

The Restaurant

Have you or anyone you know ever felt that Christianity was a failure? Knowing you are a sinner only made you feel guilty and so you looked elsewhere for that which could really help you and satisfy. Could it be that you were only told part of the message?

Once upon a time there was a hungry man. Now he wasn't just a little hungry--he was very hungry with a deep gnawing pain in his stomach. As he was walking along, he saw a restaurant that appeared clean and wholesome and he decided he would go in and have something to eat. It certainly smelled good in there as he took a seat and ordered his food. In a short while, the waitress returned with a small plate of raw vegetables, dip, and a few crackers. He ate these and they tasted good enough, but after eating them, instead of feeling full, he felt hungrier. His hunger pains had intensified and he called the waitress over.

"There must be something wrong with this food," he said. "This food has only made me hungrier."

"Hmm," the waitress replied. "There must be something wrong with you as this food seems to satisfy everyone else."

The man was highly insulted with that comment and got up to leave. As he was heading for the door, he muttered, "I'll never come back to this restaurant. The food they have here is no good. It only intensifies one's hunger pains."

The manager had overheard some of what had taken place and he ran after the man and tried to explain to him that he had only eaten the appetizer and there was more food in the kitchen: bread, cheese, vegetable stew, and much more that would satisfy him. But the man had closed his ears and would not hear.

"No," the man said. "I've tried your food and it doesn't satisfy. I'm going elsewhere." Across the street was another restaurant. Actually, it looked nicer than the first one. He went in and looked at the menu. At first, he thought it strange that only liquids were served.

He called the waitress over and asked, "Don't you have any solid food?"

"Oh, no," she replied. "We have found in our experience over the years with our customers that solid food does not ease the pangs of hunger and does not satisfy. So we have developed this special delicious drink made from a patented formula of exotic fruits and nectars. It is guaranteed to bring satisfaction and to ease your hunger pains."

So the man decided to try it and ordered. When his drink came, it sure looked good and he drank it down. It was good, although a little too sweet. When he finished, his hunger was gone. He felt full and satisfied. He thanked the waitress and left.

But in about two hours, he noticed he was starting to get the pains in his stomach again. So he returned to the restaurant for another drink. He had enjoyed the respite from the pain, although it did seem somewhat short. As he was ordering, he commented to the waitress that it seemed his hunger had returned awfully soon and perhaps it was even a little worse than it was before. But she reassured him that that was normal and he just needed more of their special drink.

He was again served and this time it was definitely too sweet, but it still satisfied and out he went again. But it was only an hour until his hunger returned. He went back for another drink, but when the hunger again returned, he decided to try another restaurant, as there were many fine restaurants on that street.

Now at the next restaurant, he told the waitress of his experiences at the first two. She listened sympathetically and said, "Of yes, I understand. The theory of the second restaurant with the liquid menu is right on. We know that solid food just does not satisfy or bring relief from hunger pains. But the problem was, they just didn't have quite the right formula for the ingredients. Now we are specialists in this area and have been doing this for many years. Our drink is guaranteed to meet your needs."

With that, he ordered and was served. Now this drink was a very large one and also looked delicious. After the first sip, the man said to himself, "Ahh, I've found it at last." After finishing it, he paid his money and left, satisfied and free from pain. But to his dismay, after only a short time, he was back at the restaurant to order again and soon again. Finally, he gave up on this restaurant and tried another and then another. All with the same results. At first, it tasted good and he felt full and his pain was gone, but it kept coming back. One waitress told him that the hunger pains were good for him and he should feel privileged to have them. Another waitress told him (after he complained of how often he had to come in), "But that's what is so special about our drink. Its satisfaction is only temporary and you get to keep coming back and you get to experience drinking many more of our drinks." The man looked at his wallet and wondered to himself how long he could afford to have so many experiences.

Occasionally, he would run into a waiter or waitress from the first restaurant and they would invite him to come back, but he would shake his head sadly and say, "No, I've tried that. It would be nice if it had taken away my hunger pains. But though it tasted good, it left me worse than before. No, I tried that and it didn't work," and he turned away.

The days went on, he grew thinner and hungrier and hungrier. One day, he happened to be walking by the first restaurant he had tried and the breeze brought him a whiff of something that smelled so good, the pain in his stomach intensified. He started to run to escape the smell. But something held him back and he really heard the words the manager had said to him long ago. "There is nothing wrong with you or our food. You have only just had the appetizer. You need the rest of the meal--the main course and the dessert."

He stood still and thought a minute. He knew he couldn't go on much longer. Finally, he said to himself, "Well, what do I have to lose."

He went in and ordered. Again, they brought the small plate. He ate that and he was not satisfied, but he waited and soon he was brought the main course: home baked bread fresh from the oven, a platter of assorted cheeses, and thick vegetable stew with barley and lentils. After this, he was quite full, but then they served dessert--apple pie and ice cream. By now, he was very full and as he left, he noticed he felt stronger than he had for a long time. All day long, he kept waiting for the pain to return. Finally, he went to bed.

When he woke up, he expected to feel the stabbing, gnawing pain in his stomach again, but instead, he felt only a healthy appetite. The pain was gone.

He returned to the restaurant for another hearty meal and decided he would eat there from now on. The pain never returned.

Scriptures for discussion:

Isaiah 55: 1 & 2

John 6: 48 - 56