

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

An elderly woman just returned from her hometown out in the hill country & told a friend they'd spruced up the churchyard cemetery since her last visit several years past. "Lots of new greenery," she said, "& families are all together now." Being puzzled, her friend asked, "All together now?"

The elderly friend replied, "Well, years ago they never much worried about where they buried someone, because everybody was a neighbor anyhow. They'd dig a grave wherever it seemed to balance things out. Now, they've redone it so people are with their children & grandchildren, instead of scattered all about."

The friend was aghast, "You mean they exhumed all those bodies & reburied them?" "Oh my, no," was the reply. "They just shifted the headstones." **PAUSE**

Doesn't life seem like that sometimes? Everything's chaotic & disorganized, Murphy's Law rules, & when you try to get a handle on things, in the end it's like all you've accomplished is shifting the headstones around. You've prettied things up on the outside but haven't been able to correct the source of the trouble on the inside.

Things look fine on top, but underneath, maybe in your own heart & soul, everything is still wrong. And it's eating you alive. It's tearing you up. Nothing satisfies. You're never content, & rest is impossible to come by. If the author of Ecclesiastes were speaking he'd probably say, "This also is vanity," or, "This too is meaningless."

Lewis Carroll in his book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, wrote, "Everything's got a

moral, if only you can find it.” And that’s the dilemma King Solomon was writing of. He wasn’t finding the moral or the meaning in his existence so he condemned all of life as mere vanity. We face a similar dilemma in our each of our struggles. What is the meaning & purpose in them? And if we find none, do we condemn our suffering as pointless?

You know, as Christians we’re more than willing to find meaning in the suffering & death of Jesus Christ, after all it paid for our sins, yet when it comes to the suffering I’m called to endure I’m not so ready to find meaning in that. Never mind what St. Paul wrote about suffering producing endurance, character & hope. I’d rather get them by taking a pill.

Our sinful human nature prefers the shortcuts, but the easy life of the Garden of Eden ended with the curse God placed upon mankind after our fall into sin, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust & to dust you shall return.”

Through corruption or abuse of others we may be able to ease the path of our lives for a time, but those attitudes are in direct defiance of our heavenly Father who gave us purpose & meaning as He, with His own hands, lovingly formed mankind from the dust of the ground & breathed life into us.

God created a perfect relationship between mankind & Himself & put very simply, that is our purpose in life, to be in relationship with our Creator. He provides us with enough talent, blessing, & opportunity, to have an unlimited # of ways to creatively reflect the loving relationship we have with our Lord.

Our sinful nature has so twisted our perspective that without God’s Spirit we reflect only the love we have for ourselves. And realizing that we are tempted to make things look pretty on the outside even if they’re still dying on the inside. Money is an efficient tool for creating

that appearance. Now Scripture says that the love of money is a root of all evil, but in truth, such a love of money accurately reflects what's going on inside, & that is a love of self. For that reason how any of us handles money can be a decent measure of our faith in Christ to save us. Do we love money, or do we love our Savior?

We are born self-centered, loving only ourselves, & not one of us will give that up voluntarily. No one can willingly decide to become other-centered, as our Creator designed us to be. Our sinful nature doesn't have it in us. St. Paul wrote in Colossians, "...you, who were dead in your trespasses... God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our sins..."

The Holy Spirit creates an other-centered heart within us, along with humility, the moment we are given faith in Jesus as Savior from all the failures of our lives. Once forgiven, we have two choices, to move forward in life living without fear because God loves us, or to remain stagnant in life, slaves to fear, never moving beyond the false comfort zone of the law.

It is fear of the Law that causes us to move the headstones around without addressing the real issues of the heart. Since we will not come to Christ as long as we believe we can manage without Him, the trials & sufferings of life are used by God to draw us back to Himself, as things should be. The failures are needed to turn us from ourselves outward towards Jesus.

Then, seeing the cross, & seeing His love for us there, in spite of no worthiness on our own part, the faith given to us clings to Jesus & to Him alone, for contentment & for satisfaction in all He gives to us, & in all He does for us. Experiencing that peace with God draws us out of our self-centered world & brings life & meaning back into our struggles.

With faith in Jesus, our struggles then help us to appreciate how spiritually lost & blind we were. Without faith in Jesus we can only condemn the suffering in life as pointless & cruel, as Solomon did in writing the book of Ecclesiastes. Have you seldom found yourself satisfied &

content? Do you find true rest impossible to come by? Does money occupy far too many of your thoughts? Maybe our Lord is challenging you to let go of your need to be in control so that you can actually trust Him rather than yourself?

Jesus wasn't joking when He said, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The more money one has the easier it is to get caught up in making things look pretty on outside, because that's easier than trying to correct things on the inside.

The words from the Epistle reading in Hebrews apply to you & me right now, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." You see, we don't give offerings to the church just because it takes money to do the ministry here. We also give offerings in order to break the chains of slavery that money will place upon us. It's an exercise in self-control.

Jesus challenges us to give generously & sacrificially, so that we are consciously resisting the temptation to let money become our god. It's similar to just pushing away from the table when you've had enough to eat. It's an intentional thought process meant to counteract the temptations of the devil. The book of Hebrews also stated,

"...the word of God is living & active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul & of spirit... & discerning the thoughts & intentions of the heart."

Our Savior knows what our sins are. Being tight with your offerings doesn't primarily hurt the ministry of this congregation. It hurts you, & it hurts your spouse & your children. But the living & active Word of God doesn't only accuse & judge. It also forgives those who hear its message, thus bringing rest & life & healing to the source of the trouble inside. Amen.

I come, O Savior, to Thy table, for weak & weary is my soul; Thou Bread of Life alone art able to satisfy & make me whole: Weary am I & heavy laden; with sin my soul is sore oppressed; receive me graciously & gladden my heart, for I am now Thy guest. Lord may Thy body & Thy blood be for my soul the highest good. Amen.

