

The Search for Satisfaction

(Ecclesiastes 2)

10/10/18; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

In January of 1848, the first gold was discovered in California, kicking off the greatest gold rush the world has ever seen..

The gold was discovered at a sawmill owned by a man named John Sutter.

Strangely enough, Sutter had only owned the mill for less than a year..

It seems that the previous owner had sold the land to Sutter in 1847..

And the reason that he sold is because he heard that gold had been discovered in southern California..

Sadly, that report was false and that man ended up selling a piece of property that had enough gold on it to make him rich for the rest of his life..

This is a common story in the world.

The same happened to a man from Persia named Ali Hafed..

Though Hafed was wealthy enough to own a 1000 acered property and lots of livestock, he sold it all after he met a wealthy diamond mine owner..

Hafed said that real wealth was found in diamonds, so he went searching the world for his own diamond mine.

He never found it.

He went broke in the process of looking and eventually committed suicide in Spain..

Amazingly, a few after his death, the man who purchased his property was down by a stream that ran through it when he noticed something shiny in the water.

It turned out to be a 3 carat diamond but it was one of many that came from a diamond mine located on the property that Hafed had sold in hopes of discovering his own diamonds..

This is the story of the world..

People searching for riches all over the world but it turns out that the greatest riches were right under their feet...

You know the sheep are right.

The isn't always greener on the other side of the fence..

Well, Solomon didn't believe that because he literally took the time to search every field of the world for greener grass..

And the reason he went looking was simple.

He couldn't find peace and contentment where he lived..

Even though Solomon was a king.

Even though Solomon was the richest man on earth in his lifetime..

Even though Solomon was the wisest man of his day.

Even with all the power, money, and fame, Solomon still thought there was something more out there for him..

So he went looking..

And his primary problem with the world was that everything in it seemed so pointless...

Last week, Solomon described the things of the world as vanity, which is the idea of worthlessness of without meaning...

We talked about how blowing soap bubbles is fun but that they quickly float off and pop and leave a mess behind...

Well, this was Solomon's issue with the world..

Solomon even said that trying to find contentment in the world was like trying to catch the wind..

Sadly though, that didn't prevent Solomon from chasing after satisfaction in the world..

Now we left off last week with Solomon setting out on his search for fulfillment..

And what we are going to see in the book of Ecclesiastes is not a chronological search, but rather a scattered search...

Solomon is going to move from subject to subject over the next few chapters but the constant theme is that nothing he investigates brings satisfaction to his soul..

However, we need to take this journey with him in order to see that the world offers no contentment...

One of the first things that Solomon thought was bring him happiness were the pleasures of the world..

So let's begin there in verses 1-11 of Ecclesiastes 2 with what we will call..

I. No Profit in Pleasure (1-11)

2 I said [a]to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So [b]enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” 3 I explored with my [c]mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my [d]mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men [e]to do under heaven the few [f]years of their lives.

A man with money, power, and time can truly indulge in any hobby or habit imaginable..

Well, Solomon did that in hope of finding happiness in a hobby or form of entertainment..

He simply set out to enjoy himself as we read in verse 1...

Yet, even trying to enjoy himself every day was not satisfying..

He simply says that it was futility in verse 2..

Now we may struggle to understand that, but we all get it and I will show you how..

Even on vacation, there comes a point when we are ready to get home and even head back to work..

Yes, there are people in the world with enough money to vacate the rest of their lives but even then most of them look for productive things to do..

And why is that?

Well, Solomon says this about pleasure at the end of verse 2...

“What does it accomplish?”

And the answer to that is it accomplishes nothing...

Now it clearly not sinful to enjoy the world..

It is not sinful to laugh and even enjoy yourself..

But the outcome of Solomon’s investigation is that pleasure and enjoyment are fine, but they aren’t fulfilling..

In verse 3, Solomon attempted to find satisfaction in wine..

Now he makes it clear that he never drank to drunkenness, but even the joy that wine brings to the soul is fleeting ..

This is what is odd about the habitual drunk..

He know that alcohol never satisfies his soul but he keeps on drinking thinking that tomorrow may bring happiness, though it never comes..

Worse yet, if he makes alcohol a part of his life, it will not only fail to bring contentment, it will actually lead to more trouble and discontentment..

Well, Solomon discovered that early on in his search for happiness..

But those aren't the only pleasures that Solomon sought to ease his mind...

Let's read verse 4-8..

4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had [g]homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.

In verses 4-6, Solomon tries to pleasure himself with construction projects...

This reminds me of the politician who is seeking reelection and keeps listing off the things that he was able to build..

New housing, new parks, new infrastructure..

In fact, many politicians build things in order to have a legacy of their rule..

Well, Solomon certainly tried to find happiness in the things he built..

But not only that, Solomon sought happiness in the things he possessed as well..

Verse 7 and 8 describe his collection of things..

Solomon collected servants.

Solomon collected herds of livestock.

Solomon collected gold and silver.

Solomon collected gold and silver.

Solomon collected entertainers.

Solomon collected women.

And the point of the all the collection was to find pleasure in them...

I collected baseball cards as a kid.

At one time, I had over 25,000 cards.

Yet, guess what?

The more my collection grew, the more I wanted.

And on top of that, the only thing I could do with the cards was look at them...

Someone once said that “people collect all sorts of things but the things they collect only collect dust.”

And that is so true..

So what was Solomon’s conclusion on looking for satisfaction in pleasure?

Verses 9-11..

9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my la-

bor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had [h]exerted, and behold all was [i]vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

Solomon's pursuit of pleasure pushed him to the top of the mountain of greatness in his day...

He literally experienced every pleasure his eyes desired..

Yet in verse 11, his simple conclusion was this..

There is no profit in pleasure..

And the reason is simple..

Solomon had to work to enjoy pleasurable things, but even those pleasurable things wouldn't last..

Solomon's realized that even the tallest building he could build could be wiped away with an earthquake, fire, or wind..

Solomon realized that his collections were essentially worthless...

In the end, he had invested much in pleasure but there no lasting return in it for him...

Even after a week at the beach, there was still work to be done..

In fact, you work harder the week the week leading up to vacation and the week after vacation so that you can take a week off..

Now that is not to say that enjoyment is evil.

It isn't at all, but it to say that a life of pleasure won't give you a meaningful life.

Solomon gave it a good shot, but he was still empty after it was over..

So if pleasure won't satisfy him, maybe wisdom and knowledge will...

II. No Satisfaction in Schooling (12-17)

A lot of people in our culture think that educating people is the key to solving all the world's problem.

In their mind, a proper education would end political turmoil, it would end pollution, it would end hunger, it would end all sorts of health problems, and the list goes on and on...

Yet, the reality is that all the education in the world can't overcome man's sinful nature..

Case in point...

A doctor can sit a person down and tell them that smoking and a poor diet is going to lead to heart disease..

In other words, the doctor can educate them, but education alone won't prevent heart disease because some people ignore the doctor's advice..

Now that is not to say that education and knowledge and wisdom are bad.

They aren't.

The Bible calls us to wisdom and knowledge and understanding..

But even with all the knowledge of the Bible in your head, that is no guarantee that a person knows Christ...

Think of the Pharisees...

Tons of OT knowledge but their hearts were never given to God..

Well, this is the frustration of Solomon..

You see Solomon tired to fill the hole in his heart with the best education but in the end it left him unfulfilled..

Let's read verse 12...

12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?

The sense of what Solomon is saying here is that all the wisdom in the world can't seem to break the cycle of man's fallenness..

In other words, the next king is no better than the king before even though he has access to more knowledge and wisdom...

Now that is not to say that some leaders are more godly than others...

That is certainly the case, but the reality is more wisdom and more knowledge doesn't result in a more righteousness...

So in that sense, getting smarter is of no use if more knowledge doesn't equal more love of God..

Verses 13-16..

13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. 15 Then I said [j]to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So [k]I said to myself, "This too is vanity." 16 For there is no [l]lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!

Another sad truth about wisdom is this...

Wisdom doesn't prevent death..

In other words, the ignorant man dies but so does the genius.

However, Solomon makes it clear here that wisdom is not all bad..

Verse 13 and verse 14 make it clear that there are advantages in wisdom and knowledge and understanding..

The book of Proverbs also made that clear.

People of wisdom often enjoy an easier life..

People of wisdom often avoid accidents and drama and poverty..

People of wisdom can see which way to go, which decision to make, while the fool man cannot..

However, despite the advantages of wisdom in this life on earth, wisdom and knowledge cannot satisfy the soul..

And neither can they put off the inevitable call of death..

All this investigation of wisdom as a source of fulfillment led Solomon to conclude this is verse 17..

17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was [m]grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

Now this attitude may come as a shock to you, but this was the attitude of a man who couldn't find happiness in the world..

But this is the attitude of so many today who live in a world without God..

Life is meaningless without Christ.

Life is frustrating without Christ.

Life is hard without Christ..

And any attempt to find satisfaction and contentment in this world apart from Christ will lead a person to hate life as well...

However, Solomon is not in his search for happiness just yet..

So in verses, he check to see if work can give him the satisfaction he desires..

We will call this..

III. No Fulfillment in the “9 to 5” (18-26)

Verse 18..

18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have [n]control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. 20 Therefore I [o]completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his [p]legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.

The Bible consistently describes the value of hard work.

We just finished up the book of Proverbs, and in that book, the value of work cannot be overstated.

Work keeps us busy and away from idle time and sin.

Work provides for our families.

Work produces wealth so we don't have to burden others..

Work is productive.

Work is mandated by God who told Adam to rule and subdue the earth..

Yet, just because something is good does not mean that it can bring happiness to the one doing it..

And this is clearly true with work..

In verse 19, Solomon says that work is worthless because the worker after him may squander what he worked so hard to produce..

But on top of that in verse 21, Solomon says that he works hard but the next generation benefits from it..

In other words, Solomon's frustration with work is what we see in verse 22...

22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in [q]his striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his [r]mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

Though that sounds selfish, it is a reality in terms of work..

You work hard all day.

Your mind even thinks about work at night..

But the benefit of your labor and thought is often enjoyed or destroyed by the person after you..

This is the vanity of work...

Remember the commercial...

“Time to make the donuts.”

It was simply a reflection of a life of routine, and worse yet...

For the donut maker, all of his work is gone by lunchtime into the belly of his customers..

And though that it good, it is also exhausting and frustrating..

When I catered for large businesses, I understand Solomon's aggravation..

WE would work for days to cut steaks, wrap baked potatoes, put together a salad to feed a place of 500 people..

And then in less than an hour, the steaks were gone, the potatoes were eaten, and the salad was thrown in the trash..

And though that was good for the business and paid me and supported my family, it was incredibly unfulfilling..

You may get few comments like, “That was delicious” or “thanks for coming.”

But in the end, there was little satisfaction in it.

This is where Solomon is at..

HE had labored for so much, and guess what the one that followed him would destroy all he had built..

In fact, the nation of Israel would divide after Solomon’s reign...

So what did Solomon conclude about work and labor?

Verses 24-26..

24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and [s]tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without [t]Him? 26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has giv-

en the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

For the first time, we get a glimpse of what Solomon eventually concluded about life..

Verse 25 is the key..

Who can eat and enjoy life without the Lord?

This is going to be a foundational truth of Solomon's search for happiness...

Nothing has meaning without the Lord..

Now, let's clear something up..

None of these things that Solomon sought are bad in themselves..

Wisdom is not bad.

Pleasure is not bad.

Work is not bad.

Laughter is not bad..

But then reality is that none are complete without the Lord in your life..

Look, I love to laugh.

There is nothing in the Bible that says believers can't smile after they get saved..

However, I have met people who acted that way..

But here's the reality laughter with Christ is much better than laughter without Christ...

The same is true of work, of pleasure, or really anything that we do under the sun...

Solomon is not telling us to give up work or pleasure or fun, he simply telling us that work, pleasure, and fun are more fulfilling with Christ...

Though all of our life should not be all eating, drinking, and being merry, there is certainly nothing wrong with any of those things if they are done and seen as a gift of God in our lives..

Conclusion

What are some things that we can take with us from Ecclesiastes 2?

#1 - There is frustration in a fallen world.

None of the things that Solomon discovered in his search for life's meaning are new to us..

WE have all felt the frustration of work.

Other people can and do benefit from our work..

Other people can destroy our work.

Other people can take credit for our work..

This is life in a fallen world lived among fallen people..

Don't be surprised when work or people at work throw you a curveball..

We have all felt the frustration of possessions.

WE buy a computer and it out of date in a year.

The same is true with our phone or TV or whatever.

We have all felt the frustration of pleasure..

Not only are vacations and hobbies expensive, they also sometimes disappoint..

Ever been out to eat and didn't like the food?

Sure we have all been there..

In fact, I often prepare for the worst since I know the world is broken..

Solomon isn't telling us to withdraw from the world to prevent our disappointment...

He is simply saying that in a fallen world, our hopes aren't often met and our satisfaction often falls short...

Again, that is no reason to give but it a reminder that this world is not our final stop.

That leads to point number 2..

#2 - There is fulfillment in a future world.

Why do we longer for a new heaven and new earth?

Many reasons..

WE get to be with our God..

WE get to leave behind our sinful flesh..

WE get to reunite with believers who will be there..

But guess what?

We will also get to live in a world that isn't broken.

And in my view of those new heavens and earth,
there will still be work there and pleasure there and
wisdom there..

But in that world, all of those things will not only
satisfy us, they will never disappoint or frustrate us..

In a sense Solomon only confirmed what we already
know..

This world is not our home, but the world to come
is..

And in that world, nothing is vanity because the
lord is there and he constantly satisfies our souls..

Let us pray..