

**Series:** Ecclesiastes

**Sermon:** The Vanity of Pleasures

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

**Teacher:** Jeff Norris

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### **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> *I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity.*

<sup>2</sup> *I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?"*

<sup>3</sup> *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 life.*

<sup>4</sup> *I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself.*

<sup>5</sup> *I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.*

<sup>6</sup> *I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.*

<sup>7</sup> *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.*

<sup>8</sup> *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 man.*

<sup>9</sup> *So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.*

<sup>10</sup> *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.*

<sup>11</sup> *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 under the sun.*

"Our unsatisfied longings are a spiritual clue that we were made to enjoy the pleasures of God ... this is why Ecclesiastes is in the Bible. It is here to convince us that satisfaction only comes in God Himself. The world is not enough. Ecclesiastes does not show us this to make us discouraged or depressed, but to drive us back to God. This is not all there is. We were made for another world."

- Philip Ryken, *Why Everything Matters*

### **The fleeting pleasure of laughter. (v. 2)**

*I said of laughter, "It is mad."* (v. 2)

"Life in this world is gift not gain."

- David Gibson, *Living Life Backwards*

Proverbs 26:18-19 (ESV)

*Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I am only joking!"*

### **The fleeting pleasure of alcohol. (v. 3)**

*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 life.* (v. 3)

### **The fleeting pleasure of beauty and accomplishment. (v. 4-6, 8)**

*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 pools from which to water the forest of growing trees ... I got singers both men and women ...* (v. 4-6, 8)

### **The fleeting pleasure of possessions and money. (v. 7-8)**

*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.* (v. 7-8a)

"We are among the wealthiest and most privileged peoples in the world, but we are far less content and rarely as happy as those who possess a fraction of what we do."

- Zack Eswine, *Recovering Eden*, p. 73

"Most Americans today experience more pleasure than most people in the history of the world. Yet in spite of our prosperity—or maybe because of it—we still suffer from poverty of soul. The taste of pleasure has grown our appetite for this world beyond satisfaction. Meanwhile, we are still searching desperately for meaning in life.

(Ryken, p. 31)

"When Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States in the 1830's he noticed the 'strange melancholy' that haunted Americans 'in the midst of abundance.' The French statesman wisely concluded that 'the complete joys of this world will never satisfy the heart'."

(Quoted from Tim Keller's *Counterfeit Gods*)

### **The fleeting pleasure of sex. (v. 8b)**

*... and many concubines, the delight of the children of man. (v. 8b)*

We have as many opportunities as Solomon had to indulge in sinful and selfish desires. In fact, maybe he would be envious of us. Generally speaking, we live in better homes, with better furniture and climate control. We dine at a larger buffet and listen to a much wider variety of music. As far as sex is concerned, we can download an endless parade of virtual partners--a harem for the imagination. Everything is offered to us. Nothing is unavailable. So let me ask: are we satisfied, or do we still want more?" (Ryken, p. 37)

### **The fleeting pleasure of success. (v. 9)**

*So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. (v. 9)*

### **The Preacher's Conclusion:**

*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, and behold, all was vanity and striving after the wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. (v. 10-11)*

"In a perverse reversal of the first answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, his chief end was to glorify *himself* and enjoy *himself* as much as he could." (Ryken, p. 33)

"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

"What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there, the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*

Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

*In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*