

Route 66

Ecclesiastes: Chasing After the Wind

Part 21 – October 25, 2009

Poor King Solomon; wisdom, wealth, power, reverence, he had it *all*. There was no possession he couldn't own, no place he couldn't go, no pleasure he couldn't experience. Nothing was beyond his reach. And yet he says ...

All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? - *Ecclesiastes 1:8-10a NIV*

He had *everything* ... except fulfillment, joy, and peace of mind. He started out wholly devoted to God; but, drifted toward the false idols of his foreign wives, and he ended up seeking after satisfaction in every *conceivable* substitute source.

If the following items had equal value, would you rather: Live in an opulent mansion? Drive a fleet of luxurious cars? Wear the highest quality clothes? Or, stay in the world's most exotic resorts? Could these things make you happy? Yes! Ecstatic! But could they *keep* you happy? Could they *fulfill* you? No! Not possible.



How many of you chose whichever one you thought you could sell off the easiest, and turn into a stack of cold, hard cash?! Even this won't do it:

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. - *Ecclesiastes 5:10 NIV*

"Ecclesiastes" is a Greek word that is usually translated as "The Teacher". And the 1st verse explains that the teacher is the king of Jerusalem and the son of David. But the 2nd verse tells the hard lesson the teacher has learned:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." - *Ecclesiastes 1:2 NIV*

The book of Ecclesiastes chronicles the misery and hopelessness that comes from even a "prosperous" life lived apart from God.

Solomon was depressed, discouraged, and dejected.

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 meaningless. - *Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 NIV*

You see, we all desire this ... *something* (that can't be had in this world). There are a lot of things out there that'll offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise.

We sense this *something* in the hope that arises when we first fall in love, or begin a new career, or move somewhere fresh. Yet, there isn't a marriage strong enough, or a job exhilarating enough, or a view beautiful enough to fulfill that ... *something*.

Without meaning to, or wanting to, we acclimatize and grow accustomed. And then we become disenchanted and disillusioned. Inevitably, that *something* that we grasped at in those first moments just fades away in the reality. It's an inescapable, universal human principle.

And there are only three ways we can deal with it.



1. The way of the fool

He blames the *things*. He thinks if only he tried another woman, a different job, or a more expensive whatever, *then* he'd finally catch that ... *something*. Solomon calls this "chasing after the wind".

Solomon spent most of his adult life in this mad pursuit, always thinking that the latest would be the greatest.

I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly ... - *Ecclesiastes 2:3a NIV*

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. - *Ecclesiastes 2:4-5 NIV*

I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well ... - *Ecclesiastes 2:8a NIV*

He says he tried drinking, partying, building, gardening, money, music, sex, dancing, philosophy, cattle breeding, art collecting, and pleasures of *every* kind.

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind ... - *Ecclesiastes 2:11a NIV*

Solomon had the means to take everything to the nth degree! So, if *he* couldn't hold onto that *something*, how can *we* expect to? Our *best* attempts to find fulfillment outside of God will fall so far short of what Solomon was actually able to engage in!

That's the way of the fool. Then there's the ...

2. The way of the frustrated

They give up the chase, and stew in their own discontentment, believing nothing can satisfy. Solomon went through this faze ...

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me.
All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. - *Ecclesiastes 2:17 NIV*

They blame life itself for being unfair. And they find a way to numb themselves from this painful and depressing "realization".

But, at some point, Solomon had a revelation. He communicates it in one of the more difficult passages to understand.



Man has no advantage over the animal. ... All go to the same place **[the grave]**; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" - *Ecclesiastes 3:19b-21 NIV*

Who knows? ... Who? (We're supposed to answer that): *God* does! Therefore, what is the only "sure thing" to put your hope in? *God*! (In 12:7b Solomon confirms this answer: "The spirit returns to *God* ...")

He realizes that both of these people have cheated themselves!

3. And this leads Solomon back to: The way of the faithful

Throughout the book he makes statements like the fact that pleasing *God* is the key to *genuine* understanding and joy.

To the man who pleases him, *God* gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness ... -
Ecclesiastes 2:26 NIV

And what is that understanding and joy? Creatures are not born with instinctual desires unless satisfaction for those desire exists. A baby feels hunger, because there's food. A duckling feels a need to swim, because there's water. Humans feel sexual desire, because there's sexual union.

If I have an instinctual desire for this *something*, which no experience in *this* world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.



He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also **set eternity in the hearts of men**; yet they cannot fathom what *God* has done from beginning to end. - *Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV*

The fish doesn't know it's wet. We do! We're not made for an earthly grave but a Heavenly home! Mankind was designed to be too eternal for earth. All of the wonderful pleasures of life were never meant to satisfy, but only to suggest what is to come. Otherwise we'd be lulled away from God by the very blessings He's given us.



So, He designed our souls to acclimatize, and grow accustomed, and become disenchanted and disillusioned, to be driven to Him!

A man can do nothing better 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? - *Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 NIV*

Gratefulness is the key to our joy. Without God, nothing else can satisfy. With God, all of life's good gifts can be gratefully received and enjoyed to the full. We must not despise or be unthankful for our earthly blessings, and at the same time, we must never mistake them for that *something* of which they're only a kind of copy or echo.

Poor King Solomon; he wasted so much of his life chasing after the wind instead of standing on the rock. In the middle of the book Solomon chastises himself:



Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. - *Ecclesiastes 4:13 NIV*

And at the end, he calls the young to lay the foundation early:

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" ... - *Ecclesiastes 12:1 NIV*

Everyone knows that that grave is coming! We have no advantage over the animals when it comes to returning to the dust. So, without having a hope is beyond the grave, how can we possibly expect life's pleasures to overcome our hopelessness?

It's like two skydivers, both free-falling at the same speed. One has a parachute, the other doesn't. Only the one with the chute gets to enjoy the scenery and the sensation! The other may try to distract himself, or take comfort in the fact that medical science is lowering the ground a couple feet every few years; but it's still gonna be a miserable trip down!

Solomon's final conclusion at the end of the book is this:

... here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. - *Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NIV*

The guy who opened by saying, "Everything is meaningless." now ends by directing us to the only One who can bring true meaning.