

Reality Check – Too Good to be Bad

2/20/22

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Sunday AM

I think by nature, most people are *adrenaline junkies* – of course, some more than others. So, while I've personally never jumped from a perfectly good airplane or bungee jumped off a bridge, I have repelled off a 100 ft cliff, free-climbed, hit a baseball, sacked a QB, mountain biked the Swiss Alps, and snow skied a double black diamond on a glacier in Austria – **each time enjoying the rush of adrenaline.**

I also should confess that a few years ago while at Victoria Falls in Africa, I came very close to bungee jumping over the Zambezi River, until I remembered that if the fall didn't kill me – **Meg just might!**

BTW – I read this week of a 100-yr old man by the name of **S.L. Potter**, who in 1993, bungee jumped from a 210 ft. tower outside of San Diego. His first words after getting unharnessed were – *Can someone please hand me my teeth!*

All this to say, by nature it's w/in us all to crave pleasure/adventure – to find fulfillment in what we think can satisfy our souls. We're equipped for seeking and fulfilling our desires. And while God has given us this gift to be enjoyed, we have to be vigilant that it never gets corrupted/perverted – or else it can take over quickly to rule/drive our lives as we seek after our lusts instead of seeking after God. (1 Timothy 6:17f)

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us w/ everything for our enjoyment... (it goes on to say) so they may take hold of the life that's truly life. 1 Timothy 6:17f

We're currently in a series in the book of **Ecclesiastes** entitled – **Reality Check**, learning about the meaning and value of **life under the sun** when we *include* God and when we *exclude* God.

A reality check is *the process of comparing one's flawed ideas, opinions, and misconceptions w/ the actual facts/reality of a situation so that one might actually see the truth.* And w/out question, more so now than ever – our world is in need of a **reality check.**

And so, understanding this about His creation, God used Solomon to write a book in the Bible about the reality of **life under the sun** – to teach us that there is nothing this side of heaven (not one ISM) that can bring lasting fulfillment/satisfaction to our soul – b/c all this world has to offer is *meaningless* w/out God.

Thru Solomon's experience, we learn that unless we begin w/ the assumption that **God IS** – the question of life's purpose is vanity and w/out satisfaction. But if **God IS** – then **everything** has value and purpose.

Picking up in **Ecclesiastes 2**, Solomon sharing his exploits by addressing man's desire to find meaning thru his unquenchable thirst to satisfy his lust. Also known as **hedonism**, all of us are equipped and predisposed to seeking pleasure/satisfaction. Whether it's a desire to satisfy our need for *success, sensuality, or something else...* we're all wired for pleasing our own inclinations. But as Solomon learned, **no one will ever find true satisfaction or value in such pursuits.**

hedonism – is the ethical theory that pleasure and satisfying our desires/ambitions is the sole or chief good in life; and that the pursuit of it is the ideal and highest aim of a person's conduct/actions.

Such a notion first showed up in the Garden of Eden when the serpent tricked Adam/Eve into partaking of tree of the knowledge of good/evil to satisfy their desires. So, this wasn't a new concept to Solomon. BTW – such an ideology was still prevalent when Paul showed up in Athens in Acts 17 and had to deal w/ the Epicureans – who

held to the teachings of Epicurus arguing that pleasure is the chief good and pursuit of life. And of course, we're still seeing humanity today seeking to fulfill their desires thru any means possible in the hope of finding satisfaction/value in life.

In reading thru **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**, we discover that Solomon tried to satisfy his lust thru the pursuit of *indulgence, achievement, wealth, and sensuality*. **Does any of this sound familiar?** Of course, it does!

I Solomon's **PURSUIITS** to Find Satisfaction

For Solomon, **nothing was off limits** and *everything* was accessible to him. If he wanted it; he got it – and beyond what most could ever fathom. And he tried it all, leaving nothing to the imagination.

A He Sought Pleasure in **INDULGENCE**

Solomon began w/ the idea that he was going to find value in life thru **consumption** – treating life as if it was **one big party**. So, he set out consuming anything and everything so long as it brought him temporary pleasure, laughter, and ecstasy. Thus, **if he could eat it, drink it, smoke it, touch it, or see it – he did it**.

I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you w/ pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be w/out profit. "Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?" I tried cheering myself w/ wine, and embracing folly – my mind still guiding me w/ wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives...

Basically, he made everyday a party indulging in the best this world had to offer. The best **entertainment**. The best **foods**. The best of **whatever money could buy**. If he thought it could bring him pleasure, then he sought it/bought it. Yet in the end – **he discovered that none of it could bring lasting satisfaction/fulfillment**.

Maybe this is why Solomon said – *Laughter can conceal a heavy heart; but when laughter ends, the grief still remains*. Proverbs 14:13

Truth – if you live for pleasure alone – you will soon discover that over time, enjoyment will only decrease unless the intensity of your pursuits increases. **IOW** – *you need more and more to satisfy your craving/lusts – and yet more will never be enough!*

But Solomon didn't stop there. He thought if the party couldn't fulfill him, maybe his achievements could!

B He Sought Pleasure in **ACHIEVEMENT**

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks, and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees...

IOW – Solomon thought he could find fulfillment by leaving his mark on this world thru his achievements and accomplishments. He thought he could build something that could last forever or accomplish something that others would not soon forget.

We still do this today. We think we can find lasting satisfaction thru our accomplishments – yet it's all only temporary. There's nothing this side of heaven other than our salvation and fellowship of Jesus that will matter into eternity.

This is why Jesus said – *Do not store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths/rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.*

Just last Sunday, after the Super Bowl, I listened to an interview w/ the Rams, Aaron Donald, and you would have thought his life was complete after winning the Super Bowl. But I can assure you, in the not too distant future, it'll be but a fond memory that'll get dusted off every once in a while, but the glory will fade.

WHY – b/c there's no achievement this side of heaven that'll ever truly satisfy. There's no record, no amount of wins/loses, no trophies/plaques, no buildings or boastings that will ever bring lasting satisfaction or meaning. This doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing; but rather, ***it means we must keep our earthly ambitions/achievements in perspective not counting on them to give us our sense of worth and value.***

C He Sought Pleasure in **WEALTH**

I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds/flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male/female singers...

This is closely related to the previous idea – for there is w/in our nature this idea that the greater wealth we have this side of heaven, the more likely we are to have a sense of satisfaction/fulfillment. We tend to think that we are more valuable than those who are less fortunate – yet this too is not true.

For Solomon, **he sought not only to own everything, but also everyone**. He tried seeing if great wealth and possession could truly bring fulfillment – but it didn't.

Jesus too spoke of this pursuit as the greatest threat to mankind – not only w/ regard to discovering value and purpose but also in discovering a relationship w/ God.

In Matthew 19:24, Jesus said – *it is easier for a camel to go thru the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!*

To His disciples, Jesus said – *what does it profit a man to gain the whole world but forfeit his soul?* Luke 9:25

And to the crowd at the Sermon on the Mount, He said – *No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and also be enslaved to money.* Matthew 6:24

All this to say (and we will discuss further in a few weeks), ***there's no amount of stuff that'll ever be enough to satisfy anyone this side of heaven.***

D He Sought Pleasure in **SENSUALITY**

I acquired male/female singers, and a harem as well – the delights of a man's heart... Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure.

W/out going into the gory details, it's safe to say that w/ 700 wives and 300 concubines, Solomon was denied no sensual pleasure – and yet, like everything else – it didn't bring lasting satisfaction either. In fact, maybe of all of the craving he sought after, this one might've been the most damaging b/c it took his heart farther from God than all of the others.

Listen to 1 Kings 11:1-4 – *Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, "You must not marry them, b/c they will turn your hearts to their gods." Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. **And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord.***

And this is the point Solomon ultimately learned that he wanted pass on to us. The pursuit of pleasure as a means of fulfillment/satisfaction is meaningless – completely w/out value. Promising pleasure but only delivering pain, bondage, and emptiness – and ultimately, taking us away from the God who loves us and desires to have a relationship w/ us.

For like all sin – it'll take you farther than you want to GO; keep you longer than you want to STAY; and cost you more than you're willing to PAY.

II Solomon's **DISCOVERY** of Satisfaction

But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless – like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere. Ecclesiastes 2:11

Solomon, after trying ever thrill-seeking, pleasure experiencing escapade known to man – **wised up!**

*I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in one's work. Then I realized these pleasures are from the hand of God. For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him? God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please Him. But if a sinner becomes wealthy, God takes the wealth away and gives it to those who please Him. This, too, is meaningless – like chasing the wind.
Ecclesiastes 2:24-25*

Solomon learned:

- The gift is never greater than the Giver
- Every God-gift is to be cherished – never abused
- Every gift has its boundaries and its blessings

Example – sexuality outside of marriage is a sin that corrupts/destroys, while w/in marriage it's a blessing.

Solomon learned:

- We are stewards of God's gifts and blessings
- Contentment/moderation are key to stewarding and enjoying His blessings – *more will never be enough*

While I've not watched but maybe 5 min. of the Winter Olympics in China to this point (it seems the only thing they're televising is curling), I did see the Jamaican bobsled team the other day – and it reminded me of the old John Candy movie, ***Cool Runnings*** – where Candy played a former U.S. gold medalist who was stripped of his medal for cheating and later became the coach of the Jamaican team. In the movie, his dark past came out and one of his team members asked him why he cheated... and his answer was actually quite profound and applicable to this message.

He said – I learned the hard way – that **if you're not enough w/out it; you'll never be enough w/ it.**

I pretty sure Solomon would agree!

TAKEAWAYS

There is no amount of consumption this side of heaven that will ever bring lasting satisfaction and fulfillment.

If you live for pleasure, you will soon discover that enjoyment can only decrease unless the intensity of your pursuits increases – yet more is never enough.

The gift is never greater than the Giver – and if we cherish and exercise w/ contentment in moderation our gifts, we can actually enjoy the blessings of God.

NEXT STEPS

1 Spend time this week in your quiet time or with another person discussing these GROW questions.

G – What are some areas of consumption in our world that are most tempting to leading people astray?

R – Read **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**. What does Solomon teach us about our nature to seek pleasure – and how?

Q – In what areas are you most prone to giving into the pursuit of pleasure? What can you do to live alert?

W – Memorize a verse of Scripture that addresses the area you are most prone to give into temptation.

2 Pray this week for victory in this area of weakness.