



CONSUMED

Consumed Church Pack – Sermon

Ainsley Freeman, Team Leader at H30 Church Sydney, shared recently on the topic of “*Laying Down Consumption, Picking Up Contentment*”. This sermon from Ainslie is included as an example of one approach to preaching on the subject of Consumerism and Consumption.

We also recommend that you check out:

The [Consumed website](#) for extra information on the issue

The Consumed bible study resources (These are available for download in the Church Resource Centre)

Our recommended reading list (This can be found in the Church Resource Centre)

Podcast

<https://www.seaforthbaps.org.au/sermons/consumption-vs-contentment/>

Sermon Notes

Letting go of consumption; embracing contentment

So I understand that over the next little while, you’re going to spend some time looking at the ideas of consumption and wealth... These are huge issues that we as followers of Jesus need to engage with. I was watching The Project this week and they walked through an enormous factory, filled with bundles and bundles of our contaminated recycling which used to get shipped off to china. Now, we have no solution of what to do with it all. And this is our recycling... This is a big issues and only getting bigger.

Jesus called people, and invites us to ‘repent and believe’.

This is a two part movement. It’s a turning away from, or a setting down. And it’s a turning toward or a picking up. We often talk about the repentance. The setting down. The turning away from. But how often do we also emphasise what Jesus calls us to. What are we embracing? What is this good life that Jesus invites us into?

So today we’ll look at consumption. And we’ll look at setting it down. But we’ll also talk about what we’re called to pick up, embrace and enter into.

So, let me start by telling you about the first time I played monopoly with Jamie and his brothers.

To set the scene, as a child and teenager, I had spent hours and hours playing monopoly in school holidays. My bestie and I would set ourselves up with the game and not move for the better part of an entire day - sometimes even allowing it to spill over days and weeks. So coming into this game, I was excited. I love monopoly. I’m pretty good at it and after Jamie had spent most of this holiday sick on the couch, I was excited to be able to do something with him.

And so we begin. And it doesn’t take long before I realise what I am about to encounter is REAL monopoly. You see, my friend and I had a whole bunch of unwritten rules that we used to play by. These included things like - if you were the first to land on say Mayfair, then you were automatically entitled to first dibs on Parklane - you just had to wait to land on it.

One of the other factors of our game of monopoly is that both my friend and I were always loaded - in fact, we had printed tonnes more money to ensure there was enough when the bank ran out... This was before I had studied macro economics at uni and realised the direct consequences of governments printing more money.

As I embarked on this game with Jamie and his brothers, I realised why it was called “monopoly”. I realised how the game ends - when people go bankrupt - and I realised that they were not going to relent. Initially, I was trying to keep up. I was trying to play their version - get to the top and take everyone down on your way up. And then as I started to crumble - as my money ran out, as I mortgaged several properties, and I sat in jail just to prevent myself from having to pay out - I then realised I just had to succumb and get this thing over with as quick as possible.

And then, I vowed to never play monopoly with the Freeman boys ever again. There are two crucial ingredients to the game of monopoly that make it what it is and they are the two factors my friend and I had eliminated from our version - competition and scarcity.

Today we'll consider the idea of consumption and as we do, you'll discover that these two elements are really important because competition and scarcity are two components that make our economy go round. We live under a free market consumer ideology and without competition and without scarcity, it doesn't work.

Consumption is in fact an economic concept and its definition is: the use of goods and services by households. It is the satisfaction of human wants. So consumption has two bookends: the desire and the satisfaction. The desire sets us on our quest and after we consume, we feel satisfied. A newborn baby is searching for food within the first hour of its life. The desire, quest, consumption and satisfaction journey kicks off that early. It's not a learned trait and nor is it something we can fully turn away from.

Consumption is inevitable.

So, what is it about consumption that needs to be laid down?

[Insatiable consumption]

In Luke 12, the passage that was read for us, Jesus introduces us to the Rich Fool. Did you note how he ended up with such a surplus?... The ground yielded an abundance ... It's not him or his keen gardening skills, all credit is due to his field. He's just found himself in the right place at the right time. And now he has an abundance of gain. More than he needs.

The key to understanding this parable is in the warning Jesus offers at the beginning (v 15):

*"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."
This is not what life is about, Jesus says. The word greed, is also translated as covetous - an immoderate desire for the world's or another's goods. So this is not about the feeling of hunger, which is a desire.
This is about an excessive desire for possessions, stuff, wealth, status symbols to use for your own advantage.
We read a lot about fools when we spend time in the Old Testament wisdom literature; a very specific ancient style of writing that features characters such as the wise, the fool, the sloth, the simple...*

The voice of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 says this:

*I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.
My heart took delight in all my labor,
and this was the reward for all my toil.
Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.*

And he reflects in Ecclesiastes 5:

*Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.
This too is meaningless.
As goods increase,
so do those who consume them.
And what benefit are they to the owners
except to feast their eyes on them?
The sleep of a laborer is sweet,
whether they eat little or much,
but as for the rich, their abundance
permits them no sleep.*

The repeated pattern we see here is that those who focus on wealth or possessions and consume in the hope of quenching some kind of desire, will never be satisfied. The rich fool wasn't satisfied with a full barn - he had to tear it down and build a bigger one. The teacher indulges in everything this world has to offer - and at the end determines it doesn't satisfy. So is the answer to restrict ourselves to just having enough? Do we need to focus on ensuring we never get ourselves to a place of surplus?

Well this didn't seem to work for the Israelites in their desert years.

When the Israelites are rescued from Egypt and lead out into the desert, their hunger prompts them to cry out to God. The Bible says that they grumbled. If we were to write the story today I'm sure we'd say they were hangry. Initially, they cry out to God and in Exodus 16, we read of God's gracious provision of Manna. Each day, God would provide enough for them to gather a days worth of food. There was enough for some to gather much and some little, but only enough for one day.

We read in 16:18 that everyone gathered as much as they needed. In theory, they were satisfied each day. But of course, they get tired of this. They become frustrated and dissatisfied by this gift. They again grumble to God, saying "we remember how good we had it in Egypt - we had fish to eat and cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic". Now of course, things in Egypt were not good. They were slaves and God triumphantly rescued them out of this situation but in this moment, they have a selective memory and are remembering only the food they were able to eat. God's good gift of manna is not enough in this moment and they desire more.

So, we can't relent from consumption all together. We need to eat. We need to purchase things.

But what I believe these verses point us to let go of is insatiable consumption . The desire for more, bigger, better, newer, flashier. The restless state of things never being enough, or good enough.

The tendency to store up and hoard our surplus.

The attitude that when I have this, or achieve that, or make it to this point in life, then I'll be happy.

The Bible warns that money and stuff will never satisfy and will be a thirst that will never be quenched.

But there are two more types of consumption I believe we need to relent of.

[Inequitable consumption]

As I mentioned earlier, one of the key principles of our economy is this idea of competition. It begins in school, doesn't it? I still remember the day I realised that the UAI, University Admissions Index, was not in fact a mark out of 100. It was a rank. Therefore, not everyone could get 100. It doesn't matter how many people technically get full marks, there is a limit and everyone will be ranked. It's the same thing with the idea of the bell curve. We just can't have everyone getting a A++.

We have to have a few people at the top, a lot and most people in the middle and a few at the bottom. This is what we know as a good balance. The implications of this however is that my success or failure is directly in response to your success or failure. There isn't enough to go around and so we compete. When it comes to the price of milk or a house, sure, competition makes sense and is helpful. When it comes to your level of happiness, your status, your family situation, your possessions - competition is soul-destroying. Why do we sometimes struggle to rejoice in someone else's success? Because deep down we have this strange feeling that their success inevitably means our failure.

There simply isn't enough goodness to go around.

And we've landed at the other important principle we discussed earlier: scarcity. We somehow believe that there isn't enough 'x' to go around. And what does it look like when we are living in a world like this? We grapple for and hold onto our stuff, because there might not be enough to go around. It reminds me of the moment a pinata cracks open at a birthday party and all of a sudden, there is a frenzied stampede. The kids grab, and stuff, and shove, and hoard, and eventually, when they can't hold anything more, they make a run for it to be sure that no one sees how much they are holding and tries to suggest they share. As the dust settles and all the lollies and prizes disappear from the grass, there is a strange moment as everyone looks to see where everything landed. The bursting of the pinata sets off a panic of competition and scarcity, and the result is inequity.

It's never fair. The bigger, quicker kids will always get more.

Contrast this with the distribution of lolly bags at the end of a party. No one grabs, no one scrambles, no one's in a panic. There is this understanding that there is enough to go around. That their turn will come. It's an undeserved gift filled with things that bring joy and spark gratitude.

See where I am going?

Don't settle for the idea of a scarce God. God is a God of abundance. There is enough to go around. And the thing that hinders this is when we are closed handed, stingy, greedy and competitive. When we don't take care of the lost, the last and the least. When we don't give to those in need and when we don't take care of the orphans and the widows. We need to let go of inequitable consumption.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 says this:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

[Excessive consumption]

And the last type of consumption I believe we need to relent of is excessive consumption. This is probably the most obvious one. Excessive consumption might look like eating too much, drinking too much, loving money, buying too many clothes, using too

much power, driving your car too much, throwing too much away, going on too many indulgent holidays, upgrading your car/ phone/house/technology too frequently or without careful consideration, and the list goes on. What I haven't touched on though is what constitutes "too much". For those who want a list of dos and don'ts, I don't have an answer for you about what energy consumption for your household is good stewardship or whether the hole in your jeans is big enough to constitute buying a new pair.

This is a matter of the heart.

Are you fostering a heart of self-control, of gratitude, of generosity?

Does your heart resist laziness, envy, gluttony and selfishness?

Is your heart's desire to be found complete in Christ?

I wonder which of these you need to let go of most?

Insatiable consumption - a constant desire for more, more, more.

Inequitable consumption - a feeling of scarcity and competition when it comes to what you own.

Or

Excessive consumption - a habit of consuming more than you should.

And with our newly empty hands, what will we pick up?

Contentment.

Paul says in Philippians 4- *"for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."*

Contentment is not about what you have but it's your conclusion about what you have.

It's a certain perspective.

It sees everything as a gift. Not a right. Not wages. Not deserved.

Contentment sees everything and sees past it to God's abundant and never ceasing grace.

Contentment always sees the present, all-loving, all-powerful, abundant God as the giver of all the good things in life.

Contentment knows that God doesn't deliver or delight in suffering but has the capacity to use it for good.

When we are content, we don't have insatiable desires for the things of this world.

When we are content, we share what we have and give generously to those in need.

When we are content, we are thoughtful, measured, and prayerful in what and how we consume resources.

So how can we pick this up? How can we find the secret of contentment?

Like anything good in life, we have to cultivate it. We have to find ourselves in places and doing things that grow this in us.

I think in our modern world, we often find ourselves in places that cultivate consumption...

Everywhere we look and everywhere we go is calling to us to buy, upgrade, replace; go bigger, better, flashier, faster, newer.

So, how are we intentionally finding places, spaces and people that cultivate contentment.

Can I ask you to close your eyes.

I want you to think of times in your day, people you're with or places you go that make you feel grateful, at peace, and content.

What stops the hustle and settles you so your soul can breathe?

When do you find you're able to say to yourself 'it is well with me'?

What habits could you incorporate to grow contentment; and let go of the restlessness of consumption?