

The Problem of Loss

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[0 : 00] Go with me to John chapter 6. John chapter 6. We've discussed the tension that death creates regarding our sense of identity.

Who are we in light of the fact that we die? And last time we considered the matter of futility. Since everything is perishable in this fallen world, what meaning can anything have?

Well, today we examine yet another problem death imposes on us, and that is the problem of loss.

The problem of loss. I'll begin by reading portions of John chapter 6, starting with the first verse.

After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?

[1 : 24] He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?

Jesus said, Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.

So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, This is indeed the prophet who has come into the world. Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

[2 : 34] Now let's skip down to verse 25. The crowd of people whom Jesus fed followed him around the sea and found him the next morning. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here?

Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

For on him the God the Father has set his seal. Then they said to him, What must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered them, This is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent.

So they said to him, Then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness as it is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Jesus then said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

[3 : 47] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They said to him, Sir, give us this bread always. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up

on the last day.

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. Now this exchange continues throughout the chapter, but let's skip down once more to verse 66.

After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, Do you want to go away as well? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? [5 : 03] You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Now I've shared with you before some of the experiences I've had working for a couple of funeral homes, and I'd like to share one more with you.

I can't speak for every funeral worker, but for me, the hardest part of the job isn't death itself. It isn't the bodies. It isn't the blood. It isn't the decay. It isn't some of the other unpleasant aspects of physical death. For me, the hardest part of death is what it does to everything around it, everything it seems to touch.

You see, death doesn't quietly take a life from this world. It's more like throwing a stone into water. It can have this very noisy splash, and we continue to see the ripples even after the stone has disappeared.

For me, the hardest part of the job is not seeing and handling dead bodies. For me, the hardest part is walking into a home and seeing the devastation death has spread through someone's entire family.

[6 : 24] For me, the hardest part is watching a family linger by the casket at the funeral home just as long as they possibly can because they know as soon as they walk away, a funeral director will come in and close that casket for the last time.

The hardest part is witnessing something as good and precious as family being ripped apart and destroyed. I've also come to notice how death begins this destructive process long before a person dies.

I've said before that we like to think of ourselves as climbing a ladder throughout life. You know, we get higher and higher, and this is especially true when we're young. We like to think that as time progresses, we will just get higher and higher and higher.

Life will get better and better. But the truth is, death begins robbing us of many good and precious things very early in life.

And the longer we live, the more it takes. I remember going on a death call for an elderly woman.

[7 : 42] She died at home, but it wasn't actually her home. A few years prior, she had moved in with her daughter and was living in a small makeshift bedroom in the back of the house.

Now, the family requested that they not see me move her from her bed onto the stretcher or gurney. We call it a cot at the funeral home.

So when I went into the room, I closed the door behind me. And when I got into the room, I had to pause for a moment because one entire wall was just filled from floor to ceiling with framed family photos.

And as I looked at this wall a while, I realized that chances are all of these photos came from this lady's house and were once spread all throughout her home and have been sort of consolidated and placed on a single wall.

So I spent a moment just looking at these photos. And at first, I thought about all of the rich history hanging on that wall. It was a nice tribute to this woman's life, so many wonderful memories.

[8 : 56] But then I got stuck on one photo in particular. It was a photo that was quite old. I'd say it was probably taken 40, 50 years ago. And it was a picture of this woman with her husband and their young children just laughing in their former living room.

And I couldn't help but think about all of the wonderful things this woman had lost long before she died in the back of her daughter's house.

As the years passed, this woman lost her young children. They didn't die, as far as I know.

Eventually, her children grew out of that joy and that innocence that was on display in that photo.

You know, they became teenagers and eventually became adults. They moved out of the house.

They may have given her grandchildren, but those grandchildren, of course, they grew up as well.

They didn't stay young forever. At some point, this woman had lost her husband. She watched as somebody closed the casket for the last time.

[10:10] She lost her home where all of those great memories had been made. She lost her independence. She lost her health. You know, years before, she had been a young woman excited to climb this ladder of life and get higher and higher, but death eventually stole everything she had from her.

For me, that's the worst part of death. Death isn't like ripping off a bandage with one quick pull, you know. It might sting pretty sharply, but it's over pretty quickly.

The sting of death is certainly sharp, but there's nothing quick about it. Death is always taking from us, little by little, until it takes everything it possibly can down to our last breath.

Even then, it isn't finished. As it is taking the last from us, it is simultaneously taking away from our families, and so it just perpetually eats away at everything good and its appetite is never satisfied. It just keeps going and going and going. One philosopher has said, to philosophize is to learn how to die. Put another way, he believed the central purpose of philosophy is to figure out how to maximize pleasure in this life in light of our inevitable deaths, knowing that we will die and that death will take everything from us.

[11:46] The problem most philosophers have discovered is that death taints everything. Everything. Imagine you're an inmate on death row, and the warden comes to your cell and says, what would you like to have for your last meal?

Now, you could get all of your favorite foods, and they could be cooked to perfection, but what are the chances you will truly enjoy that last meal knowing it's your last?

Matthew McCullough says, when you open your eyes to the reality of loss, not the exceptional and tragic and unexpected disruption of life, but the universal and absolute siphoning of time and decay, you've come to see that death is a guest at every party.

Every good thing comes tainted. I suspect some of you are like Danae and I. We've already begun to learn this feeling.

We have two young children who bring us an incredible amount of joy. They make us laugh day after day. We feel richly blessed at this stage in our lives, yet every moment seems just a little tinged by that looming loss we know is coming.

[13:18] Do you know what I'm talking about? As Darius Rucker sings, it won't be like this for long. We know it can't last. Eventually, we know the joys that we're experiencing now will be gone.

And yes, other joys will come, but those joys won't last either. We all carry this burden. No one is exempt from this.

Loss is a universal problem because death is a universal problem. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death.

Strangely enough, however, most people not only avoid the problem, pushing thoughts of loss and death as far from their minds as possible, but they also seek refuge in more of the temporal enjoyments they know they will lose.

It doesn't make a lot of sense. It's kind of like the death row inmate asking for seconds. You didn't truly enjoy the first round of food.

[14:24] What do you expect to gain from the second? Worse yet, I fear many professing Christians think this way. As we discussed last week, we should enjoy God's gifts to us, right?

But we also have to be honest about the reality of death and loss, teach us to number our days, right? Why then does it seem that so many Christians are wholly focused on God's temporal blessings?

Christians. Sometimes that's all people pray for. Sometimes that's what we hang our so-called contentment on. That's what you see people on Facebook praising God for, almost exclusively. As John Gerstner once said, many Christians are more absorbed in this world than the other. And that's precisely what we need to talk about at this point. For the sake of unbelievers and some nominal Christians, the church should never avoid the unpleasant, seemingly morbid task of confronting people with the inevitability of loss.

As I've said before, death in general can be a powerful catalyst for faith in Christ and hope in his promises. It's not just a plausible evangelistic tool.

[15:52] It is in a very legitimate sense, a necessary one. It's just, if a person never confronts the problem, why would they seek a solution?

Why would they seek a solution? To be more specific, if a sinner never confronts loss and death, why would he seek the Savior? easier? As for believers, we too need to confront this matter.

We need to thoroughly understand what Scripture says about it. I mean, how can we enjoy God's gifts when we know we'll lose them? When we know they're fleeting?
And what's the alternative to what some have tried throughout the years, which is becoming a stoic, who utterly detaches himself from everything we should love and enjoy?
How do we conquer our fears of the fleeting, the irreversible, which is the nature of every good thing we have in this life?

[16 : 59] How can we possibly be honest with ourselves and understand the place of these good things in life unless we are honest with ourselves about the problem?

Now, to be clear, before we go any further, the problem is that we are dying people in a dying world. As the expression goes, all good things must come to an end.

So how can we possibly enjoy anything? That's the question. Let's consider what John's gospel has to say about it. John has a distinct approach to telling the story of the life and ministry of Christ. While the other gospel writers often talk about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, John seems to specifically focus on the concept of eternal life.

Eternal life. Then as he chooses which miracles of Christ he's going to tell, he selects some that might leave us scratching our heads.

[18 : 08] take for example, Jesus' first recorded miracle in John chapter 2 where he turns water into wine.

Now as you likely know, Jesus did not perform miracles for the sake of performing miracles. He was not trying to stun his audience with impressive magic tricks or merely display his power, though displaying his power and his glory were part of it.

The most vital reason for his miracles is that they teach us something about his ultimate purpose. They tell us what he's really doing. When he casts out unclean spirits, we learn that he's able to defeat evil, not to mention the devil himself.

When he heals the sick, we learn that he is able to overcome the curse of sin. These miracles are small samples of what he will ultimately accomplish.

So what does Jesus turning water into wine teach us? Specifically, what does it teach us about eternal life? What does it tell us about eternal life?

[19 : 20] Again, eternal life appears to be John's focus, and he includes this particular miracle in John chapter 2 to teach us something about eternal life.

life. So according to John 2, Jesus along with his disciples and his mother, they're at a wedding feast in Cana. People are eating and drinking.

Perhaps they're dancing, they're smiling, they're laughing, they're celebrating. In short, they're having a good time, wine, but they're also running out of wine, which threatens to not only embarrass the host, but also bring an end to the party.

The text says, Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water, and they filled them up to the brim.

And he said to them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the wine, or the water, now become wine, he did not know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, The master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine.

[20 : 44] But you have kept the good wine until now. This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory.

Now I suppose if any of Jesus' miracles appears, emphasis on appears, appears to be a trivial magic trick, then it's this one.

So why start here? Why not start with Jesus healing the sick, or casting out devils, or best yet, raising the dead? Why begin with turning water into wine?

What does this teach us about eternal life? Well, to answer that question, let's jump back to the Old Testament for just a moment, and I will get to John chapter six if you're still open to it.

I just want to read a quick portion of Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah 25 says, on this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food, full of marrow, of aged wine, well-refined.

[22 : 00] And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day, behold, this is our God. We have waited for him that he might save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for him.

Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Now, working backwards through the passage I've read, according to Isaiah, God's people are waiting for a day of salvation.

On that day, verse 8 says, God will wipe away tears from all faces and swallow up death forever. Death and the sorrow it causes is compared to a covering that is cast over all peoples, a veil that is spread over all nations.

So death is kind of like an overcast sky. We desperately want to see the sun, but the clouds just refuse to leave. They are always hovering over us, darkening everything around us.

[23 : 28] But God promises to swallow up that covering, to clear the skies once and for all. Furthermore, he promises here to throw a party, a rich feast, a feast of rich food and well-aged wine.

He's promising a celebration like no other because never before have we had such a monumental reason to celebrate. This is a celebration to end all celebrations because this is a celebration that never ends.

Never ends. The food and the wine never run out. The fun is never over, if you will. And I use the word fun not to sound flippant about it, but you understand what I mean.

Just pure joy. As it stands, death looms over everything. It taints everything. While there are many great things to enjoy in this life, and we should enjoy them, they're all tainted because death will come for them sooner or later and destroy them.

Jesus, however, comes along in John chapter 2 and reverses death's impact on a seemingly trivial wedding feast.

[24 : 52] They're running out of wine, so what? All good things must come to an end. Christ says, no. The thief comes only to steal and to destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

having a moment of pleasure here and there isn't good enough. Christ came to ensure we never run out of wine. He came to ensure joy and celebration never end.

He came to not only defeat acute death, but also the chronic effects of death that taint everything from the moment we're born.

All of it. And that's the significance of Jesus turning water into wine. Now, the last big miracle that Jesus performs before his crucifixion is raising Lazarus from the dead, which makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

Paul says, the last enemy to be destroyed by Christ, of course, is death. The last enemy is death. Christ began whittling away at death's consequences.

[26 : 03] Jesus, and he ends by proving his power over death itself. So the entire spectrum of miracles effectively teaches us what he will ultimately accomplish.

It gives us a foretaste of eternal life, which is a life of joy and celebration, joy and celebration that never ends because death is utterly eradicated forevermore.

glory. Now, somewhere in the middle of these miracles comes the event recorded in John chapter 6. Jesus miraculously feeds more than 5,000 people with only five barley loaves and two fish.

Now, I believe the story essentially reinforces the points I've already made, but I also want us to notice the crowd's response here. Again, Jesus feeds more than 5,000 people with merely five barley loaves and two fish.

And this miracle is significant enough that all four gospel writers record it. And Jesus repeats this miracle when he later feeds 4,000 people.

[27 : 17] Why? In Matthew 6, Jesus says, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

You know, one of the great appeals of eternal life is not just the absence of death, but an existence where death can't touch us at all. No part of it.

No effects of it. The appeal is that death cannot continually take from us. Little by little, it can no longer rob us of joy and those precious things of life.

The perishable will put on the imperishable, right? And the sting of death, along with its many smaller stings, if you will, will be removed once and for all.

You know, what happens after we've eaten a meal and we've satisfied our hunger? Eventually, we get hungry again, don't we? And how do we obtain our next meal?

[28 : 36] By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread according to the curse until you return to the ground for out of it you were taken for you are dust and to dust you shall return.

What is Jesus doing when he feeds the 5,000 here? He's providing a small sample of his work in undoing the curse.

These people are hungry, they've run out of food, and he provides them a meal. A meal, by the way, they didn't have to work for. They didn't have to sweat for.

They didn't have to earn. All they have to do is sit back and enjoy it. Unfortunately, these people missed the point altogether.

They missed it. It went right over their head. And we begin to see that in verse 15 because they were about to come and take Jesus by force to make him a king. They're not thinking about eternal life.

[29 : 46] For them, it's all about right here, right now. They want to make Jesus a purely earthly king. If he can perform a miracle like this, just imagine what he can do for the nation of Israel.

As the story continues, Jesus leaves the crowd. He goes to the other side of the sea, but they find him the following morning. And Jesus then says to them in verse 26, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

In other words, they want more bread. They want more bread. bread. The problem is they are very, very short-sighted here because what they really want is more perishable bread.

They want more bread that can't last. They seem to be content to remain on this perpetual cycle of eating, getting hungry again, eating again, getting hungry again, and so on.

They have tragically missed the point. Jesus says, you are seeking me not because you saw signs. They, of course, saw his power.

[31 : 09] They saw the miracle. I believe what he means is they have overlooked the meaning of it. Again, they missed the point. He continues in verse 27, do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

I didn't feed you because I want your desires to be fixed on food that perishes. I miraculously fed you because I want you to see what is possible in me.

I want you to lay up for yourself treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupts. In the end, how do the people respond?

Verse 66, after this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. Now, that's a pretty strange reaction when you think about it.

I think we understand why this was the case, but Jesus is offering an infinitely better version of what they've always wanted.

[32 : 21] said, but they're so blind, they refuse. Unless he's willing to give them the perishable version, right here, right now, they're not interested.

the Lord's apostles are another story. Verse 67, Jesus said to the 12, do you want to go away as well?

And Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Eternal life.

life. Not a life that dies little by little until it's gone forever, but eternal life. Now, there's plenty Peter and the other disciples don't yet understand about God's plan of salvation.

But evidently there's one thing they do understand. They're tired of living in a dying world. They don't want it anymore. They're tired of good things passing away.

[33 : 28] They're tired of death separating them from everyone and everything they love. They want eternal life. And they know Christ alone is the way.

So where else would they go? There's nowhere to go. Now, let's back up and notice the evangelistic approach Jesus takes here.

He begins by satisfying the people's hunger and then once the satisfaction of that meal fades, he announces a better kind of bread. A better kind of bread.

He points to a possibility where they could never feel hunger again. He says, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. What did Isaiah say? On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine.

[34 : 38] Using something as basic as food, Jesus kind of indirectly confronts these unregenerate people with death. He's appealing to their innate craving for comfort and satisfaction, which they know is perpetually frustrated by the dying nature of a sin-sick world.

He's doing this to draw them to himself. In other words, he confronts them with at least one of the problems of death so that they might seek the only solution we have to the problem of death, which is, or should I say, who is?

Jesus Christ. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote to a friend, it is only when one loves life and the earth so much that without them everything seems to be over that one may believe in the resurrection and a new world.

world. So Jesus, he confronts the unbeliever with death because that man has no motivation to pursue the imperishable until he really accepts the truth of the perishable.

Again, no one seeks a solution until he knows he has a problem. this means we as the church, as believers, must be a voice that says to the world around us, don't put your hope in transient things.

[36 : 21] They can't last. We have to be willing to confront people with the inevitability of death, which means we have to be willing to confront death, right?

we have to accept the fact that we live in a dying world. We have to make sure that we've not turned God's gifts into idols, that we're not clinging to them too tightly.

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth, right? Meanwhile, God calls us to enjoy his gifts, you know, despite knowing death will take them from us.

Now, how is that possible? How is that possible? Like the death row inmate, how do we truly enjoy our last meal knowing it's our last? All while remembering that this is our last.

Death will come. The truth is, this meal is not really our last. Not for the believer, not for those in Christ.

[37 : 32] Perhaps it would be better to think of it as an appetizer. Just an appetizer. For the Christian, whom God promises and secures eternal life in Christ Jesus, a perfect feast that can never end, according to Isaiah 25, the good things in this life are merely a small taste of what's to come.

just a sample. Though death continues to take from us, Jesus' death and resurrection have purchased for us the freedom to enjoy God's gifts because, Romans 8, the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

God's gifts in this life, they don't have to last to be wonderful. They can still be delicious, God-glorifying appetizers to the eternally satisfying meal that awaits us.

While the unbelieving world is trying desperately to get their fill now, the Christian knows Jesus saves the good wine for last.

He saves the good wine for last. Let us remind people of this who don't believe, who are not yet in Christ.

[39 : 11] We're dismissed.