht? I don't even know how to swim!!! Then the voice said to me, "well then Joseph perhaps you need to buy a real big fancy house." And I thought to myself, I'm lonely in the little house that I am in!

Then the voice said to me, "Joseph what you need then is to get married and have a bunch of kids." "What!?!?" Now I know I was losing my mind! At that point in my life that was the last thing I was looking to do or even wanted to do!

Even now, Amy is one month away and let me tell you, I am excited! But I am not going to lie... I am also pretty scared! When it comes to babies, I have no idea! Last week, I had to go to some Papa class to learn how to hold a baby! Hold the neck, hold the neck! What do you mean "Hold the Neck!"... Is the head going to fall off? Scary!!! I have always been afraid of babies! I wouldn't even hold my own nieces and nephews until they were old enough to walk! I am telling you, I have no idea! They had to teach me how to change a diaper and wash the baby.... I have never ever done these things in my life!

So you could imagine me as a 26 year old guy.... with this thought being whispered in my head, "Have a bunch of babies!" Ya right! That's Crazy!!!

And for the first time in my life, I didn't listen to that voice! I didn't run off and buy a boat, or a big house, or propose to my girlfriend at the time. Praise the Lord!!! Look at what I would have missed out on (Amy)! :~

You single people out there today... trust me! There are far worse things than being single! Being married to the wrong person is far worse! Don't try to help God out by settling for less than God's best!

Well, back to the night club... Every time in my life I would hear that voice say, "This is what you need...." My response was always "okay" and I would go do my very best to get it! But this time was different... I didn't believe it.

So I went home that night thinking to myself what could possibly be next? Well, the next day I got a phone call from a friend I knew in college. He would call me about once a month to ask me some computer questions. And after each conversation, before saying good bye, he would always ask me if I wanted to go to church with him that weekend. And he had done this for around two years already. So as I was talking to him I was already anticipating the invitation to come. For two years I came up with one excuse after another as to why I couldn't go to church the next day with him.

But this time was different, I had no excuses. I had spent the entire night and morning lost, not knowing which direction to go. I thought to myself, "I have tried everything else but nothing has worked. What do I have to lose?" So at the end the conversation, my friend asked me once again, "So, what are you doing tomorrow? Do you want to come to church with me?" I said, "okay." He said, "what! Are you kidding me? I have been asking you for two years already! Are you serious?!" I said, "Yes, I am serious but you better stop asking before I change my mind!" He couldn't believe it... And neither could I!

Well, the next day I went to church with him. And after a few songs the pastor comes up and begins to preach. And I will never forget what he said. He looked out into the crowd and said, "some of you are feeling empty inside and you have been trying to fill that emptiness with relationships, with success, with

material things, but none of those things ever seem to work! In fact, they only seem to leave you feeling emptier than you were before.” And I was thinking to myself, “how does this guy know exactly what I am feeling right now?”

He continued to explain. He said, “In the beginning Adam and Eve were in the garden of Eden. And in the garden they had their body, they had their soul, and they had the Spirit of God with them. But when they got kicked out the garden because of their sin, they were left with their body and soul, but the Spirit of God was no longer with them.

And so it is today in our lives. We have our body, we have our soul, but the Spirit of God is what is missing in our lives. There's a God-shaped hole in our heart that can only be filled with the Spirit of God. Nothing else fits! Nothing else can satisfy or fulfill that void in your life.”

There were about 1000 people in that room that day and I felt as if he was speaking directly to me. After service my friend asked me if I liked it and if I wanted to come again. I said, “okay.” He then asked me if I wanted to meet with him during the week and study the Bible with him. I agreed.

After two weeks of going through these little Bible lessons with him, we came to the suffering of Jesus. I was given a handout that described the suffering that Jesus endured from a medical perspective. It was a very detailed description of the scourging and the cross.

Around six months earlier, I had gone to my niece's high school musical performance. The musical was “Jesus Christ Superstar”. Some of you may have heard of it, “Jesus Christ, Superstar, Do you think you're what they say you are?” Well there was a part in the play when Jesus was whipped 39 times at the order of Pilate.

The music had this very intense base line.

.... One! Whip!

..... Two! Whip...

..... Three! Whip... all the way to 39!

As I was driving home from the Bible study I couldn't get this song, that I had only heard once - six months earlier - out of my head! All of a sudden, I saw a record shop. I immediately pulled into the parking lot, went into the shop, and asked them if they had Jesus Christ Superstar. They handed me a two CD box set. I purchased it and began to search through the songs as I drove home that night in my car.

Until I finally found it!

.... One! Whip!

..... Two! Whip...

..... Three! Whip...

Getting more and more intense after each whip. By the time they got to 39, I had finally come to realize that those whips should have been all mine! It was an unworthy exchange! My guilty life for his guiltless one! Jesus offered himself to be scourged and crucified for me personally. I had finally come to this reality! And as that whip cracked for the 39th time I found myself broken before the Lord weeping like a baby, crying out to God for forgiveness and surrendering my life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ!

Romans 10:13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

I was lost! But now I was found!

I was blind! But now I was able to see!

I was guilty! But now I was forgiven!

I was bound! But now I was set free!

I was empty! But now, for the first time in my life, my heart was filled!

That night, May 25th, 1997, I became a Christian and have been filled ever since.

I had heard about Jesus my entire life growing up in America, but I didn't know Him! I spent more time listening to that small voice of Satan telling me what I needed to do next to be content and happy rather than listening to the Lord!

And perhaps there are some here today that have been listening to that same voice. The voice that is suggesting to you that you need someone or something other than Jesus Christ in order to find

contentment, happiness, and fulfillment in your life! Listen... don't buy the lie! I wasted 26 years of my life chasing after the wind. Don't waste another day!

Three thousand years ago there was a King named Solomon who had it all! Fame, riches, intelligence, women, power - and yet he went through life wondering why he felt so empty and his life seemed so pointless. Notice what he said...

Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the works that are done **under the sun**; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

Everything under the sun, everything he tried, **Fame, riches, knowledge, women, power** was all empty. It was not until he looked to God and got a heavenly perspective that life once again had meaning and purpose. Notice... his final conclusion as he ends the book with these words.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all."

14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

Just as a square peg cannot fill a round hole, neither can the "God-shaped hole" inside each of us be filled by anyone or anything other than God. There are always those who feel, "If I could just do this or that (fill in the blank) or get this or that (fill in the blank) then I would be happy and satisfied." I know! I was one of these people!

How about you? We need to ask ourselves... What is it that we are hoping to achieve or attain in life? What is it that we think will bring us satisfaction and happiness? Whatever it is, do yourself a favor, just write over the top of it, "You will thirst again!" Notice what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well. He said...

John 4:13b "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again"

What is it that we are thirsting for? What is it that we think will quench our thirst? Whatever it is, we will thirst again!

John 4:14 "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Notice that Jesus does not say that He *is* the living water, but that He would give living water to her, and when she received it, she would never thirst again. Of course, that does not tell us what the living water actually is! For that, we must go to another passage of Scripture. In this case, Jesus was in the Temple surrounded by thousands of worshippers.

John 7:37-39 "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."

38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Here Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the living water.

As we call upon the name of the Lord the Holy Spirit comes into our heart, and we are not only filled with His love and forgiveness... but we will also be overflowing with it! That means, whoever gets near us should end up getting wet!

Have you ever been in a water fight as a kid? Perhaps with squirt guns, water balloons, or a water hose? What is the objective? What are you trying to do? Get others wet!!! Well, that's the same idea with Christianity! We are to allow the Holy Spirit to overflow our hearts so that everyone around us will get soaked! What does that water look like Joseph? Paul the apostle said,

Galatians 5:22-23a "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

We are to allow ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit today and everyday and let the **water fight begin!** Let's see how we can splash each other with the love God desires to fill and overflow our empty hearts with. Don't wait around for someone to wet you first! You may be waiting a long time! But just like any other water fight... once someone starts it! Guess what? Everyone joins in! And before you know it... Everyone is drenched!!! Trust me! If you get someone wet... you will eventually get wet yourself! The more you love others the more you will be loved! For... "What goes around....(*What?*) "Comes around!" As Jesus said,

John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Don't waste another day! Let the love of God fill your heart today! And this is all I have to say!
Let's pray!