

Vanity of Vanities, All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes 1-2

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 22, 2021

With that said, if you would please open your Bibles with me to the book of Ecclesiastes. As you've already heard, that's the book we're going to be in this morning. The Book of Ecclesiastes because we're on the front end of a new series here at Grace, one that we've never looked at before. On the fourth book of poetry in the Bible, if you've ever studied it before, you'll know that it's the fourth poetic book right after Job, Psalms, and Proverbs so it almost rounds off the list.

But let me just read it to you before we get started. So you can hear what this book says. If you look in the first few verses of Ecclesiastes, it says:

The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun, a generation goes in, a generation comes but the earth remains forever. Also, the sun rises and the sunsets and hastens to its place, it rises there, again, blowing toward the south and turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along and on its circular courses, the wind returns, all the rivers flow into the sea, and yet the sea is not full to the place where the rivers flow, and there they flow again, all things are weary, some man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is that which will be and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there's nothing new under the sun, is there anything of which one might say; 'see this, it's new.' Already, it has existed for ages, which were before us, there is no remembrance of earlier things. And also the latter things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still.

I, the preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. And it is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men.

I'll stop the reading there. But as you read that you can tell it's a very strange way to start a book of the Bible isn't it. It's very odd, because it's so bleak. This is a very discouraging thing to read. But just to explain it to you, I just told you Ecclesiastes falls into the poetic section of the Old Testament, which very few of us have studied before. So I want to say just a few words about it. But when you open up your Bibles, you notice it's not divided up chronologically. In other words, it's not divided up on a timeline. It's divided up according to genre, the type of style the author uses. So for example, it begins with the books of the law, books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Then it goes into the history books of Joshua through Esther, to tell you Israel's history. Then the next books you see are the poetry books, which actually go back into the history and talk about some of the events that occurred there. That's why it's confusing when you read your Bible sometimes, because it seems to jump back and forth. It's not doing that, it's just divided up according to the way things were written. But the job of the poet's was to tell Israel how they should have behaved in the first place. They were to tell you how to apply the law of God to your life by putting it into real life situations.

God was a very gracious God to Israel and very creative. So He sent prophets to teach them the law. And when they didn't get it, He sent them poets. If you couldn't get it the direct way, maybe you could get it the indirect way with flowers on it, right? And if you've ever read it before, you'll know that their words are very different from English poetry because they don't rhyme. Hebrew language is not a very pretty language anyway, it's got a lot of gutturals in it, a lot of earthly kind of sounds. So they didn't bother with rhyming, they bothered with other things like shock and awe. Which is what you see here in Ecclesiastes, Solomon is writing poetry the way he knew how to write it, and he does it in order to shock you and rattle your cage. This book reads like a punch in the back, kind of like a wake up call because this sounds like a suicide note. And when you read Ecclesiastes it sounds like something you would say before you would kill yourself. It's so bleak, because that's where Solomon was at the end of his life. He was suicidal, because he had not kept the law of God. One scholar calls this his song of sorrows. After this, you have the Song of Solomon, where he's on top of the world, and everything's great. He's in love. This is his song of sorrows where he's at the bottom of the world, the total opposite of that book.

But if you look at the first few verses, again, it says, "This is the words of the preacher, the son of David king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities." This word vanity here, it means futile or meaningless. It's an important word for the book because it's found three times per chapter. And one author translated it as soap bubbles. He said, My life is just rising up and popping like a bubble. It's like blowing around like a bag in the wind. Because I lived in sin. We talked about that last week. So I don't want to go into that any more here.

But to be more specific, if you notice in chapter one, the main issue he's dealing with here is boredom. He says, My life is boring to me now it's so monotonous, because of my sin. I thought sin would be fun. I thought if I gave in to sin, it would make me happy. But it didn't it bored me to death. If you look in the words here in verse four, he says, "a generation goes in a generation comes, but the earth remains forever." In other words, we live and die and the earth goes on, doesn't even know we're here, keeps moving off into space. As if we weren't in existence.

Then it says, "the sun rises," in verse five, "and the wind blows and the rivers flow." Then what happens? Verse eight says, "they flow again," they just keep coming. Wake up today, it's the same thing, wake up tomorrow, same thing again. So that all things are wearisome to me. He says, because it's a constant cycle of go to work, come home, watch TV and go to bed, go to work, come home, watch TV and go to bed, go to work, come home, watch TV and go to bed like a hamster on a wheel or a mouse chasing the cheese. So he says in verse 10, "is there anything that's new?" Solomon says, No, because the only thing that can cure this cycle of boredom is the Lord. The only thing that can really give you anything new or exciting in life, in a true sense of the word is Him. If you remember, Solomon was the king, if you had everything he had, all the money and power you could want. He had a box full of toys, as Richard just showed us. In fact, the scripture says he had 1000 wives, or 700 wives and 300 concubines, which sounds like a dream to some evil men. It sounds like some kind of fantasy, but Solomon says he was miserable. Because after a while, they all look the same. Wife number 48 looks just like wife number 49. I can't tell the difference anymore. It's all so monotonous. Because this is what sin does. It promises you the world, but it doesn't deliver. It tells you it'll make you happy, it tells you if you're satisfied. But all it does is leave a dry taste in your mouth. And I think we can all relate to this today.

Because you see people doing this now. People are so bored with their sin today, aren't they? They're so fed up. Which is why they keep bouncing around from this thing to this thing to keep jumping around from that to that because nothing makes them happy anymore. Nothing satisfies them. So for example, they turn to fitness, they try

to eat right and drink right and exercise right, just so they can look right. Which is okay, there's nothing wrong with taking care of yourself. But some people are so obsessed with it right? They'll miss her kid's birthday before they miss a day at the gym. And when that doesn't work, other people turn to their gender identity. They get involved in the LGBTQ community and have a sex operation and put rainbow flags everywhere. But that doesn't work either. So they turn to the Green Movement, try to save the environment, and that doesn't work, they turn to the Black Lives Matter movement, try to save the oppressed, then that doesn't work. They go to the Salvation Army. That doesn't work, they go to the woods. But the point is, it's just a vicious cycle. It just never ever, ever ends. Because they're looking for something to find meaning in their life, and they can't find it because they've turned their back on God, the One true source of purpose in the universe, they've rejected.

One author said people have tried to find satisfaction for years and their pleasure, but failed. So now they're trying to find it in some purpose. And they're failing there too. Is there anything of which one might say See this? This is new. In fact, just to highlight this, I thought you guys might find this interesting, but out of curiosity, does anybody know the dieting trend? The major dieting trend 50 years ago? Anybody? It was called 'Stillman diet.' It was a lot like the Atkins diet except stronger because you could eat meat and protein, but you couldn't eat any carbohydrates and fruits and vegetables or sweets, which sounds awful to me. But you know, you didn't know that. Why? Because there's been 1000 diets that have come out since then. Right? It's just been one right after the other. Let me ask you another question. Does anybody know what the most popular political movement was 50 years ago? Civil Rights police in the States. Anyway, it was the movement to give equality to the races, but you don't remember that either. Because it's just been 1000 different political movements. They just keep coming. Because it doesn't satisfy the quest for meaning. And Solomon's point here is that if you're not careful, even as a believer, you can get caught up with that, and come to the end of your life and say, I wasted it. All I did was chase after these meaningless things. Running after fitness, running after gender, running after politics. You know, I've talked to some people who said to me, where did the time go? And they said, I know where the time went. Went into a bottle, spent it all on alcohol. And I've heard other people say, Where did the time go? I spent it all on politics, because I was just arguing about it all the time. And they're both equally tragic.

I remember, I'll never forget the time a young man came into our single's ministry out of Grace Community and he told us he had just gotten saved working on the John Kerry campaign. Which I thought was strange, because John Kerry was a liberal politician in the States, he was a godless man. But as he explained the story, he told us how Kerry lost the race due to the Christian vote. This guy was not a Christian at the time, but due to the evangelical vote. And it really made my friend angry. He said, until I started talking, talking to the Christians that I knew. And he said, these are nice people, there must be something to this Jesus thing and he got saved. But afterwards, he said, I vow to never waste my life on something like that, again. Friends, that's the message of the book of Ecclesiastes, you don't want to waste your life. You want to spend it on something that will matter in eternity. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning with several examples of vanity from Ecclesiastes one and two.

So if you're taking notes, that's our sermon for this morning, we're going to look at several examples of vanity, from Ecclesiastes. In chapter one and two, so you can see what Solomon is saying here. So you can get your mind around what he means when he says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," because let's face it, people are wasting their lives aren't they? They're spending it on foolish things. But just to remind you, what you see in this book is that, that's nothing new. People have been wasting their lives ever since the dawn of time. Some people think that's just a 21st century thing. It's a North American problem. It's not what was going on in Israel thousands of

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years ago. In fact, you could put a man in a cave, and he'll still waste his life. You can stick him in a jungle somewhere, he'll still blow it. Because it's an issue of the heart, and an issue of sin. And so let's talk about that this morning and see what Solomon says about it. With four examples of vanity from Ecclesiastes.

The first one is knowledge. The first example of vanity might be one that surprises you, when you see it in the chapter here because it's the example of knowledge and wisdom. Which doesn't refer to Godly wisdom, but worldly wisdom...secular knowledge. And if you look in verse 12, he writes and says this, he says, "I, the preacher, had been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of man to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works which had been done under the sun, and behold, all this vanity and striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted. I said to myself, behold, I've magnified and increased wisdom, more than all who were over Jerusalem before me." By the way, that sounds like a big boast. But there was only a Saul and David before him, just to put a perspective on that. Over all who were in Jerusalem before you? Well, there was only two guys. "And my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. And I set my mind to know wisdom and know madness. And finally, I realized that this also is striving after wind, because in much wisdom, there's much grief and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain."

There is some deep stuff in here, and friends, I just want to encourage you, we're going to be diving into deep waters here this morning. But if you notice Solomon starts off with the phrase, "I the preacher," which is the second time he refers to himself that way in the book. And I've told you before, that the word for preacher here is "ko Khaled" in Hebrew. It's a very important word because it's actually the title of the book in Hebrew. So if you looked at the book in your Hebrew Bible, it would be called the book of Colette. Which means the book of the preacher or the teacher or even the philosopher because in this book Solomon's philosophizing over life he's talking like an old man sitting by the fireplace. And as he does it, he says, "This is how I live my life, I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven."

If you remember, in 1st Kings, chapter 3, it says, "Solomon prayed for wisdom, and the Lord gave it to him. So he was wiser than anyone who came before him." And with that precious gift, Solomon said, "I set my mind to explore all that's been done, I wanted to know all of it." Which is quite ambitious, because it means that he set out to explore all art and history and science. He wanted to know all music and literature and philosophy by sticking his nose in a book. He was camping out at the library, day in day out. And what was the result? Verse 13 tells you the result, it says, "it was a grievous task which God had given to the sons of man." You would think you'd say something more encouraging than that. You would think after all, that study, Solomon would say it was a wonderful thing to do. But he says it was the opposite. It was painful, because verse 15, says, "What is crooked cannot be straightened." That means what is crooked in my mind cannot be straightened. There are certain things I just can't understand. Because I study and study and study and it does me no good. And I read, I read and I read, it still makes no sense to me.

We've all experienced that before, because some of you have tried to learn calculus in high school. It's very difficult, at least for me anyway. Or some of you have tried to read some of the great works of philosophy and had the same experience, he can't understand it. Because what is lacking cannot be counted. That means that there are certain things that cannot be counted or found in a book. Certain questions have no answers. Because in much wisdom, there is much grief. There you see a different word for grief, because now it's getting more serious.

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Because this term at the end here refers to anger, before the term for grief referred to sorrow. Solomon was sorry, and sad that he couldn't learn everything. Now he's mad about it. Because he really wanted to know everything. And he couldn't, I mean, he really wanted to understand this world. But it was impossible for him. Now, let me explain a little bit of what Solomon's saying here. He's not saying you shouldn't study. So young people in this town, don't go home and tell mom and dad, Pastor Jeremy said, you don't have to do your homework. I'm not saying that. That's not in the Bible. He's not saying there's not a place for growing in knowledge. Absolutely, there is. What he's saying is that you need to know the limitations of it. You need to know your boundaries, because you can only go so far with what you know, the smartest man in the world said that. You shouldn't try to find your happiness here, because you won't find it.

Just to give you a practical example of how vain it is to try to learn everything, you can look at the school system here in Canada and see that every couple years, they change the curriculum, don't they? Every couple years, they throw out everything they had before, or a lot of it anyway, I'm not making a political statement. It's just a fact. Because at one time, they taught a lot of the Canadian history here. But now they don't do a lot of that anymore. Because it's considered to be offensive and that sort of thing. They've taken a lot of it out. Which means that it's vain to try to learn everything. I mean, some of you if you wanted to, you'd have to go back to school to learn all that again, what they're teaching. Or you can take something like the medical profession, the field of medicine, because we have several doctors in our church. And they'll tell you it wasn't too long ago that a sex change operation was illegal in this country. You couldn't do it because it was considered to be unhealthy. You would damage your health by doing that. Now they tell you just the opposite, right? It's a good thing. Why? Because it's like chasing after the wind, trying to keep up with modern knowledge is like trying to catch a soap bubble with your hands. Because every couple years, the whole thing gets turned upside down.

In fact, to go into more detail on this, from what I can tell they're currently close to 5 billion people on the planet today who use the internet. In every minute, they add about half a million comments to social media to Facebook, and 400 hours of video to YouTube. Every minute, they send out half a million tweets and 16 million texts, which means there is no way you could ever keep up with all that. I was talking to one of our young people in church the other day, and I was telling him I was a senior in high school when the internet came out. And what that means is, I say for your generation, you guys have access to everything; good stuff, but the bad too. It's a constant effort of trying to filter all this when I was growing up. I never even heard of JOHN MacArthur. I never heard him preach until I went to seminary. He came on at 4:30 in the morning in some am radio station. You were very limited, but you didn't have to filter all this stuff coming at you all the time. You guys have to do that now.

One person said the biggest college on the planet today is Google University or Facebook University. Everybody seems to be enrolling in it, which should be so discouraging, right? It would be so awful if it wasn't for the fact that God only wants you to know one book at the end of the day, right? And that's the Bible. He only wants you know the Word of God. You can know those other things, that's fine, but there's only one sufficient book. II Timothy 3 verse 16, says, "the Bible is inspired by God and profitable for teaching reproof, correcting and training and righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." And the word, 'every,' means every, there if you learn the Bible, you're ready for every good thing. You're lacking in nothing. Hebrews 4 verse 12, says, "it pierces between joints and marrow, souls and spirit." Which means the Bible goes places where nothing else can go. So you don't have to worry about all the social media stuff. You can just understand the Bible.

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When David Livingston went to Africa, he had 73 books in his travel bags. But as time went on in the journey, they were too heavy. So he had to throw away every single book except his Bible. And he went on to conquer Africa with that phrase. There's a reminder in there, and that is, that you can do the same thing today, the Bible is all you need. That brings us to another thing to look at here. And this passage is just another example of vanity from Ecclesiastes he's wanting to make. The first one is the example of knowledge and wisdom. Not that it's wrong to study but there are limitations, making it a vain thing. Secondly, there's the example of pleasure. A second example of vanity from Ecclesiastes, knowledge is one and two is the example of pleasure. Which is just the opposite of that, because it refers to fun and entertainment and that sort of thing. The first example refers to anything that encourages you to think. Now Solomon is going to look at everything that encourages you not to. So if you don't find yourself in the first part of this passage, you'll find yourself in the second one.

And if you look in chapter two, he says this, he says:

“I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you With pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’ And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter it is madness and of pleasure. What does it accomplish? I explore with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my 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 to do under heaven the few years of their lives. I enlarged my works. I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself, I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and I had home born slaves. Also, I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces, and provided for myself male and female singers, and the pleasures of men, many concubines. Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.”

And if you look down in verse 11, it says, “Then I considered all my activities which my hands had done, and the labor which I had exerted, and behold, all was vanity, and striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.”

Solomon ends up there the same way you started in the first passage, but let me just walk you through this a little bit. Have you noticed as Solomon begins this next set of vain things here, he says that he's going to test himself with pleasure. In other words, Solomon's not doing this just for the fun of it, he's actually looking to pleasure to see if it'll bring him joy, happiness and meaning in life. He tried that with knowledge. Now he's trying it with another thing, ‘pleasure.’ This was a philosophical experiment for him. And the word for pleasure here, it's a Hebrew word that means, ‘good things.’ And they can refer to any good thing that makes you happy, which is what he does here. So for example, if you look in verse two, he starts off with laughter, which means he hired court jesters, he got comedians to make him smile and giggle. And when that didn't work, verse three says he turned to wine because maybe that'll do the trick. He tried to get drunk, which is something a lot of people do today. And when that doesn't work, he goes on to something else because he builds houses for himself. In fact, He builds houses and vineyards and ponds, and he just goes, goes overboard and builds everything. That doesn't work, he goes to money when that doesn't work, he goes to concubines or sex. But the point was that it was just one pleasure after another for Solomon here. He was chasing after one thing after the next because all that his eyes desired, he did not refuse them. And the idea is that anything he looked at, he just took it. Some people shop like that, don't they? Going to the store, anything they want they grab? That's how he was going through life. And

what was the result? He says it was all vanity, put him in the same place he was before. Pleasure was no better than the knowledge. Games are no better than the library. He says, I studied hard. And I played hard. I learned a lot. And I laughed a lot. What did it give me the same thing? Same thing. I was just as miserable as I was before. And to add to that there's actually a progression in this text. Because he starts with laughter in verse two, then he turns to alcohol and verse three, then to the project, and then on to money, and then on to sex. Because the idea is that each of those things cost him more than the one before. Each of those pleasures was a little more demanding on him. But even that didn't change anything. He was still vain. And friends, we need to stop here for a moment and think about what he's saying. Because it's been said that the greatest problem with our world today is not that we think too much. But we think too little Amen. Some of us would rather die than think we would rather face a shooting gallery. Or it's not that we don't play, but we play too much. We play all the time. We have entertainment coming out of the eyeballs here in Canada, I just quoted you a bunch of statistics about the internet, and all the time people spend on social media. But I don't even have time to talk about all the hours we spend watching movies around here or all the investment we spend into watching games or going hunting and fishing and camping and that sort of thing. Not that that's a bad thing. We all need some entertainment. But the problem is that it's never enough for us. It doesn't satisfy because it's just a cheap thrill. Go away camping. It's a great time, but it's just kind of a little quick thing. Eventually, you have to look for something else. I mean, what's a football game anyway, right? It's just a bunch of grown men chasing after a ball. I mean, we can make a sound more appealing than that. But that's all it is. It's just a bunch of adults who are acting like children because they're hitting and running and tackling each other. I get on to my kids when they do that, those guys get paid millions of dollars, right? Or what's a movie? It's the same thing. It's just pretend, just a fantasy. So you don't want to build your life around that Solomon says.

I've met Cheryl, several of the actors out there in California. And I've asked him, you know, why did you become a Christian? Why did you come to the Lord because you had the world at your fingertips. And they said I didn't have anything. It was all a lie. It was just so shallow all the time. Solomon says the same thing here. He says the things of this world, the pleasures of this world are shallow, they're skin deep. Because at some point, the movie ends, the game stops and then what do you do? You have nothing. So you want to build your life on something greater than that. And in fact, this is one thing I love about the Bible so much. And that is that it never runs from reality. The Bible never hides the fact that this world will be bad. Instead it shows you how to handle it. It tells you how to deal with it. But movies and games and all those other things, they do the opposite. They just want to hide reality from you. Which is why they're vanity.

You know, several years ago someone sent me a quote during a hard time in my life that really reminded me of this. Because it said this, listen to these words. He said to the artists, Jesus is the one altogether lovely. And to the architect, He is the cornerstone. To the baker, He is the living bread and to the banker, He is the treasure. To the biologists, He is the source of life and to the builder, He is the foundation. To the doctor, He is the great physician and to the educator, He is the teacher of truth. To the farmer, He is the Lord of the harvest and to the florist, He is the lily of the valley. To the geologists, He is the Rock of Ages and to the jurist, He is the judge. To the jeweler, He is the Pearl of Great Price. To the lawyer, He is the advocate and to the gardener, He is the true vine. To the scholar, He is the light and to the sculptor, He is the living stone. To the slave, He is the master and to the state's man, He is the King of kings. To the student, He is the truth and to the traveler, He is the way. To the worker, He is the rest. To the anxious, He is the peace and to the depressed, He is the Comforter. The point is that Jesus is everything to us. You don't need those other things. He is all you ever need. So you don't have to turn to all these

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pleasures to satisfy you. You don't have to chase after every ballgame. You don't have to run after every entertainment.

In the town I grew up in we live seven hours from the big football stadium in Tennessee Nealon Stadium in Knoxville, Tennessee. It can host 109,000 people in the stadium. At the time I grew up, Tennessee only had 7 million people in it. You do the math, but it was sold out every home game and I knew people that would drive seven hours from my town one way, every game to watch them play. That is called a wasted life. Solomon says I tried that; it doesn't work. You need to pour your life into Jesus.

That brings us to one more example of vanity here in Ecclesiastes, he's wanting to just review these other ones. The first one is the example of wisdom. The second one is the example of pleasure, which is the opposite of that. It's seeing things from a different perspective. Solomon says whether you turn your brain on or off, whether you study or you don't, it doesn't matter. It brings you to the same place; it's all vanity without the Lord. In fact, I can't tell you how many people I've talked to who say they're too busy to come to church and read their Bible, but they never miss a movie. They never missed a TV show. Solomon says that's vanity too. But it brings us to one more thing to talk about and that is the example of work.

The third and fourth examples of vanity here in Ecclesiastes are money and work. Which means Solomon is thinking of everything here. He's exploring every part of the world and after looking at these other things he starts talking about our jobs, and the vanity that's found in them. If you look in verse eight, he says this, "also I collected for myself, silver and gold and the treasure of kings." There he is talking about money. Then if you look down in verse 18, here he says this, "thus I hated all the fruit of my labor, for which I labored under the sun. For I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool. Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I've labored by acting wisely under the sun. This to is vanity! Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored for them. This to is vanity and a great evil, for what does a man get in all his labor, in his striving with which he labor's under the sun, because all his days his task is painful and grievous. Even at night his mind does not rest and this to is vanity."

We skipped over a little bit here in the passage, because Solomon's thoughts are a little bit scattered here. The passage and verses 12 through 17, are just another reference to wisdom. But you can hear the despair in Solomon's voice in verse 18. When he says, "thus I hated all the fruits of my labor." That's the first time he says he hated something in this passage. Because like most men, Solomon loved his job. He enjoyed going to the office every day, punching the time clock, running the kingdom. But now he says he hates it; for this reason, "for I must leave it to the man who will come after me and who knows whether he'll be wise or a fool." In other words, Solomon says, I can create a wonderful kingdom for myself, I can work and work and work and turn it into a great place. Which is what he did, only to leave it to a fool. Which is what happened in his life, right?

Remember the story of Solomon, he builds the greatest Kingdom Israel ever knew. Then his son Rehoboam splits it in a matter of days. Tears it apart! Solomon here is sitting at his chair by the fireplace. He says, I can see that kind of thing coming and I can't stop it, which makes me miserable. Even my work doesn't make me happy anymore. Before his studies made him unhappy, then his pleasures made him unhappy. Now it's his job. This is kind of the nail in the coffin, right? I mean, most men find their identity in their work. They find their purpose in

their calling in life; in their job. Which is why they put so many hours into it. That's why they're gone so much. That's why it's go, go, go all the time for them. But Solomon says at the end of this passage here, he says, now that's gone for me too. Because there comes a day you can't work anymore. There comes a day you have to call it quits and hang it up. Then you want to leave it to your kids. That doesn't even give him any joy here either. It's just a very terrible passage you read here in this book.

However, let me show you some hope here at the end of it. If you look in verse 24, before you want to despair and throw your hands up in the air, he says this, "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God, for who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him." This is one of the highlights in the book of Ecclesiastes. This is just one of the few times he says something positive. But here he gives you the solution to all this vanity and that is that you need to find your satisfaction in the Lord. Keep going back to this in this sermon. The answer to the quest for happiness is that you should enjoy life, you should eat and drink, but do it knowing that your only source of joy is found in God. The way he says it here, Solomon is saying, I'm not telling you to be a monk that goes off in the desert and beats himself all the time. I'm not telling you to frown all day long. Enjoy life, but you do it knowing that the joy comes from God. It doesn't come from the job. Some of you have jobs where there's no joy in it, right? It's miserable! You don't like your work. But he says here you can find joy if you find it in the Lord, for who can eat and drink and find enjoyment without Him. The word for enjoyment here is the Hebrew word 'Cush,' which refers to something that gives you delight or glee or fulfillment. If you remember, that's what Solomon has been looking for. This passage takes him all the way back to the beginning of chapter one where he's been looking for fulfillment, he's trying to find meaning. He says, God is the only one who can give that to me.

This is an interesting passage, because as you read Ecclesiastes, you can see the Lord stripping away the layers of Solomon's soul here. You can see Him peeling away every last vestige of his heart and putting it under the microscope and saying, see Solomon, that doesn't work. See Solomon, that doesn't work. See, Solomon, this is vain too because the only thing you need to be looking at is Me. It's the Lord. I'll say this another way, God must give Solomon joy, he'll never find it. Because this passage says, "this also I have seen is from the hand of God," which means 'joy' has to be sent down to us from heaven. It's a gift from God. Because for all his wisdom, Solomon couldn't find it on his own. Because this is a heart problem, not a head problem. So the Lord had to give it to him from heaven.

Solomon says, you're never going to be happy in life looking at me, me, me all the time. You'll never be at peace, just dwelling on yourself and trying to find pleasure in your fitness or your gender, or your movies or movements. You'll only find it in God. He's the only one who can give it to you. You find it in prayer. This sounds so simple, but it is simple. I mean, the solution at the end of this sounds so easy, but it is easy. If Solomon just would have prayed, he would have stopped all this madness. If he would have asked the Lord for help in this issue, God would have answered. But he didn't. And that's why this book sounds the way it does. I mentioned this because maybe some of you need to hear this today. Because you work and work and work and you don't find any satisfaction in it. You try and try and try to find meaning in what you do, but you don't. You're like the hamster on a wheel. It's also boring to you. You can't wait for five o'clock to roll around. You know you need to do. You need to pray. You need to seek the Lord. That's what this whole chapter is telling you, stop wasting your time. Stop trying to find joy here, find it up there. God will always give it to you.

Vanity of Vanities, All is Vanity

For others of you, it's just the opposite. Because for you, it's just play, play, play all the time. Life is just one big party. Because you don't work too much. You work too little, you're a slacker. Well, I will tell you this friend, there's going to be a time when the playing is going to stop. And the party's going to end. And when it does, you know what you need to do. You need to do the same thing, find your joy in the Lord.

The Bible says this several other ways as well. This is not the only time you see this. We heard this passage quoted earlier, Matthew 6 verse 33 says, "seek first His kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you." If you notice there's an order there. There's a sequence in that you seek the kingdom first and then comes the other things. You seek God first and then comes the happiness. The problem with most people's lives is they're trying to find the happiness first. It doesn't work that way. Seek the kingdom! Psalm 37 verse 4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." The reason He'll give you the desires of your heart is because you're delighting in Him. Psalm 84 verse 11, says, "The Lord is a sun and shield and no good thing does He with-hold from those who walk uprightly." Malachi 3 verse 10 says, "bring your whole time to Me, give Me your offering, and put Me to the test to see if I will not open for you the floodgates of heaven." You guys get the point, you need to put God first and He will take care of the rest.

You know, in my studies this week, I came across a story of two minors in the Klondike Gold Rush. Maybe they came through Chilliwack? I think the Klondike Gold Rush, some of them, came through Chilliwack. They were so excited about finding gold up there that they neglected to store up provisions for the winter. As a result they starved, and they froze. Before they died one of them wrote out a note that said this, "all this gold won't do you any good if you have to die in order to get it." Right? All the things in this world won't do you any good, if they cost you your life. You need to live for something bigger than that. You need to live for the Lord! So will you do that today? Will you let the book of Ecclesiastes be a wakeup call for you?

Let me pray that God will give us grace in this. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for what we've studied this morning. That the words of this book are penetrating to all of us in the fact that we all are guilty of looking for the wrong things for happiness. We've all chased after pleasure. We've all chased after work, and we've run after things that have done us no good in the end. Father, thank You for these words of Solomon. They remind us to stop the chase, get off the hamster wheel and start turning to You. I pray for my friends this morning because some of them need to read this book and make changes in their life as a result of what it says. Some of them may need to repent of certain sins or idols that they have. Give them grace to do that. Lord for those who are lost, may this encourage them to seek Christ as a Savior. May Jesus be glorified in what we've read and studied today. Lord, we don't want to waste our lives. We get one chance to live our lives out for eternity. Help us to make them count, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.