

*The Insatiable Appetite*  
Ezekiel 16:49-50; Galatians 5:1-6  
11/8/15  
Randy Lovelace

I want to say, some have responded when I told them the story that my plan was to spend about four weeks in three verses—they said, “Really?” And I said, “Yes, really.” And I recognize it is somewhat of a departure from what I would normally do, but the reason is, I found this passage to be so compelling. And it was brought to my attention a number of years ago, yes, in seminary—but how and in what ways, I must confess that when you’re studying all the prophets, it’s really easy to go over really great passages because there are so many of them, and you recognize it’ll take a life of ministry to be able to get to most of them.

But there was a writer, Rosaria Butterfield, and her understanding of her conversion to Christ, who herself was a lesbian for most of her life. She was a professor in LGBT studies. And she wrote a compelling book. Her first book was called *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. And one of the verses that greatly helped her understand what her real sin was—as some theologians would call it, the sin underneath the sin—what helped her was this passage. I found her remarking on it quite compelling. And so I’ve been working with this in my mind and my heart over the last year and a half, looking for the right time. And so I wanted to spend this fall in the prophets, first in Ezekiel, and then in Jeremiah in December. And so I thought this would be a good time to unpack these three very important verses. I apologize for the long introduction. However, it bears repeating from last week.

This is a prophecy from Ezekiel. Ezekiel wrote these prophecies some six years after he was brought into exile under the Babylonian reign of Nebuchadnezzar. And he was a prophet called by God to prophesy to his homeland of Judah, which included Jerusalem. And these verses contain very, very difficult words for the city of Jerusalem. And in them, he calls Sodom “Jerusalem’s sister,” not because she was related by blood—most certainly not. But the actions of Jerusalem, the sins of the people of Jerusalem, God’s people, were spiritually akin to the sins of Sodom. And as I entered in last week—many Christians, were they asked, “What were the sins of Sodom?” Many would try to find the target of the sins of Sodom in their sexual immorality. But what these verses unpack is that, indeed, their real sin did not find first and foremost its place in their sexual immorality, for their sexual immorality—all outward action, outward sin, according to Scriptures, find their roots not in outward action, but in the roots set in the heart. And that’s what Ezekiel is unpacking. And that’s where we’re going to be going.

And so last week we looked at pride. This week, we’re looking at the insatiable appetite. And we will find a corollary reading, which is the cure for the insatiable appetite—we’ll find its fulfillment in the work of Christ telescoping to the Letter to the Galatians. So I’ll be reading this morning from Ezekiel 16:49-50 and then Galatians 5:1-6. Let’s read together. You’ll see the Scriptures on the screens in front of you.

“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.”  
[Ezekiel 16:49-50, ESV]

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision

that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. [Galatians 5:1-6, ESV]

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me?

Now, Lord, we ask that you would open this portion of your Word by the power and presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would enable us to receive and understand the words of Ezekiel, but enable us as well to understand our own lives in light of this word. And may this word not be just for the filling up of our minds with knowledge, but may these words and may my words be used of you and your Holy Spirit to direct us to the person, the beauty, and the grace of Jesus Christ our Savior. In his matchless name we pray. Amen.

So last week began with pride. You'll see that as the first in the list of the sins which Ezekiel unpacks. He then says, "Sodom and her daughters," that would also include Gomorrah, were not only guilty of pride, but they were also guilty of "excess of food." And then next week we will look at "prosperous ease," and then we will look at avoiding or neglecting the poor and needy, and then haughtiness. So this week, excess of food—or the insatiable appetite.

Now, I must tell you, there could be nothing more daunting to preach about than the insatiable appetite. Let me say by way of confession and by way of teaching of the Scriptures of the Lord that all of us are gluttons. Every single one of us. This morning, what got me up? The thought of a sweet roll and coffee. I have more food in my pantry than a majority of the planet has access to. Gluttony and excess of food—and let me say this very clearly, first to the women who are sitting before me—gluttony has nothing to do with the way you look or being overweight. Men? Gluttony has nothing to do with the way you look or being overweight. A glutton can be as easily a skinny person who walks into Starbucks to order a coffee that has a six-letter name to it as it will be to the person who eats an entire bag of Cheetos but didn't need it. It has nothing to do with weight. It has everything to do with the heart. So let's talk about excess.

Let's consider for just a moment what pride can do to the human heart, as we talked about last week. One of the things that pride can do, one of the symptoms, most certainly, is, "I deserve this" And in the city of Sodom and her daughters, the idea of being filled up with pride—"We have arrived. I have worked by my own hands. I have achieved this. I deserve this." And what can go along with that is excess. And that excess, because we are human beings who enjoy food and drink, one very easy thing to do is to simply turn to food and to be filled with it, to enjoy it, and to invite its excess.

The word translated here as "excess" means "a super-abundance of bread." And do not get lost in the word bread by simply meaning, well, the solid stuff. Bread could also represent the whole spectrum of food, which would definitely include drink. One of the things which we know from the Scriptures is that clearly the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah were a revelatory people. They definitely enjoyed partying. And with that came pride, and therefore, giving themselves to excess. And so the glutton, first and foremost, is not eating the food before them because they find it to be particularly beautiful or enjoyable. It's the fact that the glutton eats it irrespective of its beauty, and in fact doesn't even think about it but is simply taking it in. And when they take it in, there's never an end to it. There's an excess of it. There's a search for its excess.

Now, the hard part about preaching about this is we live in a land of excess. We have so much access to excess. One of the first times I ever spent any time in a Costco was when we moved to Maryland. The partial issue is the fact that New Jersey didn't have enough land to build Costco's. There was a Costco where we lived, but it was really hard to get to, and there were so many people, I was afraid to go into the parking lot. But it wasn't until I arrived in Columbia, Maryland and found that they had a really big

parking lot with really big parking spaces that I went into Costco. Holy cow! I've never seen so many boxes of raisins in one package. You don't need to go the gym, people. Just go to Costco and just pick stuff up. And the carts! The carts are larger than many of our beds that we grew up in. Right? And then they have the big carts with really big handles and the big wheels—they're flatbeds. Right? There's so much stuff.

And if you go into just your local grocery store—I've used it because it's—I don't particularly like mustard, but I find it very deeply difficult to walk into a grocery store in the United States, and there's no just one mustard. There are myriad choices of mustard. And those are condiments, people. You can't live on mustard alone, though some of you may have tried it somewhere in your upbringing. But I will tell you, you can't live on mustard. But everything you try to live on, there's a condiment for it. I mean, sure, Whole Foods is easy to poke fun at with its asparagus water, but it does exist.

And so the reality is that it's hard to preach on this because I live in the water in which I'm preaching to. I like the excess. There's a lot of choice. I can fit it to my taste, to my approach, to my philosophy of food. You want a cookbook? There are thousands upon thousands of cookbooks published every month, blog after blog, on what to do with that food if the cookbooks aren't enough. We live in a country that has perfected gluttony and called it socially acceptable. The problem becomes, for the glutton, when it becomes something we're no longer even thinking about the excess. When we've become so numb to how much we have, and then we recognize we get angry when we have to go to the service counter to get a rain check because they're out of the one thing we came to get. "What do you mean, you're out of vanilla creamer? Isn't there anything in the back?" Have you ever found yourself in that circumstance? Have you ever found yourself texting your spouse, going, "They're out again." I have. Ever grown impatient with it?

You see, we become so accustomed to it, we forget like fish that we're swimming in the water of gluttony. And we have so much excess, and it's being advertised to us. And the reason why it's being advertised to us is because we have the means to purchase it—or at least, we have the access to job that will give us the ability to have access to those things. And so we've earned it, we've worked for it. We're not even thinking about it in particularly prideful ways, but we just don't realize just how much we have, until we travel to a part of the world where they don't have that, and we come back.

Now, please understand. There's nothing wrong with having a Costco. There's nothing wrong with going to Costco. There's nothing wrong with having fifty different mustards to choose from. The problem becomes, are we forgetting how susceptible our hearts are to becoming accustomed to the excess? And then slowly but surely, the excess can easily become an addiction. We know that when we begin to give ourselves to things over and over and over again, our physiological selves become quite accustomed to them. But we're not just physical beings. We are spiritual beings that have strong desires, strong loves. And when a physiological desire comes into contact with a spiritual desire, addiction can happen.

So I want to talk a little bit about the problem of gluttony and how it can lead to addiction. Let's talk a little bit about the anatomy of addiction. Biblically speaking, when we begin to turn to an agent, to something that we desire, something that can be picked up and ingested—in this case, food or drink—that we are pursuing to do one of the following things—either to forget something that is difficult, to deal with something that is difficult, to punish ourselves or even to punish others, as a cure for timidity or self-consciousness. When we turn to these things to avoid pain, when we try to use these things to build up our self-image or to manage our emotions, to fit in with others, to prove to ourselves that we can do what we want, when we want it, how we want it, or to keep loneliness at bay—these are just some of the things that Ed Welch, in his book, *Banquet in the Grave: Dealing with Addictions*, unpacks as many of the things which the Bible talks about in the language of idolatry.

When we begin to turn to something to deal with a disappointment, a difficulty, a limitation, either inwardly or outwardly, and when a spiritual desire, a need within us, something that rises up, meets with

a physiological thing, what can begin to happen is addiction. And it becomes an addiction when we turn to it to solve something that we want to fix. One addict to alcohol said these words to a friend of his. He says, "When the desire for drink hits me, I feel like I am being pulled in different directions by two different teams of horses." And his friend asked, "Which team wins?" And he said, "It depends on which one I say 'giddyup' to."

You see, at every level, as human beings, everyone sitting before me and everyone who will hear my voice understands what it means to feel an emptiness in side—somewhere, somehow. And what we begin to do is that emptiness begins to gnaw at us in some way, and we want to turn to something to solve it, to fix it. And in this case, excess of food can easily become a way to fix the problem—or excess of drink, or the way we deal with food in some way, can be a way to deal with those problems.

And I'm very grateful for the ministry of Doctor Ed Welch with the Christian Counseling Educational Foundation. Years ago, in 2001, when I had the opportunity to go to a talk by Timothy Keller at, of all places, the Harvard Club in New York City, one of the things they talk about—and particularly Doctor Keller talked about—is these things. You see it in your outline. There's a tolerance effect and a delusional field.

The tolerance effect is this. It's a physiological thing, that when we need more and more relief, when we feel we need it, what we do is we begin to turn to something, and we begin to need more and more of it to satisfy, because the more and more we need to get excited. You see, we need to feel that high again. We need to feel that escape again. We need to feel that that hole is being filled. And the problem is that we have a physiological tolerance that gets met. And to get to that high again, to get to that happy place again, it requires more and more, because our bodies build up a tolerance to it. And the more and more we take in, the more and more it's going to require of us. So when a person begins to struggle with lust and they turn to porn and they keep pouring it on and looking at it more and more and more and more, it will never satisfy. You will reach a tolerance effect that at some point may lead to adultery in a very physical way and not just in a mental way. There is a tolerance effect to these things, and they will always ask for more of you.

But the other problem is the delusional field. When we begin to fall prey to reaching this high, filling this hole, in some way that takes us to a happy place, we have to begin to spin a web of deception that we actually don't have a problem. And we begin to deny that we're being mastered by the very thing we're using to fill the hole, to get to the excited place. And so what begins to happen is these twin voices of justification and denial. The justification says, "This is a good thing. I deserve this." And the hard part about food and drink in the United States is it's completely socially acceptable. There's a t-shirt in the mall that says, "Yes, but first coffee." I'll do what you ask me to do, but first I need coffee. It's socially acceptable to turn to all manner of drink, to all kinds of things, to simply satisfy the itch. And we begin to build a delusional field of justification—"I deserve this. I can afford this. It's acceptable. It's respected. It's not a bad thing."

But then also, what comes along with it is denial, and that is, "I can actually stop. I've got this. I've got it under control." But addiction begins to set in when the thing that we turn to, to relieve our distress, becomes a source of stress. Addiction is set in when the thing we turn to, to solve our distress, becomes the stress. And that's when we know we're stuck, and we have to compensate for how it's affecting us—how it's affecting our work, our parenting, our relationships.

So, you see, it is not in any way, shape, or form morally neutral to simply be surrounded by excess—not because the excess in and of itself is bad. It's because we are moral beings. We have spiritual loves and longings and desires, and we also have a great amount of pain—pain which is past, pain which is future, or anxiety about pain that we want to avoid in the future. And instinctively, we want to avoid it. We want to cover it up. We want to get rid of it—whatever we have to do to satisfy it. And what is so readily at hand is food and drink. And so the excess of food can very easily lead to addiction.

But I want to say clearly—not all addiction is sin. There are medical reasons why there are certain addictions, things that are not the personal intent of the person who has it. But all sin is addiction. It's an addiction to avoiding God and avoiding Jesus, to try to find a way to solve that which is really bothering us, what we're really hurting in, the place where we feel empty. And so is it any surprise that a place like Sodom, so full of pride, could find itself in such revelry, which could have produced such excess of giving themselves to food and to drink because they deserved it? And then it became a habit—a habit which required a great degree more of the very thing which they were turning to. And they're saying, "Hey, this is okay. Our culture accepts it. It's all good." Now, we have no idea how many addicts there were in Sodom, but this we do know—the human heart is deceptive above all things, and we will seek after whatever we need to cure what we feel is aching inside of us.

And so I want to say, before I move to the third point, this—there's a theological model for understanding our addiction to food and drink, and there's a medical model which understands our addiction to food and drink. Neither one completely encapsulates all the reasons why we find ourselves giving ourselves to these things over and over again. But the medical model would have us believe there is no responsibility on the part of the addict, and the theological reason alone would have us believe it's always because of personal choice. But the Bible allows both together.

Somewhere along the line in our brokenness we made a personal choice to give ourselves to food and to its manipulation—either its abundance, or controlling its abundance in some way—or the same with giving ourselves to drink in whatever form, whether it's sugar or whether it's alcohol. Somewhere along the line, we began to use the words "comfort food" simply as a cover-up for what we're really feeling inside. Please understand me—I love comfort food. I grew up in the South, y'all. I've got plenty of comfort foods.

But let me tell you something as full confession. My years of growing up in the south may have give me a taste for Chick-Fil-A, but I can tell you as an adult, my trips to Chick-Fil-A have not always been because I was hungry, but because I wanted to remember something that gave me comfort because I was hurting. Is it an addiction? Confessing to you, no, I do not believe Chick-Fil-A has control over my life. But I do know this—it can. It can. It's closed on Sunday, so you can't go get it today anyway. So the way out is to close everything on Sundays. No, I'm just kidding.

All right. So the way out. Third point. There is a way out of the insatiable appetite. There is a way out from giving ourselves to finding answers with the insatiable appetite, and it this. First, there's a caution. Of course there's a caution. And I'm grateful for the work of Thomas Chalmers, who in his great sermon, which is available online, and it's called "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." The answer to being controlled by food or drink—the answer and the way out to that is not, first and foremost, discipline. It is not, first and foremost, discipline. This is what Thomas Chalmers says. I'm going to read this section, and then I will explain it, because sometimes it can seem inscrutable. So let's work together. He says:

It is seldom that any of our tastes are made to disappear by a mere process of natural extinction. At least, it is very seldom, that this is done through the instrumentality of reasoning. It may be done by excessive pampering—but it is almost never done by the mere force of mental determination.

The way to conquer being mastered by food and drink is not merely through the sheer force of mental determination or physical determination. He says:

But what cannot be destroyed is that one taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection of the mind. It is thus, that the boy ceases, at length, to be the slave of his appetite, but it is because a manlier taste has now brought it into subordination - and that the youth ceases to idolize pleasure, but it is because the idol of wealth has become the stronger and gotten the

ascendancy and that even the love of money ceases to have the mastery over the heart of many a thriving citizen, but it is because drawn into, the whirl of city politics, another affection has been wrought into his moral system, and he is now lorded over by the love of power. There is not one of these transformations in which the heart is left without an object. Its desire for one particular object may be conquered; but as to its desire for having some one object or other, this is unconquerable.

He's saying this, which is very Biblical, about the human heart—we are worshippers at our core. Our hearts were made to love, and if we believe the way to overcome sloth or laziness is to try to convince ourselves if we work hard enough, we'll make enough money—that somehow that's a better thing—it just becomes the new master. And money, when it becomes a master—it, too, can become displaced as the love of the heart, if we believe power is the thing which we were really after. In other words, the heart hates vacuums and will not exist without a chief love.

And so the caution to trying to find mastery over food and drink is not itself the sheer power of mental will. It's the understanding that where we really are broken is in our heart's desire. And where it must begin is our love, our chief love, of our heart—it must be transformed. Because if we don't see that, we'll just keep replacing one idol for another idol. And this is what Paul was after when he was talking to them in Galatia. He says—and here I'm going to paraphrase using what we've been talking about:

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yolk of slavery. I, Paul, say to you that if you accept that food or drink is your savior, then Christ will have no advantage to you. I testify again that every man who accepts that food or drink is the way to live, then you will be obligated to live by food or drink. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified through trying to satisfy your own desires, and you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ, there is neither food nor drink that counts, for everything is only by faith working through love.

Only when our hearts find the correct order of love chiefly in Jesus Christ as its object will all the other loves find their proper order. Only when Christ becomes more and more a part of the love of our heart will food and drink find their proper place.

So how do we get there? It's not, first and foremost, through ethics. It's not, first and foremost, through knowledge. And let me say this to a very educated group of people. The only way to start here, for our hearts to find their love in Jesus Christ, is to begin with that which is transcendent, that which is mysterious—may I say it?—that which is mystical. When we allow the Lord Jesus Christ to overwhelm our hearts with his love for us from the cross and his victory in the resurrection—when we are able to say, “Lord Jesus, lover of my soul, rescue me from these false, insatiable lovers.”

John Donne, in one of his holy sonnets—my favorite, I think, of all of his poems—a seventeenth century poet said these words:

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,  
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.

Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Our hearts were built to love and will fill every crevice of hurt and pain and brokenness with a love that we believe will love us back. We are always searching for the transcendent. And in our food and drink and our givenness to excess, in giving ourselves addictively to things like it, is a desire to be loved. But the dirty little obvious secret is food and drink will never love us back. That glass of wine, that plate of food, will never say, "My, my, my, how wonderful you are." It can only say, "Have more of me, and I will promise you something. Come on. Just one more bite. Just one more glass."

Ladies and gentlemen, what we need first and foremost is not an ethical discipline. We need hearts that are enthralled and ravished by a Savior who has no tolerance field, who does not lie—there is no shadow of turning—who says, "While you were yet my enemy, I died for you. Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. For my yolk is easy, and my burden is light." The Psalmist says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Taste and see that the Lord is good. The only way to defeat our insatiable appetite is to find our home in the one who created us. May the Lord enable us to see with the light of his Spirit—"Lord, I need thee, O, I need thee"—that he would bring all of our other loves into proper order. Let's pray.

Now, O Lord, free us. Free us, O Lord, from our addictions. Free us, Lord, from seeking transcendence and wholeness and healing in anything but you. Free us from finding our true identity in anything but you. Rescue us. Break us from our idols. And, O Lord, we pray, may the food you give and the drink that you provide in the work of Jesus Christ overwhelm us with a love that will never let us go, that will truly satisfy and free us from all of our false masters. We thank you for your truth. We thank you that Jesus is truth. And we thank you, Lord, that the gospel presses in on us, even into our pantries and our refrigerators—because, O Lord, you work in our hearts to see that we were made to love you, because you love us. In Jesus' name. Amen.