

Sermon Notes: Ecclesiastes #3 — “But What About Pleasure?”

Text: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 — I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

Take Away: *Solomon was in the unique position to test the wisdom of what we would call the philosophy of pleasure. Can living a life of pleasure governed by wisdom give one the Good Life? All of this, according to Solomon, is hevel and chasing after the wind. Climb to the top of the mountain of pleasure and you will find crookedness and lack. Only in Jesus Christ can one know the fullness and satisfaction of joy that our souls long for.*

I. What is “the pursuit of pleasure”?: (References: Psalm 16:2-4)

II. Why is pleasure under the sun *hevel*?: (References: 2 Chronicles 9:22-27)

III. Where is true pleasure to be found?: (References: Matthew 7:24-29)

Review:

1. ***What is Solomon's definition of "under the sun"?*** One of the key distinctions we need to keep in mind is Solomon's use of the phrase under the sun. The pursuit of anything to its end point under the sun is always hevel. It is always grasping at the wind. Even wisdom, which Solomon will commend as the best thing to pursue, is hevel if only pursued under the sun. The reason is that when humanity pursues something under the sun he pursues it as a means of gaining totalizing control over some aspect of God's creation. The lie, and the bubble that Solomon keeps popping, is that nothing can give one totalizing control under the sun. Even wisdom, if turned to this aim, will become grievous and burdensome. Time, death, and chance happen to the fool and the wise alike under the sun. God's providence is often veiled. God, by His power and His word must reveal this to man. His doings above the sun ultimately require humble faith not in the why of God's doings but in the Who of God's covenant keeping character.
2. ***What is Solomon's test in Ecclesiastes?*** Next, we wanted to gain a clearer picture of Solomon's question—his test under the sun. Solomon because of his unique position of power, wealth, and wisdom has the ability to test whether it is really true that everything under the sun is hevel. He does this because man's fantasies of totalizing narratives are very powerful. We can't help believing, "if we just have" this thing then everything will be okay. Then we will be safe and secure. Then we will have eudaimonia or the good life. And while Solomon does declare it all hevel right off the bat, he also says that some things are better than others. Wisdom is objectively better than folly. You will live a better life following wisdom under the sun than following folly. But, if you make wisdom into an idol—if you believe that wisdom will bring you totalizing control, then you will be disappointed.
3. ***What is the folly of Gospel Wisdom?*** Yet, uniquely, if you follow wisdom genuinely under the sun she will always lead you to a point of confession in the person of Jesus Christ. Because in the wisdom of God—this will seem foolish to the worldly wise because it will require humble faith. This is Paul's point about the foolishness of the gospel in 1st Corinthians. To someone wise in the world, putting your faith in Christ seems like hevel. It is an ashamedly foolish thing to do. But in fact it is the power of salvation for those who are perishing. In fact, it's the wisest thing that one could ever do under the sun. For the incarnate Christ came as the revelation of God under the sun. He crossed the line from above the sun to under the sun to save sinners. He is Jacob's ladder. And the amazing thing about being wise in Christ is that it doesn't matter how many degrees you have or what your IQ is. Even our children can be deeply wise by trusting by faith the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Questions for the Table:

1. What are some of the temptations to pleasure *under the sun* that you face? What would Solomon say to you about them?
2. What is the difference between exploring a philosophy of pleasure *with wisdom* against *giving yourself over* to pleasure in worship? Why did Solomon test one and wholly reject the other as not worth testing?
3. Discuss how Solomon believes there is pleasure to be found in one's labor but not when that labor is complete *under the sun*.
4. Do you struggle to enjoy the daily labor that God has given you? Do you find yourself sinking into "what if's" and totalizing narratives while doing the labor God has given you to do? Do you believe that it is pointless? How would Solomon exhort you to change the way you think about the labor God has given you today? (see: Ecclesiastes 2:24)
5. How will our labor actually *last*? Does it matter on what foundation we build upon? (see: Matthew 7:24-29, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)
6. Read Psalm 16. Is pleasure wholly bad? Where will we experience true lasting pleasure?