

Part 20: How to Never be Satisfied

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We are back in the book of Proverbs today and our topic today is the experience of desire and satisfaction. But as I was thinking on satisfaction this week I was surprised at how subtly depressing all of our language about it is.

How many of you have used the phrase: "If I could pause time right here, this would be the life?" Or "If I could go back to a specific season or place?" Or, "If I could have unlimited resources I would do this..."

All of these betray a sad reality and that is when we talk about getting what we want and finding the place or premise of true desire fulfilled we often speak about it in impossible hypotheticals. Unless you can control time, we readily admit the sad truth behind our dreams: we may never be satisfied.

For those of you who have watched the play or listened to the soundtrack of *Hamilton: The Musical*. You've heard the central song in Act 1 which creates the tension on which the movie runs. In the song one of the characters, at the conclusion of a joyful wedding, begins a toast to the bride and the groom, but quickly unwinds into a confession on the fleeting nature and lingering fear that she herself will never be satisfied.

The lyrics of the song become a frequent call back as the play progresses but even the choreography in that moment expresses the paradox in our own minds. In the moment the stage begins to rotate counter clockwise, those around her begin to move in slow motion, her reality becomes distorted and her lyrics become so frantic and desperate that the listener begins to feel the completely disorientating fear she herself is experiencing, a fear which would also drive Hamilton himself to pursue satisfaction at such a rate and pace that causes his whole world to come crashing down around him.

But this is why our text today is so needed for our hearts this morning because Solomon offers the promise of satisfaction. In fact twice today Solomon speaks to believers as those who have their desire fulfilled.

What we are going to see today is this: **Submitting ourselves to satisfaction on God's terms fulfills our desires and shapes our lives.** We are going to see this in three ways. First in Proverbs 13:6-11 we are going to see: **The Paradox of Satisfaction**, then in verses 12-18 we are going to see **The Humility of Satisfaction**, and finally in verse 19 we are going to see **The Fruit of Satisfaction**.

In other words we are going to see today what true satisfaction is, how we get it, and how we live with it.

Let's begin by looking at our first portion of scripture today: **Proverbs 13:6-11.**

Here we read what almost sounds like a riddle that Solomon wants us to figure out. This is where we see our first point today: **The Paradox of Satisfaction.**

The Proverbs are both a blessing and a curse to our modern minds. They fit so naturally into our short social media driven world, and yet they demand a thoughtfulness and a consideration which we often find not worthwhile in our frantic pace of communication.

But understanding what's happening in the first four verses of our passage today is key to understanding the rest of our passage.

A paradox is just a seeming contraction and this passages seems to be filled with paradoxes. Paradoxes about wealth and riches, safety and danger, and righteousness and wickedness.

How do we make sense of all of this? Well if you'll look, Solomon bakes some structure into this text which helps us understand what is going on. In verses 7-8 we get this paradoxical picture on wealth and poverty, but straddling this paradox are two clear statements on righteousness and provision. Look again **Proverbs 13:6-9**.

So it's clear that while wealth and security are being discussed in the middle, the true guard and the satisfaction which we are to see is that which comes from righteousness. In other words if we want to understand our hearts when it comes to riches we need to first understand our hearts when it comes to righteousness.

We've talked about righteousness a lot in Proverbs but let me just give a brief update as to what we mean when we talk about righteousness. If we miss what righteousness is from Solomon's perspective we miss how to read Proverbs correctly.

When we encounter the word righteousness in Proverbs we have found window to the gospel. That's because Solomon uses righteousness as both a subjective expectation of an individual, but also as an objective reality that exists in something outside the individual.

Righteousness on a subjective or individual level is that Solomon expects the wise person to want to do what is righteous, what is blameless, what is upright. These commands can be over generalized to doing what is right and not doing what is wrong.

But this is where we find the limits of subjective righteousness. Who gets to decide what is right and wrong? This is the objective standard of righteousness. Righteousness when used as it is in verse 6 also expresses a type of loyalty to something outside of ourselves. Righteousness in this way is faithfulness towards something else. That something else which, the standard of what righteousness is, is not simply ethics or morality, but the nature of God himself who is righteous.

This is the type of righteousness which Solomon says guards him who is blameless. How are we guarded when we are walking in this type of righteousness? Because it means we are near to the God who is himself powerful, strong, just, loving, and pure. God wants us to be righteous so that we can be near to him and reap all the benefits of that profound relationship.

In order to help his people walk in faithfulness to who he is, God revealed a bit of what he is like in his law. Look at how **Isaiah 42:21** puts it. God's law reveals his righteousness by showing us not only what God is like, but how we can walk in a way where we enter into the nearness of his protection.

If the Israelites kept God's righteous law, God promised to be near to them, to dwell with them, to protect them, and even to atone for their sins by sacrifices he promised to accept.

But even though God's law was wonderfully capable of drawing his people into this perfectly guarded all satisfying relationship, the hearts of his people refused to keep their part of the righteousness bargain.

But this is where we see the good news of the gospel. Jesus fulfilled the requirements of this righteous law. He kept the subjective commands of the law so that when we put our faith in him we are declared to be brought into God's objective righteousness.

So when Solomon is calling his readers realize the benefits of God's righteousness it meant two things: First, to the Israelites, trust that your greatest privilege and security is walking in God's objective righteousness by keeping the subjective standards of the law. But for us as Christians it is that we trust that walking in God's objective righteousness, revealed not in the law but in Jesus Christ, is the greatest privilege and security there is.

This righteousness satisfies us, it protects us, it keeps us, it is a fire gentle enough to warm our cold hearts but powerful enough to destroy all that threatens us. When you have a righteousness like this through Jesus you don't need to trust in anything else.

This is why he is able to leverage this issue of wealth so stunningly. What's interesting is Solomon is not telling us the dangers of wealth. Sometimes it's easy for us to read that, and those who don't have wealth can think that they've mastered this. But instead Solomon is warning us of putting our trust in wealth which is something even the poorest man can do.

This is actually why he begins with the poor man who tries to be rich! Haven't seen this plotline played out a thousand times in movies and TV shows? Whether to impress a date, or to get a job, the character goes to great lengths to appear they have the wealth that we the viewer so obviously know they don't.

Why do they do it? Because they believe, and so too do we, that wealth can provide something which they lack. Wealth can bring them the acceptance, the desire, and the satisfaction they seek. So they try to convince others that they have it so that they might gain their own security or satisfaction themselves.

This is contrasted with the man who is actually rich, but his life isn't not embellished in fixings of gold and gadgets, but instead he lives his life as if he is poor. This is intentional.

This is countercultural to the western world today. We have accepted the reality that if and when you get a raise, or come into more money, that your life should rise to match the level of income that you have. But here this man refuses to let the money he really has drive his consumer habits.

Why? Because he knows the reality of the world. Look at what follows: **Proverbs 13:8-11**.

He knows the dangerous allure of the get-rich-quick scheme which tries to fast track satisfaction and protection in what is probably a deceitful, or at least uncharitable scheme.

He also knows this really unique paradox: If a rich person has someone kidnapped in their home, they can pay the ransom price to get their child back. We would expect him to say: "But the poor cannot ransom their child." But that's not what he says is it? Instead he says: "But the poor hears no threat."

What is the point? That wealth can often be both our perceived savior, but also our ever present enslaver. Such is the nature of sin. When we don't trust that God is sufficient we will turn to gold (or lust, or affirmation) to find what we think God lacks.

But once we have whatever resources we think will satisfy us, we realize that the world actually demands or threatens it. We have to expend some of it to stay happy. But once we've spent some of it, we have less of it, and now we need to get more of it. And the cycle of slavery goes on and on.

Sin leads us with a promise of something which will never actually endure. That's why he says the light of the righteous rejoices but the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

Solomon has already used this theme of light earlier and notice what it's connected to: **Proverbs 6:23**. What is the light? The light is the commandment, the law of God. The righteous person knows that God's promise of righteousness will always stand for those who submit themselves to his salvation. But on the flip side all of the motivations of peace and security from a worldly standard, be it money, sex, or power those leaders will soon be put out. Snuffed like a candle.

Trusting in God's righteousness looks like not trusting in the world's righteousness. Trusting in God's provision to save according to his word does not look like trusting in the promise of the world's word. But it is the light of this righteousness, the righteousness we see in the gospel where Jesus takes away our debt of sin and restores us to God which will always lead us to rejoice.

But to actually believe this, it takes a counter-cultural humility. This is where Solomon goes next: **The Humility of Satisfaction**.

Read with me: **Proverbs 13:12-18**.

So here we see a profound statement and then a series of warnings.

The statement is this: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life."

Psychologists called this delayed gratification. It's the idea that you deny or resist an immediate reward in hopes that one day the reward is sweeter. It is to a large degree the acceptance that wealth gained slowly over time is better than the get-rich-quick scheme.

But there's one fatal error of this which Solomon here points out. Hope that he's talking about in this sense is a hope of satisfaction in the ways of this world. To think that you will find desire in this world is to make yourself sick with hope.

Many of us know that worldly riches or physical provisions don't satisfy. Instead we play the long game, try to live a good life, try to give back to those around us, and try to find satisfaction in family and relationships.

Our hope in doing this is to think that at the end of our life we might look back and say: "I'm satisfied." But such a hope will only lead to sickness, it will never actually satisfy. Why? Because it doesn't address the real problem of our dissatisfaction!

We were created to enjoy God forever, but our sin separated us from him. This was the first sin we see in the Garden. The first sin was Adam and Eve beginning to think that God was actually holding out on them, that there was something more satisfying for them than dwelling with God in perfect relationship.

Behind all of our language of joy and satisfaction is the reality of life and death. Because we rejected God, we earned death. Sin promises joy and pays in death, but God offers a call to and have your desire fulfilled in his provision of righteousness, not what we can earn, but what he freely gives in Jesus so that we become a tree which produces satisfied fruit right here and right now.

All of our verses today except for one play off this sort of riddle form of stating something in part one, but stating the opposite in part two. But in verse 14 Solomon breaks this form to provide for us the point he wants us to see: **Proverbs 13:14**.

What does Solomon want us to see? If you want desire fulfilled, if you want true satisfaction, if you want true life, then listen to the teaching of God's wisdom and turn away from death.

How do we turn away from death? By turning into the wisdom of God. Time and time again in this text we see words which imply a message being proclaimed: The light of the righteous, the advice of the wise, the word preached to the wicked, the commandment received by the humble, the teaching of the wise and the rejected instruction of the fool.

Yet behind all these warnings we get this idea that we will not want to follow this word? Why? Because it seems counterintuitive to our sinful hearts. Consider Jesus' words in **Mark 8:34-37**.

Following Jesus looks like saying no to following the world. Following Jesus looks like saying no to what the world says is life.

In 2020 Netflix posted an annual revenue of 25 billion dollars. That's more than McDonalds. But did you know in early 2000 Netflix came and offered to sell to Blockbuster?

Blockbuster said no. They were the giant. They knew the industry, they knew they could adapt. But 21 years later Netflix is king and Blockbuster no longer exists.

What's the point? Look with me at **Proverbs 13:13-18**. What is Solomon showing us here? He's giving us example after example of what it looks like for Blockbuster to say no to Netflix. He knows the power of the world and the arrogance of our heart will often lead us to say "I think I can find satisfaction on my own in this world."

It's what Moses warned against in **Deuteronomy 29:18-19**.

Our hearts will hear the wonderful message of satisfaction in Jesus but will stubbornly refuse to actually trust that Jesus satisfies. We place our hope in the things of this world, we try to gain life in whatever way the world calls us to gain it all the while Jesus' promise of joy is left untapped because we doubt his goodness.

But when we see who Jesus is, we receive the humility we need to place ourselves under his word. We humbly realize that in Christ we already have desire fulfilled, we have been won back to God, we have the riches of knowing Christ in this world and now we live our lives in joyful obedience to him.

Where are you trying to affirm faith in Jesus while still refusing to humbly take Jesus at his word? Where are you the poor man pretending to be rich instead of being rich in Christ and therefore comfortable to be seen as destitute in the eyes of the world?

Solomon here in the end gives us one place to immediately apply this text, and this is our final point today: **The Fruit of Satisfaction.**

Read with me: **Proverbs 13:19.**

How do we apply this text? We become so satisfied in the sweetness of the gospel that we are able to turn away from what is evil.

I want to share a story with you guys but I want to preface it first by saying, I'm not a miserable glutton. I do have some self-control, but at the same time, I like to get full when I eat.

With that said, when Sarah and I go out on a date to a fancier restaurant, I know that those restaurants charge lots of money for little amounts of food. So what I often do before I get to the restaurant is I eat something before we go out.

Why? Because I know that if I end up in that restaurant famished then one of two things will happen. The first being that I spend way too much money. The second being that I'm miserably hungry the rest of the night.

This is the dilemma of thinking the sins of this world will satisfy you! You will either overspend yourself on sin to find satisfaction and realize it is a price you can never afford. Or you will say no to the desires of the world, and white knuckle yourself away from lust, money, power or adventure only to experience this all-consuming hunger pain of what you do not have.

Solomon says a fool cannot turn away from the things of this world because it is an abomination to him. To turn away from the overpriced plate of the world is to turn away from the only thing he hopes will satisfy him.

But the gospel starts with satisfaction. It fills us so that we might say no to sin and the world with our hearts filled with the sweetness of satisfaction. It is free, delicious food that we eat in the kitchen of mercy.

This is why the gospel is so profound. We often think that in order to receive the satisfaction of the God we must say no to sin. But the gospel is so much better than that. The gospel is the good news that by faith we receive the satisfaction of God so that we can say no to sin.

In this way saying no to sin is not only the sign of the satisfied, but it is where we receive more of the sweetness of God which satisfies.

When many of us purchase a new car we think to ourselves, “I wonder how fast I can actually go in this?” Here Solomon shows you the sweetness of the gospel and he says: “Floor it.” Try the righteousness of God that comes through faith and you’ll find there is no limit to its satisfaction because even when this world is hard and difficult, we have new life and an eternity with Jesus ahead of us.