

Where Can I Find Pleasure?

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

February 5, 2012

Intro: Most of you are probably aware of a significant game that's going to be played tonight known as the Super Bowl. The significance is heightened for us here in Boston because the New England Patriots, our home team, are playing for the title of World Champions and looking to bring home the Vince Lombardi trophy for the 4th time, all since 2001. Wouldn't that look nice next to the Stanley Cup trophy that the Bruins currently possess? While this is a huge game, let's be honest, most of you watch the Super Bowl not for the game, not for the halftime show (you never know what's going to happen there), but for the commercials. Whoever creates these commercials probably gets paid a ton of money because many of them are just flat out hilarious. But let's not fool ourselves into thinking that these commercials are just about entertainment, because they're not. Each one of them have a message that they want to communicate and along with that message promises that they want you to believe. Their main message and promise is this: you won't be happy unless you have my product. It is the message of materialism and consumerism at its best. I did a quick preview of many of the Super Bowl ads for this year and it is amazing the number of car ads that will be aired (Honda, Acura, Cadillac, Hyundai, Kia). Most of them promise that if you get their car, you also get...the lady, the job, fame, prosperity, etc. Let's take quick look at Toyota Camry's new commercial. It begins: "After reinventing the Toyota Camry, we've decided to keep reinventing."

- Reinvented a couch made of women wearing bathing suites (also comes in men).
- Reinvented a police officer as a masseuse. Traffic stop? Nope...just another free massage.
- Reinvented a baby that doesn't poop. This will improve any day for exhausted mothers
- Reinvented the DMV. Now it's about eating ice cream and improving your golf game while you wait.
- Reinvented a blender that plays Lionel Richie.
- Reinvented a plant that fights crime. No worry now to lay in fear at night.
- Reinvented curtains made of pizza. Lazy husbands can eat the pepperoni-covered curtains.
- Reinvented rain that makes you skinnier: You can burn off those pizza calories by standing in the rain.
- Reinvented Toyota Camry available with everything you could possibly want.

If you get everything that you could possibly want, will you be satisfied if you don't have God? Can you be satisfied in this life apart from God?

The point: True satisfaction is found only in God because all worldly pleasures are futile.

Background: Last week we were introduced to the main character in Ecclesiastes, the Preacher. The man was on a journey to discover if there was any meaning in life, if there was anything that provided **ultimate** and **lasting** fulfillment and satisfaction in life. In other words, at the end of the day, at the end of our life, what do we have to show for everything we've done? As we come to Ecclesiastes 2 today, we're going to see the Preacher's **reflection** on his pursuit for pleasure and this is clear right from the very start (**Read Eccl. 2:1**).

All men seek pleasure:

- Blaise Pascal says, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception."
- John Piper says that "...seeking one's own happiness is not a sin; it is a simple given in human nature. It is a law of the human heart, as gravity is a law of nature."
- His journey is really not that much different from ours.

The pursuit of pleasure is vanity:

- The Preacher’s goal is to evaluate the real value of pleasures and he’s already given his conclusion: the pursuit of pleasure is vanity (he admits this also at the end of the section in Eccl. 2:11). This is the theme of the book: everything is vanity (meaningless, worthless, empty, absurd, pointless).
 - Laughter is madness and pleasure is worthless (2:2).
- The problem with the Preacher’s pursuit of pleasure is that he sought pleasure apart from God. He was after a pursuit of sensual, material pleasure (alcohol, possessions, and sex).

1. The pursuit of pleasure in alcohol is worthless (3).

- This pursuit is very sensual and self-centered.
- The reference to the heart connotes determination and focus.
- The purpose: he wanted to see “what is worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.”
 - Death is presented as the Preacher’s adversary (“few days”) and this goes well with the theme of vanity (which can also mean “mist” or “vapor”, life is so fleeting).
- The biggest question is: what does it mean that he was “guided by wisdom”?
 - Options: 1) this means he kept his drinking under control and didn’t get intoxicated or 2) he went all out to see just what wine had to offer (so Enns, Bartholomew, Longman).
 - His approach is contrary to wisdom in Proverbs:

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things” (Prov. 23:29-33).

- Reference to “wisdom” is ironic. “We start to realize that what Qohelet calls ‘wisdom’ is something quite different from what Proverbs calls ‘wisdom,’ and...it starts to become apparent that his use of ‘wisdom’ is ironic” (Craig Bartholomew).
 - One hint is in the follow-up phrase, “to lay hold on folly.” He seems to leave no stone unturned rather than holding back in his quest (cf. 2:10).
 - So...he plunges into pleasure but part of him stands back (i.e. “my heart still guiding me with wisdom”) to see what this does to man.
- Some thoughts on alcohol:
 - Let’s not go farther than what Scripture says: drunkenness is sin (Eph. 5:18).
 - Another reaction is to swing the pendulum in the complete opposite direction against legalism and to flaunt freedom found in the gospel.
 - If anyone ever started saying, “You cannot be a Christian and drink alcohol,” I’ll reply, “Pass the bottle on over. I’ll take a glass.”
 - On the other hand, let’s not ignore the stern warnings from Scripture about the dangers of alcohol.
 - It’s also wrong to drink with a person who is being tempted or drawn into something that they just spent six years trying to get free from.

Ills: Josh Hamilton - outfielder for the Texas Rangers and 2010 American League MVP. In 1999, he was the #1 overall pick by the Tampa Bay Rays. He was banned from baseball in 2003 for drug

and alcohol abuse and wasn't reinstated until 2006 and is drug-tested three times a week. He didn't debut in the Majors until 2007 with the Cincinnati Reds. On Oct. 6, 2005, he vowed to stay sober but he had a relapse in 2009 (which was his first drink in almost 4 years) and most recently this past week he had a relapse. "I cannot take a break from my recovery," Hamilton said. "My recovery is Christ. My recovery is an everyday process. When I take that one day off, it leaves me open for a moment of weakness and it's always been that way." ESPN reported that Hamilton had worked to avoid even the smell of alcohol, something his teammates have respected. They have even catered their postseason celebrations for him by having ginger ale and water showers before breaking out the champagne after winning a playoff series. You think alcohol will bring lasting pleasure, look at Josh Hamilton's example and learn.

2. The pursuit of pleasure in possessions is worthless (4-8a).

- a. Here we see the usefulness of the fictional association with Solomon. Who built more than he? His projects are written about in the historical books (1 Kings 7:1-12; 9:15; 2 Chron. 8:1-6) and Song of Songs 7:1 associates him with vineyards. Who had more gold and silver than he? (see 1 Kings 10:14-25; 2 Chron. 9:27).
- b. These works are still self-centered. Notice the continual reference to "self."
- c. His possessions: 1) buildings, 2) various horticultural projects: gardens, parks, trees, pools, 3) slaves, 4) cattle, 5) wealth: gold, silver, and treasure, 6) singers, and 7) concubines (see below).
- d. Recreating Paradise:
 - i. There are numerous similarities between this section and Gen. 1 and 2
 - ii. The Preacher is not only posing as a king, but now as God. He has created a secular Garden of Eden with no forbidden fruits (see Kidner).
- e. Why would he not be satisfied? Why does this not bring pleasure? He seems to be posing this question: "What can *I*, the superwise king, do so that I will be remembered, something to give lasting meaning to these fleeting days spent on earth?" (Peter Enns). What can I do that will have lasting quality? His answer: nothing (2:10-11).
- f. Possessions can be lost in a minute (rot, rust, fire, be stolen, fire, etc.).
- g. We value possessions because we long for comfort. If we have everything then we'll be comfortable and lack nothing.
 - i. We get a high from new stuff and this high rarely even wears off before it is replaced with something newer. "Those new clothes, that new house, this new car, the new gadget; whatever you collect just feels good for a second and makes everything settle for a moment. But if given too long, it loses its power, and it will be time for something new. The new is intoxicating—and most of us are too inebriated with the stuff of future garage sales to realize we're drinking sand" (Matt Chandler).

3. The pursuit of pleasure in relationships and sex is worthless (8b).

- a. Solomon was also a well-known lover and this is what contributed to his downfall (1 Kings 11:1-3).
- b. Relationships and sex are beautiful gifts from God. He created them. But when they are elevated above what God created them for, everything gets distorted and they leave nothing but heartache and disappointment. You will never find another person who completes you. "A fling, a fantasy, a boyfriend or girlfriend—even a spouse—is not going to satisfy what has gone wrong in you. Only Jesus will do that. Because your heart is broken. You need a Savior, and no one person can fix it" (Matt Chandler).

4. The pursuit of pleasure in God is the only worthwhile toil in life (9-11).

- a. The result of the Preacher's toil is that he became great. He bears all the marks of royalty and greatness.
- b. He did all of this with wisdom. He lived better and celebrated life harder than anyone else and yet he did it while retaining wisdom. This means that he "kept his mind alert to evaluate possible benefits during the sensual experience" (Longman).
- c. He exercised no restraint, no self-denial. He fully explored all of these delights. 2:10 is similar to Gen. 3:6:

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

- d. BUT...his toil was vanity, a striving after the wind (left empty-handed), and nothing was gained under the sun. What real meaning is there in finding joy here and now knowing that death brings all such things to naught? What plagues the Preacher is not the absence of temporary meaning, but the absence of lasting meaning.
- e. If the king, "who is wise beyond all others and has at his disposal all earthly resources, can arrive at only such a conclusion, then nothing more can be expected from commoners" (Peter Enns).
- f. Blaise Pascal, speaking to man's attempt to fill his life with happiness from his surroundings says, "But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself."

The gospel: Jesus came for your joy. The following excerpts are from the tract, "For Your Joy."

God is the **source** of full and lasting pleasure: "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). He sent Christ to suffer "that he might **bring us to God**" (1 Peter. 3:18). This means that God sent Christ to bring us "the deepest and longest joy a human can have. Hear then the invitation: Turn from 'the fleeting pleasures of sin' (Hebrews 11:25) and come to 'pleasures forevermore.' Come to Christ" (from the *For Your Joy* booklet by Piper). You can come to Christ today by *repenting* of your sin (i.e. turning from all the deceitful promises of sin) and placing your *faith* in Christ (i.e. trusting in all of God's promises for you in Jesus). Jesus says, "He who believes in me will never thirst again" (John 6:35).

Some of you are here today because you have sought after pleasure in alcohol, drugs, sex, possessions and you've come to the same conclusion as the Preacher...it's worthless.

- Have embraced God in Jesus Christ as the greatest means of joy in your life?

Some of you are here today and this is your story. You're pursuing pleasures in alcohol, drugs, sex, and possessions and you haven't yet come to the Preacher's conclusions.

- It's just a matter of time. Wisdom for you today would be to embrace the Preacher's conclusions, repent and turn to a greater joy and delight in God.

Some of you are here today and this story is foreign to you. You haven't sought after pleasures through alcohol, drugs, sex, and possession and you're probably even wondering, "Do I have to experience this pleasure to come to these conclusions?" The answer is no. Wisdom is trusting in God's purposes and his plans and following him wholeheartedly.