

Living for Your Job

by David Hocking

Solomon's pursuit of earthly pleasures and accomplishments ultimately led him to conclude that they are vanity and do not bring lasting satisfaction.

Duration: 51:45

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Ecclesiastes 1:12 - 2:6

Topics: "Finding Joy", "Godly Satisfaction"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of true lasting satisfaction and joy. He emphasizes that satisfaction and enjoyment come from the resources of God alone, as stated in verse 24. The preacher addresses the challenges of life, including the fact that death is inevitable for everyone, regardless of their accomplishments or circumstances. Additionally, he highlights the reality that others will inherit what we have done in our lives. The preacher concludes by presenting three principles that should be applied: enjoying the good in our labor, recognizing that God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who are good in His sight, and understanding that the pursuits of sinners are ultimately in vain.

Transcript

Let's take our Bibles and turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 2. Ecclesiastes chapter 2. Ecclesiastes chapter 2, just a reminder of the purposes of the book, there are three of them. Number one is to reveal the futility of all earthly pursuits, and that's the one that most people see the moment they read that book. They see the theme at verse 2, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

They see it repeated throughout the book along with additional phrases like grasping for the wind, striving about nothing, and what profit is there to all that we've done under the sun. The book is filled with a very important principle, and that is the futility of all earthly pursuits. But if that's all you see, and there are many Christians who only see that and therefore question its practical value to us today with the exception of maybe the last couple of verses that tell us the conclusion of the matter.

But the second purpose of the book is to realize the source of all that we do enjoy in life. Many people read the statements of this book that are like refrains at the end of each section that speak about enjoying what you do, and they think that's worldly wisdom. Doesn't say it is, but we somehow conclude it is because Solomon has said that all of the pursuits of life were vanity.

There's a two-pronged purpose of the book, not only to show you the the futility of all earthly pursuits, but also to show us all the source of everything that we enjoy in life. The proper perspective of how to live, how to enjoy your work, how to relate to your family, how to enjoy each day. The Bible teaches you in this book how to do that, how to enjoy life from God's point of view.

That is certainly a theme of Ecclesiastes, therefore very important and relevant to us today. And then there's a third purpose of the book that is seen throughout, and that is to remember our ultimate accountability to God. Learning how to enjoy life, learning the futility of all earthly pursuits is all submitted to one great concept, and that's my accountability to God, that I must answer to Him.

Phrases like, fear God, and God will bring every work and every thought of your life into judgment. All of that is also in Ecclesiastes. So those are the purposes, now we're ready for chapter 2. Take your Bibles please and follow along, beginning at verse 1. We call this living for your job.

Verse 1, 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, it is 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 at 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. Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly, for what can the man do who succeeds the king? Only what he has already done.

Then I saw the wisdom excels folly, as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all.

So I said in my heart, as it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, this also is vanity. For there is no more remembrance of the wise man than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. How does a wise man die? As the fool.

Therefore I hated life, because the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because 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 rule over all my labor in which I toiled, and which I have shown myself wise under the sun.

This also is vanity. Therefore I turned my heart in despair of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun, for there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

For what is man for all his labor and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful and his work grievous, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor.

This also I saw was from the hand of God. For who can eat or who can have enjoyment more than I? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in his sight, but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and collecting that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Let's look to the Lord in a moment of prayer. Father, thank you for your word, and we ask that you would speak to our hearts again about all earthly pursuits, everything we're involved with day after day. Help us, Father, to understand it in the light of your eternal truth, relevant to every generation.

God, I pray that some of us may wake up today to what God really teaches. So many of us have been living on a wrong wavelength. We really aren't in tune with the living God who made us.

Help us, Father, to understand. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Living for your job, let's face it, is not really that easy.

There are people at work who no doubt will drive you up the wall, maybe even tomorrow. Isn't that exciting? There are no doubt many things that you've got planned in your job and your career that I'm happy to tell you, frankly, will not work out. There are many things that you hope to achieve, and money you hope to obtain, success you hope to obtain also, but simply will not work out to your heart's desire.

And some of you are going to achieve it all, and you're going to look back on it and say, what in the world did I do that for? You're expressing the problems of life that Solomon saw. There are three paragraphs here before the final conclusion in the last three verses. There are three paragraphs with three problems in them, all dealing with living for your job.

So let's take a look at these problems that we must face. Number one in the first eleven verses, the first problem is that our pursuits do not bring satisfaction. Solomon goes over the whole history of everything he went after, but all of his pursuits never brought him satisfaction in his heart.

That's the first problem you face with life. The second problem we find in beginning with verse 12 and down to verse 17 in the second paragraph is that death is no respecter of persons. So no matter what you've done in your life, the inevitable fact is whether you've been lazy or you've been a hustler, whether you've been rich or poor or whatever's been your problem or your success, everybody is going to die.

Death is no respecter of persons. That's the second problem we've got to face. The inevitable fact is we're all going to die, unless some of us are alive at the return of Christ.

The third paragraph and the third problem we face in verses 18 to 23 is the fact that others will inherit what we have done. Now I don't know what we're building for or what we think we're going to accomplish, but the truth is that other people, after we're dead and gone, are going to inherit and take over everything that

we have done. Now those are three problems that lead Solomon to say, as I face these, it's all vanity.

There's nothing to it. It doesn't bring satisfaction to my heart. And then he'll bring the conclusion as to what does.

So let's break it down. Let's take paragraph number one. The first problem every one of us face, and I dare say there are tons of people who have not faced this yet.

You don't even want to hear about it, because you're dedicated to pursuing these things. The truth is, according to this first paragraph, that all of our pursuits don't bring the satisfaction that we think they will bring. Now in your sane moments, when you're sitting quietly thinking through things, you realize that even the accumulation of things does not bring happiness.

People, if they really think about it, they know it. But the next moment, you want to accumulate something that you believe will bring you temporary relief or excitement or happiness or a moment's thrill or a little entertainment or pleasure or whatever. So you get that thing.

To me, the classic example of this is Christmas, right? It's a classic example, all those gifts. Don't they look exciting, you know, until you see them? And it's really kind of disappointing to the parents when they watch their little kids play with the boxes instead of the gifts. You know what I mean? Even they experience the frustration and the futility of all the so-called goodies of life.

Folks, pursuits, whatever you're after, is not going to bring you the lasting satisfaction. What a tragedy that you should dedicate your life totally to that and wind up one day simply in total agreement with what Solomon said. Now, let's take a look at this whole matter of pursuits.

What are we talking about? First of all, verse 2, chapter 2, verse 2. He said, of laughter it is madness, and of mirth, what is it accomplished? In verse 1, he said that he was going to test his whole life with mirth or laughter, enjoyment. He's going to enjoy pleasure, but he found out it was vanity. You know, it's a true principle that what you seek that the world offers never brings you lasting satisfaction.

But the things you really want to see happen, if you want to enjoy life, they don't come by your pursuit of the enjoyment in this world. They come from the hand of God. That's the conclusion of Solomon.

So your ability to enjoy what you think is going to bring enjoyment to you never comes by those things. It only comes by God. So I don't need all the things that people say I need in order to enjoy something.

All I need is my relationship with God, because I can enjoy it whether I have it or I don't. And that is the struggle that all of us face, even in our jobs. The reason why a lot of people aren't happy in their jobs, because they're focusing on what the job is somehow going to bring to their life in terms of enjoyment.

And if there's some tough things or some tough people to work with, then the enjoyment is lost, because enjoyment is coming from God. It is not coming from the things that I am doing. You say, but I want to enjoy what I do.

Great, and Solomon wants you to enjoy it too. But he says it's based on a relationship with God. So however long you've lived, the longer you live, the more you realize the truth of what Solomon is saying.

That the enjoyment factors in life are related to God more than they are to the things that I somehow am accumulating or am doing. Solomon literally pursued laughter, fun. That's what it's saying.

And he looked at the whole thing. So what is it? It's madness. What does it accomplish? Look please at Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verse 6. Now that's an interesting goal.

Suppose that some of you say, I am going to pursue laughter and fun. I am going to listen to jokes, write them myself. I'm going to laugh all day.

I'm going to have myself a ball. Laugh continuously. After all, they tell me that when you smile, you're using less muscles and effort than when you frown.

So I am going to just laugh my way through this life. Hey, let's go after it. Amen.

Sound exciting? Now, first of all, if you enjoy humor, it might be slightly attractive. But some people don't enjoy humor at all. I have people frequently who write me notes and say, get the jokes out of the pulpit.

You know, I don't know what you mean by that. You're going to have to get the jokes out of the guy's life. Get yourself another preacher.

I see things that are funny. I mean about people, about life, about lots of things. I wonder about people that don't have a sense of humor.

I mean, take a look in the mirror. That ought to do it. We need to take ourselves a little more lightly than some of us do.

We're entirely too serious about life. But on the other hand, are we going to pursue laughter and humor and fun as though that will meet the need of my heart? There's a lot of people that look at the weekend that way. Do you realize that? They live for Friday, man.

They live for the weekend. They live for hitting it out on Friday night, Saturday night. They live for trying to live it up, trying to go somewhere where somebody can give me a quote, good time.

Our so-called happy hours are filled with some of the most unhappy people in the world. Somehow hoping to get a little kick, a little joy, a little laughter, a little fun, somehow in life. Solomon pursued it with all his heart.

In chapter seven, verse six, he says, for like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity. What happens to that? It burns up.

It's nothing. It goes to ashes. It doesn't achieve anything.

Look at chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes, verse 19. It's an interesting verse. You better make sure you understand the context, which we're not going to do today.

You have to wait till chapter 10 and suffer. But it's an interesting verse. It says, a feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry, but money answers everything.

Now, wouldn't that be great? Take that out. That's my life verse. That's why you need to study Ecclesiastes carefully.

You need to know what the context is behind those statements. But again, he points out, hey, some things are made for laughter, great. But what does it achieve? It's like the crackling of thorns under a pot that you're warming something in.

Just watch what happens to it. Turn over to Proverbs chapter 14. Solomon wrote this also.

In Proverbs chapter 14, verse 13. Remember, according to Jewish tradition, Song of Solomon was written when Solomon was young and enamored and romanticized by his first love. Proverbs was written when he was a middle-aged man in his maturity.

And Ecclesiastes when he's an old man looking back. In Proverbs 14, we have, therefore, principles that God gives us that are seen in maturity and in understanding. And in Proverbs 14, 13, it says a very important principle.

Even in laughter, the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief. How often you see that? There are people who join in laughter who really are only laughing on the surface because inside they hurt. And many times we can tell a joke and make fun when somebody is really hurting and there's grief inside and there's no laughter and there's no response.

Even in mirth and even in laughter, there can be great sorrow. But the truth about laughter is it doesn't last. And if it doesn't come out of a heart that's in love with the Lord and filled with the joy of God, what in the world is it accomplishing? Back to chapter 2 again of Ecclesiastes.

But pleasure, fun, laughter, that wasn't all he pursued. He went after wine, drinking. He said, hey, that's a lot of people I notice drink wine, and they seem to do it in order to have fun.

I mean, look at our television set. You think there's something new under the sun? Why, Solomon knew it in his day, and we're doing the same thing today. You can't have a TV program without somebody asking you, do you want a drink? Everybody's drinking on that program.

I finally discovered what it is. The real key, I believe, is to fill in time. That's what I believe, the real key.

They just keep asking for a drink. Once they have one, another guy asks for it again. And they're just all drinking all the time.

It's being perpetuated on our brains that that's kind of an end thing to do. So you go out to lunch with a businessman, you're going to have drinks. Why? It's a thing to do.

I asked a guy the other day, who's a sort of a drinker, he's not a Christian, and we were talking, we were at a lunch, and I asked him, I said, hey, do you enjoy that stuff? I just about fell over. He turned to me, just looked me straight in the eye, and says, I hate it. I said, why do you do it? Hey, man, you got to get along in this business world.

I'm telling you, you got to have this stuff. He said, but I can't stand it. I said, why do you do it? Hey, you got to do it.

You got to do it. It's a part of the game. I said, no, you don't.

No, you don't. You don't have to do it. Everybody's doing it.

Solomon decided to do it. And yet the Bible says he kept his wisdom with him. So he didn't lose control.

He said, I'm not going to get drunk in this thing, but I'm going to find out what it is that everybody thinks is so sharp about drinking yourself into some sort of condition where you can have a little moment's pleasure

or relief. What does he say? Verse 3, I searched in my heart. Boy, anybody who drinks, you better understand that.

Search in your heart. Why? I search 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 life. And this also, as he concludes at the end of the passage, is vanity.

It was a colossal waste of time. It didn't achieve it. Momentary relief.

That's it. Have you ever watched that commercial? Well, you don't watch television, but the carnal Christians who watch television, you know, on television, they frequently have an ad about Roloids. Have you noticed that Roloids? Haven't you always wished somebody would just kind of stop the thing and say, the better thing instead of Roloids would be not to eat too much.

I mean, they don't do that. Hey, momentary relief, Roloids. It's almost as though continue to gorge yourself and get very, very sick.

But always remember we have Roloids. Hey, they don't tell you that, but that's really the impact of the whole thing. Everybody wants a little relief.

And Solomon said, hey, I tried that stuff too. It didn't work. It didn't work.

And his achievements, verses four to six, it tells you about all his great achievement. He said, I built myself houses, plural. And you can read about that in 1 Kings.

He built them also a beautiful house for the daughter of Pharaoh, whom he married. He built a house for himself also up in the beautiful forest of Lebanon. He built a gorgeous home for himself also in Jerusalem.

He built cities, literally cities, built them in all their houses. He did everything in construction that you could imagine. His pools of water, by the way, are kind of interesting.

These aren't swimming pools, but pools for irrigation. Verse six, I made myself water pools. Kind of interesting.

I have visited those pools. They're a little southwest of Jerusalem in the Valley of Artis. And down there, those pools, and we don't know if they're exactly the same pool.

They're called Solomon pools, and the stones are a very ancient vintage, and they could very well be from Solomon's time. We don't know. You'd have to drain the whole things and then, you know, take it apart piece by piece to find out.

But they're called Solomon's pools, and a long tradition with them. It's interesting, just for your information, that there's a lower, middle, and upper pool. The lower pool is 582 feet long, 207 feet wide, and 50 feet deep.

The middle one's 423 by 250 by 39. The upper one's 380 feet long by 236 feet wide and 25 feet deep. What I'm trying to say, if you just, you know, you've got kind of that mind that thinks through that, these are enormous in size.

And it tells you somewhat of what the ancient gardens and vineyards of Solomon must have been like. The man did everything, his wealth, and the picture of what was in Jerusalem. When other kings would come, they would just be astonished at what they saw.

The finest of everything in the world, Solomon did all of these achievements. What does he say at the end? It's all vanity. There's nothing to it.

What's life all about? A couple of years ago, my wife and I had dinner with a guy and his wife whom we had met, and had the joy of telling him about the Lord, seeing him get his life straightened out. And he wanted us to meet his close friend of many years. He's a multi-million dollar contractor in this country, and he flew in his own little private jet to have this little dinner.

And this guy is as worldly and as carnal and as, you know, secular as you can imagine. He got really stoned just at that meal. And we're sitting there, we're talking, and he's achieved so many fantastic-- he's built great shopping centers.

And at that meal, I'll never forget asking him the question. I said, what do you think life is really all about? He was half stoned. But he said, and I won't use his swear words, but he said, I would sure blankety-blank like to find out.

So for two hours, I told him about the God who made him. He'd never been to church in all his life. Told him about Jesus Christ, what he could do, about forgiveness and love.

He said to me, he said, you know, Dave, that's the greatest story I've ever heard in my life. How come people aren't telling it more? There's a man who never heard it all his life. Lived for everything that he thought he should pursue.

And as he looks at it, there's nothing there, nothing there. Happiness, it fleets out the window. It's not there.

What's real? What is real? Solomon says our pursuits do not bring satisfaction. Not at all. You talk about possessions, look at verse 7. He had greater possessions, the Bible says, than all who were in Jerusalem before him.

He's the top of the ladder. You can't get any bigger than this. Money, look at verse 8. I gathered silver and gold, special treasures of kings and provinces.

You can read back in the book of kings, if you want to relate ancient, ancient coinage to today. If you want to see the value of silver and gold, get a good Bible commentary or handbook, look it up, compare it with today. And you'll discover there's nobody in the world, including all of the world's richest men that even compare with Solomon.

Even translating the values of that day into our day. There's nobody in the entire world that would compare with King Solomon of the past. He had it all, people, everything.

The wealthiest and wisest monarch of the ancient world. He had music, as verse 8 says, all this stuff. He had it all.

He had fame, everything. But he said, our pursuits don't bring satisfaction. I'd like you to see just three things in quick succession here related to that.

I would say that Solomon's argument is that our pursuits don't bring satisfaction, even though we excel in them all. Look at verse 9. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. That's an interesting point, because a lot of people who are out there in the marketplace, they think if they only could excel in something that then they would really have made it.

Then they'd really find out who they are. Then they'd really find out what life's all about. Are you kidding? Solomon excelled in everything.

So pursuits don't bring satisfaction, even though you excel in them. Because when you're not excelling in them, you think, oh, well, they would be satisfying if I could only be the best in that thing. And secondly, your pursuits don't bring satisfaction, even though we explore everything possible.

Look at verse 10. Whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure.

See, some people think, well, I just haven't got on it. You know, I'm not finding that right thing for me. I'm not finding the thing that brings me satisfaction and happiness.

And Solomon says, hey, pursuits in this life don't bring satisfaction, even though you explored everything possible. And third, it seems to me that he's saying that our pursuits don't bring satisfaction, one, even though we excel in them all, two, even though we explore everything possible, and three, even though we have a measure of enjoyment in what we have done. Even though we do enjoy what we have done.

Look at verse 10. My heart rejoiced in all my labor. He looks at it and says, man, that was something what I just did.

On all the labor in which I had toiled, I looked at it. It's like our monument to our own credibility and greatness. Our little trophies, what our hands have done.

I looked at it and I rejoiced in it. But as I thought about it, there was nothing to that. Nothing to it.

It didn't bring the satisfaction in my heart that I thought it would bring. The first problem is that our pursuits don't bring satisfaction, and he goes quickly to the second problem that affects all of us, whether we want to face it or not. And that is that death is no respecter of persons.

It is impartial and it is inevitable. The Bible says it's appointed unto man once to die, and after this, the judgment. And as Solomon reasons through this in verses 12 to 17, I think he gives at least four things that are good for us to see.

He's talking about wisdom here because he evaluated wisdom. But in all this wisdom, learning, knowledge, understanding life, he said, as I compare it to the event that happens to us all, how is the wise man better than the fool? We all die. What does your wisdom do for you to prolong your life? Nothing.

Death is no respecter of persons. So it seems that he puts these four points on. One, that death does not recognize the excellence of wisdom.

Verses 12 to 14, he clearly says that wisdom excels folly. A light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head.

The fool's walking around stumbling in the darkness because he doesn't think first. So wisdom is better than being a fool, obviously. But his point is that death does not recognize the excellence of wisdom.

Secondly, I think he's saying that death does not respect the desire for wisdom even. Look at verse 15. He said, I said in my heart, as it happens to the fool, it happens to me.

Why was I then more wise than I said in my heart? This also is vanity. Getting down to the desire for wisdom, that motivation. He said, why did I even do it? If death truly eliminates any partiality, any judgments as to whether you're better because you're wise, or worse because you're a fool, if death eliminates it because the same event happens to both, then why did I even seek wisdom? What's the point? We all have to die.

Third, it seems to me he's saying that death does not remember the work of wisdom either. Verse 16, there's no remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. Just give a little time and they'll forget who you are and what you have done.

And how does a wise man die? He says, as the fool. Verse 16, hey, you talk about morbid stuff. You talk about discouraging, depressing.

If you don't understand the points that he's driving at, you could read some of this and walk away and say, man, I have just been crushed, bombed out for good. But it's the joy of God that's in this book that'll lift your spirit and cause you to understand how to truly live on the job. But at this point, death itself is no respecter.

One more thing, death doesn't relieve the burdens of wisdom either. Look at verse 17, therefore I hated life, because the work that was done unto the Son was grievous, a heavy burden to me, for all his vanity and grasping. Why was it a heavy burden? His wisdom caused him to understand that the inevitable fact is death is coming.

And the fact that death is coming and I can't do anything about it becomes the grief to my heart. I can't solve that problem. I can't stop it.

Even because I'm wise and wealthy and I've got all this going for me, I can't change one fact. I'm going to die just like the fool. Death is no respecter of persons.

One more problem to face. The third problem is in verses 18 to 23. And it's simply this, that other people, others are going to inherit what we have done in our lives.

And he lays three principles on us, all of which have a conclusion. Let's look at the conclusion first. In verse 19, last phrase, this also is vanity.

A second statement in verse 20 and 21, and a conclusion again, verse 21, this also is vanity and a great evil. Again, something in 22 and 23, and then the statement at the end of 23, this also is vanity. Three times, like a refrain.

This is what we call Hebrew poetry. And they do it different ways. Don't have to rhyme.

Sometimes they're parallel statements. Sometimes they're done with a point and a principle, and then a refrain that causes you to know this is poetry. And he, like the poet of all, is reeling off this stuff about how others will inherit what you have done.

And his conclusion, it's vanity, it's vanity, it's vanity. What are the three things that he's concluding about this? One is that we don't know what they're going to be like, do we? How many parents think that they can secure the response of their children when they give them what they have themselves worked for and inherited? And all the, as you look at life, that's not the way it is. So often, the kids will do something entirely different.

They will be entirely different than their parents. So they have the same kind of, what we say, genetic possibilities, though they have the same kind of background that might influence their behavior. Many times, the children simply do not do what their parents did.

Their value system is not the same as the parents, and they don't want it. And maybe they, with the rebellious sin nature, are fighting against the authority of their parents. So the parents become the enemy, though the parents are trying to protect the kids.

And as a result, one day, the children become something other than their parents are. And you tell me this is not a grief to parents? It hurts deep within our hearts, and we wish we could change it. The truth is that because every individual is unique, and every single child that is born has its own nature and its own propensity to evil, there is nothing that we can do apart from the grace and power of God to change it.

And that is a stark reality that hits many of us as we grow older. You don't know what people will be like who follow you. And do you know the story of Solomon and who it was that followed him? Rehoboam.

Lack of conviction, lack of principles in his life, and the whole kingdom is split and torn up, and Jeroboam, a man who caused Israel to sin and go into idolatry, he takes over. Not even in the messianic line, but he takes over and starts ruling Israel, and thus we have a divided kingdom. Was Rehoboam what Solomon was? Solomon who also was given the name Jedidiah, beloved of the Lord.

Solomon who was pleasing to God, the Bible says, with the exception of how he pursued these things in his life. Solomon who at the end of his life saw all of these things and gave his heart back to God alone. Did his children do that? No.

What was the history of the kings of Israel? Every one of them were bad. What was the history of the kings of Judah? A father is good and a son is bad, and another son is bad and then a son is good, and it goes on and on like that. That's one of the griefs that we must bear, and Solomon says it's vanity.

We don't know what they'll be like who follow us. And a second problem, which he mentions in verse 20 and 21, is they've not labored for what we have done either. They didn't lay a finger to anything that we have done and we have left it to them.

Others are going to inherit what we have done, but they've not done one thing to achieve it. He says that's vanity. It's interesting, he adds in verse 21, it's not only a vanity, it's a great evil.

I think many parents, grandparents ought to think twice about that statement in Solomon. It's not only vanity in the terms of to you and what you have done. Now you're giving it to somebody who hasn't lifted a finger.

You say, well, I'm doing it in love and to give them a good start in life. But Solomon not only says it's vanity, he says it's a great evil. Because the truth of the matter, if you give too much, you have now set in the stage of a person not sensing their own accountability to God.

They don't sense their own responsibility to life and the people around them. Instead they think, hey, it's a culture of getting rather than of giving myself and of committing myself to life and the responsibilities of it. It's a great evil, he says.

And a third problem related to this is that our struggles and sorrows that we've done in our life make no difference whatsoever to this fact that someone else, whether it's a child of yours or someone else in life, is going to eventually get all that you have done. No matter how much you struggle, you say, I worked hard for that. And Solomon says, big deal, vanity.

Because someone else will get it after you're gone. And you look at this and you're saying, this is a positive message. Hey, sometimes we need to face the negative because we don't understand the positive without the negative.

I hope I can strip all your dreams and plans away from you. I hope I can smash the props out from under your life. I hope I can leave you in absolute depression so there's only one person that you've got to call on and that's God Almighty.

That's what I really believe. I think the trouble with our culture is that we aren't calling upon God. We don't see these things as from the hand of God.

Man is trying to achieve things himself. He's the captain of his own fate and the master of his own soul. And look at where it's leading us.

We need to get back to the Lord Himself. I look at all these factors and what we've been looking at here and I say, what's the answer to all this? I think of Lord Byron. Lord Byron, a poet, well-known, read in a lot of our literature classes, but absolutely one of the most filthy men in all of history.

Corrupt in every way, messed up his life every way he could. Listen to this one. At the end of his life, here's what he wrote.

I quoted it verbatim. I want you to hear it. He said, were I offered the choice either to live over again or to live so many more years, I should certainly prefer the first.

And yet my young days were vastly more unhappy than I believe those of other men commonly are. I once attempted to enumerate the days which might, according to the common use of language, be called happy. I could never make them amount to more than 11.

And I believe I have a very distinct remembrance of every one of them. I often ask myself whether between the present time and the day of my death, I shall be able to make up number 12. The dismal character of a man who wasted his life.

In James MacDonald's excellent commentary on Ecclesiastes, written in 1856, he quotes a Princess Amelia in England who shortly before her death said this, unthinking, idle, wild, and young, I laughed and danced and talked and sung. And proud of health, of freedom vain, dreamed not of sorrow, care, or pain. Concluding in those hours of glee that all the world was made for me, but when the hour of trial came, when sickness shook my trembling frame, when folly's gay pursuits were o'er, and I could dance and sing no more, it then occurred how sad it would be were this the only world for me.

You could read all the poetry and literature of all of our countries and ages of the past and you'll discover the same pessimistic depressing tone. Why? Because long ago Solomon said in one of the greatest poetical books of history in Ecclesiastes that all of these pursuits are vanity, that death is no respecter of persons, and the truth is that others are going to inherit everything you have ever done in life. It's vanity, he said.

So what's the answer? We've looked at the problems, let's look at the principles we should apply. Verse 24, there is nothing better, there is nothing better for a man that he should eat and drink, that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw was from the hand of God.

For who can eat and who can have an enjoyment more than I? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in his sight, but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and collecting that he may give to him who is good before God. And this is also vanity obviously for the sinner and grasping for the wind. Now I look at this passage and I see three things.

Solomon does this throughout Ecclesiastes. He talks for a while, tells you about life, and then he summarizes about what true lasting satisfaction and joy is. And I think he tells us three things.

One, he tells us that satisfaction or enjoyment is based on the resources of God alone. Verse 24, this is from the hand of God. Where does lasting satisfaction, where does enjoyment come? How can I go to work even though it's a hassle tomorrow and even though people are bugging me, how can I go to work and really enjoy life? And the answer is, look to God.

It comes from the hand of God. Turn please to 1 Timothy chapter 4. Now some Christians believe that this is still worldly wisdom and you're not supposed to enjoy life ever. They are dedicated to not enjoying life.

I don't sympathize with you, I feel sorry for you, and I don't believe you're right. 1 Timothy 4, there's plenty of other scriptures besides Ecclesiastes to prove the point. And how could you say that this is worldly wisdom when Solomon says it comes from the hand of God? Are you saying worldly wisdom comes from the hand of God? No, enjoyment comes from the hand of God, lasting satisfaction.

Is it true that we should enjoy every day like this? 1 Timothy 4 says in verse 4, Every creature of God is good and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified or set apart by the word of God and prayer. There are two things that will govern therefore my thankful and responsive heart to all that God has created.

What are they? The word of God and prayer. God's word will guide me as to what is right and what is wrong and my own relationship with God and prayer will keep my heart tender and precious towards him who alone, who alone can determine in my heart how to enjoy that which my hand does. Turn to Psalm please, Psalm 104.

Psalm 104. If you're trying to live your life apart from God himself, apart from trusting his resources, you're on a wrong track friend. I wish we could stop every person who tried to do it.

And sometimes we're so stubborn and we don't listen, we don't accept it as God's revelation so we go out and we get hurt also. And the pain and the suffering and the sorrow could have been avoided if we had responded to God, but instead we go through the process only to discover we were wrong. Psalm 104.

Interesting what he says here in verse 14 and 15. Speaking of God, he says he causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for the service of man. That he may bring forth food from the earth and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread which strengthens man's heart.

Isn't it interesting even the whole matter of food and how to sustain yourself in life, God does it. Why? He does it so you can make your face shine and make your heart glad and rejoice. Because it comes from the Lord.

Like Jesus taught us to pray, give us this day our daily bread. You say, why do I need to ask that, man? I buy the bread. Where'd you get the money? Hey, I have a job, man.

That's where I got a salary. Really? Who gave you the job? Well, I went down, I asked him about it. Well, who caused him to give you the job? Well, hey man, he just wanted some... You know, you can go... If you want to play this game, we go all the way back to Adam.

You know what I mean? There isn't anything we have, the Bible says, that doesn't come from the hand of the Lord. So how am I going to enjoy life? I'm going to recognize everything I have is from the Lord. And you know, that can really excite you because you see, I have a lot more than you know I have.

You say, I knew he had other income. No, now listen. I got a lot more than you know, and so do you.

You see, I happen to be a joint heir with Jesus Christ, and this whole universe is his. And sometimes when I walk out under the stars, I like to look up and say, man, those are mine, right up there, all of them. This is mine.

I'm a joint heir with Jesus Christ, praise the Lord. And half of us go around acting like paupers. I got a lot more than you may think I got.

And it's an exciting thing to me. I can enjoy life because this is my father's world, and I am his son, and I am a joint heir with his son, Jesus Christ, and it belongs to me too. Take care of my flowers, and take care of my weeds, ouch.

Take care of everything, because they're mine, I'm going to enjoy them, and one day God's going to even beautify them more than I see now with my eyes. Praise God, I'm a joint heir with Christ, and so are you if you know and love the Lord. Enjoyment, everything comes from the hand of God.

And the second principle, back to Ecclesiastes, the second principle is that satisfaction and enjoyment is not only based on the resources of God coming from his hand, but it's also based on our relationship to God. No doubt about it. Look at verse 25.

Who can eat and who can have enjoyment more than I? Now, depending on what version of the Bible you have, you'll notice, some of you who did not have what I just read, that it reads without him. Some translations read apart from him rather than more than I. And there's a difference in point. Is he saying that no one can have enjoyment more than me because of my trust in God? That's an interesting point.

Or is he saying who can eat or have enjoyment apart from him, which means you have to be related to him in order to have the lasting enjoyment? Now, I think it's the latter rather than the former. I think the translation is apart from him. You say, why do you say so? In eight Hebrew manuscripts on this matter, all eight of them have the phrase apart from him.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it also in the Greek has apart from him rather than more than I. In the Coptic version, the Syriac version, in Jerome's translation of the Scriptures in the Latin, they all have the phrase apart from him. I happen to believe that is the correct translation of verse 25. Good points both ways.

But let's read it that way, assuming that all the evidence is piled up that way. It says who can eat or who can have enjoyment apart from him or without him. A whole different point, you see.

Satisfaction is based on our relationship to God. And one final point in verse 26. God gives wisdom, knowledge, joy to a man who is good, but to the sinner he gives a work of gathering, collecting that he may give to him, obviously one day in the future, to him who is good before God.

Satisfaction, therefore, is based on our response to God. He who is good in his sight. You say, wait a minute, is that saying good works get to you in heaven? No.

In fact, I would take you back to verse 25 and say the ability to enjoy can't be done apart from him, and that's dealing with your relationship to God. We aren't discussing here how a man becomes a Christian. We're dealing with the conduct and behavior of a person's life.

The truth of the matter is Christians who know the Lord and have received Christ, but who live carnal lives and do not look to God to sustain them, who are not frankly good and pleasing in his sight, but rather are committed totally to what self wants. The Bible teaches that there's no lasting satisfaction either to that person. God gives the joy, the Bible says, to him who is good, not only positionally because of his faith in the Lord, but good because that's the conduct and style of his life.

In other words, many of the pursuits of sensual pleasure and appetite in the things of this world are exactly designed to get you away from the key that really brings that joy from God. Christians who walk with the Lord have a tendency to be joyful even though they don't know a thing you're talking about. Did you know that? And sometimes you say, man, they are out of it.

Don't they know what's really happening? Hey, who cares? Who cares? I want to live my life with joy. And God will give it to him who is pleasing in his sight. Are you rightly related to God? Is that really the issue? William Cooper wrote a song in our hymn book that we're going to sing in just a moment.

William Cooper, the English poet, he wrote a song that's a very interesting song because it was controversial in his day. William Cooper lived at the last of the 1700s and he had fits of depression in his life. He was a Christian.

Some call him a manic depressive. He wrote this song in a fit of depression that we're going to sing in just a moment to conclude our service. William Cooper was studying Ecclesiastes chapter 2 and he remembered something Lord Chesterfield said about his whole life.

And he pulled it out and he read it and I'll read it to you. Lord Chesterfield, who never became a Christian, obviously said, I have run the silly rounds of business and pleasure and have done them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world and consequently know their futility and I do not regret their loss.

I appraise them at their real value, which is in truth very low. Whereas they that have not experienced them always overrate them. They only see their gay outside and are dazzled with the glare.

I have been behind the scenes. I've seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes of life which exhibit and move the gaudy machines. I've seen and smelt the tallow candles which illuminate the whole decoration to the astonishment and admiration of an ignorant audience.

When I reflect back upon what I have seen, what I've heard, what I've done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry and bustle and pleasure of the world had any reality at all. I look upon all that has passed as one of those romantic dreams which opium commonly occasions and I by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose for the sake of the fugitive dream. Shall I tell you that I bear this melancholy situation with that meritorious constancy and resignation which most people boast about? No, for I really cannot help it.

I bear it because I must bear it, whether I will or no. I think of nothing now but killing time the best I can. Now that time has become my real enemy, it is my resolution now to sleep in the carriage during the remainder of the journey.

William Cooper took those words of Lord Chesterson, William Cooper, a Christian though often depressed and often discouraged, and he wrote the words of one of the most beautiful songs of hope, though controversial in his day, a dark day in English history. He wrote the song, there is a fountain filled with blood. Drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

He said the only answer to Lord Chesterfield and the only answer to the futility of all life's pursuits and worldly pleasures is to find it in the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. To have sweet forgiveness is to have peace. To have the sense that you have been cleansed is to have the joy of life.

Let's sing his song as we conclude. Let's pray first. Father, thank you that you're the great healer.

Thank you that you're the great one of forgiveness and love. And no matter what we have done in our lives, there is no sin greater than your grace and forgiveness. For our Lord Jesus has paid for it all.

And though we have pursued a thousand things and been unhappy and defeated, though it has never brought us lasting satisfaction, one moment at your feet, one moment at your hand, and we know true joy. You, Father, are our joy. God, I pray that many here who do not know that peace and that joy may give their hearts to Jesus Christ and know that he alone can pay for sin.

He alone can cleanse and forgive the stains of our heart. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

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