

SATISFACTION
Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12-15; 2:24-26
Luke 12:13-21
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The last time I preached, I recited selected lyrics from the Beatle's song *All the Lonely People*, but not before stating unequivocally that I am not now and never was a member of the Beatle's Fan Club. As a teenager living through the '60's I was an anomaly, preferring melodious sounds of the Glenn Miller Orchestra over the strung and drang of rock and roll.

Having said that, it may surprise you that this morning I'm going to recite lyrics from another popular '60's song, this time the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," because sometimes even someone like Mick Jagger, who I'm sure is a lovely man, has insights worth sharing on a Sunday morning.

I can't get no satisfaction
'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
I can't get no...(satisfaction)
When I'm drivin in my car
And that man comes on the radio
And he's telling me more and more
About some useless information
 Supposed to fire my imagination
I can't get no...(satisfaction)
When I'm watching my TV
And that man comes on to tell me
How white my shirts can be...
I can't get no...
 No satisfaction.

These lyrics reveal the frustration that comes from buying into a status quo that's primarily driven by conspicuous consumption, but curiously enough not about the erratic behaviors promoted by the popular culture which the Rolling Stones helped shape. Even so, Jagger and his band stumbled on a profound truth, you'll never find satisfaction in something that never lasts.

Perhaps if the Stones heard the exchange between Jesus and that man dissatisfied with not getting his fair share of the family inheritance, they'd join us in listening intently to what Jesus had to say about looking for satisfaction in all the right places.

First a little background for this passage from Luke's Gospel. Jesus' parable of the Rich Foolish Man was foreshadowed in the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes.

Vanity of vanities, says the
Teacher

vanity of vanities! All is
vanity...
What is crooked cannot be made
straight
and what is lacking cannot be
counted
(Ecclesiastes 1:2; 15)

I used to think Ecclesiastes was the Gospel according to Debbie Downer, with the Teacher making fatalistic statements that would even cause Norman Vincent Peal to cut his throat. The writer seems to be saying, "All is lost, abandon all hope, we're all going to die." But on further reflection that's not the message, actually there are words of hope and salvation in Ecclesiastes, but not until after we finally admit nothing the world offers is permanent. Instead the Teacher argued, if you trust God as if your life depended on him you'll never know despair, but again according to the Teacher there's never satisfaction if you base your life on your own achievements unless your legacy is based on the faith, hope and love advocated by the Apostle Paul and perfectly lived out by Jesus Christ.

Listen again to how Jesus' parable of the Foolish Man is foreshadowed in Ecclesiastes:

There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw is from the hand of God' for apart from God who can eat or have enjoyment? For the one who pleases him, God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner God gives the work of gathering and heaping... This is also vanity and a chasing after wind.
(Ecclesiastes 2:24-26)

What does the teacher mean by the sinner "gathering and heaping?" Probably the obvious poster boy for "gathering and heaping" is Ebenezer Scrooge before his reclamation. Unlike his clerk Bob Cratchet or his nephew Fred, Scrooge never found "enjoyment in his toil." Instead Scrooge was totally obsessed with "gathering and heaping," never acknowledging his dependence on God and therefore never able to please God, and ironically, never able to please himself ("I can't get no satisfaction").

There's a lot of negative press about what is called the Protestant Work Ethic which is unfortunately associated with Christian exceptionalism and greed, probably because nominal "Christian" entrepreneurs used the excuse to pursue wealth with abandon because they mistakenly rationalized the accumulation of wealth was a sign of God's favor. This line of thinking has been repackaged in what is now called the Prosperity Gospel, that is, God rewards select believers with tremendous wealth and success. There's one televangelist in particular who preaches this stuff to tens of thousands of worshippers every Sunday in what was once a sports arena and millions more who watch him on television. But did Jesus suffer and die on the cross so we can become conspicuous consumers while others live in poverty? I don't think so, and Jesus' parable of the rich man shows us why.

Let's set the stage. Jesus was preaching to a large crowd when suddenly a man in the crowd interrupted Jesus' teachings with a petty complaint, "Teacher tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

I said this was a petty complaint, but wouldn't you expect fairness and justice if you were being cheated by a relative who claimed the entire family inheritance for him or her self? Most of us can empathize with this man, but Jesus, probably discerning this man was setting himself for getting no satisfaction, told the parable of the Rich Fool to refocus him away from getting no satisfaction in material things to finding ultimate satisfaction by becoming rich toward God.

The parable is simple and straight forward. A very rich man spent his life obsessed with "gathering and heaping." His biggest problem was where he'd store his crops. That would be like your biggest concern in life is trying to decide what banks and investments you should put your money in. But Jesus' parable makes it clear this rich man was really a fool because that night he would die and go to a place where all the wealth in the world would ever get him satisfaction.

Let's be clear about this, the Rich Man wasn't a fool because he worked hard and became wealthy. Remember what the Teacher wrote in Ecclesiastes,

There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink and find enjoyment in their toil.
(Ecclesiastes 2:24)

No, the Rich Man was a fool because he used his wealth to satisfy only himself. He spent all his life laying up treasure on earth and not treasure in heaven. He put all his eggs in the wrong basket and in the end even though he tried and he tried he got no satisfaction.

Question, what do you chase after that gives you no satisfaction? Maybe it's not money, but are you still looking for satisfaction in things other than God? What things? Things like your personal security and I don't necessarily mean financial security. Instead, I mean always playing it safe instead of taking risks and becoming vulnerable, letting your guard down and daring to be real, giving yourself the chance to do something really important for God and your neighbor even if it costs you dearly.

Maybe you get no satisfaction from your addictions to alcohol, drugs or sex. Perhaps your rage over how you were once unjustly mistreated gives you no satisfaction, or your need to manipulate and use others to give you a sense of control never really gave you any satisfaction.

The truth is whatever you've been pursuing that gets you no satisfaction is actually a distraction from the only one who can give you satisfaction on so many different levels if only you'd let him. His name is Jesus, the Son of God, our Lord and Savior. Jesus came into the world to save us from getting no satisfaction in things false and cheap to offer us a better way that's costly, yet satisfying.

The old saying, “You get what you pay for” applies here. Only by paying the highest cost do you finally get lasting satisfaction. How?

Jesus said, “Deny yourself.” Deny yourself what? Deny yourself self-destructive attitudes or behaviors keeping you from finding satisfaction in Christ.

Jesus said, “Pick up your cross.” What does that mean? Being willing to pass up the cheap and easy short cuts and instead take the long, hard, narrow path of self-sacrifice and service to your Lord and others.

Jesus said, “Follow me.” Follow Jesus where? Wherever you sense God tugging you, even if it means blood, toil, tears and sweat, even your own crucifixion, so your old, false desires for satisfaction are overwhelmed by Christ’s new and truthful desires that guarantee the full abundant life.

Are you sick and tired of being frustrated, shamed, isolated and cut off from the ultimate source of joy and peace?

Listen to Jesus’ gracious invitation, “Come to me all you who are getting no satisfaction and I will give you everything you need. Throw off your chains that keep you dissatisfied, then deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me.”