

TITLE: THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 1

INTRO: You've just inherited more money than you have ever imagined having! The question now being asked of you by everyone, including yourself is "what are you going to do with it?" Even after paying off all your debts, the debts of all your family and friends, giving to the church, to the poor, to all sorts of charities, you still have tons of money! What will you do with it? What would the average person (non-Christian) do with it? Solomon had this 'problem.' He was the richest man to ever live. He had every resource imaginable. What did he do with it? What did he learn from it? What did he want *us* to learn?

I. SOLOMON'S OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS (v. 1-11):

- A. (v. 2-3) Initial conclusion: All is vanity! Vanity of vanities (x3)!
- B. (v. 4-8) Examples of meaninglessness in nature (monotonous, repetitive cycles)
 - 1. (v. 4) Through generation after generation, the earth is still here.
 - 2. (v. 5) The sun rises. The sun sets. The sun rises. The sun sets. Nothing changes!
 - 3. (v. 6) The wind blows from north to south, all the way around the earth and back (jet stream). Nothing changes! What could the weatherman predict that we've never seen before?
 - 4. (v. 7) The water cycle never changes. It just keeps flowing from the mountain to the sea, evaporates, precipitates, etc.
 - 5. (v. 8) And worst of all...we are never satisfied with anything! Everything that happens...we've seen it and heard it before, but we still don't seem to get tired of it...whether it's the endless cycles of nature or the desires in our eyes and ears.
- C. (v. 9-11) Solomon's conclusion
 - 1. There is nothing new under the sun. Everything that is happening now has happened before and will happen again!
 - 2. Yet, there is no remembrance of former things [generations]. Even things in the future will be forgotten afterwards.

II. SOLOMON'S SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS (v. 12-18):

- A. (v. 13) Solomon dedicated himself to use his wisdom (God-given) to search out the reasons for all things done "under heaven."
 - 1. He says God has given this sore travail to us for us "to be exercised therewith."
 - 2. God intends for us to understand what Solomon is saying, and to *learn about God from these facts of nature.*
 - 3. Solomon did this (only he took it to every extreme). We don't need to do that.
- B. (v. 15) That which is crooked cannot be made straight. He's not saying someone can't turn from evil. Rather, in general, evil is evil and it will always be present. How should we respond to this fact? Give up? Join it? Accept it?
- C. (v. 16) I said to myself, I've got everything! I've got more than anyone who has ever lived! What will I do with it?
Solomon left God and looked for meaning in this world in every avenue possible (**2:2-11** – in laughter, wine, houses, vineyards, gardens, pools, servants, cattle, silver and gold, men & women singers, in greatness and wisdom). Results (v. 11) – all was vanity, vexation of spirit, no profit under the sun!

III. PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS:

- A. Our Declaration of Independence states that we have "certain unalienable Rights...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."
- B. Temporal pursuit – I know of nobody who truly desires to be sad and miserable every day. We all want to have happiness in our lives. How do people pursue this goal?
 - 1. Working for retirement. Then what?
 - 2. Vacations – fun for a while, but obviously very temporary. Otherwise, why would we ever need a 2nd vacation?!
 - 3. Alcohol – extremely temporary. Otherwise, why would anyone need a 2nd drink? Why would we have so many alcoholics?
 - 4. Family – seemingly a very good pursuit. But again, without God, it is meaningless. Why? What happens when families break up, go separate ways? What happens when family members die?All these things bring temporary happiness. Those non-Christians who claim to be truly happy are usually the ones who can ride one high to another. In the end, Solomon tells us they are a waste of time...“vanity, vexation of spirit, no profit under the sun.” Why not? Because the benefit received is temporary. It is soon forgotten. It has no spiritual profit!
Then what pursuit is permanent?
- C. Spiritual pursuit
 - 1. **1 Tim 6:11-12** – But thou, o man of God, flee these things and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith *lay hold on ETERNAL life!*
 - 2. **James 4:17-18** – The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy & good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.
 - 3. Happiness is not a goal to be pursued, but the result of a right relationship with God.

CONCLUSION: Solomon seems to contradict himself in Ecclesiastes (he says all these pursuits are meaningless, but then says it is for man to enjoy these things). But we must understand the message he is trying to convey. These things are completely and utterly meaningless *under the sun* (i.e., if we do not acknowledge God). When we do acknowledge and follow God, we realize that God has given us richly all things to enjoy (1 Tim 6:17). We enjoy the beauties He's created, just like He wants us to, but recognize that they are temporal and that the true beauty and joy is waiting for us in Heaven.