

“Satisfaction”?

In the late spring of 1965, apparently weary (if only momentarily) of the rampant commercialism, emptiness, frustration and alienation that they saw in the 60’s culture, British rockers Keith Richards and Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones wrote what would become one of their most well-known songs and their first #1 hit in America entitled, “I can’t get no Satisfaction.” The theme of dissatisfaction goes as far back as Genesis 3 and is still with us today. Because of the fall of mankind into sin, there’s a desperate need for genuine satisfaction in life that no amount of money can buy. In this series of articles we’re addressing the topic of the emptiness of life apart from God. Our text is Psalm 127 which is one of only two Psalms (along with Psalm 72) written by one of the most well-known kings in the Bible, King Solomon. In my last article I noted that Psalm 127 begins with two conditional clauses, (i.e., the outcome of a given situation is conditioned by certain choices that we make). The first conditional clause of verse 1 reads: “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” Let’s move on now to the second conditional clause: “Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”

In ancient times, when they were alerted to coming danger, those who lived out in the country would gather their families and go to the cities which were walled in for protection against enemy attack. In these ancient walled cities, men would be placed on the watchtowers to sound the alarm when the enemy was approaching. The Psalmist is giving us a picture of security and protection from harm that only God can provide. The Hebrew word that’s translated “watches” carries the further idea of “to keep.” In addition to “watching,” the word also expresses the effort that it would take for the city leaders to “keep” a city.

Going back to the text, Solomon, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is pointing to the truth that there’s no ultimate security merely in walled cities with expert watchmen. Our only true security is in God. No matter how closely someone may be “watching” or “keeping,” this Psalm teaches us that we must never ignore or marginalize God as we seek to live our lives in this broken world. In verse 2, we get a different look at what it would mean to focus on ourselves with no thought of God: “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil...” Notice that the Psalmist points to the futility of working hard from early morning until late at night if our only focus is on what we can accomplish in and of ourselves. Hard work generally brings benefit but not always satisfaction. In our passage we see the blessing of bread on the man’s table as a result of his work; but what’s missing is the peace and satisfaction of a job well done. There’s no joy—only anxiousness in his work. “Anxious toil” could be described as the result of working merely for ourselves and what we can receive from our work, rather than any thought of working to give glory to God. “Anxious toil” may bring certain financial rewards for some, but it will never bring genuine satisfaction. Notice these words from Ecclesiastes 5:10-11 also written by King Solomon:

“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money...” The language of “loving money” pictures the love of the reward that work brings for me and my family. This type of lifestyle will never bring the lasting satisfaction that we crave, no matter how much money we make. Listen again to Solomon: “When goods increase they increase who eat them and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?” Solomon is pointing to the fact that money alone can never satisfy. No matter how much the self-sufficient person makes, the money never exceeds the desire for more. There’s always another need, another bill to pay, or a desire for more and bigger and better things to buy with the money; there’s never enough.

Many today still desire the satisfaction that Jagger and Richards said that they wanted—but couldn’t get—in the words of their song written 54 years ago this spring. And yet, satisfaction is available to all those who are trusting in Jesus Christ by faith. When God is “watching over” us—rather than living lives of “anxious toil”—we should increasingly experience true joy, fulfillment and satisfaction given to us from God our loving Father. Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.