

It's Time to Tear Down Your Idols

Knowing God's truth is an absolute necessity in our journey to freedom, but so is our truthfulness. Psalm 51:6 says God desires "truth in the inner parts" (NIV). God's truth and our truthfulness are both needed in order to gain complete freedom in Christ.

I mention the importance of honesty because I may be about to get more honest than some of you can stand. I ask you to consider what I have to say: Many Christians are not satisfied with Jesus.

Before you call me a heretic, let me set the record straight: Jesus is absolutely satisfying. In fact, He is the only means by which any mortal creature can find true satisfaction.

However, I believe a person can receive Christ as Savior, serve Him for decades and meet Him face to face in glory without ever experiencing satisfaction in Him.

Rather than waste our effort on worthless things, God wants us to find satisfaction in Him. When we look to other sources, we are guilty of idolatry.

The True Source of Satisfaction

In Isaiah 55, the prophet contrasts the world's attempt to find satisfaction with what God provides. It is one of the most poetic and comely expressions of grace in either the Old or the New Testament.

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost" (v. 1).

On the heels of the invitation, God poses the question that

haunts every generation of Adam's descendants, "'Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?'" (v. 2). In effect, God is asking, "Why do you work so hard for things that are never enough, can never fill you up and are endlessly insufficient?"

Like a frustrated parent determined to get through to his child, God says, "'Listen to Me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare'" (v. 2).

Satisfaction in Christ can be a reality. I know from experience, and I want everyone to know how complete He can make us feel.

I believe God's prescription for those who possess an inner thirst and hunger they cannot fill is implied in Isaiah 55:6: "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near."

I believe God creates and activates a nagging dissatisfaction in every person for an excellent reason: He doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

God wants everyone to come to repentance. He gave us a will so we could choose whether or not to accept His invitation, but God purposely created us with a need that only He can meet.

Many come to Christ out of their search for something missing; yet after receiving His salvation, they go elsewhere for further satisfaction. Christians can be miserably dissatisfied if they accept Christ's salvation yet reject the fullness of daily relationship that satisfies.

Dissatisfaction is a "God thing." It's only a terrible thing when it fails to lead us to Christ, because the only thing that will truly satiate our thirst and hunger is Him.

Dismantling the Idols

Realizing that God desires for us to find genuine satisfaction

in Him helps us discover a primary obstacle in our journey to freedom in Christ: settling for satisfaction in anything else. God gave this practice a name I was unprepared to hear—idolatry.

After serious meditation, I realized the label made perfect sense no matter how harsh it seemed. Anything we try to put in a place where God belongs is an idol.

To experience real freedom in Christ, we must remove the obstacle of idolatry. We begin by recognizing the obstacle as idol worship, but we may find removing it difficult.

Other obstacles to freedom, such as unbelief and pride, can be removed effectively by an act of the will. But our idols—things or people we have put in God's place—can take much longer to remove.

Some of them have been in those places for many years, and only the power of God can make them budge. We remove them by acknowledging their existence and admitting their inability to satisfy us fully.

The nation of Israel struggled horribly with the sin of idolatry. We can observe some of the results in the lives of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Isaiah recorded what he saw when he looked at Judah and Jerusalem. The passage sounds hauntingly like prosperous America.

He said of Israel: "They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans. Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots" (Is. 2:6-7).

In the first words of verse 6, Isaiah wrote, "You have abandoned Your people." Isaiah concluded that he saw no sign

of God's presence there.

God had promised not to abandon them, and He didn't. But where sin is rampant He is certainly capable of removing the signs of His presence.

The nation of Israel had been given everything, yet they refused to receive and be satisfied. They traded in what their hearts could know for what their eyes could see.

Isaiah reminds us that a person's idols can profit him nothing and will ultimately reap shame (Is. 44:10-11). He gives us several glimpses at the destructiveness of idols.

In Isaiah 44:12, he wrote, "The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint." People can become so engrossed in their idols that they no longer pay attention to their physical needs.

According to Isaiah, idols can also take the form of humans. "[The carpenter] shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine" (v. 13). We can apply this point literally. At some time each of us has exalted someone to a place where only God belonged.

Even after such a catalog of idolatry, God promised, "'I will not forget you'" (v. 21). The mercy of God is indescribable, isn't it?

He swept away their offenses like a cloud, their sins like the morning mist. As we face some of the idols we have worshiped in our quest for satisfaction, we need never doubt the mercy of God. He asks one thing: "'Return to Me, for I have redeemed you'" (v. 22).

There is a strong tie between our quest for satisfaction and the worship of idols. This is due to the fact that the void

God created in our lives for Himself will demand attention.

Filling the Void

We look desperately for something to satisfy us and fill the empty places. Our craving is so strong that the moment something or someone seems to meet our need, we feel an overwhelming temptation to worship it.

In my opinion, one of the most thought-provoking verses in Isaiah 44 is verse 20. Read it carefully: "He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie!'"

Fresh conviction washes over me like a squall. How many times have I fed on ashes instead of feasting on the life-giving Word of God?

How many times has my deluded heart misled me? How many times have I tried to save myself?

I could fall on my face at this moment and praise God through all eternity for finally awakening me to say, "This thing in my right hand is a lie."

I can remember one thing in particular I held on to with a virtual death grip. I also remember the harrowing moment God opened my eyes to see what a lie I had believed. I cried for days.

I originally thought this lie was a good thing. My heart, handicapped in childhood, had deluded me. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I eventually worshiped it.

My only consolation in my idolatry is that I finally allowed Him to peel away my fingers and, to my knowledge, I have grasped only His hand since.

I plunged to the depths before I discovered satisfaction. And I pray to settle for nothing less the rest of my days.

I am very aware that Satan will constantly cast idols before me. But I hope never to forget that I could fall again.

Beloved, whatever we are gripping to bring us satisfaction is a lie—unless it is Christ. He is the Truth that sets us free (John 8:32).

We easily can be led into captivity by seeking other answers to needs and desires that only God can meet. Perhaps you've experienced an empty place deep inside that you tried your best to ignore or to fill with something other than God.

If you are holding anything in your craving for satisfaction right now, would you be willing to acknowledge it as a lie? Would you lift it before Him and confess it as an idol?

God does not condemn you. He calls you.

Will you open your hand to Him? He is opening His to you.

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