

The Gift of Hunger

by Dennis Kinlaw

The gift of hunger is the desire to know and experience God in a deeper way, and seeking God with our whole hearts is the key to finding fulfillment in him.

Duration: 39:57

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 10:40, Matthew 22:37, Hebrews 11:23-28, Revelation 1:12-13

Topics: "Hunger"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being in the presence of God. He acknowledges the value of building friendships and connections with others, but states that the true reason for coming together is to experience God's presence. The speaker highlights the significance of Moses and the legal structure he established, which was influenced by his personal encounter with God. He encourages the audience to seek a face-to-face relationship with God, as it has the power to unlock their untapped potential and bring about transformation in their lives. The speaker also mentions the festivals in the Old Testament and how they were central to Israel's spiritual life, emphasizing the importance of personal exposure to Jesus Christ in bringing about social reform movements.

Transcript

Here the Word of God is found in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, and reading from verse 23, the segment in that great chapter on Moses. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ's greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians, a saying to do, were drowned.

May God bless his word to our hearts. Will you pray with me for just a moment? We thank you, our Father, for the privilege of being together. We know that there is something that comes to us when we are in the fellowship of believers, of those who have similar faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

There is something that comes to us that we never get in any other way. But, our Father, we know that it comes because of your presence with us. And so tonight we'd like for these next few minutes for you to make us as minimally conscious as possible of everything but yourself.

Give us the privilege of confronting you because you have confronted us, and we will give you praise in Christ's name, amen. I want to extend my personal word of welcome to you also. It's a great joy to have you in Wilmore.

And as I look around I see some of you that have been friends over the years, and I suspect there are some of you that will be friends before these four days are over. And so we rejoice in that. There is a great privilege in having just the opportunity to come together to spend four days to open ourselves to God.

I do not know anything that a person could do that would be more important than that. I have in recent days been reading some about the festivals in the Old Testament. You will remember that in Israel's life, every Jew was supposed to go three times a year to the city of Jerusalem.

And for those three special occasions, he was supposed to go for at least a seven- or eight-day stint each time. You know the festivals of the Passover and of ingathering and tabernacles. You know of Pentecost and of tabernacles.

That was the heart of Israel's life. They didn't have a church. They didn't have a Bible.

They didn't have any of the sacraments that we have. And before they had any of those things, the thing that kept the people of God together was the fact that three times a year they came together to worship God and to experience him afresh. You and I would not be sitting here tonight if it had not been for those three festivals.

So I'd like to think that these four days that we have together might play something of the part in our lives that those festivals played in ancient Israel's life, where we come together away from the usual routines that bind us, the things that preoccupy and normally press us, and where we have a chance to look at our priorities. But more than that, we have a chance to look at him and let our lives come more perfectly under his dominance and under his lordship. So for these next four days, I'd like to think that he might be the central one in our midst.

As we said a few moments ago, there are many of us that are old friends, and we will relish the opportunity to refresh those friendships. And that's good and right, and that is a gift from God. And there are many of us that in these days will get to know each other for the first time, and we will find our lives mutually enriched by those friendships.

But those are not the reasons that we come, because, you see, I do not believe there's anything in you or me that merits the kind of travel and the sacrifice that you have gone to to be here, to make it worth your while to do that. But there is something about the presence of God that if you can spend four days in his presence, there is no distance too great to travel, and there is no price too high to pay for that kind of opportunity. You'll be hearing some interesting speakers and some good speakers, and you will have the opportunity to enjoy some priceless music and some teaching.

But the main thing that should be here from now until Wednesday noon is his presence. He is the drawing card that should bind us together. Now is it possible for us to come together like this and miss him? I think it's possible for me to say that if we want to, not a one of us has to miss him, but all of us can with

confidence say that he will be available, he will be here to be met by us.

You know, every religion in the world has its sacred places of pilgrimage, whether in India it's to the Ganges or in Islam to Mecca or whether among the Jews to the Holy Land and among Christians to Jerusalem or to Rome. But one of the things that entrances me the most about the Scripture is that Jesus said, where two or three that belong to me meet together, there will always be a third or a fourth person, that there is something about the believer that when the believer meets with other believers, there is an extra presence, and that presence is the living God. And so that is why we are here.

It's not because of Ashbery, it's not because of Wilmore, it's not because of any of the organizations that we represent, it is because of him that we are here. But isn't it an awesome thing that he is to be found better among his people than anywhere else? There is a sense in which we find him in the sacraments, in baptism, the Lord's Supper and in these things, but there is an unequivocal promise given by Christ that if you receive one who knows him, you get Christ, and if you reject one who knows him, you miss Christ. The same way Jesus said, if you receive me, you get my Father, and if you miss me, you miss my Father.

So there is something about the person who is sitting next to you or in front of you or behind you that makes him or her incredibly valuable to you and incredibly valuable to me because it is in that fellowship of believers that he comes to us. I don't want to take the time tonight to discuss that biblically and to document it, but just let me remind you of that priceless vision in the first chapter of the closing book of the New Testament. In that apocalypse of John, when John suddenly has a vision and there in front of him stands Christ, and when he sees Christ in all of his glory, he is standing in the midst of seven lampstands and seven lamps, and when he says, What are these? God speaks to the prophet and says to him, to the apostle, These are the seven churches and you will find him in the midst of his people.

So I don't know about you, but that puts a leap of anticipation in my soul as I think about what these next four days ought to be. So as we sing, as we hear the Word talk, as we pray together and as we fellowship together, let's be careful that we don't miss him. Now in spite of the promise, it's possible for us to miss him because you will remember that when he came in the flesh, in the incarnation, he lived with his family for thirty years and they never knew who he was.

And the reality is that those that were the closest to him physically and socially when he died still did not believe. You will remember that the hometown in which he grew up, Nazareth, not as big as Wilmore, so everybody in town knew him. But when you remember when he was crucified, they said, Who's he? He's a hometown boy.

Don't pay any attention to him. He is simply a boy from Nazareth. You will remember that his church itself missed him because when he, the one for whom the temple was built, when he came to his own house, the priests who were there to be his servants, they said, What right do you have to rearrange the furniture here? We're the ones that are in control of this house.

And he spoke and said, But you don't understand. It's mine. You made it for me.

But they couldn't believe him. And his own people, the chosen elect people of God, they said about a thief, a robber and a murderer. We can handle him.

Give us Barabbas. But this Jesus of Nazareth, we don't know what to do with him. Now, that makes us conscious that you can be right in the midst of this.

You can be right in the midst of this fellowship and you can miss him and I can miss him too if we are not receptive to him. Now what does it take for us to find and for us to know God in intimacy? Let me very quickly say some very obvious and very simple things. And the first thing I want to say is, you have to want to know him.

And if the want to isn't there, you won't. There has to be a desire that comes in the human heart to know him and to fellowship with him and to commune with him. And if that desire is not there, there is no act that you can perform that will cause you to know him.

Because you see, he responds to that hunger within our hearts. Now I don't know about you, but I've come to believe that the greatest gift that God ever saw fit to give to me was a hunger for himself. Do you remember a day when you didn't have one? I can tell you about a day in my life when I had no hunger for God.

I had no interest in anything religious except to be appropriately proper and to keep a good public appearance. But as far as anything within my heart, there had never been the vaguest quickening to cause me to long to really know him. And then one day a hunger started.

And when that hunger started, it began the total reorientation of my life. I don't know whether you have a hunger in you tonight or not, but if you don't, you need to plead with him that he will quicken you and put one there. And if he has put a hunger in your heart for himself, you ought to say, Lord, intensify, quicken it, make it so strong that it's the dominant factor in my personal existence.

I have become convinced that if there is hunger there, that's promise, because he's the one who put the hunger there. Only the Holy Spirit can cause you to long for God. I was remembering today afresh that story of Joy Davidman.

She was a Jewish. She was an atheist. She was a communist.

She was one of the editors of the communist publication, The People's Masses. She was a graduate of Barnard College in New York City. And she was married to a man who was an author.

And she had a family. They were living just north of New York City. And one morning during the middle of the morning, the phone rang and it was her husband.

And he said, I'm losing it. I'm losing my mind. And he hung up the receiver.

That put her in a panic, and so she spent the day searching for him. And she never could locate him. And so she came to 11, 11.30 and 12 o'clock that night in her home there in the farthest north of New York City, alone with her children, totally alone, full of inner panic, in a state of trauma and shock, and feeling that she was totally alone, when suddenly she said, I knew I wasn't alone.

I didn't know who was there, but I knew there was a presence. And she said suddenly there was hope. And she said something happened in me that night that said I have to find out who he is.

So being a good Marxist, she began to read Lenin. And she read all the works of Lenin to find out who it was that was with her. And that didn't help.

And so being a Jewish, she turned then to the rabbinic literature. She said that was a little bit better. But then one day someone gave her a copy of the New Testament.

And as she read the gospel, she said, I knew who he was. And she said, I've never been alone since. And she became the wife of C.S. Lewis, as you know.

But it's interesting, that sense of presence and hunger and a compelling desire within her to know who he was and to know him. Now I want to ask you, do you have a hunger in you tonight that is the best gift, that's the best possession that you could have? It's worth more than money? It's worth more than fame? It's worth more than security? It's worth more than any gift that this life can give? Just to have an inner hunger for God. I have a friend who's a retired clergyman, graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

He was pastor of a university church. And then he became a church official, a superintendent in his denomination. And he said, I began to find an emptiness within me.

And he said, I began to hunger. He said, we came through annual conference and it's been a very wearing time. And so he said, one morning, the week after annual conference, I wake up about 4.30 in the morning and I knew that I was not going to go back to sleep, so I got up, went into the living room and sat.

And then he said, I knelt next to a coffee table and said, God, if you don't do something for me, I'm done. Now from the human point of view, he was at mid-career. And from the earthly point of view and from the clerical point of view, from the ecclesiastical point of view, he was a genuine success.

But he said, I had a great emptiness within. And on the table there was a book, The Way to Pentecost. And he said, I picked it up and said, well, I'll see how much this guy knows about the Bible.

And he said, cynically, I was teaching Bible at the university at that time. Cynically, I started to read. But he said, as I read, a hunger began to develop within me for the fullness of God's Holy Spirit.

He said, you know, that hunger became so intense, I'll never forget him telling me this. He said, Dennis, I got to the place where I was physically ready to run to find anybody anywhere in the world that could tell me more about Christ's Spirit and how he could fill me. I had one of the preachers to whom he ran tell me about his visit with him.

But he said, one day sitting in my study, I said, Lord, I believe you have something for me that I haven't received. I see it promised in the Word. I know the hunger in my heart.

I don't know enough about it to tell you how to do it, but I suppose you're smart enough to take care of all that. So I ask you and I thank you. And he said, my life began to unfold like a flower before the sun in a new and a fresh way.

Now I want to ask you if you've got a hunger inside you. If you've got a hunger inside you, that's a promise. Now, not only the hunger, we must seek him.

And that means we must turn our direction to him and give him the attention of our hearts, our minds, our souls. Because the Word is very clear. You remember that word Jesus gave us in the Beatitudes? Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Because if you hunger positively and thirst positively, the Word is that you will be filled. Or the word of the prophet, seek ye the Lord while he may be found. And that's what these four days are.

He is findable here, because there are others who bring him. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. If you do not find him here, it may be that the next place you find yourself, but he is not findable.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near. Now the wonderful thing to me is that you don't have to seek him because he wants to be hard to locate.

The reason he says to seek him is so that you'll be sure you've found him instead of an inadequate substitute. Because do you know most people end up with an inadequate substitute for him? If you go to the Old Testament, you will find that the temple was built in such a way that it was very difficult to get to God. There was an area in which a Gentile could go and beyond which he couldn't go, except a danger to his life.

There was an area into which a Jewish woman could go and beyond which she could not go, except a threat to her life. There was an area into which a man could go, a Jewish man, but beyond which he could not go, except a danger to his life. There was a deeper area within into which a man could go if he were a Levite and a further area into which a person could go if he were a priest.

And then there was that final area into which a person could go if he was a chief priest and he could go only one day a year into that immediate presence of God. When I read that and began to study it, I thought, is God trying to hide himself from us? And then I come to the New Testament and it says the veil has been broken and the door has been opened and all are invited in. And do you know why I think the Old Testament temple is structured that way? Because that world was full of substitutes for God.

And God says, I want them to know the difference between the living God and all of the other options. So we need to seek him to be sure that we found the real thing. And when we seek him, the scripture is very clear that we need to seek him with our whole hearts.

Now that frightens some of us to seek him with our whole hearts, let him have total control of our lives. What will he do with the likes of me? And will I be happy about what he does or wants to do with the likes of me? But you see, it's appropriate that we should seek him that way because of who he is. The one thing we know is that this is his creation.

He made us all. And as he made us all, he has a right to be Lord over it all. And the reality is that there ought not to be a spot in the universe that is not under his loving, sovereign control.

What a tragedy it is that when I keep a little territory in my life in which the Lord God of all is not in control and I have rebellion and treason within me and there's not a one of us who hasn't been there. There is something appropriate about saying, if you're God, you ought to have a right to be God everywhere. And if you're God, you ought to have a right to be God everywhere within me.

So come during these days, press your frontiers within me to see that there's not a corner left that you don't possess and in which you are not Lord over all. Get the rebellion out of us. Now, you know, the reality is that I shouldn't fear his rule because he's given a very priceless definition of what his rule is.

Do you remember Paul in the 14th chapter of Romans saying, the kingdom of God, the rule of God is not meat and drink but it's righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. And if there's a corner in me that he doesn't control, then you can count on it that there is an absence of righteousness, there's an absence of joy and there's an absence of peace. And if I will let his righteousness move into that remotest corner, then I will find a flooding of his joy and a flooding of his peace.

Now, if we seek him and find him, there are things that take place that are priceless to me. You see, here is the place where, whether we want to admit it or not, we find our greatest fulfillment. Did you know that he's better than any of his gifts? Could I say that over again? Because I don't think most people hear that.

It took me years to hear it. Do you know it took me years before I even heard it when I preached it myself? You know, one of the advantages of being a preacher is that you have to listen to yourself occasionally. And then you've got to go home and live with what you've preached, at least face it, you know.

But it is true that our greatest fulfillment is not in any of his gifts, but it's his gifts that we latch our affections on. You will remember that Eve in the garden looked at the tree and the fruit was beautiful. It appealed her aesthetic nature.

She'd like to take some home. Then she smelled it and realized it was good to the taste and it appealed to her physical senses. And then somebody whispered to her, it will make you wise, and that appealed to her pride.

And so she took her eyes off the giver and put them on the gift. And when she took her eyes off the giver and put them on the gift, she lost the giver and all that goes with him. And the gift became a source of pollution and corruption instead of a source of satisfaction.

Do you know the most satisfied people I've ever met are the ones who have surrendered themselves wholly and completely to God and where he is first and preeminent within their lives. And when he gets to that point, as we said, it's very satisfying. I've become interested over the years in just that very motif in the history of the church and in the scripture and in the literature of the church.

And so I've found myself looking for testimonies to that. Do you know one of the places where you'll find some of the greatest is in an old, old hymn book, if you've got one. I ran across a hymn many years ago.

It's very old, and you'll recognize the oldness of it, the style. How tedious and tasteless the hours. That's an interesting way for a worship hymn to begin, isn't it? That's a good description of most church services, isn't it? How tedious and tasteless the hours when Jesus no longer I see.

Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers have all lost their sweetness to me. The midsummer sun shines but dim. The fields strive in vain to look gay.

But when I am happy in Him, December's as pleasant as May. I'd be interested, how many of you have ever heard that hymn? Well, we've got a few old folks here. Let me tell you about the second verse.

His name, the name of Jesus, yields the sweetest perfume and sweeter than music His voice. His presence disperses my gloom and makes all within me rejoice. I should, were He always thus nigh, have nothing to wish or to fear, no mortal as happy as I, my summer would last all the year.

If I just had Him, I wouldn't need anything else. But hold on. Content with beholding His face, my all to His pleasure resigned.

No changes of season or place will make any change in my mind. While blessed with a sense of His love, a palace, a toy would appear and prisons would palaces prove if Jesus would dwell with me there. Now, isn't it interesting when a guy gets to the place where the White House becomes a toy, plastic that he can kick out of the way and when a prison is a better place to dwell than a palace because Christ is there.

The guy who knows Christ that way is free. The person who knows God that way is liberated because you see what he needs for the satisfaction of his soul cannot be taken from him. It's interesting that was written by John Newton and John Newton was a slave trader.

John Newton was a brutal and a dissolute man and he got a vision of Christ. And you know what he became? He wrote amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see. And then he became a pastor and then he became a vigorous abolitionist in a day when it was dangerous as well as brutally unpopular to fight slavery. Do you know what I noticed? I noticed that the greatest social reform movements in the history of the world started in somebody's personal exposure face-to-face to Jesus Christ.

There is something about getting to know him that turns us into creative, useful beings. Do you know the most important thing in your life is not what you do but the one you know? More important than any service we will ever render is face-to-face fellowship with him to where we know him because that's the only way that we will be what God intended us to be. You know, there's where our safety is because if you've ever tasted that then the allure that the world has to offer loses its appeal.

You know, there are many people that come to God because of fear. John Newton came to God because he was afraid. He was on a leaky ship that was sinking and he got converted.

Now, we understand that. But you know, fear will bring you to God but it will never keep you there. You know, there are many people who come because of guilt, conscience, law.

Conscience and law may bring you to Christ. Guilt may bring you but it will never keep you there. Do you know the only thing I believe that will ever keep a person? It's the face of Jesus Christ in your life.

When you've seen him and you've fallen in love and you know there's a joy in his presence that nothing else in the world can ever give, then there's something that draws you to him and you can look the best the world has in the face and say, it's not good enough. I've tasted something better. A friend of mine said it in a rather dramatic way.

He said, if there isn't more of this, I might as well go on a long, good drunk. Now, that may not be your way of expressing it but he was getting at the heart of it. He found something that could keep him and it does.

Some of you who have been with us at Hemlock Inn will remember that three years ago in 1988 there was a lady with us and her husband, Connie Herndon in Jim. Connie had cancer and was facing the end at that time. She was with us in August and in September she went to Seattle for bone marrow transplant.

Before she left, she sat down with her sister and she began to talk to her and she said, Pam, I'm not coming back. And Pam said, Connie, don't tell me that. And she said, no honey, I'm not coming back.

And she said, what do you mean? She said, the Lord has told me. I'm not coming back. But she said, it's good.

And Pam said, what do you mean it's good? How can it be good if you're not coming back? Well, she said, do you know? The Lord has told me that through my death somebody whom I love will seek Christ and fall in love with Him. That will make it all worthwhile. I got a letter this week from Pam.

She said, you see, Dr. Kinlaw, I was a practicing homosexual and I'd been practicing homosexuality as a lesbian and had been for 19 years. She said, for 39 years I'd been totally convinced that I was born that way. And because I was born that way there was no way out.

But she said, through Connie's witness and through that sense of the divine in her life I began to get a glimmer of what it was that could enable her to look death in the face and say, it's good. She said that was in September. And Connie died in October.

And she said, in October I saw Christ. And she said, I started that long path to wholesome normalcy. And I've been on it now for three years.

I'm a testimony to the world that you're not born that way. He has the power to transform us. Let me go back to my text.

It took me a long time to get there, didn't it? The greatest man I think that ever lived in human history was Moses. I'm ready to argue that case anywhere, anytime. His influence on human history is greater than anybody else's unless you want to put Christ in the mix.

But we wouldn't have understood Christ if it hadn't been for Moses. You remember, he lived in a palace. That's what John Newton was singing about.

And he gave up a palace. And he gave up a palace for a wilderness. He gave up a palace where everybody served him and he was a general commanding an Egyptian army with everybody bowing and scraping to tend in sheep.

Have you ever taken care of sheep? I can't think of anything worse. Have you ever smelled wet sheep? He moved from the Pharaoh's palace to sheep. But one day while he was tending sheep, a bush burned.

And when he looked, there was God. And all of human history has come out of it. Because you will remember, the one that he met there is the one that cares for the oppressed, the one that cares for the widow, the one that cares for the orphan, the one that cares for the fatherless, the one that has no rights.

All of our understanding of rights, legally and otherwise, have come largely out of the legal structure that Moses gave to the world that came from his coming to know the character of the one that spoke in that burning bush to him and later talked with him face-to-face. You know what excites me about four days like this? Who knows what will come out? Who knows what will come out? Because you see, when you get face-to-face with God, all the potential that God buried in you that's never been realized begins to get quickened. And if you keep yourself in a face-to-face relationship with him, all the potential that is in you will be realized.

Like the sun shining on a plant that's been under a bucket. The color changes. The plant straightens up.

It begins to grow and it begins to blossom. You take that sun away and it wilts and it turns white and it dies. I hope you find his face this week because he's here to be found.

And if you do, your life will be different. But you know, the world will be different.

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