

Have you found what you are looking for?

Jeremiah 2:13

Pastor Tim Melton

Have you found what you are looking for? At first you may wonder what I am really asking. Maybe you have never taken the time to consider what you are looking for. Maybe you would say you have not because life has not yet worked out the way that you want. Maybe you would say that you have, because, regardless of material things, God had blessed you with the faith, love, relationships and contentment.

We all are looking for something. Something worth getting out bed for. Something that makes life worth living. Something that we desire or seek more than anything else. We all are seekers.

Everyone is seeking something. Some live their entire lives trying to fill that God-shaped void that we all have in our hearts. We seek to fill it with money, success, respect, freedom or pleasure, and at the end find ourselves emptier than we were when we started.

In the book of Jeremiah, we find an example of this:

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jeremiah 2:13)

Cisterns were often large holes or storage tanks cut out of limestone rock, either in the ground or in the side of a hill or cliff. It was difficult work. If possible, it would then be lined with plaster to prevent leaking. Even if the cistern was able to hold water, the water collected was the runoff from clay roofs, animal stables, dirty streets, or marly soils filled with remnants of all kinds of undesirable minerals and deposits. If the cistern was broken or cracked, it would be even worse. Instead of clouded water, they would find mud instead of water as they sought to quench their thirst.

This was the analogy presented by God through the prophet Jeremiah. God’s people, who had access to all of God’s resources, forsook the natural flowing spring of God’s living water, and turned to manmade broken cisterns to drink from.

This is a picture of our world and sometimes even us as Christians. In Christ we have everything that we need, but instead of turning to Him for His living water and taking his yoke that is easy

and light, we turn to the world and toil in vain seeking to find in the world that which only God can provide.

We were separated from God because of our sin, but through Christ, we are forgiven and are now reconciled to God. In this relationship with God we now have received all that we need through Christ Jesus. In Christ we find unconditional love. In Christ we find security. In Christ we find provision. In Christ we find righteousness. In Christ we find freedom. In Christ we find peace. In Christ we find new beginnings. In Christ we find purpose. In Christ we find all that we need. But yet so often our hearts and our desires are turned from God and towards the world. Many times this is the source of our problems in relationships, in decisions, in our emotions and our desires. We are seeking from the world and from other people what has already been granted to us in the gospel. This can only result in frustration and brokenness. Let's consider what scripture says about our desires and what we are looking for.

James 1:14-15 tells us that, *"Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."* Our desires are the doorway to sin. They are what Satan uses to tempt us, but our desires are also the doorway to worship.

In Psalm 37:4, we read the words of the psalmist: *"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart."* It is not a promise that God will give us whatever we want. It is stating the fact that as we delight in God, as we seek Him first, as He grows to become more and more our first love, our desires will conform to His desires for our lives. The more we delight in Him, the more we can trust our desires.

When we delight in the wrong things, we desire the wrong things and spend our lives pursuing the wrong things.

Chuck Swindoll, in his book *"Paul, a Man of Grace and Grit"* tells how he heard of an interview that happened between a young journalist and the late Roman Catholic nun, Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa was the one who founded an organization that had over 4,500 nuns and was active in 133 countries. They managed homes for people who were dying of HIV/AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis. They also ran soup kitchens, mobile health clinics, children's and family counseling programs, orphanages and schools.

At one point during the interview, the zealous reporter asked this saintly woman if she had any other dreams in life. Was there anything else she had ever dreamed of doing? Without a moment's hesitation, she replied, "Well, I always wanted to be a flight attendant." Her response tends to catch us off guard.

A person can serve God as a flight attendant, but in this situation do you see how things would have been different if Mother Teresa had followed her desire for her life instead of God's desire for her life?

Can you imagine how many lives would have been different if Mother Teresa had followed her desire to be a flight attendant? How many people were impacted because of the choices that she made and the desires that she chose to follow?

The same struggle exists for each of us. What are your dominant desires right now? Are we delighting in God enough to trust our desires, or are we delighting in the world and desiring the things of the world? Those who are delighting in God will find their desires becoming more and more trustworthy and fulfilled in Him. Those who do not delight in God will look to fulfill their desires elsewhere, and even if they reach their goals, they will find that they still have not found what they were looking for.

In Acts 17, we find the story of the Apostle Paul. He, Silas, and Timothy had been preaching in the city of Berea. Paul, being the most visible, had been threatened and was sent out of the city to avoid danger. He arrived in Athens, where he waited for Silas and Timothy to join him.

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, he walked around the city of Athens and found the city full of idols to many different gods. In the center of the city, you had the Acropolis, the famous location of the Parthenon up on the hill above the city, and the Agora, the city's central marketplace, which also contained more idols and temples.

In Athens one could find idols to a god of power, a god of peace, a god of war, a goddess of fertility, a god of wine, a god of wealth, a god of fire, a god of the sea, a goddess of love and beauty, a goddess of harvest, a god of protection, and even a goddess of fortune and fate. In reality, they had created many gods to serve their appetites and their desires.

The pagan writer Petronius said it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. That is how many idols were visible throughout Athens.

Athens had been the home of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. As these verses say, ***"Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new"*** (Acts 17:21). So, Paul joined in the discussion. While in Athens, every day, Paul went to the synagogues and the Agora marketplace and talked of the gospel with those who would listen. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers heard Paul's "new ideas" and asked Paul to come to the Areopagus to present his ideas to the most respected philosophers in all of Athens.

Among the Greeks there were two dominant beliefs concerning the gods. One was held by those known as the Stoics. They believed that the gods did not have the ability to feel any emotion. This came from the idea that if the gods could feel emotion, then they could be hurt, and surely the gods cannot be hurt, so they must be emotionless, apathetic and indifferent.

The second dominant belief concerning the gods was held by a group known as the Epicureans. They believed that the gods were most characterized by perfect peace and tranquility. The Epicureans realized that the world was chaotic and often out of control. The gods would surely lose their tranquility and peace if they got involved in human affairs, so surely the gods must be distant, detached and uninvolved.

Those philosophers who had heard Paul speaking in the marketplace invited him to share his ideas at the Areopagus or Mars Hill as the Romans called it. It was a huge rock near the marketplace and below the Acropolis. It was the meeting place for the Areopagus court, the highest court in Greece. It was here that criminal, civil and religious matters were discussed. It was the most elite group of

philosophers in all of Greece. It was here that God opened a door for Paul to speak. Most would have been intimidated by the opportunity, but not Paul.

During Paul's time in Athens he had noticed one unique idol. It was to the "unknown" god. The Greeks had constructed this idol just to make sure they had not left out a god who might be offended if ignored.

It was with this idea that Paul began. He acknowledged that they were a religious people, but then he proceeded to tell them about this unknown god of who they did not know. This God, our God, is a Creator God who lords over heaven and earth, not just over a specific need or desire or season or land. He cannot be bound by a temple made by man. Nor is he dependent on being served by man. Instead, He is the one who gives mankind life and breath and everything. He is not a god who lives at a distance and who is not involved in the workings of our lives. *"He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place . . . In him we live and move and have our being."* (Acts 17:26,28)

He was not a god who can be created by the imagination of a goldsmith, a carpenter, or a sculptor who creates an idol and gives it a name.

Paul was speaking directly against all they understood their gods to be. Their gods were man-made, distant, self-serving, apathetic, temple-bound, inanimate objects. Paul's God, the unknown God, was all-powerful, but also ever-present. He was above all things, yet dwelling within all who believe.

Paul declared to them God did all of these things so that *"they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us"* (Acts 17:27).

For the Epicureans and Stoics this must have sounded so foreign. A God who knows, cares and works in our world and in our lives. To some it must have seemed like a dream come true, to others it likely made them want to flee and hide their sin as Adam and Eve had in the garden of Eden.

Paul explained to them that in the past God overlooked people's ignorance, but now God was calling all people to repent. Paul declared to them that there is a day that God, through one man, will judge the world in righteousness. He has given testimony to the identity and authority of this man by His resurrection. This Savior, Judge, is Jesus Christ.

Paul was giving them a chance. He was extending them an invitation to reconcile to God through Jesus Christ. He was offering them the opportunity to draw near to the God who has drawn near to us. All they needed to do was repent and believe. The scriptures record their response:

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed."

They, like us, are seekers. As you look through the characteristics of their gods, you can see that they were trying to fill that god-sized void just like the people in our world today. They sought love, victory, riches, beauty, protection or pleasure, just like our world does. By the world's standards these respected judges and philosophers seemed to have a successful life, yet they were continuing

to pursue the things of the world because they had not found what they were looking for. They had not yet filled the void in their lives.

Paul came giving them what they needed, reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. Some had ears to hear, and others mocked and walked away from the very thing they were so desperately seeking.

We often dream of the future when life will be better, believing that “the grass is always greener on the other side”. We believe that once we are richer, more popular, more loved, more comfortable, more pain-free, or more entertained, we will find what we are looking for, but that is not true. In the Christian life the true riches are at our fingertips every day. They are right in front of us. The truly priceless, precious things of life are always within reach.

The world breeds discontentment in us. We long for deep things like love, joy and peace. We try to take hold of them through money, materialism, popularity, pleasure, and ease of life, but God’s Word already promises these blessed things of life. It is all found in Christ. We don’t have to bow to the world’s methods to experience the truly “good life”. We just need to delight in Him.

In John 10:10 Jesus said, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* This is a description of the battle for our hearts and our minds. Satan has come to destroy life, and Christ has come to save it. Christ has come to offer us the “Good Life” that no longer depends on money, comfort, success or circumstance. As we trust, forgive, obey and give our lives away for the sake of others, we find the depth and goodness of life that God intended for us. Only in Him will we ever be truly contented and find what we are looking for.

It could be today that you are seeking the wrong things. Maybe you are looking for things that only feed your selfishness and superficial desires. If so, repent and turn back to God.

It also could be that you are seeking the right things, but in the wrong order. We are commanded to seek first the kingdom of God. We are promised that we will seek Him and find Him when we seek Him with all our hearts. And in Him we will find all that we need.

There is nothing wrong with desiring love, joy, hope and peace. But if we seek them first, even these “good” desires become idols and will remain unmet in our lives.

An intimate relationship with God our Father is the greatest gift that we can receive. We were designed to look for Him above all other things. That is why it is such foolishness when we turn to the world to meet our own needs.

The story of the Prodigal Son is a clear example of this. In Jesus’ parable a young son requests his inheritance from his father. His father grants the son’s wish and gives it to him. The son goes to a foreign land where he spends all of his money in wild living. A famine then strikes the land, and the son finds himself feeding pigs to survive. Finally, he “comes to his senses” and returns home to ask his father if he could be one of his servants.

The father sees the son coming and runs to meet him, providing his sandals, robe and ring. The son, like those in Jeremiah's cistern analogy, had turned to the world to find what he was looking for, but found in the end that with his Father he already had everything that he was looking for.

So, for now ask God for a heart that desires Him. Ask God to show you the sin that is keeping you from Him. Ask God for the strength to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Set aside the things of the world that will pass away and delight in Him. In Him you will finally have found what you were truly looking for.

Discussion questions:

1. Have you found what you are looking for? Why do you answer that way?
2. What is the meaning of Jeremiah's analogy of a cistern, in Jeremiah 2:13?
3. "We are seeking from the world and from other people what has already been granted to us in the gospel." How would you explain that in your own words?
4. As we delight in God, God conforms our desires to match His. Our desires become more trustworthy. What could a person do to better delight in God?
5. Take a moment to read through Acts 17:22-34. What do you like about how Paul shared Christ with the philosophers of the Areopagus?
6. What do you need to remember from this sermon?
7. How do you think God wants you to apply it?
8. How can we pray for you?