

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 29TH, 2019 // BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

THE VANITY OF PLEASURE (ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11)

As part of his quest to find life "under the sun", Solomon examined everything.

- His life became a great experiment to see what had lasting value or meaning.
- Solomon records in his experiments as he searched for a satisfying meaning in life.

First, he turns to pleasure (vs. 1)- he adopts the lifestyle, "eat, drink, and be merry."

- Israel under the reign of Solomon was a place of opulence and extravagant wealth.
- King Solomon had the means and the authority to do just about anything.
- He turns to laughter to see if it provides meaning or lasting satisfaction- but he concludes that, "it is mad."

Laughter and humor are great things, but they can't provide a real basis for life.

- If everything is funny, then nothing is funny. Laughter is fleeting and doesn't deal with the weighty matters of life.
- Humor & laughter aren't evil, but if you turn them into solutions, you won't get answers, you'll only get distractions- which is "madness" (vs. 2).

Then Solomon leaves the comedy club and goes to the bar (vs. 3)- to find pleasure in wine.

- The Bible speaks of ways that wine can be enjoyed as a good thing (Eccl. 9:7, Eccl. 10:19, Ps. 104:15), but also how it can be abused (Eph. 5:18, Prov. 20:1).
- Solomon's use of wine was to numb himself.

Scholars are divided as to how exactly he sought to "cheer his heart with wine".

- If we live for pleasure alone, enjoyment will decrease unless the intensity of the pleasure increases. Then you reach a point of diminishing return where there is little to no enjoyment at all, only bondage and desire without satisfaction.

So Solomon got involved in all kinds of projects (vs. 4-6).

- He built "great works" that included houses (1 Kings 7), cities (2 Chron. 8:4-6), gardens, vineyards, orchards & forests (1 Kings 4:33), and water systems.
- He also built the temple (1 Kings 5), one of the greatest buildings of the world.

He had slaves & servants to attend to his every need (vs. 7).

- He accumulated more possessions and treasure than anyone before him (vs. 8).
- He apparently loved the arts, and he conscripted musicians and singers (vs. 8) to provide music to him and his many guests.

He also acquired "...many concubines, the delight of the sons of man" (vs. 8).

- Solomon had a harem of 300 women, and 700 wives (1 Kings 11:3).
- So many people are on an endless search for sexual fulfillment, and they continually look for a new fantasy or illicit experience in order to be satisfied, but like Solomon ultimately they come away empty & disappointed!

The point is this- Solomon outdid anything we could ever do.

- From one life stage to the next, Solomon chased things he thought he truly wanted.
- He had more and did more than anyone before him and indulged in every desire he had.
- Pleasure is not a bad thing in and of itself, but if it's turned into a god, it will enslave you and never satisfy your deepest longings.

THE VANITY OF WISE LIVING (ECCLESIASTES 2:12-17)

Solomon now turns to a consideration of wisdom, madness & folly (vs. 12).

- Wisdom certainly has some advantages in this life over folly.
- Changing the oil in your car, obeying the law, and being wise with your finances are good ideas that will lead to a better quality of life.
- But simply being an ethical citizen won't shield us from death & meaninglessness.

Solomon says, "the same event happens" to both the fool & the wise (vs. 14-15).

- No matter how wise & "good" of a person you might be, you'll die just like anyone else.
- Some of us think that life is about leaving a legacy, but ultimately, there is no "enduring remembrance" (vs. 16) of either the fool or the wise, so Solomon asks, "what's the point?"

As Solomon looks at how death and the curse of sin "under the sun" renders all of our efforts meaningless & empty, he despairs and hates his life (2:17).

- Some of us have embraced a kind of homespun, folksy, moralistic, religiously influenced but ultimately humanistic philosophy of life that emphasizes simply being a "good person" apart from having any real connection to God.

We tell ourselves (and our children) that happiness & satisfaction in life are found in moralism and being "good"- but there are two dangers. 1) Self-righteousness 2) Futility & frustration.

THE VANITY OF HARD WORK (ECCLESIASTES 2:18-23)

The result of Solomon's "toil" was that he had more wealth than anyone on earth and more of an impact on his nation than anyone who had ever lived.

- But he soon arrived at a haunting realization that all he'd spent his life working for and building would someday be gone.
- He couldn't keep it (vs. 18)- someday he'd die and pass it to the next generation.

Not only could he not keep his wealth, he couldn't protect it either (vs. 19-20).

- It's bad enough that we must leave our wealth behind, but even worse that we might leave it to someone who will waste it or destroy it!
- What Solomon didn't know was that his son Rehoboam would do that very thing.
- One generation can completely squander another's prosperity.

It seemed like an injustice to Solomon as well that the prosperity of one generation's hard work will be enjoyed (and most likely unappreciated) by a generation that didn't work for it (vs. 21).

- Wealth & success also don't bring the enjoyment most people think they bring (vs. 21-23).
- If all we do is think about our wealth & worry, we'll be miserable.

It doesn't seem fair that we do all the hard work and then leave the wealth to somebody who didn't even work for it and won't appreciate it.

- We spend days in backbreaking labor and have many sleepless nights worrying about things, yet the heirs of great wealth never have to go through this.
- It all seems so futile and so full of meaninglessness.

The grass is always greener on the side- we all think that the good & worry-free life is the one full of success, wealth & prosperity.

- But Solomon says that people that have achieved it often find little peace- "even in the night his heart does not rest" (vs. 23).
- Work is wonderful gift, but it makes a terrible, tyrannical god- it will destroy your family, your marriage, your faith walk, your peace, and your joy.

THE ENJOYMENT OF GOD'S GIFTS (ECCLESIASTES 2:24-26)

Solomon now arrives at the first of six "conclusions" in Ecclesiastes, each which will emphasize the importance of accepting life as God's gift and enjoying it in God's will.

- Those of us who grew up in hyper-religious circles squirm when he speaks of enjoying food & wine (2:24, 9:7), enjoying marriage & sex (9:9), and enjoying wealth (9:8).
- We think that God is the enemy to joy & pleasure.

He's not advocating a philosophy of "eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow we die!"- he's telling us to thank God for what we do have, and enjoy it to the glory of God.

- Solomon makes it clear that not only are blessings from God, but even the enjoyment of blessings is God's gift to us (vs. 24).
- The missing piece that Solomon was chasing was the ability to enjoy & be satisfied.

Solomon asks, "apart from him [God], who can eat or who can have enjoyment?"

- Without God in our lives, everything "under the sun" can only bring a little bit of satisfaction before the emptiness sets in. But when you bring God into the picture, everything changes!
- Good things now are seen as gifts, not gods.

Life and death, wisdom and wealth, are all in His hands; and He wants us to enjoy His blessings and please His heart.

- But if we rejoice in the gifts themselves and forget the Giver, then we become ungrateful idolaters enslaved to meaninglessness, emptiness, and futility.
- The important thing is that we seek to please the Lord in all things and trust Him (vs. 26).

When we seek to please God, our work stops being about "making something of ourselves", and starts being about pleasing Him.

- When we seek to please God, our money & stuff stop being about security, identity, and power and start being about being a blessing to others.
- When we seek to please God, we enjoy things like laughter, food, wine, and sex within the parameters He's given us- which brings joy & life!

God also wants to give us "wisdom, knowledge, & joy" (vs. 26)- three gifts that enable us to appreciate His blessings and take pleasure in them.

- It's not enough to just possess "things"- we also have to possess the kind of character to use things wisely and enjoy them properly. But to the "sinner" (vs. 26), even if he heaps up all kinds of riches, he can never fully enjoy them because he's left God out of his life.

BROKEN CISTERN (JEREMIAH 2:13, JOHN 4:13-14)