

September 1, 2019

Dan Hollis

Up to sixty percent of the human body is water. As humans we're made up of tiny particles of all kinds, all tied up together in various different ways. And if you were to wring one of us out like a sponge—which, by the way, I don't recommend... don't try this at home... you'd end up with sixty percent water, and forty percent other stuff.

Now when you start thinking about people like this, it raises some interesting questions. My favorite is one that's made it's way around the internet a number of times over the years. "If I'm ninety-nine pounds, and I eat *one* pound of nachos, does that make *me* one percent nacho?" Which I think is a fascinating existential question. And if *true*, it would mean that after two-and-a-half years of living in York, *I* must be at least a few percent "lobster mac & cheese." It also leads to the age-old philosophical treatise: "You are what you eat."

And I think that message is at the core of this section of Jeremiah, the book we read from just a few moments ago. Jeremiah was a prophet active in ancient Israel about six hundred years before the birth of Christ. The message God had placed on Jeremiah's heart was that God's people had gone astray, and if they didn't get their act together it would not go well for them. Jeremiah was desperate—he saw all the different social and political ills that were circling the nation, and he saw the rival empires that were eyeing his homeland like it was a tasty carcass rotting in the sun. He knew God had the answers, the solutions that would get them out of this dangerous predicament, but he had to somehow convince the people to understand.

And Jeremiah was nothing if not direct. He didn't shy away from telling it like he saw it. The sentence *just before* today's Scripture reading from Jeremiah began goes like this:

"Thus says the Lord: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?"

That's how Jeremiah's speech here in Chapter 2 *starts*. Our reading today skipped that part because it's kind of a *lot* for someone to sit down in a nice friendly church and all of a sudden with no warning hear Carol MacDonald start reading from the Bible about how *worthless* you and your ancestors are. That's not what we come to church for. At least it's not the kind of church *I* want to go to.

But it's an important part of Jeremiah's message, and I think it speaks directly to this idea that "you are what you eat." Jeremiah saw his people putting all their hopes, their joy, their love and fulfillment, their *lives* into things that were empty. That

had no nutritional value. The meaning and completeness they sought, they wouldn't *find*, because in Jeremiah's mind they weren't looking for the right *things*.

I think we can all recognize examples of this kind of situation in our lives today. We seek nourishment in money, for example. And when I say nourishment I'm not talking about "physical" nutrition, because, yes, money can bring real satisfaction and solve real problems. It can put food on our table, give us safety and security, keep the loan sharks at bay with one hand and grant us convertibles and video games and the first color TV on the block with the other.

Seeking money can benefit us and even do a lot of good for others through generosity and charity. But if money becomes our *focus*, our *god*, the place we go to for meaning and wholeness... not only will it leave us wanting—spiritually hungry still—but it can corrupt us, addict us, make us selfish and jealous, as we hoard our wealth and do more and more desperate and immoral things to fill that hole in our hearts.

And money's just one example of many gods we can chase after. Attention, affirmation, power, fame, a sense of superiority, conquest or victory, weapons, social status... looking for love in all the wrong places.

Just like in our time, Jeremiah saw a people who were becoming what they ate. People chasing after empty things and becoming empty themselves. Like being lost at sea, seeking to quench their thirst with the water all around them, but finding that the salt water only makes them thirstier. Draining them of life and soul.

Part of the problem Jeremiah saw was that wherever people searched for nourishment, they weren't asking where God was. Focusing *solely* on their material needs or temporary "feel-good" highs to the exclusion of all else, no one was looking for anything deeper. They weren't recognizing the active power of God in their lives because they weren't looking for anything bigger than themselves.

We mostly ask where God is when bad things happen. Right? It's easy to ask where God is when everything's gone wrong. Why didn't God help me? Why didn't God protect me? Where is God in my suffering, why won't God take away my pain? We ask those questions all the time, and we *should!* Those questions are the first steps to finding the answers, and finding where God *is!*

But we don't *always* recognize when God is in the *good*. When everything's going well, everything's lining up just right, and dinner tastes so *good* tonight, our thoughts don't *always* go to God, do they? Can any of us say that we lift up more prayers of gratitude than prayers of concern in our lives? I know I don't.

And we almost *never* notice God in the mundane. Or even *look*. The boring, the everyday, the average, routine. The stuff that happens in all the moments between Point A and Point B. Default, normal... blah blah blah. Why would God be *there*, right?

When we don't seek God in *all* those elements of our life—the bad times, the good times, and even the *bland* times—we won't *find*. Every one of those moments is just a little more empty because we aren't looking for the God in it all. The meaning, the fulfillment, the wholeness and flourishing of life is always going to be *missing* something if we aren't *opening* ourselves to it.

Jeremiah saw his people chasing after all manner of things, but it was all *surface*. There was nothing *greater* in their pursuits. Nothing deeper, nothing holy.

And Jeremiah had to beat them over the head with his message because God *wouldn't*. God was *there*, doing God's thing, in every corner of life in every corner of the world... but the people weren't *engaging* with it. The people had turned away from spiritual pursuits toward empty calories that would never fully satisfy.

And the irony is that God was actually *there* in all those things they were *seeking*. God *can* be found in food and television and technology. Spiritual beauty exists *within* money and fame and sex and victory. God is active and accessible and *ready to work* in all those things we keep making idols for ourselves out of.

If you look in money with an attitude of accumulation, you may get lucky and accumulate some money. But if you look in money with an openness to God, you'll find where—in all that money going back and forth—God is at work, and where God can *be* at work, and how God *wants* you to be a *part* of that work.

If you look in *television* with an attitude of diversion and escapism, sure, you'll have a lovely time and spend a few pleasant hours tossing back some popcorn. But if you look in television with an openness to God, you'll start to recognize messages God has for your heart, and lessons God has for your mind, woven into themes and storylines and characters both good and bad.

But why bother? To paraphrase Freud, can't a cigar just be a cigar? Sure it can. But if that's *all* you're hanging your life on, you will find yourself empty more and more. Again and again, your gas tank hits E and the light on your spiritual dashboard begins to glow.

As a Christian, I believe that God has what you need. Whatever it is that you need in this moment, God has it. Those moments in our lives where we desperately need God and can't *see* God, even though truly I tell you God is there reaching out to you? We would have been able to *see* if we had been *looking* all along.

You are what you eat. Or, in a more biblical sense, you are what you *drink*. Again and again in the Bible, God is referred to as—or as the *source* of—living water. A spiritual refreshment that quenches deeper than thirst, that heals, renews, cleanses, and transforms. In the Gospel of John, Jesus sits by a well full of ordinary water and says, “Everyone who drinks of *this* water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that *I* will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The Book of Revelation speaks of a “river of the water of life” that flows through the kingdom of God. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end,” says God. “To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

God's fountain can quench your thirst and prepare you for all the long treks through the desert ahead. And when you travel in the desert you want to drink *water*, not soda or alcohol or coffee. Water becomes a part of you, up to sixty percent they say. *Water* will get you to the other side of the desert... the rest of it won't.

I shifted from talking about *food* to *water* because *Jeremiah* does. He talks about *cisterns*: large spaces people would cut out of bedrock to catch rainwater because there wasn't much water to be *found* in the dry land where they lived. Jeremiah said that the way people pursued *fullness* without the *body* was like trying to catch rainwater in a cracked cistern. It was as if Jeremiah's people were crawling at the bottom of the cistern, licking up a thin film of stagnant water, muck, and grit. Have you ever been at the beach and gotten sand in your water bottle? And every sip now has a crunch to it?

Jeremiah is trying to remind us that *sure*, we can *try* to dig our own cisterns... but there's a perfectly good fountain right over there that will quench our thirst and fill us up in ways *nothing* else can. It's like eating a bag of potato chips when there's a three-course feast in the other room.

In chapter 20, Jeremiah describes his experience of God as a burning fire locked up in his bones. Just like *we* are some percent water, Jeremiah was some percent *God*. When we drink from the water of God we become some percent living water. Some percent God. Our very being becomes tangled up in God, and that changes us. It transforms us.

If instead of sixty percent water our lives were sixty percent God, we wouldn't have to ask the *question* Jeremiah's people failed to ask. "Where is God?" We would already *see* it, every day. We would see the way God is active in our lives and be grateful. We would see the ways God is guiding us and follow. We would see the power of God, grab onto it, and use it to do God's work! There would never again be a moment when we felt empty, or lost and alone.

If you've ever had a long walk in the hot sun and gotten home and taken a cold drink out of the fridge... *you* know the feeling of that first ice-cold drink. The relief, the healing, that surge of energy? You could feel that all the time!

Because you are what you drink. And you are what you eat. You are what you consume.

Seek the wind of the Spirit and breathe. Seek the nourishment of Christ and eat. Seek the fountain of God's living water and drink.

I'll take a pound of that over a pound of nachos any day. Will you?

Amen.