

The Eye Was Satisfied, but the Heart Was Still Empty

Ecclesiastes 2:7-11; Proverbs 30:7-9

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The eyes of a man, woman, or child can take in a lot of sights which they would consider to be very desirable. Every day people cast their eyes upon many desirable things in this life: new cars, fashionable clothing, sumptuous food, interesting books, beautiful houses, high-speed computers etc. But with most of them, the mere seeing these items will definitely not lead to receiving these items. Most people simply lack the resources, so they must learn to live within their means. Because most people cannot receive everything they see, they may be tempted to question at times whether this or that would, in fact, bring them the joy and satisfaction they feel they are missing in life. "If only I could have _____ (you fill in the blank), I would be filled with such joy and satisfaction." What is it that you can see with your eyes that you believe would bring that lasting joy if you only had it?

Solomon has written the inspired Book of Ecclesiastes in order to correct such wrong thinking. For whatever his eye saw and his heart desired he grabbed it. He had no lack of resources that hindered him from getting whatever he saw and desired. If satisfying the eye of man could bring a person an enduring happiness, Solomon should have enjoyed more happiness than any person that ever lived; for he was rich beyond imagination. Yet, the faithful testimony of Solomon, who did not refuse his eye anything it desired, was that everything his eye desired was utterly incapable of bringing him closer to true joy and contentment.

You and I will never (in this life) be able to receive all that our eyes behold and desire. But we need not be able to do so in order to know that we will end up just as empty as when we began, for God has told us this will be the case through Solomon, who did receive all that his eyes saw and heart desired. How self-destructive we are when we allow our eyes and desires to lead us into such sins of envy, covetousness, and discontentment. We become utterly miserable. We hate our lives. We hate others who have what we want. In the state of discontentment, we are miserable and we want to make everyone around us as miserable as we are. This, I submit, is self-destructive. By our actions we (in effect) spit on God's blessings, treating the many mercies of God as if they were raw sewage. It is a grievous sin against the goodness, faithfulness, mercy, and love of our holy God, who has blessed us with so much. Let us repent of such sins before the mercy seat of our Savior, even now where we sit.

As we consider our text today, let us note the following main points: (1) Solomon Sought for Joy in Wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:7-8); (2) Solomon Sought for Joy in Music (Ecclesiastes 2:8); (3) Solomon's Search for Joy Was Empty (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11).

I. Solomon Sought for Joy in Wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:7-8).

A. So far in Ecclesiastes 2, Solomon has personally sought for a lasting joy and contentment in mirth and laughter (verses 1-2), in wine and food (verse 3), in various building projects (verses 4-6), and yet Solomon's search continues for that peace that passes all understanding.

B. Solomon next increased his wealth greatly in order that he might bring his tedious and exhausting search to an end—but to no avail. There were only endless days and nights in which joy eluded him again and again and again. There are three areas wherein Solomon specifically enlarged his wealth.

1. The FIRST area wherein Solomon enlarged his wealth in order to find an enduring joy

was in multiplying SERVANTS unto himself (both male and female servants). The excessive number of servants engaged by a ruler of that part of the world was an indication of his great wealth. For servants had to be supported and provided for by their masters. So the more servants meant the more wealth on the part of the master that owned them. Servants were part of the household and were cared for accordingly. Note that Solomon says he had servants that were born in his house and were, therefore, considered members of his household. These servants, born in his house, were literally called “sons of my house” in Ecclesiastes 2:7 (servants bought or born into the house of the priest were entitled even to eat the holy food of the altar as a family member, which no one else was permitted to eat according to Leviticus 22:10-11). These servants were not trash to Solomon, but were like “sons” of his household, for whom he faithfully provided. Solomon says concerning these servants and maidens, “I GOT FOR ME servants and maidens.” The Hebrew word for “got” also means “buy.” In fact, this very Hebrew word is used by the Lord in regard to buying a bondservant in Exodus 21:2. Did Solomon sin in buying servants? Was it contrary to God’s Law to own another human being? Of course, no one can own another person’s soul or conscience, for God alone is lord of the conscience. But we shall see that a master may own the body of a bondservant (as it relates to the bondservant’s work). The Scripture, in fact, distinguishes between a bondservant that was owned and a hired servant that was not owned (Leviticus 22:10-11). In some cases it was NOT contrary to God’s Law to own servants, but in one notable case it was always contrary to God’s Law to do so.

a. IT WAS NOT CONTRARY TO GOD’S LAW TO OWN SERVANTS IN THE FOLLOWING CASES (NOR DO I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE UNLAWFUL TO DO SO IN THE PRESENT AGE). For the cause of servitude in each of these cases yet remains in all nations.

(1) One who was the spoil of a just war (Deuteronomy 21:10). Not just any war, but a just war.

(2) One who was a poor and destitute brother and voluntarily became a bondservant (Leviticus 25:39-46).

(3) One who was a thief that must make restitution for what he had stolen (Exodus 22:2-3).

(4) One who voluntarily became a bondservant due to the benefits he received from his master (Exodus 21:5-6).

(5) As we see, poverty was not remedied by the civil government, but by the family. There was no national welfare program to provide for those who were capable of working but fell into bankruptcy. Such a person indentured himself (and perhaps his family as well) until his debt was paid off and he was able to get on his feet again (at least for those who were Israelites it was temporary—7 years, Exodus 21:2). Also note, there was no racial servitude in the Scriptures as was sinfully practiced in the United States at one time. Servitude was not an issue of race in the Bible, but one chiefly of how to care for the poor who needed help.

(6) There is a wonderful application of the law of servitude that is found in Psalm 40:6 where the Lord Jesus comes to do the will of His Father and uses the same language of voluntary servitude that is used in Exodus 21:5-6 as it relates to boring a hole in the ear (see also Hebrews 10:5-7). If all forms of servitude were inherently sinful, such language of servitude used here by the Lord would be inappropriate in any sense (even in a spiritual sense). Because Christ figuratively had His ear bored as a bondservant to persevere in doing the will of God, you are redeemed from being the bondservants of Satan to being the bondservants of God (Romans 14:4; 1 Corinthians 9:19; Galatians 4:7). Dear ones, have you voluntarily offered your ear to be bored (in a figurative sense) as a token of your love and gratitude to God as your Father who has made you His own heirs and has made you joint heirs with His only begotten Son? What more could the Lord do to show His everlasting love for unworthy sinners like you and me? Let us lay our heads today against the door and voluntarily have our ears (spiritually) bored in love and obedience to our Savior.

b. IT WAS ALWAYS CONTRARY TO GOD’S LAW TO OWN SERVANTS IN THE FOLLOWING CASE.

(1) One who had been kidnapped or stolen against his will (Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7). Man-stealing was always sinful.

(2) In fact, it was a capital crime to kidnap a man and to sell him. Thus, it would also be criminal to knowingly buy one who was kidnapped as well; for it is a crime not to return stolen property whenever you find it and can do so. Therefore, how much more of a crime it is not to return to his/her freedom a stolen person made in the image of God (unless one purchased a person that was kidnapped in order to set him free). On the basis of this, it should be evident that the form of servitude practiced in the United States wherein people were kidnapped from their own country (Africa or any other country) and were sold here was a crime worthy of death.

(3) Dear ones, if to rob a brother of his freedom is a grievous sin and crime, is it not a heinous sin in the sight of God to rob a brother of his good name by dragging it maliciously through the mud? A person’s name is as precious to him as is his very own life. Even when it is necessary to warn others concerning the sins of professing brethren, it is not necessary to hate the brother, or to demonize the brother, or to tarnish every area of the brother’s life and character. Love compels us not to destroy our brethren with our words and deeds (even if they have offended us or are walking scandalously). There will never be restoration in love and in the truth with brethren if such sin continues in our thoughts, words, or deeds.

c. You may think you do not have any servants in your house, and in a strict sense, you probably don’t. However, we all have many “servants” in a more general sense in our house. Think of all the modern conveniences that we have to serve us every day: electric refrigerators instead of ice boxes to preserve food; gas/electric stoves and ovens instead of wood stoves; gas/electric washing machines and driers instead of the washboard; indoor water and plumbing instead of fetching water from the stream or having to go out to an outhouse in the cold of winter; and cars and airplanes instead of carriages. Have you considered how blessed you are to have all of these “servants”? Are you taking these “servants” for granted that God has given to you?

2. The SECOND area wherein Solomon enlarged his wealth in order to find an enduring joy was in acquiring great herds of CATTLE (Ecclesiastes 2:7). No doubt Solomon needed an enormous amount of cattle just to feed his enormous household.

3. The THIRD area wherein Solomon enlarged his wealth in order to find a lasting joy and contentment was in gathering SILVER AND GOLD (Ecclesiastes 2:8). Not only could Solomon swim in the amount of silver and gold he possessed if he had wanted to, but he continued to add to his great wealth (by way of tribute or taxes) from the neighboring kingdoms that served him (1 Kings 10:27).

a. Dear ones, money is not evil in itself. There is nothing wicked in being rich in itself. However, God tells us through the Apostle Paul that “the LOVE of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). In other words, when we fall in love with money (whether we have it or don’t have it but want it), such covetousness leads us into all manner of sin and temptation (as Paul makes clear in 1 Timothy 6:10,17-19). With money comes the temptation to be proud (forgetting that it is God that has blessed us with the riches that we have), the temptation to trust in our riches as that which supplies our own needs (rather than in the living God), and the temptation to glory in our power, wherein we are tempted to think that the rules that apply to everyone else do not apply to us, because we are rich.

b. This is why the wise Agur (Proverbs 30:7-9) taught us to pray the following prayer: Read it. Agur prays that God would keep him from two extremes: (1) ABJECT POVERTY wherein he is unable to provide even the necessities of life for himself and his family; and (2) EXCESSIVE WEALTH wherein he is able to obtain whatever his eyes see and his heart desires. Again, remember that neither extreme is sinful in itself. Agur, however, prays for a sufficiency in order that he might avoid the temptations of both extremes (as found in Proverbs 30:9). The inspired words of Paul on the subject of being content in all circumstances is

to the point (whether we have enough to pay the bills or whether we struggle in not having enough to pay the bills): Read Philippians 4:11-12.

c. Dear ones, most people around the world would consider us (in our present circumstances) to be wealthy by comparison to what they have. They may look at us and think, “How could you not be thankful and happy with all that you have?” Has the Lord allowed you to go hungry? Has the Lord put you out into the streets? Has the Lord stripped you naked of all clothing and protection? He has promised to provide for all your needs (Philippians 4:19) as you cease from worry and trust Him day by day.

d. Do not forget that God graciously supplies us with the riches that we have, not only to provide for ourselves and for our family, but also to provide for the ministry of the Church in promoting the Kingdom of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:13-14) and to provide for those who are in need (Ephesians 4:28).

e. Solomon was one who could have whatever his eyes beheld and whatever his heart desired (with the mere snap of a finger). And yet this same Solomon tells us that enduring joy is not found in the accumulation of wealth. Dear ones, heed the inspired words of Solomon (who had it all), when he says, “Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Proverbs 23:4-5).

II. Solomon Sought for Joy in Music (Ecclesiastes 2:8).

A. As I have noted before, Solomon was not a warrior like his father, David. Solomon was at heart an artist. He loved fine art whether in food and beverages, whether in architecture, or whether in music. Solomon gathered to himself the best vocalists that could be found in order to perform for him. Whatever the style of music that would be most pleasing to the ear and would bring the greatest amount of pleasure, Solomon acquired it. He could afford to have a concert with the best choir and the best musicians to enjoy every day and every night. He made a thorough search to see if a lasting joy could be found in a pursuit of music. No doubt, there was a temporary enjoyment with the finest of music, just as there was with the finest of food and drink. However, as with a gourmet meal, the enjoyment quickly subsides once one gets up from the table, so with exquisite music, the satisfaction quickly diminishes once the last note sounds. Then there is the silence and the quiet of the night, and all that can be heard is the crying out of an empty soul that cannot find a lasting contentment. For life is not wealth. Life is not music. Life is Jesus Christ. And without Christ, one cannot find a lasting joy in either wealth or in music.

B. The two Hebrew words used here in Ecclesiastes 2:8 for “musical instruments” are only used this one time in all of the Old Testament (in fact only this one time in all of Hebrew literature that is presently available to us). Thus, the meaning of these words is very uncertain. Whatever they mean, we can say this with certainty: these words further describe the phrase they follow: “and the delights of the sons of men.” And these two words are essentially the same word—first in the singular, and second in the plural forms. Thus, if these words refer to musical instruments, the literal meaning would be “a musical instrument and musical instruments.” However, there also exists the possibility (according to various Hebrew scholars) that these two Hebrew words refer to “a wife, and wives” or to “a concubine and concubines”, due to these words being possibly derived from the Hebrew word for the “breast of a woman”. In which case, this would only add to Solomon’s experience in order to find true joy and happiness, in that he sought for contentment in life by means of sexual intimacy with many different wives and concubines (which we see was actually the case with Solomon according to 1 Kings 11:1-3).

1. We must condemn the polygamous marriages of Solomon (as well of Abraham, Jacob, David, and all others that practiced it) as being contrary to the original institution of marriage as stated by God in Genesis 2:24, and as being contrary to the precept of God in Leviticus 18:18 (the preferred translation is

this: “Neither shalt thou take one wife to another”) and contrary to the precept of God in 1 Corinthians 7:2. How could David, a man after God’s own heart, fall into the sin of polygamy? Remember that David also fell into the sin of murder and adultery. Likewise, Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived (apart from the Lord Jesus Christ), fell away from the Lord and embarked upon this worldly search to find true joy and contentment. Likewise, the high places were not removed by certain righteous kings (even though they were clearly sinful). The sins of the saints are manifest to us all in order that the amazing grace of God might be more manifest and glorious against the dark backdrop of man’s sin. If Solomon refers in Ecclesiastes 2:8 to the multiplication of wives and concubines as another place that he sought to find lasting joy, he again came up empty. Sexual intimacy is not sinful in a lawful marriage, but sexual intimacy in any context cannot bring lasting joy, satisfaction, or contentment. If it could, Solomon would not have needed to continue to add to his harem.

2. Those of you, who are not yet married, do not think for a moment that sexual intimacy will in and of itself bring you the joy that is missing in your life. It is true that Paul says that it is better to marry than to burn with lustful desires (1 Corinthians 7:9). However, if one believes that a lasting joy will automatically follow from sexual intimacy, he/she is truly deluded. Sexual intimacy without spiritual intimacy with Christ will only lead to frustration, discontentment, and (in some cases) to sexual immorality of various kinds. Sexual intimacy can only be enjoyed (as God intended) when it is within a lawful marriage and flows from love for Christ and love for one’s spouse.

III. Solomon’s Search for Joy Was Empty (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11).

A. We now come to the same conclusion that Solomon had reached in Chapter One. In Chapter One, Solomon had conducted an investigation into all of the activities of man by way of his own observation of men in general, and he came to this conclusion: Read Ecclesiastes 1:13-14. Now in Chapter Two, Solomon has conducted an experiential investigation into all the pleasures that his own eye might behold or his own heart might desire, and he came to this conclusion: Read Ecclesiastes 2:11. All of Solomon’s personal experiences were not only VANITY (i.e. a vapor that was momentary and fleeting, that boasted greatly of bringing joy and satisfaction, but did not deliver what was promised), but all his personal experiences were also VEXATION OF SPIRIT as well. In other words, Solomon was not only left with an emptiness or a nothingness from his search, but also there was a painful gnawing at his soul, which tormented him. As a result, Solomon concludes, not only from his observation of men in general, but also from his own personal experience of not denying himself any pleasure he beheld or desired, that there is “no profit under the sun.” Solomon says in effect, “When you pursue joy in the creation apart from the joy of the Lord, you will find that joy, satisfaction, and contentment are always just out of your grasp.”

B. Dear one, do you really think you can search more fully the pleasures the world has to offer than did Solomon? Can you grasp all of the pleasures your eye beholds or your heart desires? Jesus said it so well in Luke 12:15: Read it. Of what would you say your life consists? Whatever your life consists of, that is the God whom you are serving. Our lives, as Christians, consist of Christ. If our lives consist of anything else, we will not know that enduring joy and contentment that comes from enjoying Christ.

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