

CHASING THE WIND

"Just a Little More" Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

March 12, 2023

INTRO.: Good morning and welcome to the third part of our series in Ecclesiastes, *Chasing the Wind*. This is a book in the Old Testament right after the book of Proverbs. Like Proverbs, many believe Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, near the end of his reign as king of Israel. Life is short and he wants to be able to understand all that occurs in life. His three most used phrases in this book are:

"*meaningless*:" (or vanity) he begins by using this word 5 times in the second verse.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NKJV) "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

The word literally means *vapor, breath, puff of smoke*

Not the most positive way to start!

"*under the sun*:" refers to that which we can see, the here and now which leaves God out of the picture. When you and I take God out of the picture life truly does lose its ultimate meaning and purpose.

"*chasing the wind*:" this describes something that is futile for no one can catch the wind. Even if we were to get close, it could change direction in a moment. It's like the weather in Pennsylvania: "If you don't like it wait 5 minutes." The weather this past week was more like what one would expect in February not March!

Using his own wisdom, Solomon is going to pursue finding an answer to the meaning and purpose of life. In his exploration there is going to be missing a huge piece in the puzzle of life: God! In the process of his pursuit he is going to show how *meaningless* life is *under the sun* (without God), leading to a *chasing after the wind*. Last week we saw how he began with the pursuit of human wisdom, concluding that it was *meaningless under the sun, a chasing after the wind*. In chapter 2 he's going to look at possessions, stuff we collect, attempting to have them satisfy. We will look at three things: **His Test, His Testimony, and The Truth**. Let's begin by reading Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 together. Please note what word is repeated over and over again.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. 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. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. 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—the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 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; nothing was gained under the sun.

What is the word that is repeated multiple times? "I" is the word and Solomon is going to investigate life when it is all about him. He had an "I" problem and he needed new lenses to look through. I've entitled this message, "*Just a Little More*," which is the goal of many people and sometimes I can be there as well. It even seems that those who have much can be some of the most discontented and unhappy people.

Study Finds the Rich Are Still Not Satisfied

In 2018, Harvard Business School undertook a first-of-it's-kind study of over 4000 millionaires in the United States asking them about how much money it would take to make them happy. Each millionaire was asked to report how much they currently had. How happy they were on a scale of 1-10. And then how much money they thought they would need to get to a "10" on the happiness scale. Shockingly, 26%, the largest response was assigned to "10x more," the largest possible option given. 24% chose "5x more" followed by 23% at "2x mores." Only 13% of respondents said they "currently have enough to be happy."

Perhaps most surprising of all, this answer was consistent no matter how much money a person had. This means that someone with 100 million was just as likely as the person with 10 million to select they needed "10x" the amount of money they had to be truly happy. In an interview with *The Atlantic*, lead researcher Michael Norton suggested that the

problem for so many millionaires is comparison. So the question of happiness is not so much "Do I have enough?" but "Do I have more than those around me?"

Norton concluded, "If a family amasses \$50 million dollars but moves into a neighborhood where everyone has more money, they still won't be happy. All the way up the spectrum of wealth, basically everyone says [they'd need] two or three times as much to be perfectly happy."

Grant Edward Donnelly, Tianyi Zheng, Emily Haisley, and Michael I. Norton. "The Amount and Source of Millionaires' Wealth (Moderately) Predicts Their Happiness." Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 44, no. 5 (May 2018), pages 684–699. Joe Pinsker, "The Reason Many Ultrarich People Aren't Satisfied With Their Wealth," The Atlantic (12-4-18)

First, we see:

HIS TEST

v. 1-8

Ecclesiastes 2:1 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless.

Solomon proposes a test which proved to be *meaningless* (vanity). He is going to record for us all that was involved in the test. His test involves the investigation of pleasure. If what we can see is all there is to life than we should go for all the pleasure we can. Or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ is not raised:

1 Corinthians 15:32b If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

So, let's take a quick trip through all those tests.

*laughter

Ecclesiastes 2:2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

Does that mean we can't laugh? I have had way more fun and reasons to laugh since I've become a Christian than before I came to know Christ. This type of laughter is described as "foolish", or frivolous. Solomon is speaking of how laughter cannot answer the hard questions about life and even death.

*drinking

Ecclesiastes 2:3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

Does drinking or drinking parties provide any solutions to the problems of life? Alcohol does not take away the pain. It may provide a temporary escape, but we will have to come back to reality. Once again, he emphasizes the shortness of life.

*building (v. 4-6a)

built houses
planted vineyards
made gardens and parks
planted all kinds of fruit trees
made reservoirs

He built the temple for the Lord which he doesn't even mention because he is concentrating on those things *under the sun*. The house he built for himself (1 Kings 7:1-12) took 10 years to build!!

He planted vineyards, made gardens, planted all kinds of fruit trees and even made reservoirs to water the trees. One has to wonder if he was attempting to recreate the Garden of Eden? Part of his "greatness" is seen in the plural use of what he was building.

*Owned (v. 7-8)

male and female slaves
more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me
amassed silver and gold
treasure of kings and provinces
men and women singers and a harem

You want to talk about wealthy? Here is wealthy!! He had slaves (second generation slaves as well), more animals than anyone in Jerusalem, treasure, singers, and a harem. His moral life was a disaster, having 700 wives and 300 concubines. This was not God's plan revealed in the beginning of creation: one man and one woman. From a worldly point of view Solomon had it all. From a godly point of view he had it all messed up.

As he tests all this we notice secondly:

HIS TESTIMONY

v. 9-10

He says some very interesting things.

Ecclesiastes 2:9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

*greater than anyone else: he's winning the race of stuff, but is it a race worth winning?

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

*in all this my wisdom stayed with me: what wisdom is this? It certainly isn't godly wisdom! He's acting like a fool!

Proverbs 3:5-7 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

Ecclesiastes 2:10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

*he denied himself NOTHING his eyes desired

1 John 2:16 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

Psalms 119:37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

Job 31:1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.

Ecclesiastes 2:10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

*look at all my work, I deserve everything I have

Colossians 3:1-4 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The reality is that everything you and I have is a gift from God to be used for His glory in serving others.

Solomon's testimony in these verses is extremely sad. It leads to:

THE TRUTH

v. 11

Ecclesiastes 2:11 (New American Standard Bible) Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

"*considered*." (surveyed: NIV); to look something right in the eye .

Solomon is seeing his life as it really is; the mask and pretense is coming off. (Philip Ryken)

Pleasure and possessions, without the Lord are hollow and lose their meaning and value. They can't get any one of us anywhere spiritually. They can be used as tools in the hands of God but they can also become idols.

The Emptiness of Wealth

Chuck Bentley, CEO of Crown Financial Ministries, writes:

Living only to acquire more is a foolish proposition. The story of a dear friend's father brings this point home in a profound way. My friend grew up in a modest home with a father who worked diligently to provide for his family. Over the years, he worked long days and most evenings. His business required him to have appointments with potential clients after most people had finished their workday.

Early in the father's career, he purchased a small lot overlooking a beautiful lake. To avoid extravagance, he moved a simple mobile home on the lot and had a deck installed around it so he could sit and watch the sunset. The family spent most weekends together at the lake as the children were growing up.

Over the years, the small business grew and so did the demands on his time. He spent less time with the family as mergers and acquisitions increased the size of the company. The children began to consider him distant and uninvolved in their lives. Still, he continued his relentless accumulation of more and more assets.

Ultimately, his company was acquired by a major company. This landed his picture on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, but then disaster struck. He had traveled so very far up the ladder of financial success only to learn shortly thereafter that he had a rare disease that would take his life in a matter of weeks.

Before my friend's father died, he uttered heartfelt words summarizing the vanity of all that he had acquired. "I was happiest when sitting on the deck outside the trailer watching the sun set on the lake. I never needed anything more than that."

Source: Chuck Bentley, *The Root of Riches* (FORIAM Publishers, 2011), Pages 74-75

Solomon's conclusion on his pursuit of pleasure and possessions as being the answer to life:

Ecclesiastes 2:11 (New American Standard Bible) Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and **behold** all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

"*behold:*" this is emphatic

"*all:*" no exceptions!!

"*vanity;*" "*chasing after the wind;*" "*no profit under the sun*"

SO WHAT???

I asked the following two questions in staff meeting this week.

*Why do we pursue accumulating stuff?

*Why doesn't this satisfy?

I want to answer the second question in light of the passage we looked at today.

*We were created for relationship: first with God and then with each other (made in the image of God, look at the "one-another's in Scripture). To replace relationship with stuff rings hollow

Philippians 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

*God has set eternity in our hearts and it is something we think about and need answers for.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 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.

*You and I don't deserve anything: all is by grace

Ephesians 1:7 (NIV84) — 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

*As followers of Christ we don't own anything for all is from the Lord. We are to be good stewards of God's stuff. This changes how we look at money: many think that they give God 10% and the rest is their money. It's all God's money and I am called to use God's money wisely and give cheerfully and generously.

*To make possessions our goal does not make sense

Matthew 6:19–21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This changes how we look at possessions: Since everything I own is God's, I don't need to hang on so tightly. I can use my possessions to serve others. If God can't take of His stuff, nobody can!

So... **Matthew 6:33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.