Recapturing Satisfaction in a Consumer Society

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The day I sat down to start writing this talk, I was in Starbucks with my grande, skinny, extra-hot wet latte in hand, playlist selected from my Apple music account on my iPhone 6 Plus, listening via my Shure noise cancelling headphones. I was just the right temperature in my GAP hoodie as I sat down at my brushed aluminium MacBook. I checked the time on my Pebble smart watch, turned on my Kindle Voyage E-Reader, and began to consider the question: what exactly is consumerism?

BECOMING CONSPICUOUS CONSUMERS

Our word 'consumer' comes from the Latin word *consūmere* which has a broad definition, roughly meaning, 'annul, burn up, destroy, extinguish, put an end to, reduce, wear away'.[1] Jesus' final words on the cross had they been recorded in Latin would have been *consummatum est*, 'It is finished'. *Consumere* first found its way into the French language around the twelfth century, and from there was transferred into English and other European languages. In the twelfth century, it was a verb used to describe a candle or firewood being used up. It was in this sense that the bush at Mount Horeb burned but was not 'consumed' (Exodus 3).

In this original sense consumption has always been a part of life; there has always been the using up of different things in the course of normal life. However, beginning around the fifteenth century, the definition of 'consume' broadened. It not only describes something being destroyed and used up, but now also has a meaning, 'relating to the use or exploitation of resources.'[2] It can refer to a pattern of behaviour. So Laura Hartman defines the related term, 'consumerism' as 'an ethos—a collection of attitudes, values, and cultural constructs—that places great value on shopping and consumption, such that consumption defines the parameters of the good life and the ultimate goals of the human'.[3]

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1 'Consume, v. 1', Oxford English Dictionary, Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39973>, and for the following historical information.

2 Ibid.

3 Laura M. Hartman, The Christian Consumer: Living Faithfully in a Fragile World (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 6; interacting with Alan Aldridge, Consumption (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

We now have in view what Thorstein Veblen called in his seminal work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 'conspicuous consumption'.[4] According to Veblen, no longer was consumption about meeting basic needs, it was all about assuaging unnecessary wants. No longer was it about survival, it was now about exhibitionism and the flaunting of material goods to elevate standing and respect, and elicit praise from peasants and peers alike. But conspicuous consumption—this focusing in on high-status, opulent, and rare items—is very old. The opening of the silk road in 200 BC brought new desirable items into Europe, expanding 1,000 years later by voyages across the Indian Ocean, from 800 AD, meaning that there was a stable supply of luxury items: dates, cloths, sugar, and hardwood timber amongst other commodities making their way into Europe. Conspicuous consumption was prepared to trickle into everyday life, but early on it was the prerogative of the upper classes, and was as much a secure investment of money as an exhibition of wealth.

By the late fifteenth century, particularly amongst mercantile families in cities like Florence and Venice, a new craze was sweeping the upper classes. An appetite developed for sophisticated tableware, elaborate crockery, and artisan silver cutlery along with a desire for ornate decorations in the form of silks, rugs, cushions and furniture. These were mostly acquired with an aspiration to impress guests and exhibit wealth—it was a way to display and take pride in possessions, thus further stratifying established social class.

Western society was emerging from the grip of its Platonic roots, but those ideas found new purchase in the later period. Plato had written famously in his Republic about the decline of a virtuous, frugal city as it was corrupted by the lust for luxurious living. Frank Trentmann recounts how Plato's ideas resonated in the new Latin translation made in in Renaissance Florence:

> When citizens kept to the basic needs set by nature, the city was in 'sound health'. Once people started to follow the desire of their flesh, however, they set in motion an insatiable drive for more that ended in war and corruption. First, they wanted to 'lie on couches and dine from tables, and have relishes and desserts', but rather than being satisfied with that, this only whetted their appetite for 'painting, embroidery, gold and ivory'.[5]

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[4] T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899). Chapter IV, pp. 68–101, is devoted to an analysis of 'Conspicuous Consumption'; the phrase makes its first appearance on p. 62.

[5] F. Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (London: Allen Lane, 2016),

This departure from 'sound health' went up a gear with the craving for more exotic tastes and beverages among the aristocracy in Europe in the sixteenth century, as tea from China, coffee and cane sugar from Arabia, and tobacco and cocoa from the New World flooded into the continent. Consumerism was transforming life, though still principally among the wealthy, generally preserving societal order and within clearly defined niche items.

This proto-conspicuous consumerism though is paltry compared to the place we find ourselves in today. Consumerism is now the unquestioned world view that has become the dominant Zeitgeist for our society. What started as a whisper of bragging in the home of wealthy merchants in fifteenth century Italy has become the ravenous roar of the general populace on the streets of twenty-first century Britain. How did this come about? The tidal wave of conspicuous consumerism engulfing us was generated by the perfect storm of circumstances that fell perfectly into place during the latter half of the twentieth century. As people emerged from the nightmare of World War II, they began to dream of what the future might hold. The American Dream was voraciously pursued as everyone's right, everyone's dream.

The structures of the past had been obliterated in the global conflict, and everything was up for grabs. By the end of the twentieth century, people were no longer moored in traditional roles. Opportunity for upward mobility through self-betterment and acquisition was now a tangible and realistic goal. With the mass production of factories swamping the market with consumer goods, there was now opportunity to consume like never before, especially set against the backdrop of rationing and austerity that was necessary during and following the war years. To cope with production now far exceeding demand; advertising, branding, marketing, and sponsorship ramped up to sow the seeds of dissatisfaction into people's lives which would in due course bear the fruit of new and larger purchases. The dawn of the disposable culture was now here with durability and stagnation the twin enemies of consumerism.

This coincided with the dawning of the television age. The television proved almost irresistible to those with even a small amount of disposable income. In 1957, less than '5 per cent of the French and British population owned a fridge', but 'every second low-income household in Britain

p. 35; citing Plato, *The Republic*, Book II, 'The Luxurious State' (372–37CE), trans. R. E. Allen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 55–6. The account here draws broadly on Trentmann's work.

owned a TV set'.[6] Now advertisers could infiltrate the home like never before and nag, cajole, and entice everyone with relentless intensity. With the advent of the credit card in the 60s overcoming the consumer time-sensitive inertia of saving money, you really could not only want it all, you could have it now and pay for it later. With the collapse of communism in the late 80s, the capitalist free market economy was free to roam the savannah of the globe unchallenged as the alpha male world view and its consumerist roots could go deeper into the very fabric of society. In no time at all, MTV and others would be broadcasting documentaries about the lives, homes, and habits of the rich and famous into the living rooms and lives of impressionable children, turning their covetousness and consumer appetite up to '11'.

As Ayatollah Khomeini observed in his final testament in 1989: 'The radio, the television, the print media, the theatres and the cinemas have been successfully used to intellectually anesthetize nations, and especially the youth.'[7] It should be noted, however, that conspicuous consumerism is even traceable in Khomeini's Iran. Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, women were required to cover up and don headscarves and the *hijab*. With scant opportunity to conspicuously consume in such an imposed monoculture, two consumer markets exploded overnight: cosmetics, and designer sunglasses—two permissible outlets for these Iranian women to broadcast their social status and affluence, even amidst this enforced conservatism.

BEING CONSPICUOUS CONSUMERS

The last situational concrete that would cement consumerism unshakably as the societal norm was delivered in the form of the internet and the digital age. This interconnected web of personalised information took advertising to a bespoke and micro-targeted level. At the same time, it not only opened up '24/7' shopping possibilities, it also provided a forum for exhibiting, manicuring, and promoting one's identity forged through

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6 Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 247. According to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, about one third of Britain's 15 million domestic households had a television in 1956; by 1977 it was almost at saturation point (19.0 of 19.5 million households having a television); statistics at <http://www.barb.co.uk/resources/tv-ownership/>.

7 Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, pp. 616–7; also for the account which follows. Cf. *Imam Khomeini's Last Will and Testament*, available as a PDF from the Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project <https://www.al-islam.org/imam-khomeini-s-last-will-and-testament>. The passage used by Trentmann is found in §M.

conspicuous consumption in the form of social media. Now in this virtual world inhabited by the ultimate moulded self identity—the 'avatar'—individuals are free to invent, enhance, and sculpt their 'self-brand', in order to penetrate their spheres of influence unhindered.

It seems we really are what we eat, what we wear, what we make our calls on, and what we drive. So aesthetics become paramount and substance takes a back seat with the result of wafer thin superficiality. Our appetites grow exponentially and always at a faster rate than the products we crave can satisfy our cavernous souls. Shopping is the social obsession, the mall is the twenty-first century cathedral, and Zuckerberg, Bezos, Cook, and Gates amongst the plethora of High Priests ready to initiate us into deeper levels of consumerist indoctrination.

Conspicuous consumerism conveys our limitless ability to form and broadcast our identity in relation to our stuff. Things have finally become our ends. As Malcolm Muggeridge so beautifully writes:[8]

> So the final conclusion would surely be that whereas other civilizations have been brought down by attacks of barbarians from without, ours had the unique distinction of training its own destroyers at its own educational institutions, and then providing them with facilities for propagating their destructive ideology far and wide, all at the public expense. Thus did Western Man decide to abolish himself, creating his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own vulnerability out of his own strength, his own impotence out of his own erotomania, himself blowing the trumpet that brought the walls of his own city tumbling down…. Until at last, having educated himself into imbecility, and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he heeled over—a weary, battered old brontosaurus—and became extinct.

Why is conspicuous consumerism so compelling? Why have we swallowed such an idolatrous, dangerous and expensive mantra for our lives unthinkingly? What is it about consumerism, that despite our growing sense of dissatisfaction, we keep journeying down the same *cul-de-sac* of stupidity and heaping more stuff on top of our excess hoping that just a few more things will bring us to contented complete nirvana? Well it

[8] In this form, from the essay 'True Crisis of Our Time', in *Vintage Muggeridge: Religion and Society*, ed. by G. Barlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); the ideas and some of the words were first used in Muggeridge's address to the Lausanne Congress, 'Living Through an Apocalypse', in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: The Complete Papers from the International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, 1974*, ed. by J. D. Douglas (London: World Wide Publications, 1975), pp. 449–56 (see p. 451).

surely has to be the promises made by consumerism makes that tap into our deepest spiritual needs.

We have a longing for joy, and consumerism says, 'Joy can be found here, in this, by wearing that!'. Search YouTube for 'unboxing' to find people offering videos of themselves experiencing the suspense and awe of unboxing a new product for the first time. We have a longing for acceptance, for people to like us and befriend us, and consumerism says the gateway to acceptance is by being seen in these shoes, driving this car or listening to these tunes. If you watch the classic marketing campaign of Apple — 'I am a Mac' vs. 'I am a PC'—then it is clear that no one will find acceptance if they are a PC. We have a longing for wholeness, and the promises made by advertisers about their products are legion in this direction. Whether it be the sexualised undertones of a majority of adverts, or the fact that every face connected to the product in question smiles on us, or the use of blatant slogans like 'Because you're worth it'—commodities promise to bear the weight of our longing, and meet our craving for that thing we are missing.

Consumerism is a promise-saturated worldview, including the promise of joy, acceptance, wholeness, and hope, all hanging on the acquisition, accumulation, and exhibition of countless products for any and every situation.

The great flaw in consumerism, though, is that it is a flawed philosophy from the beginning. The oil that lubricates this insatiable amassing of stuff is dissatisfaction. Contentment is always one step further away than the consumer finds themselves. The goal posts are constantly moving and keeping up with the Joneses is an exponentially exhausting endeavour which, if achieved, only serves to introduce us to the Joneses' more affluent associates. Consumerism is the quintessential snake-eating snake, ravenously transitory, and accelerating to the point of social schismogenesis. Far from fulfilling the promise of joy, acceptance, wholeness and hope, consumerism simply demonstrates how elusive these emotions are when pursued through the stockpiling of stuff.

OVERCOMING CONSUMERISM

Simply highlighting the holes in consumerism, though, is ultimately an unsatisfactory solution. Pointing out that the emperor is naked may pedestal one's own insight but does nothing to comfort the startled onlooker on the street or cover the shame of the now exposed emperor.

So against this vacuous, superficial, and insatiable conspicuous consumerism, I want to show you how Jesus Christ is the only one who meets our deep seated longings. It is only the gospel that quenches our poten-

tially fatal soul thirst as Jesus frees us from our emptiness, selfishness, and futile endeavour to write our own impressive story, by graciously including us in the most enormous and complete story conceivable—the story of God and his eternal rescue mission to redeem a people for His very own possession.

Perhaps oddly, I begin with Johan Cruyff. He passed away on 24 March 2016, at the age of 68—just a fortnight before the SETS conference where this paper was delivered. From an early age, Cruyff was a heavy smoker. Even during his glorious playing days at Barcelona, lighting up was his perpetual habit. After his playing days, he graduated to management and was a very successful manager at both Ajax and Barcelona. His puffing away on the touchline was a familiar sight for players and spectators alike. In 1991, as stress and the cumulative effects of decades of tobacco intake took their toll, Cruyff underwent heart bypass surgery and was commanded by doctors to stop smoking. At this point, Cruyff famously replaced his smoking addiction for the voracious consumption of lollipops. Cruyff couldn't simply give up his cigarette addiction without something to take its place.[9]

It is human nature to lack the capability to give up consuming without a more compelling, more fulfilling, and more satisfying alternative. To overcome our consumerist hard-wiring, we need a radical reprogramming, one only possible by the grace of God through the gospel of the Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Thomas Chalmers wrote in his famous discourse, 'The Expulsive Power of a New Affection':[10]

> It is not enough, then, that we dissipate the charm, by a moral, and eloquent, and affecting exposure of its illusiveness. … It must be by substituting another desire, and another line or habit of exertion in its place—and the most effectual way of withdrawing the mind from one object, is not by turning it away upon desolate and unpeopled vacancy—but by presenting to its regards another object still more alluring. …
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> In a word, if the way to disengage the heart from the positive love of one great and ascendant object, is to fasten it in positive love to another, then it is not by

[9] Johan Cruyff, *My Turn: A Life of Total Football* (New York: Macmillan, 2016), pp. 135–7.

[10] Thomas Chalmers, *Discourses on the Application of Christianity to the Commercial and Ordinary Affairs of Life* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1836), pp. 212–13, 220. The title of the collection makes a more striking connection with the theme of 'consumerism' than the more famous title of the discourse itself would suggest.

> exposing the worthlessness of the former, but by addressing to the mental eye the worth and excellence of the latter, that all old things are to be done away and all things are to become new.

To this end, turning away from the illusory enticements of conspicuous consumption, we turn toward the satisfaction of the gospel. I simply want to take the four deep seated longings of joy, acceptance, wholeness, and hope and show the sufficiency of Christ to eternally satisfy those longings using the imagery of water in the gospel of John.

LIVING WATER FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

Water is a pervasive theme in the Bible. Water is first mentioned in Genesis 1:2 as the spirit hovers over the waters. Water is last mentioned in Revelation 22:17, the last verse before John's postscript with the invitation to the thirsty to come and freely drink of the water of life. Water also forms a key image in many of the pivotal events of Israel's history, whether creation, or Noah's flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the provision of water in the wilderness, or the numerous references picked up in both the Wisdom and Prophetic literature. Chad Bird begins his commentary on water in the Bible by observing that, 'Almost every page of the Old Testament is wet'.[11] This may be hyperbole, but there is no escaping that water plays an important role in Israel's formative events.

In keeping with this saturated Old Testament backdrop, the New Testament is also an aquatic array and no writings are more 'moist' than those of John. Of the 118 instances of water in its various forms contained within the New Testament, 70 occurrences flow from John's pen and are found in his gospel (28×), his first letter (4×) and Revelation (38×). Some of the most memorable stories in the gospel are sprinkled with water: the changing of water into wine (2:1–11), the conversation with Nicodemus (3:3–5), the conversion of the Samaritan woman (4:7–15), the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:2–9), Jesus walking on the sea of Galilee (6:16–21), Jesus' proclamation at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37–39), the healing of the man born blind (9:1–12), the washing of the disciples feet (13:3–11), the thirst of Jesus on the cross (19:28), the mingling of water with blood flowing from Jesus' side (19:34), the reinstatement of Peter beside the Sea of Galilee (21:1–19).

With Chalmers' words in mind, these texts help us see Jesus as more alluring than the disposable, transitory and unfulfilled and endless striving held out by conspicuous consumerism.

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[11] Chad Bird, *Water: A Theme Throughout Scripture* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), p. 5.

1. Joy

We arrive at a wedding in full flow in Cana in Galilee, at the beginning of John 2. It is a scene of communal joy as the bridegroom has returned to the marital home to finally marry his betrothed. The wine is flowing, the food is sumptuous, the community is celebrating and the feasting is set to continue for many more hours. All of a sudden there is a serious situation: the wine has run out. Joy turns to potential shame, and the party stands every chance of being curtailed by the *vino* drought. The exuberant shouts and hearty congratulations are replaced by whispers behind hands as the problem is relayed to those responsible for hosting. Once Mary, Jesus' mother, gets word of this, she immediately presents to Jesus the predicament.

Now Jesus' comments to his mother have been the source of much debate in scholarship over the years. What exactly does 'My hour has not yet come' (2:4)[12] mean in this situation? In context, it surely must mean that the hour for Jesus' glorious identity to be revealed openly and fully hasn't yet arrived.[13] That hour is still a few years down the line when it will be exhibited on the cross at Golgotha, and by his resurrection from the dead at the empty tomb. What Jesus does in the following episode is a discrete miracle to keep the reception going and prolong the joyous occasion.

Now the symbolism here is multifaceted. Firstly, ceremonial Jewish washing jars are filled; these are vessels for facilitating ritual purity. This water is then miraculously transformed into wine, a central symbol of the new covenant signifying Jesus' blood making efficacious the cleansing of the conscience and bringing eternal forgiveness from all sin.[14] Secondly, there is this creationesque miracle, as Jesus with the creative power of God—simply speaking the word—transforms simple water into the produce of plant life in a matter of moments, a micro-version of the third day of creation. Thirdly, there is the converse of the Jewish understanding of older being better. Just as the new wine was better than the old wine, so the words of the master of the banquet, '… you have saved the best until now' (2:10), suggest that what is now available in Jesus is far better than what was available to the Israel of old.

What is so significant though in our quest, over and above all these and the many other seismic symbols thrown up in this account, is the

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12 Scripture citations throughout are taken from the NIV Anglicized edition.

13 So, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 2nd edn (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 191.

14 This connection is not as prominent in John's gospel as elsewhere in the New Testament, but remains resonant (cf. John 6:55–56). The book of Revelation tends to associate 'wine' with the cup of wrath motif.

identity of Jesus as the eternal messianic bridegroom. The symbol of wine in the Old Testament is synonymous with joy.

> Wine gladdens the heart of man. (Psalm 104:5)

> Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. (Isaiah 55:1)

> Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men and go hold sway over the trees? (Judges 9:13)

So in a very real sense, with the wine consumed, so joy is also run out. However, through this miraculous intervention by Jesus, better wine flows and greater joy is now amplified.

Yet the end of the account invites a clearer vision. 'What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him' (2:11). There is a symbolism attached to the miracle. He granted his select few disciples a vision of his true identity, a vision that garnered their belief and promised to complete their joy. It is a vision that flows, too, out of Isaiah 25:6–9:

> On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
> a feast of rich food for all people,
> a banquet of aged wine—
> the best of meats and the finest of wines.
> … He will destroy the gloom that enfolds all people…
> He will swallow up death forever.
> The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces;
> he will remove people's disgrace from all the earth.
> In that day they will say,
> 'Surely this is our God;
> we trusted him and he saved us!
> This is the Lord we trusted in him;
> let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'

It seems what Jesus does here at Cana in Galilee is but a dress rehearsal of the final feast to which he will welcome his bride the church at the end of this age: 'Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready' (Revelation 19:7).

If consumerism in the twenty-first century offers us fleeting joy at ever increasing prices with diminishing returns, Jesus holds out to us eternal, infinite, and satisfying joy, a foretaste of which is seen through his intervention at a wedding feast in Cana in Galilee.

2. Acceptance

We stumble across a potentially scandalous scene as a Samaritan woman with a dubious reputation is drawn into a conversation instigated by a lone Jewish man in John 4. They are at Jacob's Well outside the town of Sychar and so naturally the conversation flows sparked initially by the topic of water and the request for a drink. As the conversation continues it appears that the physical is superseded by the spiritual and the water available from the deep and ancient well is displaced by an altogether different liquid available from a new and alien source.

What takes place besides this well is breaking every social and ethnic barrier imaginable. A man conversing with a woman. A Jew conversing with a Samaritan. An ill-reputed adulterer conversing with a devoutly religious individual. None of these represents the biggest barrier being overcome in this interaction, however. What we have here is God himself in the second person of the Trinity speaking face-to-face with someone who is in everyone's eyes an infamous sinner. It is holiness personified encountering sinfulness exhibited.

As the conversation continues, this woman who knows ostracism and shunning both on account of her ethnicity and actions finds someone willing to overlook it all, accept her despite it all, and offer transformation in place of guilt and shame. Jesus reveals biographical details about her sequence of husbands and her current partner to whom she is not married. Her behaviour has been consumer-like. She describes Jesus as a prophet, and goes on to seek clarification as to acceptable worship, whether Samaritan style on Mount Gerizim or the traditional Jewish way in Jerusalem. Jesus resists her invitation to debate, and introduces her instead to the radical newness of the kingdom he is ushering in, that acceptable worship will not be geographically defined but spiritually determined. Acceptable worship—the worship that the Father seeks—will not be a matter of temples or shrines, but a spiritual reality.

So in this scandalous scene, we find one who holds out true acceptance. One who knows everything, the sordid details and the categorical failings, and despite it all he welcomes us to come and drink from him eternally soul quenching water, that will become in them a spring of living water welling up to eternal life.

Consumerism offers an ever increasing number of hoops to jump through in order to be greeted with the acceptance that we all crave. Jesus

though, says you can be accepted forever by the God of the universe, not through self-improvement or wearing the right brands, but by accepting humbly the transformative grace he offers meaning you will be forever welcome and accepted by God in him.

3. Wholeness

The third glimpse of Jesus and 'water' in John that helps us to recalibrate our affections is the pair of healing miracles recorded in John 5 and John 9. In John 5 Jesus enters a scene of despair near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem at the pool of Bethesda. This is the gathering place of a large number of the infirm and disabled. It is a hopeless scene, as people pin their hopes on the healing properties of this mysterious pool (5:7). The tragedy is that the sighted but disabled invalids can see the water stir, but cannot get into the pool; on the other hand, the blind but able-bodied people are left guessing when the pool might stir, but can get themselves into the water.

Within this desperate assembly we focus in on an invalid who had been afflicted for 38 years. Jesus asks him, 'Do you want to get well?' (5:6). This question the man totally misunderstands, thinking that Jesus is offering to be a means to his ends by helping him take the plunge before his peers when the waters are stirred. Then, displaying his healing power, Jesus with a sentence invites the man: 'Get up and … walk!' (5:8), bringing instantaneous healing to his atrophied legs.

Three chapters later we see a similar scene, this time of a lone, blind beggar on the streets of Jerusalem (9:1). The disciples question Jesus as to the cause of this man's apparently cursed state. Jesus dismisses their causal interpretation and says, 'This has happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him' (9:2–3). Then, in a slightly grotesque act as seen through our modern eyes, Jesus makes saliva-saturated mud and applies it as salve on the man's eyes, before inviting him—in scenes reminiscent of Elisha and Naaman (2 Kings 5)—to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Again, healing is instant, as sight is restored.

Both these men are restored by Jesus. Both these men are healed with reference to water, Jesus doing himself for the invalid what the water was thought to do, and the blind man healed having trustingly obeyed Jesus' instructions. Both miracles are framed in relation to sin. The invalid is told to stop sinning having been healed (5:14), the blind man is thought to have been afflicted on account of his or his parents' sin (9:2). Yet the commonality between them is the restoration, healing, and wholeness Jesus brings to both. Again, using water, Jesus' identity is portrayed.

Yet again this is a compellingly complete vision when placed alongside the fractured promise of consumerism. Wholeness is forever held out as being attained through the acquisition of stuff, completeness found

in relation to possessions. Jesus stands in these two miracles as the one who offers wholeness, fulfilling a deep desire that is far greater than the superficial diagnosis consumerism delivers and tries to solve. Jesus is able to heal us of the destructive disease of sin and restore us to a relationship with God—something we are inhibited by, but ignorant of, due to the masking symptoms of our multifaceted covetous desires.

4. Hope

Finally, we gaze at a grotesque scene from John 19—a picture of anguished death on an infamous and exposed hill overlooking Jerusalem. Here amidst a hostile crowd of ridicule and mockery, one man is lifted up, and nailed in agony to a wooden instrument of torture. A small group, mostly made up of women, stands distraught at the foot of this cross, bewildered at what has transpired, and how Jesus has come to suffer this fate at the hands of the religious leaders.

A few hours into this pain-filled scene, Jesus pushes against his pierced hands and feet, rubbing more skin off his lacerated back to draw just enough precious air into his burning and bursting lungs to say, 'I am thirsty!', literally 'I thirst' (Greek: *dipsō*, 19:28). A very real response from one who is fully human, made like us in every way (Hebrews 2:17).

It is a declaration which casts shadows of familiarity across this event. Centuries earlier, one of David's psalms, Psalm 22, anticipated the suffering of a coming saviour king. Verses 14–15 of this Psalm provide the 'text' that Jesus is obviously meditating on despite his tortured state. David writes, 'I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death' (Psalm 22:14–15). By declaring his thirst, Jesus was declaring that the sufferings he was going through measured up to the suffering that the Saviour of the world would undergo to rescue his people.

And in a very real sense Jesus takes on our thirst, the one who was eternally satisfied in himself as a member of the Trinity becomes thirsty, is parched, in order that our soul thirst might eternally be quenched in Him. Jesus Christ became thirsty for us so we wouldn't have to go on being thirsty for him. No one has captured this more beautifully than Horatius Bonar:[15]

> I heard the voice of Jesus say,
> "Behold, I freely give

[15] Horatius Bonar, 'The Voice from Galilee', in *Hymns of Faith and Hope*, 5th edn (London: James Nisbet, 1860), p. 159.

The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

Jesus' thirst resulted in our eternal hope. The one who thirsts at Golgotha previously made a remarkable declaration at the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast itself has watery connotations, and featured libations involving water and wine (Mishnah *Sukkah* 4:9), and a ritual to secure rain for the rainy season shortly to follow (Mishnah *Ta'anith* 1:1).[16] On the greatest day of that festival, Jesus said: 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow…' (John 7:37–38).

So, to complete the symbolism, the Golgotha account ends with soldiers piercing Jesus' side, inducing a deluge of blood mixed with water. Now with sin atoned for, paid for in full, with eternal work finished and the hope of eternal life secured—now the insatiable soul-thirst that is endemic in each of us can finally be satisfied by this One who is our eternal hope.

Consumerism dashes hope almost as soon as it has delivered. Jesus delivers sure and certain hope through his taking up our thirst in order that we can be eternally satisfied in him.

CHRIST—THE ONE WHO SATISFIES COMPLETELY

Perhaps it is a clichéd place to finish, but a fitting conclusion to this reflection comes from an introduction to a much, much older one. Against the backdrop of restless, ravenous, and relentless consumerism, Augustine famously penned these words: 'You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.'[17] It is only in this Jesus Christ that the anguished pantings of our desiccated souls are fully and finally satisfied. Seeing him, coming to him and trusting him will immunize us from the foolish and futile life that defines meaning from the accumulation and abundance of possessions.

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16 Cf. Barrett, *Gospel According to St John*, pp. 310, 327.

17 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by J. G. Pilkington, rev. by Kevin Knight <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1101.htm>, Bk. I, Ch. 1.1.