

Hedonism's Empty Well

Ecclesiastes

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We are continuing on in our series of the book of Ecclesiastes. Last week we took a brief break to that addressing something that I felt that led to speak upon, but today we are back in our series and we're going to be looking at Ecclesiastes 2, primarily verses 1 through 11. Thus far as we've gone through the letter to Ecclesiastes, we've seen a few different concepts. We saw the identity of the preaching and we recognized that that preacher is Solomon. Solomon is the preacher in the story here. It is his life that is being put on display for us.

We see the preacher's cry, "Vanity, Vanity, all is vanity." Then he asks basically the enigmatic question that will permeate the entire book, "What does man gain by all of his toil which he toils under the sun?" And then as he begins, he gives us a prologue. After he cries out, "Vanity of vanities, what does man gain," he gives us this prologue by which the entire book is going to need to be read through and in that prologue we saw the myth of progressivism, that there is truly nothing new under the sun, and then the last time we were together looking at this book, we saw the story that Solomon wishes to give us now where he goes into his search for meaning, his quest for answers, and the first means by which he begins to look for meaning in this life, is there any way to find victory over vanity under the sun, first he seeks those answers through his wisdom and knowledge. Perhaps if I simply study enough and if I utilize my wisdom and all of my knowledge, there I will find victory over this vanity, and yet again in that beginning of his quest, he came up empty and not only empty, we are told that he left more sorrowful than when his journey began for he said, "In much wisdom there is much vexation, and where there is an increase of knowledge, there is an increase in sorrow." Today his search continues but instead of wisdom and knowledge, this time he tries a new avenue, a new path that might finally rid him of the vanity that he has seen under the sun. Today he will try the path of pleasure.

Let us look at God's word. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11.

1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. 2 I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?" 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. 4 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. 7 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. 8 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. 9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 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. 11 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.

Let us pray.

Father God, this morning let us see the empty well of hedonism, the empty well of seeking a life solely for the pursuit of sinful pleasure. God, open our eyes to see where we are running after these same broken paths today, let us see where we are drinking from these broken cisterns which not only leave us famished but more broken than we were when we first drank of them, and let us see the glorious, delightful, joyous pleasure that is found alone in your Son Jesus Christ. Let our hearts be overwhelmed by his beauty and majesty for there is pleasures forevermore at your right hand. God, open our hearts, move our will away from the wicked pleasures that we so often run after and open our eyes to see your glory that we might feast upon it with perfect delight. God, open our hearts this morning and give us an appetite for you. We say all of these things in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The title of today's sermon is "Hedonism's Empty Well." Hedonism simply means the pursuit of pleasure but there is also a philosophy of hedonism and that philosophy teaches that pleasure, that is, the satisfaction of your desires, is the highest good and proper aim of human existence, that is, we exist to seek and to go after and to feel every pleasure that we have. That is our ultimate purpose is to live the most pleasing and satisfied life possible.

Now this kind of behavior has been around since the fall but it was really championed and first defined by the ancient philosopher Epicurus, it's where we get Epicureanism from and you've all heard his famous statement, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." So many have followed this path that leads to existential famine because they have come back time and time again to the empty well of hedonism looking for satisfaction only to be left more empty than they were when they first came.

One such man was a great author, his name was Oscar Wilde. If a storm could be embodied, it would have been embodied in Oscar Wilde, the passion, the power and the struggle that existed inside that man. He wore his heart on the sleeve and whatever he did he did with zest and power, and yet when he died, in those sobering moments I believe his reason triumphed in the end. Wilde was big into aesthetics which was a big movement in the time of the Victorian era in England. He wore big colors, bright clothes, and everything he did was meant to scream, "Look at me! Look at me!" He indulged in pleasures and like an anchor tied to his leg, those pleasures drug him deeper and deeper into the abyss of worldliness.

Such pleasures ultimately drew him into the dark depravity of homosexuality, and even worse, pedophilia. During the Victorian Age, it was illegal for one to practice sodomy and therefore he was thrown into prison. While in prison, he wrote what I believe is one of the most powerful pieces of poetry you could ever read, it's called "De Profundis," and in it he talks about how sorrow became his diet every day. After he was released from prison, he then wrote what was called "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," in which he just cries out to God in the whole ballad. Here are some of the lines from it. "Suffering is one very long moment. We cannot divide it by seasons, we can only record its moods and chronicle their return. For us there is only one season, the season of sorrow. The very sun and the moon have been taken from us." The profound sorrow and regret and one of the things that he wrote was, "Terrible as what the world did to me," listen to this, "Terrible as what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still." He was a brilliant man yet he was lost and enslaved to his passions.

Perhaps one moment in his life imprinted on him more than any other, when he was a young boy, his mother looked at the young Oscar and said to him, "When you are as old as I am, young man, you will find out that the only thing worth living for is sin." Oh, how those words were branded on that young man's heart and he spent his whole life living for sin. He could not control his passions and his passions destroyed him from within.

One of his famous works, many of you have read it and if you haven't you should, is the book, "The Picture of Dorian Gray." It could just as easily have been just entitled, "The Picture of Oscar Wilde." It is a book about a man who lives a life of total hedonism. He's a beautiful man by every means but he decides, listening to someone that he has kind of come under their wing, that the best way to live is to fill yourself with total pleasure and satisfaction. He has a picture that has been painted of him and he begins to realize that his heart and the things that he is going through, the things that he goes and lives in this hedonistic lifestyle don't affect him at all, they simply affect the portrait, and so he hides the portrait away because in hiding the portrait away, it hides any guilt of his own sin, his own depravity. So he remains beautiful, untouched by his own choices.

Over time, he comes to realize how empty those pursuits have been and he hates how bad he's been, but he realizes that when he goes to destroy the painting, the painting that reveals how wicked he is, the first thing he notices on the painting is the painting is looking back at him with a look of hypocrisy, and he's come to realize that he didn't come to kill this painting in order to kill his sin, he simply wanted to kill that which convicted

him of his sin. So in desiring to finally destroy that which has cost him the guilt that he feels and the shame, to finally destroy that which reveals how sinful he is, he takes a knife and seeks to dagger it right into the heart of the painting and to those below hear a thud fall to the floor, they run upstairs and in the painting they see a beautiful portrait and on the ground they see a horrible, old, disfigured man with a knife in his heart.

You see, he tried to destroy the portrait that revealed his depravity but in trying to kill his depravity, the only way to do so ended up being to kill himself. You see, the source of his sinfulness was not the picture, it was him. The picture was simply a mere reflection of a depraved heart.

The more that I read about Oscar Wilde, the more I am convinced, beloved, that every time you dabble in that which is desacralized, it reshapes your conscience and reshapes your hungers. The more he got into things that he never ought to have been in, the more he desired them and in his own words, the more he loathed them. So you do not enter into a life of profanity and promiscuity with impunity, beloved. It shapes your hungers and it will trap you and what you thought was going to bring you so much satisfaction only leaves you more empty than ever before. This is the empty well of hedonism and it is exactly where we find our preacher, Solomon, today.

In verse 1 he says,

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

In this passage today, Solomon is going to give us five specific avenues, five specific buckets he dropped into the well of hedonism hoping it would come up with a life spring, a source of life, a source of everlasting satisfaction and every time he dropped his bucket into the well, the nourishment and sustenance lasted only but a short while before he once again found the well totally empty.

The first bucket that he drops into the well of hedonism was he sought a good laugh. He sought pleasure and a good laugh. Verse 2,

2 I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?"

Laughter is a sign we're having a good time and enjoying ourselves and though it is important that having a good laugh, though it is important that we should laugh, laughing is good, laughing is fun and sometimes we just need a good laugh, what's interesting is we shouldn't conflate a good laugh with a good sense of humor because a good sense of humor, some of the most humorous people I know actually laugh very little; you'd almost consider it a dry sense of humor. Laughter can do us great good and oftentimes we can laugh at a situation and in doing so it means we've taken a higher perspective. Laughing at the joke of someone can be an expression of shared love and affection. We need to laugh at ourselves sometimes but the pleasures of laughter can also be a gratification of

cruelty, even expression of hatred or jealousy. Many times our laughing comes at the expense of others.

But most of the time laughter is simply empty. Watch even a clean comedy on television or in a play and compare the after effect with watching a good drama or tragedy. Comedy is light, tragedy is weighty. Comedy is superficial but a good tragedy tugs at our soul and pulls us to the edge of our seat. No one talks about the comedies of Shakespeare talk about the deep tragedies. No one usually lists a comedy as their top movie, their favorite movie. They love movies of heroism, bravery, courage, tragedy, drama because there's weightiness to it, there's substance, and this was certainly the experience of the preacher. In chapter 7, we are going to read, he writes, "Sorrow is better than laughter for by sadness of face, the heart is made glad, for as crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools. This is also vanity."

G. K. Chesterton was a great Christian teacher, even though I totally disagree with him because he was Romanist through and through, he was a Roman Catholic through and through, but he was a good Christian apologist and he had a good sense of humor. There's a story of him walking down the streets in London and in doing so, there was this man trying to move a big grandfather clock to be taken into a repair shop to be fixed, and when the man takes the grandfather clock out of the truck, he swings it around and accidentally knocks Chesterton over on the ground. Laying there on the ground, Chesterton wants to immediately react out of anger at first, but then in seeing the situation, recognizing it was an accident, he looks at the man and simply says, "Why can't you just wear a wristwatch like the rest of us?"

Chesterton was a humorous man but Chesterton was also the one man who said, "The one thing you never find Jesus doing in the Bible is laughing." Now surely, I'm sure he laughed but not once is it mentioned because it's such a temporal fleeting concept. Jesus is spoken of as a man of sorrow yet never will you read of one who is more satisfied and joyful in spite of his sorrow and suffering than Christ. Beloved, laughter can be a smokescreen. "Our war is not against flesh and blood but darkness and spirits and principalities," right? I don't know what that was about. The Holy Spirit's moving, I guess.

But laughter can be a smokescreen. I think more than anything of Robin Williams. Here was a man filled with laughter, humor and comedy. Nobody saw it coming when he hung himself by a door handle because laughter is hevel. It's empty. It's an illusion. It's here and gone and so laughing can be a temporal good, it is not the prescription for lasting joy.

So the preacher continues his search. Perhaps it may not be in the bucket of laughter but how about the bucket of a good drink? A good drink. Surely, pleasure lies in that? Verse 3,

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.

Now this is no attack on drinking a glass of wine, this is no teaching of total abstaining from any source of alcohol. That's not what at all is in the mind of the preacher here. It's not what he's talking about. Here he is talking about delving into drinking in such a way as to elevate him out of a depressed state; to numb him in such a way that he is no longer able to feel the sorrow that his great wisdom has led him to. Wine had become more to him than just simply one of the good things in life to responsibly enjoy, rather it was now a drug to mask the unsatisfied longings of his soul. He had hoped that it might be a stimulant only to find that it was a depressant.

There is a great gulf, beloved, that exists between drinking a glass of wine to enjoy the taste and drinking it in order to dull the conscience. Solomon was hoping that in drowning himself in good drinks he might drive away the despair of his heart; that maybe in those wineskins existed the answer to where one could find lasting pleasure irregardless of those rough side-effects the next morning. He stared into a chalice hoping that he would find the switch that would turn off the record and give him peace and all he saw instead was a reflection of his own emptiness.

The truth of the matter is this: when we look for pleasure in a buzz, we are actually not seeking satisfaction, we are simply looking to escape, and the reason we run are many. Marriage problems. The loss of a child. The loss of a loved one. The loss of a job. The hope of ridding chronic pain in our body. Past trauma that we've endured. There are many problems that we choose to run to the buzz in order to numb ourselves, whatever that may be, what's interesting is the word for "witchcraft" and "sorcery" in the Bible is the Greek word "pharamkeia." It's where we get "pharmaceuticals" from." And so much of witchcraft and sorcery revolved around the use of hallucinogens and psychogenics, these drugs, these opioids and things like that and, beloved, today we see an opiois crisis like never before and here's the truth of the matter: every time we seek the buzz, the next time we'll need to go a little bit further to achieve it and a little bit further and a little bit further until before long our sense of a limit and parameter is totally gone. We just drink or we just smoke or we just shoot up until we finally feel numb and blinded from the world around us. In the buzz we are not seeking satisfaction, we're seeking an escape.

And hoping that he would find lasting pleasure in a good drink, he remained just as empty as the wineskins that laid around him. His song was that of the old English lament, "I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, but all the waters failed. Even as I stooped to drink, they fled and mocked me as I wailed." Satisfaction was not found in a good drink. So it wasn't in a good laugh, it wasn't in a good drink, but there was a third bucket to drop into the well of hedonism and, "This time it wasn't about me. This is more productive, this is good, this will help people. This isn't just me in a room with my alcohol and drinking my sorrows away, and this isn't just me trying to fill myself with empty laughter, this is actually going to be productive. This will be finally the answer to where I can find lasting pleasure and satisfaction. Solomon looks for it in a good project. A good project.

Verses 4 through 6,

4 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

"Surely, surely pleasure and satisfaction are found in these memorials of my great artistic ability and endless finances. If I just continue to create these monuments, these memorials, these great works of beauty that people will fall over and be amazed by, surely, surely then I will know pleasure. Then when I see the project's finished, I'll say, 'Man, look at what I did. Look at the job well done. I did good.' Surely, I'll find pleasure there."

1 Kings 7 gives us a picture of Solomon building his own palace. Listen to what it says. It took Solomon 13 years however to complete the construction of his palace. He rebuilt the palace of the Forest of Lebanon, 100 cubits long, 50 wide and 30 high, with four rows of cedar columns supporting the trim cedar beams. It was rooted with cedar above the beams that rested on the columns, 45 beams, 15 to a row. Its windows were placed in high sets of three facing each other. All the doorways had rectangular frames. They were in the front in sets of three facing each other. He made a colonnade 50 cubits long and 30 wide. In front it was a portico, and in front of that were pillars and an overhanging roof. He built the Throne Hall, the Hall of Justice, where he was to judge and he covered it with cedar from floor to ceiling, and the palace in which he was to live set farther back was similar in design. This guy was an architect. This was a building project like never before. If you think that, I mean, I'm just imagining at this time with the kind of rudimentary things that they would have had at this point in history, he is bringing, importing trees, giant cedars from Lebanon, he is getting the finest things and creating it and putting it all in his architecture. When this is done, I can just see him seething in his mind, thinking upon it, "When this is completed, oh, how satisfied I will be, how much pleasure I will have in my great works."

But not only does he try to find it in building houses and palaces, what about gardening? He says, "Let's take up gardening. Let's create great gardens," and this was something that was very common to kings in the Ancient Near East. We think of the Hanging Gardens in Babylon with King Nebuchadnezzar making them. This was a staple of it showing our royalty, our nobility and our great resources. But what's interesting here is how many words that are used in this garden are directly referring or alluding back to Genesis 1 and 2 in the garden of Eden. Many commentators believe that there is an allusion here to the garden of Eden and whether or not that's true is hard to say. Is Solomon specifically pointing back to the garden and saying, "I'm trying to build my own Eden," or was that just something that is happening within him subconsciously. Regardless of whether or not it was an actual specific means by which he was trying to point back to Eden, the truth of the matter is this: what we are all ultimately trying to do is find our own Eden in this life and we want to work and build to create our own garden of peace, and you know who we want to be the god of that garden? Us. Me. I want to be

the god of my Eden, and so we build these projects whether it is building a tower to the heavens like Babel, or a garden to be our own Eden, we still find ourselves constantly busy moving to the next project or wishing we would have done more with an already completed project. Even in building our Edens and building our towers, we never find satisfaction. It's never enough because we need more than just us in a garden for satisfaction.

Over time, these projects will simply rear their ugly heads as a house of cards, blown down either by the passing of time or the destruction of men. Solomon's temple and palaces would be absolutely leveled, crushed to ruins, to rubble. Solomon looked at all of the works of his hands and though his project list was full, his well of satisfaction remained empty. What else is there? Not in a good laugh. It's not good drink. It's not in a good project. Well, then it has to be in a good life. A good life. Verse 7 through 8,

7 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. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.

Solomon here points to all that he has acquired. He says, "My house is filled with both male and female servants and their children. Anything I need done, any task I need accomplished, anything that I want done for me is simply a snap away. I have servants day and night waiting upon me hand and foot to do whatsoever I don't want to do. They do it for me. My house is filled with people who are there at my every beck and call." And he would need that kind of a workforce. He says that he has herds and flocks that are greater than anyone had ever amassed. And that's true, we're told of pictures of that in 1 Kings 10. Money for him, not an issue. Doesn't need a 401k, fingers crossed praying that Social Security will still be there. No, he says, "The silver and gold of kings and entire provinces are mine.

This is a good life. This is the good life. This is what we all would describe as the good life, right? "You've got everything. You have no need of doing anything that you don't want to do. You can do whatever task you want to do and leave it to the rest or not, and they're probably walking around fanning you and wiping the sweat off your brow. You have unbelievable amounts of resources. If there were ever a famine, if there was ever a need of food, if there was ever a shortage, they would come to you because of the things that you own. And money, let's not even talk about it. Literally to build, to buy and to go and acquire without ever even thinking what it might cost me." Oh, that's the good life, right? So we work our life for 65 years as Americans hoping that we can do, so that we can retire on a beach in Florida, collect seashells, trying to run from our children so they don't put us in a nursing home. That's the good life, right? That's satisfaction, right? The American dream, right? Sipping mimosas on a yacht with servants there to break their backs for you at every beckon, this is pleasure, right?

This is what we need to be satisfied, hired labor, lots of land and a loaded bank account. That's gotta be the answer and Solomon says it was all vanity. It was empty. Why?

Because what's there to live for when you have everything under the sun? What's the reason to go another day, to push a little further, to strive a little harder, to love a little deeper when you have everything you need, or at least you think you do? Beloved, you could amass it all tomorrow and your soul would be just as empty as it was the day before. True pleasure is not found in a filled bank account. It is not filled in a source of worldly security. It's not found in luxury living because deep down inside those things still don't answer anything. They don't answer why are we here. What's our purpose. What is value. What is right. What is wrong. And oftentimes when we are seeking this good life, what is wrong slowly gets pushed further and further away because as Machiavelli said, the ends justify the means, right? Beloved, naked you came into this world and naked you are gonna leave. You ain't taking a U-Haul to heaven or hell.

Solomon found that lasting satisfaction is not found in the worldly notion of the good life so he gives us one more bucket to try. "I've gotta try one more time." It's not in any of those things, perhaps it's gotta be in a good time. Just have a good time." Verses 8-10,

8 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. 9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 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.

Music was a rare pleasure in those days. The man who wrote Ecclesiastes, this preacher, Solomon, could afford to bring it into his own home, engaging entire choirs to sing for him at his own pleasure. The choir could just follow him around and he'd say, "Hey, sing me a song. I'm in a bad mood." And they'd start singing. That's what they would do. And if that wasn't good enough, [unintelligible] this was the modern day iPod and he walked around and this choir that followed him and they'd sing, and if that wasn't a good enough time, how about the largest harem of women ever known to mankind? That's not enough, let's just throw in that. No one has ever been given to more promiscuity than Solomon. When he got tired of one woman, he'd simply marry or take another one into his concubines, to his harem.

Here he speaks of many concubines but 1 Kings 11 gives us a little bit more of the raw statistics: 700 wives and princesses; 300 concubines; more partners than anyone could ever imagine. The erotic luxury of this vast harem was the royal icing of his cake and pleasure, right? Yet at the end of this book, you will see an old man who is filled with 1,000 wives and concubines who can please none of them because age has set upon him. That's vanity.

In verse 9 Solomon says that he had become great and surpassed all those before him in Jerusalem. Laughter, wine, projects, servants, women and song, the Solomon of Ecclesiastes had it all and today his face would be on the cover of Fortune Magazine. He would be in the annual issue of the wealthiest man alive. His home would be featured in a

photo spread of Architectural Digest, the interior and the exterior from the wine cellar to his lavish gardens. Pop stars would sing at his birthday party and supermodels would dangle from his arm. Don't you find it hard not to envy the man? Wouldn't you like to live like a king? All other things being equal, wouldn't you rather have a bigger, nicer house with better, more beautiful views? I'd go up on the hillside and I would look out at what people see up there and it's incredible. I'm covered by these trees but I know there's a beautiful view that exists that way and I've seen those homes and they're nice and they're amazing and I'm like, "Man, that'd be awesome," but I wouldn't want to heat them or pay for that. Don't you wish that you had someone that could do all the work for you, at least the work you didn't want to do? I'd love to have people do the dishes for me. I hate dishes. I'll do anything else, but the dishes are, ah.

Sure, think of all the money Solomon had with all those [unintelligible]. Think about his concubines. Honestly, if you could get away with it, wouldn't you be tempted to grab some of that gusto for yourself? In verse 10 he said, "I kept nothing from myself. Everything my eye could see that it wanted, I took it. If my heart desired it, I got it. There was no end to what I gathered for myself to accrue pleasure, to seek and grow in this hedonistic search and journey." Unfortunately, the Bible warns against such things, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. The Psalmist was warning when he prayed in Psalm 119, "Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways," but Solomon in all his wisdom disregarded God's warning completely. Whenever he spied something he wanted, he took it. Whenever he was tempted to indulge in a fleshly pleasure, he did with no retribution at all. There was nothing he denied himself, nothing visibly entertaining or inwardly satisfying. He did this because he thought he had it coming to him. "I deserve it." Isn't that how we feel sometimes? "I deserve better than this. I deserve more. It's my right to have as much as I can and to lavish myself because I earned it."

The answer that Ecclesiastes gives us regarding what happens to people who pursue passion as their main goal in life and pursue the sinful pleasures of this world as passion is one that we ought to know already based upon what happens when we pursue our own pleasures distant from God. Like Solomon, we have ample opportunity today to indulge in many sinful desires. Generally speaking, we live in climate controlled homes. That's pretty nice. They didn't have that back then. We have portion sizes in this country that are bigger than anyone could ever possibly imagine or need, with this kind of amount of food they put on plates in this country. We go to the grocery store. A grocery store, we take for granted the realities. These people depended on harvests every single year and [unintelligible] when the tomatoes go bad in two days. "Darn you, Costco." We listen to a wide variety of music and as far as sexual promiscuity is concerned, the internet offers an endless supply of virtual partners providing a vast harem for the imagination. We are living in the godless time that Paul described to Timothy when people would be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Everything is offered to us. There is truly nothing unavailable.

So are we satisfied or do we still want more? Greg Easterbook in his book "The Progress Paradox" says we have more of almost everything today as a culture and society except

happiness. Solomon thought if he removed all the parameters and loaded on the pleasures, he would be satisfied but in these worldly pleasures, that he might find in them some beauty, that there might be beauty among the vanity in all of the pleasures and satisfaction that are here under the sun, that I might find the true beauty of life in the midst of these pleasures that the world has to offer, and instead of finding beauty, he found emptiness and destruction instead. Why? I'll give you an example. A campfire is a beautiful thing except for the fact that the smoke always want to go where you are, but what makes the campfire so beautiful, so life-giving, so awesome? It's because it's confined within a parameter, it has boundaries, but the moment those parameters are removed, that campfire goes from being a beautiful sight to a destructive force. Why? Because beauty has parameters, destruction doesn't.

And what did it leave Solomon with? Verse 11,

11 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.

It wasn't in a good laugh. It wasn't in a good drink. It wasn't in a good project. It wasn't in a good life. And it wasn't in a good time. Solomon, what are you telling us? Where are we to turn, then? Is there any pleasure to be found? Is there anything that might finally satisfy our soul? Where is true pleasure to be found?

For many years, Immanuel Kant taught that joy and pleasure should only be unintended consequences of an action, and many Christians championed that, seeking to avoid falling into the dangers of being described as hedonists; that we should simply do our duty to God and if we're given joy in the process, then hey, that's great; that we should just be good moral people no matter what it cost because the suffering or because there's joy, all of that is irrelevant. We should simply seek after duty for duty's sake and for morality's sake. That's Kant's argument. However, I think that that is an absolutely absurd and an impossible notion to follow a disinterested loyal behavior. Why? Because the human will will always incline to what it perceives will bring the most happiness. The will is not autonomous, it will always run after that which it believes will give it the greatest pleasure. Always. The will is chained to the pleasures of the heart.

Pascal, Blaise Pascal, the Christian philosopher, said it right when he wrote, "All men seek happiness without exception. They all aim at this goal, however different the means they use to attain it. They will never make the smallest move but with this as its goal. This is the motive of all the actions of all men, even those who contemplate suicide." Why does someone contemplate suicide? Because they believe that the pleasure of dying is better than living in the suffering here. They believe that happiness exists in that solution more than it exists in going another day. Every decision we make as human beings is made with the presupposition and driving force of, "Will this make me satisfied and happy?" It's what we do. That's what drives us.

Beloved, God has made us in such a way that our heart would constantly be unsettled and unsatisfied until it finds the supreme pleasure and where is this supreme pleasure found? Psalm 16:11, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father and we are told that at the right hand are there pleasures forevermore. That is this meaning, that every pleasure, every desire, every ounce of satisfaction need to drown our soul in bliss for all eternity is found in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

Everyone longs for happiness and the problem with hedonism is not that we long for pleasure, it's not that we long to be satisfied, it's that we let ourselves be satisfied far too easily. We look at porn because we are satisfied far too easily. We drown our sorrows with a buzz because we're satisfied far too easily. We can't wait until marriage because we're satisfied far too easily. And young people and singles, I speak to you. We don't call you to wait, to wait for your precious beloved bride or husband because we want to keep something from you, we are just sick and heartbroken when you rob yourself from the satisfaction that comes in waiting for the time God called you to wait for. We are not keeping you from satisfaction, we're trying to keep you from robbing yourself of satisfaction.

Beloved, everyone is seeking after pleasure and happiness. Turn away from all the cheap substitutes that you keep trying to find satisfaction in and turn to the one who will plant you beside streams of living water where your deepest yearnings will be satisfied for all eternity. Christians, stop seeing this faith as bland and boring. Stop it. The Christian faith is one of the greatest delights and joys and pleasures ever. To belong to Christ is pleasure forevermore and only in our Savior, only in Jesus, can one know true happiness. So stop painting this as some bland faith, some frozen chosen mentality. This is the light.

John Piper is one of my heroes and he has come up with kind of a way of thinking called Christian hedonism and it sounds like an oxymoron but it's not. Basically John Piper's premise in Christian hedonism is this: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. And I believe that it's very true because here's the grand reality: God isn't just glorified in us when we do duty for duty's sake, "Oh, I'm just gonna do it because I don't wanna get in trouble." Man, I think of my oldest, Colt. Colt, man, Colt will be by my side no matter how boring of something I'm doing. Literally last night I was writing and finishing up my sermon and he's like, "Whatta you doing?" I said, "I'm writing a sermon." He said, "Can I just sit here with ya?" I was like, "Yeah! Yeah, you can." And he just sat there and watched me type. I'll take out the trash, "Can I go with you, dad?" We're walking like 25 feet. Yeah. I ask him, "Hey, Colt, can you help me to do this?" I'm getting choked up by this, and he said, "Yeah, I'll do whatever you ask, dad." And it's not because he wants to do something to try and make me proud of him, he's not there yet, he does it because he just delights in me. He delights in me and in 10 years he's not, in 10 years he's not going to want anything to do with me and he's just going to want to do it because he doesn't want to get in trouble.

Beloved, we've become a bunch of deranged teenagers in our Christian faith, who will only do for God because we don't want to get in trouble or be the bad kid in the class. We

need to have a child-like faith and delight in him. He's so wonderful. He is so beautiful, so glorious, and there is more pleasure in him than you could ever imagine. Oh beloved, that you would know of this great God and this great Savior Jesus Christ. Stop going to the wells of this world and being shocked when you find them empty. Come to the well of Christ which runneth over with pleasures forevermore and have your tastebuds quenched by the bread of life and hydrated by rivers of living water. I pray today that you would run from the cisterns of worldly pleasure which are fleeting and often leave you more broken than you were and shameful than you were before you came to them. Beloved, run to the bread of life and the river of living water and have your tastebuds quenched forever. I pray today that if you are like Solomon, burnt by a life of pleasure-seeking, barely being able to look at yourself in the mirror because of the life of shame that came with it all, I want you to know I've been there, my friend, and I'm here to tell you that everything you've ever longed for, every moment of wishing there was something more, something greater, something that wasn't a forbidden fruit plagued with pain from eating it, will be found alone in Jesus Christ. I affirm that to you with the greatest authority of his word and experience today. Beloved, I plead and appeal to you, those who are here and those who are listening to this, turn from the pleasures of this world and taste and see that the Lord is good.

Let us pray.

Father God, oh I thank you for your goodness. I thank you for how wonderful you are and how amazing you are. God, you are so perfect and in you is pleasure forevermore. God, I ask that if there's anyone here today who is still feeding upon the empty wells of this world, that they would come and be satisfied by you; that you would show them, open their eyes, draw them, grab their will and change it that they might see that there is only satisfaction in you. God, I thank you for opening our eyes to see your beauty that we would freely run to you because of the glory which you reveal to us by your grace. As we move into this time of sacrament, God, I ask that you would allow us to reflect deeply on the wells of this world that we are eating from and drinking from, and that you would cause us to put them away and feast upon you perfectly. As we symbolically do so, God, in this Lord's Supper, let us feast upon Christ and all of his perfection and majesty and beauty and reject the empty pleasures this world tries to dangle over us. Thank you. We praise you and we say all of these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.