

Pleasure without Christ is Meaningless

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

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Text: Ecclesiastes 2

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Introduction: Tonight we continue in our series called “Finding the Meaning of Life”. We are looking tonight at Ecclesiastes 2, and Solomon, the wisest man in the history of the world outside of the Lord, uncovers a serious scandal and controversy in the world. Can a person be happy by acquiring knowledge? The government campaigns all tell us that education is the answer. Solomon shoots that down and says “No, after getting all the wisdom and knowledge that a human being can have, I still have an emptiness, an ache, a pain, and a vexation in my soul and in my spirit.”

I. Experiment #1: **Pleasure through Parties.**

Tonight Solomon fields another question. “What if I could fulfill all the desires of my flesh and have all the pleasure that a human being could possibly enjoy? Then I would be happy!” Solomon actually attempts this experiment. Solomon, who is king of Israel, is going to use his almost unlimited wealth and immense power, which is beyond what any of us can fathom, and he is going to fulfill every imagination his heart can dream up as far as pleasure goes. And his goal is to see if there is any meaning and any lasting value and purpose to what he is doing under the sun.

Tonight’s first experiment begins in **Ecclesiastes 2:1-3**, “I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth [pleasure], therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. 2 I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth [pleasure], What doeth it [What use is it]? 3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.”

A. His motto: **If it feels good do it**

The slogan of our society today can be reduced to six single-syllable words, “If it feels good do it”. Solomon lived this 3500 years ago. So here in Ecclesiastes 2, Solomon wants to put “mirth” to the test. Mirth according to the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament is “mirth, gladness... or pleasure”. Solomon is going to put **pleasure** to the test. Solomon who has infinite resources and time is going to use all his imagination and creativity to launch an experiment with pleasure and see if there is any fulfilling and satisfying purpose to it, in and of itself apart from God. He’s already said in **verse 1** of all his experiment, “behold, this also is vanity”. At the end of the day, it is not fulfilling. There is no lasting value in pleasure. But in case you doubt Solomon tried hard enough, consider **1 Kings 4:22-23**.

B. The **mirth** of his banquets.

Solomon had jesters and comedians. He says in **verse 2**, “I said of laughter, It is mad”. He laughed so hard day after day after day. But at the end it was all of no value to him. There was no fulfillment.

Warning: Are comedians ok for Christians to watch? I would say there is very little they have to offer. I know of almost none that are clean. Most sitcoms are the same way. They usually laugh at life without God. At the end of the day laughing is not the solution but truly repenting over our sin!

Christians who are walking with God have much laugh about and be joyful, but laughing away our problems and sins are not the solution. Sitcoms and comedians only distract people from the coming day when we will meet God. When all is well with your soul and your are walking with God there is “joy unspeakable and full of glory”. There is laughter in His presence.

Psalm 126:1-3, “When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. 2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. 3 The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.”

C. The massiveness of his banquets

The size of Solomon’s banquets were beyond comprehension. Solomon says, “I’m going all out, using all my unlimited resources as king, all my unhindered time, and my fantastic creativity to consume as much pleasure as I possibly can”. You cannot imagine the epic banquets Solomon had. Solomon begins to throw the largest parties the world has ever seen. He’s going 7 days a week for an extended period of time with his pleasure experiment. No one is really sure how long he continued this way.

- He had massive amounts of food.

We have to be careful not to compare ourselves with Solomon, thinking our day would be better than his day. Check out **1 Kings 4:22-23**—Solomon is going to list what it took to throw his parties. It’s going to tell us what he needed for just one day. **Verse 22**, “And Solomon’s provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour [220 liters], and threescore measures of meal, 23 Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts [100 deer], and roebucks [100 huge male deers], and fallowdeer [100 other type of deer that have moose like antlers—they’re beautiful], and fatted fowl [this would be like Quail, Chicken, Hen, and Partridge].” Now for every party he has the commentaries say, he would have hosted between 15 and 20 thousand people.

What ever pleasures you could imagine—if you only had the money. He did it. He had an epic series of parties, night after night. There was no time clock for Solomon. He could do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted. If he wanted to sleep till 11, he did. If he wanted to stay up all night he did. Eventually he got tired of all the pleasure and the partying.

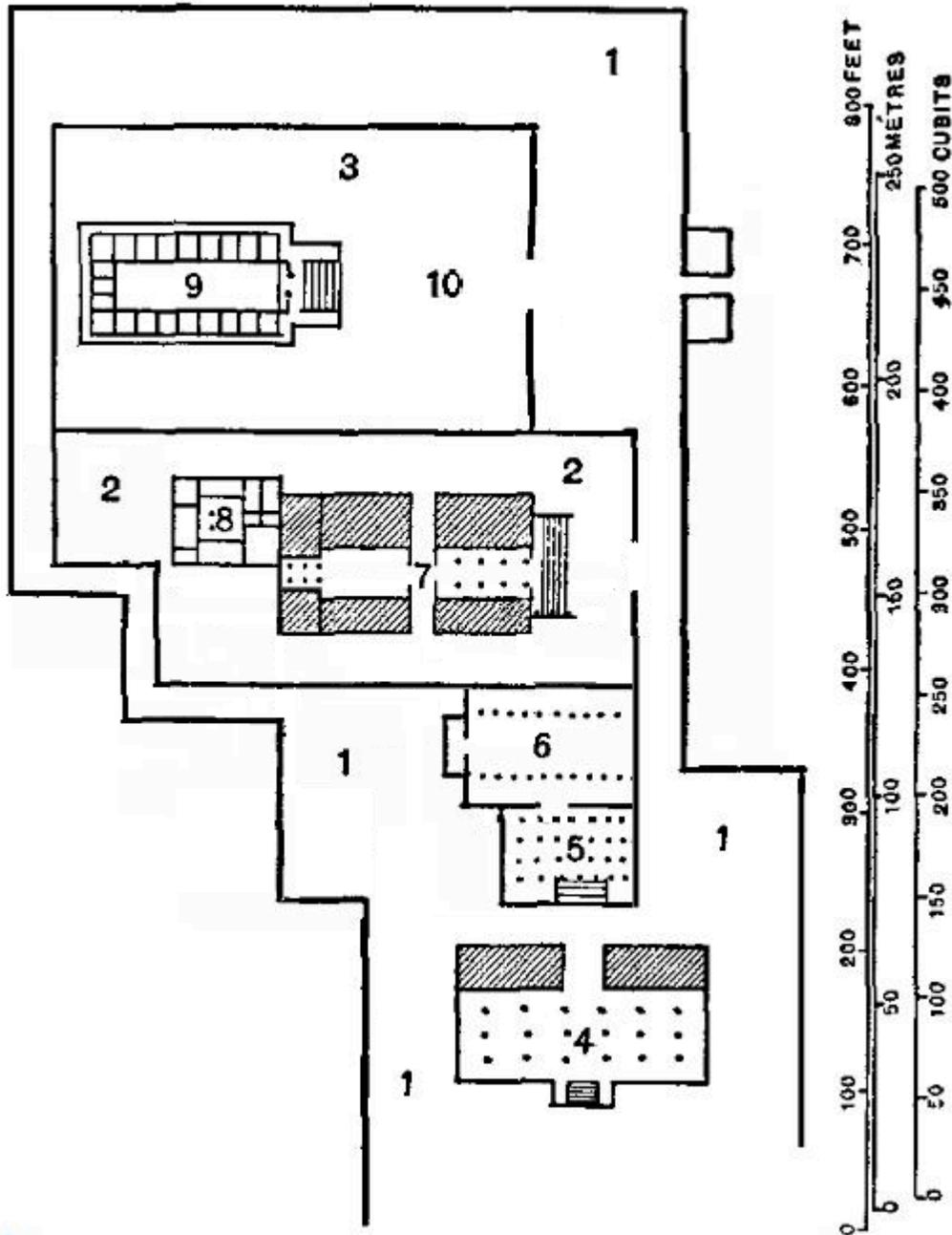
Solomon deals with pleasures of all sorts that have been developed by human beings. People fix their hearts on all kinds of pleasures and enjoyments under the sun, but at the end of the day, without God they are empty and leave an ache of unfulfillment in the soul.

- II. **Experiment #2: Pleasure through Productivity.** So Solomon moves from pleasure through parties to pleasure through productivity.

We have all these people who say, if I could get the house I want and the car I want and the little vacation house on the lake, I would be happy. Solomon is out to prove you wrong. Look at **verses 4-6**, “I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: 5 I made me gardens and orchards [i.e. parks], and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits [fruit trees]: 6 I made me pools of water [irrigation tanks], to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:”

So now he moves on from narcissistic pleasures to more productive pleasures. He starts building elaborate houses with elaborate gardens and parks. When he says he “built great houses” (v. 4), he’s talking about a palace and other houses for all his wives and concubines. Solomon’s palace was massive. The temple took 7 years to build. Solomon’s house on the other hand took 14 years to build.

Below is an approximate plan of Solomon's palace. Reconstruction is based on biblical scholarship, and topography of the land (the shape of the hill).



- 1 'Great Court'
- 2 'Second Court'
- 3 'Court of the Temple'
- 4 House of the forest of Lebanon

- 5 Hall of Pillars
- 6 Hall of Judgment
- 7 Royal Palace
- 8 Harem
- 9 Temple
- 10 Altar

Solomon undertook a great project. There is something that is satisfying about getting your own home. There is also something about working hard all day going after your dream and accomplishing it. But Solomon did all that. Check out the diagram of Solomon's palace and homes and parks and orchards. It's massive!

Application: So you might get some satisfaction out of your flower garden and your nicely kept lawn. You fix it up. You plant the marigolds and petunias. You put in some shrubs. You add a horse shoe pit and your gas bar-b-que grill. You plant trees and put in the mulch everywhere. You are feeling good, sitting on your porch and enjoying your yard. Well Solomon I'm sure would appreciate your garden, but he planted forest and orchards and parks on his back 900 acres!

Solomon's Irrigation Ponds, verse 6, "I made me pools of water [irrigation tanks], to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:"

To this day, if you went to Jerusalem, southwest of Jerusalem, you would come to this place where there are all these craters in the earth and it's called "The Pools of Solomon." This is where Solomon dug these huge cavernous holes in the earth, filled them with water to water all the gardens and national parks and everything else he built out.

So Solomon builds the most amazing place on earth, and at the end he says, "it's all vanity". I had all the money, all the time, all the creative powers, but utopia on earth just didn't satisfy me (**Ecc. 2:1**).

Now he turns to a third experiment.

III. Experiment #3: **Pleasure through Prosperity and Ease.**

Verses 7-8, "I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house: also I had great possessions of great and small cattle [livestock] above all that were in Jerusalem before me: 8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts."

A. **Solomon had servants.** Solomon did nothing for himself. He woke up about 11:00, somebody cooked breakfast for him. He moved on from there to get massage number one. He got the facial, the pedicure. He did nothing for himself. He sat back and enjoyed his riches and wealth."

Application: Being able to do what you want when you want to will not bring you happiness. Have you ever turned on those "success" shows in the middle of the night, and found out how you could make money from home doing nothing?

Listen, if you could make money from home doing nothing, we'd all be rich! Yet people fall for it!

- B. **Solomon had a horse and cattle ranch.** He had , "great possessions of great and small cattle [livestock] above all that were in Jerusalem before..." him. He took advantage of all his wealth and power and spent it on himself. Anything he wanted he got it. You might want a boat—Solomon could buy the harbor!
- C. **Solomon had his own orchestras.** Solomon didn't have an iPod. He didn't download music. He had enough money to buy the band! Any music he wanted he brought in to play for him.

Application: Today people cannot live without their music. Some of you are listening to your iPod in church, outside of church. You can barely put it down to eat dinner. You've got to stop it. It's killing you.

- D. **He had 700 wives and 300 concubines.** We read about this later, but Solomon also lived out the intimate sensual fantasies in his mind.
1. **What about pornography?** Pornography is a scary word that we want to say is other people's problem. What is pornography? David Powlison says, The first part of the word pornography, "porné," means immorality and the second part, "graph" means to write, draw, or portray. Pornography is about picturing, imagining, and fantasizing about immorality.¹

You may not be aware of it, but soft core pornography is every where you look. It is on about every other commercial on television. It's all over the billboards. And it's not just in the media. In our world, both men and women dress to attract attention and to elicit romantic or erotic feelings in others. We are all bombarded with pornography every day—it's the atmosphere we live in.

2. **What is the answer to pornography?** We must understand that God has a place for fulfilling sexual desire. It is in the marriage bed. Married men you need to be loving and treating your wives in the right way. Ladies, you need to be there for the needs of your husband.

We are prone to criticize Solomon for his excursions with 700 wives and 300 concubines, but in the world today, men are having those kinds of fantasies in their minds with the internet and other gateways to porn.

Now marriage is not the part of the only solution. The ultimate solution whether you are single or married concerning sensual imaginations is self control and living in the real world. You must stop the escapism.

¹ David Powlison. *Breaking Pornography Addiction*. Available on the web at: <http://ccef.org/breaking-pornography-addiction-part-1>

But a healthy marriage is an important place to start if you are married.

There is a place for fulfillment, and it is in marriage. The experts say that about every 3-5 days, a married man will become physically irritable if he is not intimate with his wife. That is pretty much the norm!

Look over at **1 Corinthians 7:1-3**, “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. 3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.” Do you know what Paul is saying to married people? Be kind by having intimate relations with your spouse!

Then **verses 4-7**, “The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.” He says if you are married you are to use your body to please your spouse. Men you are to give back rubs and hugs and be kind throughout the day. Use those hands to write letters of kindness. Intimacy is only 1% of the married love life. But verse 5 talks about that 1%. If you are married this is what it says, “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”

There is a satanic temptation that comes to the married couple if they are not together regularly. Physically and scientifically speaking, I would say once a week is reasonable.

I’m not going to camp there, but if you are a married couple having problems with this, YOU NEED to address it! I’m glad to help guide you in the Scriptures.

But also realize this: your spouse is not ultimate answer. If you are married you need to be healthy in that area, but you will not be satisfied unless you struggle to keep a closer walk with the Lord. It’s not a perfect walk, but a closer walk and a Holy Spirit filled life.

Now let’s look at Solomon’s conclusions.

IV. Solomon’s conclusions.

- A. A rich life without God might make you **popular**, but that doesn’t satisfy. **Verse 9**, “So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.”

1. Solomon never forgot what his goal was. His “wisdom remained” with him. He never lost sight of the goal, which was to see if there was any value in pleasure for pleasure’s sake.
2. **Verses 10**, “And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.” Solomon took in his pleasure. Party after party. Night after night. After so many months, it got old. There is a ceiling to pleasure. Then he moved to productivity. He took in the beauty of his palace and houses and forests and orchards and parks. That got old after a while too. There had to be something more. So he took in pleasure. He did nothing for himself. He spoiled himself with music and ranching, and pleasure with his wives and concubines.

Solomon went from the party scene, to the productivity scene, to the prosperity and pleasure scene, and he says, you know what I had momentary fun. What did he get out of all of it? *Pleasure—momentary, fleeting pleasure that is here for a moment and then it is gone!*

- B. You see, a rich life of pleasure without God is **empty**. **Verse 11**, “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.”

Conclusion: Here’s the conclusion. Sex and pleasure and food and joy are all God’s idea. He creates the world and puts two unclothed people in the Garden and says, “Be fruitful and multiply”. Pleasure in Christ is beautiful. But you take it outside of Christ and it gets messed up.

Now you may be feeling a bit messed up in this world. Perhaps you are struggling with addictions to this world’s pleasure. You can’t stop watching TV. You are addicted to your music. You might be addicted to food. You might be addicted to pornography. Pleasure outside of God is dangerous.

I heard the story of a preacher who took a rose and passed it around the audience. There were hundreds of people there. He was talking about how this world’s pleasure will mess you up. At the end of the message someone tossed the rose back on stage. He cried out “Now who would want this rose? It’s all damaged and messed up?”

I want you to know that Jesus wants the messed up rose. We are all damaged and messed up. It’s ok to want pleasure. But you must find your ultimate pleasure fulfilled in God. It must be God’s way. There is a ceiling to earthly joy. If all you have is earthly joy you will find your spirit vexed. There is joy in Jesus! All the other pleasures He gives are gifts. Let’s not put our hope in the gifts of God but in our Lord Jesus Christ. And if you feel a bit messed up by sin, then join the club. We are all damaged roses. And Jesus wants the rose. That’s why he died! He came to set us free and renew us!