

“Can We Enjoy Life?”

Ecclesiastes 2

In Ecc. 1:3 Solomon asked the question, “*What do we gain from all our labor at which we toil under the sun.*” “Under the sun” means looking at life only from a human perspective, without God in the picture.

God gave Solomon extraordinary wisdom, wealth and a peaceful reign that allowed him to meditate and pursue this most important quest. In Ch. 1 Solomon said life seem monotonous and purposeless. So he “*devoted myself to study [investigate thoroughly] and explore [get to the root of the issue] **by wisdom** all that is done under heaven*” (1:13)

Solomon’s search for satisfaction was careful and purposeful. Since he was the wisest man who ever lived (God’s words in 1 Kings 3:12, and Jesus affirmed this in Matt. 12:42) we would want to listen to his conclusions. His use of wisdom does not initially have God in the picture. So he set out to find out what on earth could satisfy us.

In the first 23 verses, God is never mentioned. Verses 1-23 are his observations along the way as he examines life without God. But vv.24-26 he brings God into the picture because life doesn’t make sense without God. So, what can we learn about finding joy in life?

Listen to God More and Less to Yourself **(2:1-16)**

In the first 23 verses Solomon will say “I” 29 times, “my”, 15 times, “me” 7 times and “myself”, 4 times. The focus is on self:

V. 1 “*I thought in my heart* V. 10 “*I refused my heart no pleasure*”

V. 15 “*Then I thought in my heart*” *I said in my heart.*”

These are Solomon’s observations alone, without God’s view ‘above the sun.’ He is listening to himself and making his own conclusions and presumptions. Do we not do the same? Who do we listen to more than anyone else? Our-selves. We silently and mentally are communicating with ourself, drawing conclusions and making presumptions based on observations we have that often do not include God. We prejudge people because we’re not talking to them, we’re just talking to ourselves. We misjudge God because we make faulty conclusions based on minimal evidence not cross-referenced with His Word or prayer. And we do it all the time. Our minds never shut down.

We all want to find joy in life but as Solomon points out

If we live to please self we’ll live a futile life (vv.1-11)

Solomon sought to test himself with pleasure to see if laughter and fun can satisfy. He probably employed court jesters. Maybe he had a contest for the best joke. How long did this go on for? We don’t know but after awhile he became tired of it. Laughter is fun but it’s empty. Being a comedian must be hard because you always have to come up with new material. Why? Because once we hear the joke we grow tired of it after a few times.

Then he explored what many people think is best way to have fun. Drinking and having a good time! That's the life, right? Don't all the alcohol commercials show good looking young people, having a great time drinking. Solomon did this with *"his mind still guiding him with wisdom."* He drank so that he could feel the alcohol's affects without losing control. He had the parties. He brought in the best food. We read in 1 Kings 4:22 that Solomon's daily provisions for his household, including servants was about 200 bushels of flour, about 400 bushels of corn, 30 head of cattle and over a 100 sheep and other animals! If that's what the daily provisions were what did he have at parties!

Remember, Solomon's main target audience is a younger generation. In ch. 12 he calls young people to remember God when you're young. Solomon's observations and search for satisfaction are meant to tell everyone, *'Don't go this direction! I've been there and done that. Trust me, you won't find satisfaction there!'* Where else did he look for satisfaction? So 'living the life' is rather purposeless. So he invests his time and energy and resources in accomplishments in vv.4-6.

Solomon probably drew the plans for his palace and many other buildings. He orchestrated the temple being built. He built huge gardens. He made 3 very large pools of water, their remains are still there today, to feed the gardens and orchards. He sat back and said *'Look what I've done. Isn't this wonderful?'* No, our accomplishments are great and can help people but in and of themselves they do not satisfy. Because there's always another project or we'll think of a new or better way to do it. What else did he pursue in his search for satisfaction?

As the wealthiest man in his day he bought slaves to do all his work for him (today's equivalence to technology that lessens our workload). He owned herds and flocks, bought gold and silver, entertainers – and we have all similar modern equivalent things to buy thinking they will give up purpose.

Stuff, stuff and more stuff. No matter how big or small, how fancy, how fast or loud the possessions we have are, they never satisfy. He even pursues sex for joy and purpose (v.8) only to find that too doesn't give us meaning and a sense of purpose. In his human wisdom Solomon delighted himself with sensual pleasure – outside of God's parameters. He denied himself nothing. He refused his heart no pleasure, and this was the reward for all my labor (v.10). What was? The things he pursued. As we'll see, God does give us many things to enjoy in the right context, but no matter the purchase or the pursuit, if you don't include God in it, you will not find true joy.

In Matthew 6 Jesus warned the Pharisees not to fast and pray and give offerings in order to impress men, because that will be their reward. Similarly, Solomon is saying that his reward was simply all that he did. In other words it was empty. It was chasing after the wind. In his search to find satisfaction in fun, in accomplishments, in possessions and in sex, he did not gain anything. They did not give him and sense of value or purpose. He lived for the moment and that's all he got out of it – a moment of pleasure, and then, it's gone.

In all this who is Solomon listening to? Himself. Maybe entertaining the opinions of others but he's listening mostly to himself and trying to satisfy himself. It isn't working

"Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom and also madness and folly" (v.12). Solomon thought maybe if I simply look to live wisely in this life, make good decisions, be the best person I can and do good with my knowledge, surely that will satisfy me. So he came back to wisdom – the ability to use your knowledge and apply it to how you live. This is common wisdom, the ability to live a smart life.

In v.13 he says living wisely is better than living like a fool. The wise man can see, the fool lives in the dark. What would Solomon mean by living wisely? By working hard, being a good parent, a kind person, plan for your future – the basic wise things we do and people say we should do. Yes, living wisely has more advantages than being a fool.

However, in vv.14-16, there is something [‘the same fate’] that puts the wise person and the fool on level ground – death. They both die and they’ll both be forgotten in time. And we see that living for self doesn’t satisfy

Because godless living all has the same result (vv.12-16)

Whether you live a wise life or a foolish life, you still die. So where’s the gain? Where’s the benefit? There isn’t one if you only live for yourself, an under the sun perspective life. What does Solomon conclude from this?

He says he ‘Hated life’ because all our hard work, all our bank accounts, all our possessions we’ve spent so much time working to achieve will be left behind to someone when we die. V. 19, *“And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. So my heart began to despair.”*

This is what Solomon says – how do I know I’m going to leave it someone wise or a fool? *“For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill and then he must leave it to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune” (v.21).*

Solomon shows us that a

A Godless Perspective Will Not Value Life as God Designed **(2:17-23)**

Twice he says, “I hated life”. Note, however, not enough that he wanted to end it. But he hated it because there is no guarantee that the things you accomplish in life will make a lasting difference if the next generation don’t appreciate what you’ve done or waste all that you amassed or built up. Since we all die, we have no control over these things once they are no longer under our direction.

Ironically, for all the wives and concubines Solomon had, the Bible records that he only had one son, Rehoboam. And Rehoboam would indeed squander what his father had built. Under his leadership the country of Israel will separate. One generation is all it took for Israel to fall apart. And we see the same thing happening in our own society in a generation or less.

So where do we find purpose? Hope? A new government? New laws? Escape to a lonely place where we can live in seclusion from the world? Or do we need to change our perspective and look at life above the sun? If a godless perspective shows no purpose to the things we do in life, then what does God do for us? Solomon changes viewpoints to show us that

A God-Centered Life Finds Joy ... **(2:24-26)**

He came back to his original question from 1:3 in v.22. *“What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even*

at night his mind does not rest. This too is futility". A mist, vapour; it doesn't leave us with permanence or joy or happiness.

Solomon has so far left God out of the picture. If your life consists of hoping to find satisfaction in having a good time, doing great things, accumulating stuff, pursuing sex, working hard or just trying to be a good person – then you will never find satisfaction. But you can find satisfaction in doing many of these things if you recognize everything you have under the sun and everything you can do in the healthy limitations God has prescribed in His Word, are God's gifts to you and me to enjoy.

HOW?

When we are thankful for the blessings God gives (vv.24-25)

"A man can do nothing better (ie. the best it can be) than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see is from the hand of God, for without Him, who can eat or find enjoyment?"

Who gave you the abilities and talents to do what you do so you can earn money to provide for your needs? God.

If we accept God as the giver of life and all things we recognize He gives them to us to enjoy, but not to worship. That God loves us enough to give us life in the first place and then to bless us in so many ways that we thank Him for it. But not only that but when we recognize the impact sin has made on the world and that life is not always perfect, that God is there in the difficulties in life. And we go to Him for those needs as well. Needs of comfort, strength, hope and joy.

Paul knew this. He reminded Timothy of this and then told him to tell his congregation because if you do you'll be a good minister of Jesus Christ.

"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer." (1 Tim. 4:5)

"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 WITH EVERYTHING FOR OUR ENJOYMENT." (1 Tim. 6:17).

Everything that we have that is good is from God. There is nothing wrong with having fun, accomplishing great things, enjoying our possessions, enjoying sex within marriage, living wisely and working hard, as long as we recognize they are God's gifts to us to enjoy. This is what it means to live above the sun and to enjoy life.

When we thank God for these things, we will grumble less, we will sleep better, we will enjoy people more and we will see all that we do through the eyes of God. And that joy comes from using these very blessings for God's purposes

To understand that pleasing God [not self] is life's goal (v.26; 1 Cor. 15:58; Col. 3:17)

We get more enjoyment out of pleasing and serving others than ourselves. *"To the man who pleases God . . ."* If we're seeking to please God we're seeking to honour God and to tell others how awesome He is. When we seek to glorify God, God gives us wisdom and knowledge and happiness. When our life purpose is to exalt God, then we will grow in his wisdom and knowledge and we will be happier. Because life is about finding God, believing in Him through His Son Jesus, receiving forgiveness of sins and a new kind of life called eternal life. Now we live here with an eternal perspective because when we do our accomplishments knowing that God gives us the abilities to do it or when we make something to enjoy because God made us unique to do that and when we do

wise and good things to serve others in obedience to his Word, then all that has eternal significance. People may not remember our accomplishments or good deeds but God will when we did it to please Him and not ourselves.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Col. 3:17)

Glorify God in all you do because He gave you all things and the ability to do what you do. Yes, but some of the things we do aren't very pleasant. And some of the people we serve aren't very pleasant. We work and serve “E.G.R's” [Extra Grace Required] people. [As if you and I are not EGR's!]. It's not always easy to thank God and to see how we can glorify God in that, yet that's what God tells to do and we do it by faith. Living by faith pleases God since we serve Him by faith because we know He remembers what we do and will reward what we do in the future. But knowing God is behind everything also helps us to enjoy the reward of accomplishing a task, building something productive, being helpful and wise to benefit others.

Take time this week and thank God for everything you find enjoyment in. Your children, grandchildren, spouse. They are God's gifts to you. Thank God for the satisfaction that the job you did this week met a goal, improved a situation, build something that helped others, repaired what was broken, brought order out of chaos ... Those are good things God meant for you to accomplish with His gifts so you could improve someone's life. Make a list this week and see how many times you thank God for something or someone.

And then use these as a way to pray to God, asking Him to show you how you can glorify Him in the tasks you perform or the people you love or the activities that help you rest and even with the non-Christians who God has brought in all this mix. Pray they will see God through the joy you have in living a purpose-filled life.

Solomon's searching led him to conclude that we should eat, drink and find satisfaction in all we do because they are from the hand of God. When we thank God and glorify God in all we have and do, Solomon also said, it doesn't get any better than that.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net