

Solomon's Quest for Meaning

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Date: 12 June 2022

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[0 : 00] And we're going to go now to God's words. We're going to listen to the book of Ecclesiastes. I don't know what you think. Actually, for preachers, maybe it's a hard book.

But actually, for you in a congregation, Ecclesiastes is great, right? Sometimes you read a book about prophets and kings and, you know, what does this have to do with me?

But now here's a book that says, you know, life is frustrating and actually that relates to us. So what we're going to do in a moment, Anastasia is going to read. The preacher is going to go on a quest for the meaning of life.

I think that's what we all want, right? Everyone is looking for meaning. Where can I find happiness? Where can I find meaning? Where can I find gain?

That's after I've done all this stuff, you know, here's something lasting, something, yeah, that's worth living for. So many books, movies, that's what they're all exploring.

[1 : 00] I mean, why are there so many books? It's not easy, right? Where can we find it? Well, we're going to listen to God's words. I'm going to pray and then Anastasia will read from Ecclesiastes.

And let's see where the preacher can find meaning. But let's pray. Father, yeah, we come before you. Thank you that you are speaking, God.

We pray that you would speak to us now. We need to hear from you. We need your help. We are not worthy to hear from you, of course. I'm not worthy. But you, in your grace, want to speak to our hearts.

So please do that. Honor your son, Jesus, as we look to him. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The scripture reading today comes from the book of Ecclesiastes, chapters 1 and 2.

Please follow along on the bulletin, on the screen, or on your own Bible. Starting in chapter 1, verse 12, we read, What is crooked?

[2 : 30] What is crooked cannot be made straight. And what is lacking cannot be counted. I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me.

And my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after win.

For in much wisdom is much fixation. And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with pleasure.

Enjoy yourself. But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, It is man. And of pleasure, What use is it?

I searched with my heart How to cheer my body with wine. My heart still guiding me with wisdom And how to lay hold on folly Till I might see what was good for the children of man To do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

[3 : 42] I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks And planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

I made myself poobles From which walked to water the forests of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves And had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks More than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

I also gathered for myself silver and gold And the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, The delight of the sons of men.

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them.

I kept my heart from no pleasure. For my heart found pleasure in all my toil. And this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done And the toil I had expended in doing it.

[4 : 52] And behold, all was vanity And a striving after win. And there was nothing to be gained under the sun. So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly.

For what can the man do who come after the king? Only what has already been done. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, As there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, But the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them.

Then I said in my heart, What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise? And I said in my heart, That this also is vanity.

For of the wise, as of the fool, There is no enduring remembrance, Seeing that in the days to come, All will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool.

[6 : 01] So I hated life, Because what is done under the sun Was grievous to me. For all is vanity, And a striving after win. I hated all my toil, In which I toil under the sun, Seeing that I must leave it To the man who will come after me.

And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool. Yet he will be a master of all, For which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

So I turned about and gave my heart up To despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun. Because sometimes, A person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill, Must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone, Who did not toil for it.

This also is vanity, And a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart, With which he toils beneath the sun?

For all his days are full of sorrow, And his work is a vexation. Even in the night, His heart does not rest.

[7 : 15] This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a person Than that he should eat and drink, And find enjoyment in his toil.

This also, I saw, Is from the hand of God. For apart from him, Who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him, God has gifted him wisdom, And knowledge, And joy. But to the sinner, He has given the business of gathering and collecting, Only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity, And a striving after win.

This is the word of God. Great. Well, yeah, It's a long reflection, As the preacher just goes through various aspects of life, And, yeah, On this quest, right?

That's what he says. I, the preacher, Have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my heart to seek, And to search out by wisdom, All that is done under heaven. I've investigated everything.

[8 : 23] Where can we find meaning, Happiness? Now, You may wonder who this preacher is, Because it says here, right, I've been king over Israel. We talked about it a little bit last week, Right?

He says, I'm the king, And I get more wisdom than anyone, And I became greater than anyone. He really writes as if he's Solomon. I don't think he is, But he's writing as if.

Now, why is he doing that? Why is this guy writing as if he's Solomon? Well, I mean, If you know the Bible, Solomon was like the golden age, Right? Solomon was the greatest king Israel ever had, In some ways.

Because he ruled over the whole Middle East. Everyone was rich. Everyone was happy, It seemed, Right? Everyone was, You know, Here is the good life. Solomon, Well, Yeah, The ultimate king almost, Right?

And that is the right person to ask. What is the meaning of life? Because he is the king who had everything. He is the king who could fix anything, Who could do anything.

[9 : 27] I mean, If you ask me, Does money make you happy? Now, I could say a few things about it, But I'm not really the ultimate authority on money, Right? If you ask Elon Musk, With his hundreds of billions of US dollars, It does, How about money?

He can tell you more, Right? And after him, No one else can say anything. There is this verse in 2 verse 12, Later in the passage, What can the man who do, Who comes after the king, Only what has already been done, Right?

If Elon Musk has given his verdict, Then I can't say anything more. And if Solomon, You know, What he finds, Well, That's kind of what, That's the answer for all of us.

But what does he find? Well, You've heard the reading, Right? He says, Well, It was an unhappy business, This quest for the children of men. I've seen everything that is done under the sun.

Verse 14, And behold, All is vanity, And is striving after wind. Vanity, That word vapor we looked at last week. This, This is breath that you can't grasp.

[10:30] That, That's gone almost immediately. Nothing lasting. Well, Let's, Let's go on his journey, And look at these three areas, Where he tried to find meaning, But he couldn't.

2, 1, 2, 11. First of all, He starts with pleasure. Pleasure, Well, It won't last, Right? It's the first area where he seeks, It's very common. Right?

If you ask people, Well, What's, You know, What brings joy to your life? What brings happiness? I guess it's the things we enjoy, Right? Pleasure. And so, He goes, And he looks at different things, And he tries this, And he tries that, And, Well, Does this bring happiness?

And it is a Solomon guy, Right? So he could really go for it. Verse 3, I search with my heart, How to cheer my body with wine, Right?

You know, Just, Just wine, And getting, Drinking, Does that make you happy? Verse 4, I made great works, I built houses, And planted vineyards for myself, Right?

[11:30] Property, Possessions, Does this help me to, You know, Can I find meaning here? What else? He, He had lots of silver and gold, Right?

Verse 8, I get it for myself, Silver and gold, And then Solomon, He had so much gold, That the silver was worthless. You know, That's how rich he was, According to 1 Kings. If you want to read more, 1 Kings chapters 4 to 10, That's what Solomon was like.

You know, He had singers, So he, He partied, And he had culture, With every part of life. Sex, Right? I get it for myself, Many concubines.

If you don't know that word, A concubine, It's somewhere between, A wife and a mistress. Wasn't the wife, Not the same status. Basically, A woman, That's the rich guys had, Kind of, To bear more children, And those kind of things.

It's a status symbol. It's not a very godly thing at all. But, As you probably know, Solomon, He had 700 wives, And 300 concubines. Right? A lot.

[12:35] So, He really went for it. Yeah, That seems weird, Right? But, Seriously, He really says, I became the greatest king ever, Right?

Verse 9, I became great, And surpassed all, Who were before me, In Jerusalem. And whatever my eyes desired, I didn't keep from them. I kept my heart, From no pleasure. And, You know, And I considered it all, What is it?

For my heart, I found pleasure in all my toil. This was my reward. You know, He went for it, And he enjoyed it. But then, He stood back. Okay, Now, What do I have now?

I've done all this. Verse 11, Then I considered all that my hands had done, And the toil I had expended in doing it. And behold, All was vanity, And a striving after wind.

And there was nothing to be gained. He did all these things, Right? Things that we can't even dream of. And he looked back, And actually, It's vain. It's gone.

[13:35] The thing is, Pleasure won't last, Right? He did this. You know, You have a great weekend, And then Monday, You go back to work. Where's the joy? Right?

Things don't really last. At the end, He says, I've got no gain. Actually, Think about all the toil I've expended. That sometimes you do so much work, You spend so much money to have this fun, And then it doesn't last.

And you just wonder, Is it really worth it? That's what he found. We know it doesn't last. Why do we take pictures of all the fun things we do? Because we want to kind of see them again.

And then try and remember, Oh yeah, That was fun. That was so fun. Except, It's gone now, Right? It's over. That's the problem. And so, We go back to pleasure. Let's go there again, And maybe it will be fun.

Or think we need more. Right? You had a good party, But now that's over. Well, Maybe I should have a bigger party, And it will last longer. I should have a bigger house, And then life will be better.

[14:35] Well, This guy was Solomon. Right? He, The richest and most powerful person they knew. If money didn't make him happy, Why do we think that having more money will make us happy?

Right? Why do we think a bigger house will make us happy? When Solomon in his Jewish palace? Actually, It was all vanity. Again, Well, We laughed at it just now, But, You know, Sex.

In the Western world, Right? That's almost seen as the big thing. If you want to have a happy, fulfilled life, You need to be active in that area. And that's why there is sexual assault, And

pornography, And all those things.

Right? It's really the message you get from Hollywood sometimes, That this is what gives life meaning. I'm going to be very crude, But, Right? Men, 700 wives, And this guy wasn't happy. Sex is not the answer. Right? It's very obvious. None of these things. Nothing. And society realizes this as well, Right?

[15 : 40] We are richer, And have more money, And more luxury than ever. Is Hong Kong such a happy place? Is the world such a happy place? Even if you don't have problems, Are people satisfied?

No. Of course, I'm not saying that these things are bad. You know, Solomon enjoyed himself. You know, It's great to eat and drink, And have a party, And go on a holiday. They're all great things, But, Don't expect the joy to really last.

That is what he's saying. And that's not just the Bible. People say it. Jim Carrey, He said it quite well. This actor from the 90s, When you're as old as me.

But, He started writing books, And he said, You're rich and famous. Yeah, I'd love everyone to be rich and famous, And do everything, They ever dreamed of. So that they see, That it's not the answer.

It isn't the answer, He found out. And it's not the answer, For any of us. After all, We're trying to do the impossible, Right? We saw last week, Why is the world like this?

[16 : 42] We're out of the Garden of Eden. In a way, That's what Solomon tries to do. He wants to get back to the Garden of Eden. Back to what we had back then. That's why he's building gardens, And streams, And all those things.

Right? It feels like, I'm building a Garden of Eden. I'm trying to bring the perfection, That was there. But he can't. Not even Solomon. Well, what then?

Well, pleasure won't do it. You know, It won't satisfy. Well, what now? Well, wisdom. So he goes, Well, wisdom, right? In the Bible, wisdom, If I live God's way, Then I will have the best life.

Right? That's what Proverbs says. You know, Get wisdom. It's the most precious thing, And then you can live, If you live God's way, Everything will go well, And everything will be good. Maybe this is how I can get a good life.

So, verse 12, So I turn to consider wisdom, And man as a folly. Yeah? And I saw that there was more gain in wisdom than in folly. It's good to be wise, right?

[17 : 42] Because it makes life better, right? The wise knows where he's going, The fool walks in darkness, And yet when he thinks about it, It doesn't really last, right?

Because, end of verse 14, Yet I perceive that the same event happens to all of them, Whether you're wise or foolish, The same thing happens. And what is that thing? It's going to come up quite a lot in Ecclesiastes.

It's death. Because, you know, What happened, I said in my heart, What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?

Verse 16, How the wise dies just like the fool. You know, You can live a very wise life, But actually, I'm still going to die, right? And everyone's going to forget about me, Whether I've been very wise or very foolish, 50 years, 100 years later, It really doesn't matter.

Then why make the effort? I don't know, I don't see many of us trying to be wise in the same way. But you meet people, right? They want to know everything. They're constantly reading the news, And keeping ahead of the, You know, All the new technologies, So that they know everything, In the hope that, Well, Now I can, That will help me live the best possible life.

[18 : 58] It won't stop you from dying, right? 100 years from now, It doesn't matter. What do other people do? It feels a bit like health, right? And don't be unhealthy, right? Don't, You know, Those kind of things.

And yet, No matter how much exercise you do, 100 years from now, You'll be dead, right? It doesn't, Ultimately, Going really, Oh, Some people, They live like that, right?

I'm going to go to the gym, And eat this, And eat that, And I'm going to be, As if you will live forever. You won't. Still, Don't be unhealthy. But at the same time, Right?

It's not ultimate. But that's what he's saying, Right? How, Why have I been so very wise? Well, What then? How about work?

Work is such a big thing, So, Verse 18, Toil. Well, I hated all my toil, With which I toil under the sun. I, I, I'm going to work, But, Actually, My work doesn't work.

[19 : 57] Why? Well, Seeing that I must leave it, To the man, Who will come after me. Yeah? I, I work really hard, On something, And what happens? I die, Or I retire, And it goes to someone else.

Now, That's not a bad thing, Right? You've still done this work, You've done something productive, And, You know, It's something good. Well, But what if he ruins it, The next person? Yeah? The man after me, Who knows, Whether he'll be a wise, Or a fool.

Yet he'll be master, Of all for which I toiled. Right? Think of Solomon again, He had the greatest kingdom, And that passed to his son. And if you know, Read the Bible, His son was an idiot, And the kingdom split in two.

And apparently, The God was behind that, It was out of judgment, But, You know, You've built this great thing, And then, The next person ruins it. Don't we ever feel like that?

I remember my first job, I worked on this great project, For a bus company, Great way to save money, By hiring tour buses, And taxi vans, So we needed less buses, Worked very hard, Did all the analysis, And then, Yeah, For political reasons, They didn't do it.

[21 : 08] Two months work, For nothing. What a waste, Right? Maybe your work is like that. Or even, Even if it's, The other person ruins it, Sometimes, He feels it's unfair, Right?

Verse 21, Sometimes a person, Who has toiled with wisdom, And knowledge, And skill, Must leave everything, To be enjoyed, By someone who didn't toil for it. It's almost like unfair, Like, I've done all the work, And this other person gets it.

Right? You do all the work, Your manager takes the credit. You earned the company, A lot of money, But it all goes to the shareholders. Why? What's, Right?

The frustration. We feel that, Right? That's, That's what he says. And so, Yeah, Working, It doesn't last, Right? It, It's not, Doesn't give, It kind of really, I'm doing something lasting, I'm doing something, That really makes a difference.

The, The best thing you can hope for, Is enjoying it. Right? Verse 24, Sorry, We're going quite quickly, But, But I think you've heard him. The, The best thing you can, Do is enjoy it.

[22 : 15] And there's nothing better, For a person, Than that he should eat, And drink, And find enjoyment, In his toil. I mean, Even if your project, Gets scrapped, If you enjoy doing it, That's still something, Right?

If you enjoy life, If you enjoy life, If you eat and drink, If you can enjoy life, It doesn't really matter, So, Enjoy yourself, That's almost his message, Right? And actually, That's a gift from God, He says, You know, This also, I saw, Is from the hand of God, For apart from him, Who can eat, Or who can have enjoyment, You know, If you have a job, That you enjoy, Thank God for that, A lot of people, In the world don't, If you have a, Enjoy your family life, Great, Thank God for that, You know, If life in this world, Is just enjoyable, You know, That it's a gift from God, Of course, Not everyone has that, Right?

I'm not going to go too much, Into verse 26, It's a bit of a weird verse, But just remember, Not everyone can, Just enjoy themselves, You might feel like that, If my job isn't great, I'm going to have a, More enjoyable job, I talked about my friend last week, Every two years, Every half year, He'd have a new job, Of course, He was a brilliant IT expert, He could, Find a new job, If you're just a manual laborer, You're kind of stuck, Right?

This is not for everyone, So, Actually, For all of humanity, It's limited, But then what do we do? Right? Yes, Enjoy yourself, It's nice, The world knows that, Marie Kondo, Right?

Just keep the things that give you joy, And nothing else, And yet, It's not enough, And so, He's looked at work, He's looked at pleasure, He's looked at studying, He's looked at wisdom, He's looked everywhere, And none of it gives, What he's looking for, At the end, It's all vanity, It's all vapor, It's all trying to, Grasp the wind, It just doesn't work, I don't know if you feel it, And often we're just too busy, We just do things, Because we have to, But if people stop and think, What is it?

[24 : 26] And maybe that's when men, Get a midlife crisis, They suddenly stop and think, Why is this? Why am I doing all this? No, It's a, It's a dead end, Right?

We talked about it last week, Ecclesiastes wants to show us a dead end, We try to find our meaning, And happiness in the things of this world, And that just doesn't work, It's, You hit a wall, And that is meant to, Well, To turn you to Jesus, In a way, I, I, I don't have to, It's not a surprise, Right?

I was in a growth, Community group last week, And everyone there knew, Okay, Of course, Jesus, Right? Jesus is the thing that satisfies us, Jesus is the thing, Well, The person who gives us

meaning, Who gives us hope, And we kind of, We're a gospel-centered church, Right?
We know that idols or anything doesn't satisfy, And so we, I guess that's what you're going to hear,
So much through this series, But actually, Do we believe it?
Do we believe that, Okay, If I have Jesus, If I have a relationship with him, All of this doesn't matter,
That it's okay, Because I certainly find, I often don't live like that, Many Christians don't, Still, They
go for their career, Or their studies, As if this is really, The thing that's going to make the difference,
In my life, I can't wait for, No more quarantine, So I can see Taiwan, And Thailand, And all these
places, And that's going to, Give me life, And again, These are good things, They're not wrong
things, But often we look for them, For meaning, Right?

[26 : 03] As if they, Can offer more than Jesus, I find often, When I'm tempted, Basically, That's
what I'm doing, Right? I'm saying, Well, I can have Jesus, Or I can have this, And I think this one,
Will bring more to me, This will offer more, It will satisfy me more, And that's when we have to say,
No, No, Jesus really offers more, And I think from this passage, As we see Solomon here, I think
this passage helps us see, Why, Why is Jesus so great?

Why do we know, That if we have Jesus, That that is something, That will last, That is enough, How
do we know Jesus is enough? Well, Because there's a king here, And Jesus is, In some ways, An
even greater king, Right?

I mean, Jesus, He rules the universe, Not just the Middle East, He has all the glory, He has
everything, Jesus can overcome death, Again, We're going to talk about it, More in other weeks,
But, You know, Death always was the problem, Here's Jesus, And he's overcome death, But even
more, How do we know, That Jesus really wants us, That actually, This is something that, You
know, Even if he can do it, Does he want to do it?

Well, I just find Solomon here, So different from Jesus, Or actually, The other way around, Because
if I read this, It's so self-centered, In a way, Right? We all not, Because that's what we're like, But
it's very self-centered, Pleasure for me, That's what he's looking for, And wisdom, Well, I die, So
what's the point for me?

The work I've done, It goes to someone else, I get nothing, What's the point? Right? Actually, It's all
about him, It's all about me, And here is Jesus, The greatest king ever, And he does exactly the
opposite, Jesus does have, All the worship of the angels, And all the glories of heaven, And all the
riches of intimacy, In the trinity, What does he do?

[28 : 09] He lays it all aside, And the preacher would say, That's meaningless, Right? Here is the,
The wisest person ever, Jesus was so wise, He didn't need to die, What did Jesus do?

He died like a fool, It's the exact opposite, Jesus did the greatest work ever, He lived a perfect
human life, Enough to inherit God's kingdom, What did he do with that?

He died and gave it to someone else, Right? All the things that the preacher says, This is
completely meaningless, Jesus lived a meaningless life, Right? He was offered the world, And
instead, Age 33, He went to a cross, Why is Jesus so different?

Why did he do that? Well, We know the answer, Right? He did it out of love, Out of love for us, He
died like a fool, Because he died, In the place of fools, Like me and you, He did all the work, And he
gave that to someone, Who didn't work for it, Because we couldn't, None of us could, Come back to
Eden, None of us could, Come back to God, None of us could live a life, Good enough, And Jesus
gave that to us, It was just pure love, Even joy for him, Right?

That's what it says, For the joy set before him, He went to the cross, Yeah, There was joy, When
we're looking for joy, In a way, Of course, In some way, Jesus doesn't need us, In another way, He
was looking for joy, He went to the cross, Because that would achieve the joy, Of bringing us to him,
Making us his people, Bringing us to the glories, Of the new creation, To enjoy him, And the father,
And the spirit forever, Forever, Well, If Jesus did that for you, Don't you think, That it will be,
Satisfying, To know him, Don't you think, That will be, The most wonderful thing, To know, This
God, Who gave up everything, So we can have a relationship, With him, Right, We see this
passage, And, I just think, Yeah, Jesus will be the one, He, When I'm attempting to find joy, In
another thing, I remember Jesus' love, And, If he loves me that much,

[30 : 29] That will be the thing, That can give me meaning, Right, That will be the thing, That can
get me through, All these other things, Get me through, The, The, Not that working here is boring,
But, If I would have a boring job, It would get me through that, Right, It would, Get me through the
frustrations, Of life, Because, Jesus is not just anyone, This is Jesus, And we have him, I mean,
Does that really work, Can people really live, You see Christians, And they're so content, Right,

Often, Maybe you're not, But at the same time, You see other Christians, They, They have a boring job, And they're, They don't mind, Some people go, Even further, Right, Jesus, Gave things up, Christians, We can give things up, You know, If, I can be in a boring job, Out of love, Love for my family, And provide for them, Love, For society, Because I'm doing something good, Something good, Even if it doesn't satisfy me,

Love for the gospel, Because I'm earning money, And giving it away, And those kind of things, Right, We can love, Just like Jesus, Because we have something greater, We have him, So I don't mind, This life, In fact, I can give it up, Everything, Like Paul said, In that reading from Philippians, We heard it, In the call to worship, You know, I can get rid of all these things, Because I have Jesus, That is the secret, And again, We're going to think about it more, But I hope you feel, How great Jesus is, I hope you feel his love, And isn't that greater, Than anything else, This world, Has to offer, Why don't we pray, Our father, Please, Yeah, Make these truths, Real to us, Thank you for Jesus, Thank you for your great son, Thank you for his incredible love, Lord Jesus, Thank you for what you did for us, We, We want to remember that, We want that to be something, That drives us, That satisfies us, Forgive us when, The things in this world, You see more real, Than your love for us, So please help us to see you, And to respond, In love, In service, In sacrifice, In Jesus name, Amen,