

Isaiah 55:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?
and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken
diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your
soul delight itself in fatness.

Analysis

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. The rhetorical questions expose futility of pursuing what cannot satisfy. "Spend money" (tishqelukesef, תִּשְׁקַלְקֵל־כֶּסֶף, literally "weigh out silver") and "labour" (yegi'akhem, יִגִּיעַ אֶחֱמָה, literally "exhaust oneself") represent human effort and resources. "Not bread" (belo-lechem, בְּלוֹ-לֶחֶם) and "satisfieth not" (velo lesobah, וְלֹא לְשֹׁבָה) indicate these pursuits provide no real nourishment or fulfillment.

The alternative: "hearken diligently" (literally "hearing, hear"—emphatic construction), "eat that which is good," "delight...in fatness." Deshen (דֶּשֶׁן, fatness) suggests rich, satisfying food—the best provisions. The soul's delight indicates not mere physical satisfaction but spiritual joy. The contrast sets worthless pursuits against valuable ones, futile labor against satisfying grace.

From a Reformed perspective, this addresses idolatry—pursuing created things expecting satisfaction only God provides. Augustine's famous prayer echoes this: "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in thee." Ecclesiastes demonstrates that wealth, pleasure, achievement—all prove "vanity" apart from God. This verse calls for repentance from idolatrous pursuits and turning to God's satisfying provision in Christ.

Historical Context

Ancient laborers often spent wages on insufficient or poor-quality food. The futility of labor without satisfaction was common experience, especially during economic hardship or oppression. Israel's exile involved forced labor benefiting Babylon, not themselves—literal example of laboring for what doesn't satisfy.

Ecclesiastes (written by Solomon) explores this theme extensively—pursuing wealth, pleasure, wisdom apart from God proves futile. Jesus addresses this in Sermon on the Mount: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat" (Matthew 6:25-34). Paul warns against pursuing "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Church history shows saints abandoning worldly pursuits (Antony, Francis, Bunyan) for spiritual riches, testifying to this verse's wisdom.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What 'not bread' are you pursuing that cannot ultimately satisfy?
2. Where do you labor for what doesn't satisfy rather than receiving God's free provision?
3. How can you cultivate soul-delight in God's 'fatness' rather than worldly substitutes?

Interlinear Text

לָמָה	תִּשְׁקֹלוּ	כֶסֶף	בֶּל וְאֵ	לָחֶם
H4100	Wherefore do ye spend	money	not	for that which is not bread
	H8254	H3701	H3808	H3899
וְיִגִּיעַכֶּם	בֶּל וְאֵ	לְשִׁבְעָה	שָׂמָּה וְעַ	שָׂמָּה וְעַ
and your labour	not	for that which satisfieth	diligently	diligently
H3018	H3808	H7654	H8085	H8085
וְאָכְלוּ	טוֹב	וְתִתְעַנֶּה	בְּדָשָׁן	נַפְשְׁכֶם:
unto me and eat	ye that which is good	delight	itself in fatness	and let your soul
H398	H2896	H6026	H1880	H5315

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 22:26 (Parallel theme): The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.

Psalms 36:8 (Parallel theme): They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

Jeremiah 2:13 (Parallel theme): For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Jeremiah 31:14 (Good): And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the LORD.

Hebrews 13:9 (Good): Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

Habakkuk 2:13 (Parallel theme): Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

Hosea 8:7 (Parallel theme): For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.

Isaiah 51:1 (Parallel theme): Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

Isaiah 51:7 (Parallel theme): Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

Psalms 63:5 (Parallel theme): My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org