

Learning from Solomon's Experience #1

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18; Isaiah 26:3-4

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It has been said that EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER. It may be true that many of the lessons God would teach us are most indelibly imprinted upon our minds by means of that which we personally experience.

A child may know from what his parents have told him that he is to avoid a hot stove. But knowing the natural disbelief that corrupts our being from infancy to adulthood, the child may still inch closer and closer to that stove until one day you hear his painful screams. After suffering the experience of being burned on the finger, the word "hot" becomes more than just a word—it becomes a painful lesson in the classroom of life that is not so easily forgotten.

How we pray as parents that our children would learn more from our instruction and less from such experiences. How we pray that we as adults would learn more from godly biblical instruction and less from the painful experiences in our own lives. Yes, experience is a good teacher when accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. But, oh the pain we must experience to learn the hard way. From all our painful experiences of life are left many burns that hurt for a long time. And once those burns are healed (by the grace of God), there is still the scar to remind us of the pain we experienced.

Dear ones, a sign that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ is that we trust Christ more and more to know what He is talking about when He tells us to flee temptation, i.e. the hot stoves in life that would burn us. By trusting Christ and learning from both the Word of God and the experiences of others, we will all the more enjoy Christ and His blessings and will all the more be spared many scars upon our bodies and memories.

From our text this Lord's Day, Solomon will instruct us as to what he has learned from his own personal experience in seeking for happiness and satisfaction in this life. Solomon had to learn the hard way. Dear ones, you don't have to learn the hard way. You can learn from Solomon's own experience and testimony if you will but trust and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. The main points from our text are these: (1) Solomon Gives Himself To Investigate Human Activities To Find Joy (Ecclesiastes 1:12-15), and (2) Solomon Gives Himself To Know both Virtue and Vice To Find Joy (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18). I will only be able to cover the first main point this Lord's Day.

I. Solomon Gives Himself To Investigate Human Activities To Find Joy (Ecclesiastes 1:12-15).

A. In the first eleven verses of Ecclesiastes chapter one, Solomon has given us general observations from the natural world to prove the vanity of all things in this life, apart from faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ. In our text this Lord's Day, Solomon moves from general observation to personal experience in order to demonstrate the vanity of all things in this life, apart from faith in and communion with Jesus Christ. Solomon moves from the general to the particular in his argumentation.

B. Solomon gives again for the second time his credentials in Ecclesiastes 1:12. He gave them the first time in Ecclesiastes 1:1 as you will recall. Solomon wants his experience to make a huge impression upon you, not only by virtue of what he has said, but by virtue of who he was. Who was he? What were his credentials?

1. **He was THE PREACHER.**

a. As noted in an earlier sermon, this title emphasizes Solomon as a repentant mouth piece for God. The Preacher gathered God's people together to explain to them where he did not find true joy, and where he did find true joy. It is important that Solomon's role as the Preacher be emphasized by him so that when he mentions other credentials that he had, he does not come across as an arrogant, boastful man. For his other credentials are enormously significant. Here is a man that has been duly humbled by the loving, yet firm strokes of his Heavenly Father.

b. Dear ones, if we would have people listen to us when we have something to say, there must be humility in our words, in our tone, and in our expressions. We must never compromise the truth for sure, but the truth must be spoken in love for Christ and for the good of our neighbor. We must not exalt ourselves, nor draw undue attention to ourselves, for we are but servants of Jesus Christ. He must increase, but we must decrease.

c. Dear ones, do people tune you out because of the pride and arrogance with which you speak? If that is a familiar refrain you have heard from others, perhaps it would be wise to listen to what is being said. Lines of communication may shut down in a family simply because of the pride and cockiness with which something is said. Are you a good communicator? That in part will be demonstrated by how well you listen, not by arrogantly exalting yourself over others, but by communicating the truth as one sinner to another.

2. **He was KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM.**

a. Some commentators have latched on to the word "was" in this verse in order to defend their view that Solomon did not author the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon does not say, "I AM king over Israel in Jerusalem", but rather "I WAS king over Israel in Jerusalem." Since Solomon remained king over Israel until the day of his death, it is argued that Solomon could not have been the author of Ecclesiastes. Let me say a couple things about this argument.

(1) Solomon's point is not that that he once "was" king over Israel, but is not so any longer. There was no king over Israel that did not reign as king until his death. The point that Solomon is making is that during the time that he conducted his thorough investigation of where true joy is found, he was not limited in his resources at all, for during that time he WAS king over Israel.

(2) If it is a stumbling block to some that Solomon states that he "was" king over Israel, other acceptable translations of the verb may be used: "I became king over Israel", or "I have been (and continue to be, rather than I had been) king over Israel." In either of these two legitimate translations of the Hebrew verb, the concern of certain commentators may be avoided.

b. Why do companies use celebrities to advertise their products on T.V.? Because they have learned this much about human nature—familiar faces and successful celebrities instill some degree of confidence in the mind of the consumer. When the consumer goes to purchase a product, that familiar face of the celebrity is more likely to be associated with a certain product than the product that has no celebrity association. Solomon was the celebrity of celebrities in the ancient world. The royalty from distant lands traveled far and wide to have an audience with Solomon. The fame of his riches, armies, and wisdom were unmatched. Thus, when Solomon spoke—people listened. If anyone had the monetary means and the intellectual gifts at his disposal to pursue the host of human achievements in order to find true joy, it would have been Solomon. If you and I were to write a book about our lives, we might sell a copy to the members of our family, and some of our friends might even have mercy upon us and buy a copy. However, if the President of the United States writes his Memoirs, it is almost assured to be on the best seller list because of who he is. The same is true of this inspired Book of Ecclesiastes. Because of who has written this book and because he has written from his own experience, his book would have been on the best seller list.

C. Having considered Solomon's CREDENTIALS, let us next consider his INVESTIGATION

(Ecclesiastes 1:13-14a).

1. This personal investigation conducted by Solomon was not a casual affair about which he was indifferent or apathetic. Solomon says, "I GAVE MY HEART."

a. Solomon was passionate about the investigation he undertook. He had the resources to conduct the investigation, and he also had the desire to do so as well. Solomon gave his heart to pursue an investigation from the perspective of one who was "under the sun" (i.e. one who lived from a mere earthly perspective). How much more should we give our hearts to pursue that which is godly and holy from the perspective of one who is "above the sun"?

b. The wicked of this world are not idle or lazy when it comes to their desires, goals, and dreams. They are tenacious in applying themselves to their work. In fact, the wicked work into the wee hours of the morning, and lie awake at night planning and meditating on just how their dreams will be realized. We, Christians, so often face one day at a time with little or no preparation for it. Not only do we not give our hearts to the glory of Christ, we hardly give a thought to the glory of Christ. Our day simply happens. Is it any wonder that we are used so little by the Lord. When we "give our hearts" to fervent prayer, to the cause of Christ, to personal holiness, to loving God and our neighbor by keeping His commandments, we will see the Lord work in our lives, in our families, in our Church, and in our country in amazing ways.

2. Solomon gave his heart to do what? "TO SEEK AND SEARCH OUT BY WISDOM CONCERNING ALL THINGS THAT ARE DONE UNDER HEAVEN." Solomon wanted to thoroughly examine by way of his own personal experience all types of human activities that are done apart from Christ, in order to see whether they would bring true joy. Solomon sought to penetrate to the deepest depth and to survey to the fullest extent what he might learn from all of the many varied activities man might experience, in order to find true satisfaction, peace, and contentment: from riches to poverty, from a study of nature to a study of God, from suffering to feasting, from work to play, and everything in between.

a. Solomon, the Preacher, has left with us a well researched sermon. He approached his study, moved with passion, and applied his knowledge and wisdom to all types of human activity that are done from a mere earthly perspective. Likewise, dear ones, faithful preachers have always been men who mixed both passion and the truth in their preaching. Faithful preaching should not be dry and boring as if it were a lecture that only fills the mind with doctrine, but neither should it be only emotional without any substance. Faithful preaching should have both heat and light (or passion and the knowledge of the truth, experiential religion and doctrinal religion, application and instruction).

b. Dear ones, faithful preaching is not that which has little preparation, or that which merely entertains, or that which one excuses as "led by the Spirit", because it is evident there was little exploration, little investigation, and little time spent in preparation. A preacher that only excites the people for the moment will not be used to bring lasting reformation. However, the faithful preacher that both excites and instructs people in the knowledge of Christ will be used by the Spirit of God to bring lasting reformation. Even the Apostle Paul, as brilliant as he was and as gifted as he was by the Holy Spirit, was a diligent student of God's Word (2 Timothy 4:13).

3. Solomon worked so hard to find true joy in all of the activities of men "under heaven" and without any success, so that he describes the work as one of "sore travail" or sore trouble. His thorough investigation did not bring him to enjoy life more with a full hand, but brought him to more dissatisfaction with an empty hand. What did he have after all the time and resources he put into his study? Nothing, but fruitless labor. Solomon makes his own personal, exhaustive study the study of all the sons of man in whom God has placed the desire to have true joy. What is true of him in particular will be true of all men universally in their search for true joy, peace, and contentment—they will not find true joy "under the sun", but only "sore travail" in body and mind.

4. Solomon actually states that this "sore travail" is given to the sons of man by God in verse 13. In other words, God gives to every man the desire to find true joy, and leads every man apart from

Christ to the same “sore travail” wherein he does not find the true joy, peace, and contentment for which he is searching. This “sore travail” is a part of the curse that God brought upon Adam (and his descendants) when he fell into sin. But even in the curse of this “sore travail”, the Lord uses it to show sinful man that nothing in this life truly satisfies. The Lord gives to man a hungering and thirsting, so that they may find their hunger and thirst satisfied in Jesus Christ.

a. Dear ones, isn't it truly amazing that Him for whom the world seeks (without realizing it) is the One who has graciously revealed Himself to us by opening our eyes to Christ and to all of His benefits. The world has this inner desire for truth, for reality, for hope, for meaning and purpose, for joy, peace, and contentment, but the world will seek and will never find these blessings by its sore travail. Why are you any different than the rest of the world? What was in you that made you any different than those who come up empty-handed? You are no different. You and I would be in exactly the same spot if it were not for the grace of Christ which supernaturally filled that void and that emptiness in our lives. What do you have that you did not receive from Christ? And if you did receive it from Christ, why do you live as if you found it by your own searching?

b. There is affliction and travail in this life that come to the Christian, it is true. But dear ones, you know where to find the help you need. You know where there is a river of life, from which you can daily drink. You are no longer searching for joy. You have found it through faith alone in Christ Jesus. Having found the river of life (wherein is found righteousness, forgiveness, love, joy, purpose, and hope), it is simply a matter of daily enjoying the benefits which Christ has already purchased for you.

c. If, as a Christian who is trusting in Christ alone for your eternal salvation, you are not experiencing the blessedness of joy, peace, and contentment in your life, it is not because your search for these blessings must continue. It is because you must grow in faith in learning how to enjoy these blessings from this river of life everyday of your life. The joy of the Lord is yours. The peace that passes all understanding is yours. The contentment in prosperity or poverty is yours. You simply need to learn to drink daily by faith of that which is already yours. The enemy may try to convince you that you are still searching and never finding. But dear child of God, nothing could be further from the truth. These blessings in Christ are not out of your reach, they are as near to you as the words that you utter. Reach out and receive by faith that which is your inheritance in Christ.

D. Having considered Solomon's CREDENTIALS and INVESTIGATION, we are now ready to consider Solomon's CONCLUSION (Ecclesiastes 1:14b-15). After all of the time and resources expended in personally investigating the source of true joy and happiness in all of the activities of man “under the sun” and apart from communion with Christ, Solomon concludes, “and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecclesiastes 1:14b). If you look for joy and happiness outside of Christ, outside of the love and grace of Christ, outside of faith and obedience to Christ, outside of communion with Christ, you will only find all of your labor to be vanity, emptiness, and a vapor that is here today and gone tomorrow. Furthermore, you will find your unending search not only to bring you nothing by way of lasting joy, you will find your unending search to bring you a “vexation of spirit” or “affliction of the soul” (literally, a feeding or consuming of the spirit). In other words, this search will eat you up alive. And this condition in a natural man, who is without Jesus Christ, is so crooked that he cannot straighten it out, and so many things are lacking in the life of the natural man that it cannot be supplied by anything in this world. Rather than the search providing the answers you need, you will only find more questions than answers, more doubts than certainties, and more confusion than hope.

1. Wow, what a discouraging message! What a hopeless sermon! Good. You are beginning to see and to understand the plight of a man who seeks for joy and happiness apart from Jesus Christ. This is the message of Solomon, the Preacher. Until you clearly see this hopeless and endless struggle in the man who is without Christ, you will never know the hope and fulfillment of the man who is in Christ.

2. Dear one, what have you been trying to hold on to so tightly, hoping that it would give

you the joy, peace, and contentment for which you seek? Family and friends that are nearer or closer, a church that is without problems, a country that is not so liberal, more money to pay your bills, a better job, more respect and appreciation from others, a more dependable car, a body that is free of illness, aches, and pains, parents that give you more freedom, children that obey you, and on and on goes the list? Dear ones, your joy, peace, and contentment do not depend upon the realization of any of those things in this life. If it does, you will be forever on an emotional and spiritual roller-coaster. Our life is hid with Christ. Our life is Christ. Is Christ worried about your bills, about your car, about your family or friends? Is Christ biting His fingernails and worried about anything in your life? Of course not! Your life is inseparably connected to His life. Your joy, peace, and contentment are in union with His. Your future is bound up with His. It is our God who has promised us in Isaiah 26:3-4: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."

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