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Ecclesiastes Revisited - Pleasure & Laughter

Ecclesiastes 2

Prayer: *Father, I just want to thank you for your grace, I thank you for just the gift of You Tube, just the fact that we can actually expand and extend our reach, we're grateful for that. I just continue to pray as we this morning once again open up your book, and Lord, we just thank you for that gift. We pray continually for the presence of your Holy Spirit as we open up your book that you would guide us and that you would bring us into truth and that this truth may be of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well this summer we are looking at the wisdom of God and in particular we're looking at the book of Ecclesiastes. This is Solomon's account of God's wisdom applied to life itself. Last time we saw Solomon as uniquely qualified to comment on life itself because God had given him the ability to experience, experience it in a way that very few people ever had. Solomon had more wisdom, more power, more wealth than any other before or after him; and as we said last time, he was miserable.

So Solomon took his power, he took his wealth, he took his wisdom and his analytical skills and he studied life itself. He said: *I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.* And so he broke down all that's done under the sun into a number of different categories including laughter and pleasure, wine and folly, amusement, sex, work, wealth and finally he looked at wisdom itself. And he found that all of life presented the same four stages of perception. The first discovery was delusion, life is not at all as it appears; that's followed by depression, all of life was essentially meaningless; that led to discernment, God alone gives meaning, which led to deliverance: Fear God and obey his commandments.

So last time we saw how Solomon applied those perceptions to life in general. This time we're going to start looking at the particulars. We're going to focus on the wisdom that God gave Solomon about laughter and pleasure and its pursuit. And when it came to both, Solomon was uniquely qualified to comment. He approached both laughter and pleasure like he approached all aspects of life, he approached it analytically.

In chapter 2 he said this, he said: *I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure,*

"What use is it?" So again we picture the analytical Solomon, he's got clipboard in hand and he's analyzing all these different aspects of laughter and pleasure that he's experiencing.

Understand, the laughter that he's speaking of here, it's not the fun laughter of somebody taking a light view of things, in fact it's its exact opposite, it's the laughter of the cynic. Solomon examines the emptiness of seeking all the various pleasures of life and then he goes in depth into one of the false ways of handling its failure to deliver, and that false way is cynicism. Solomon also went full bore after pleasure. In this case it was the pleasure of work itself. He said -- quote -- *"for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil."*

So like I said, Solomon's wisdom was a blessing and it was also a curse. The blessing was that he saw both laughter and pleasure exactly as it was without any of the blinders. The curse was that he saw laughter and pleasure exactly as it was without the blinders. He saw the real unvarnished truth about laughter and its pleasures and he realized just like that famous line that Jack Nicholson once answered, that we can't handle the truth. In fact nobody can because it's just too painful. And so we invent myths about life and pleasure itself and the beauty of the circle of life and we all know deep down it's all phony, it's all made up. We just refuse to face the facts. Well, Solomon faced them head on.

In fact he said: *The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness.*

And so again, this was step one for Solomon, this was recognizing the delusion of life. And he knew that pleasure, even the pleasure that work had given him was just a distraction from the crushing pointlessness of life. We saw last time what Solomon saw, that life consists of these endless cycles of wind and water and strife and labor and it all looks so busy and so worthwhile but it all amounts to absolutely nothing. It amounts to vanity, futility and a chasing after the wind. The wisest man who ever lived discovered the ultimate weakness of all the pleasures of life under the sun, as singer Paul Simon once put it, "Everything put together sooner or later falls apart." Solomon discovered what renders every aspect of life, from the trivial to the crucial, as meaningless and do you know what it is? It's the passage of time.

Allow me to illustrate just starting with the trivial. As many of you know I am blessed or cursed to be a big fan of the New York football Giants. And again I know exactly why I am, my dad was a big fan, he used to take me to games. I actually saw Frank Gifford play in the Polo grounds, if that means anything to anybody under 60. Probably doesn't. But Steve Weingartner, who's sitting right there, hates football with a passion. He thinks it's the dumbest

waste of time on planet earth. So he's always giving me a hard time for watching the Giants. One day to his credit he actually tried to watch a football game. He didn't last very long. He couldn't take it. So he called me and he asked me, "how can you watch grown men in costumes pushing a ball around a stadium for points?" He said, "It's so meaningless." Well, my answer to Steve was not an explanation of or instructions about football, in fact I was in complete agreement with him. I said, "Steve, I absolutely agree, football is absolutely ultimately pointless." But then I pointed out what Solomon points out, and whether it's trivial or whether it's crucial, it doesn't really matter because everything in time becomes pointless. And whether it's nuclear medicine, international politics or the latest innovation in computer technology or watching football, they are all in the great scheme of things pointless; not equally pointless, but ultimately pointless to be sure. And as Solomon puts it, he says: *When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.* You see, Solomon understood that time renders everything from the sublime to the ridiculous as pointless.

And again to go back to football, I mean, ask me who won the Super Bowl five years ago. Don't know, don't care. When the Giants won

the Super Bowl I cared for a while, a couple of days, but that happened so long ago and time has rendered that victory basically pointless. Do I really care that the Giants won the Super Bowl in 2004, 2005 or whenever they won it? I mean I cared then. I really don't care now nor does anybody else really.

So let's pick something more important than football. Let's pick politics. I mean things are starting to heat up right now because we're starting to get into the midterm elections, and I would certainly agree that's a lot more important than a football game. There's going to be hundreds of millions of dollars spent on this campaign and it's all going to be center stage, and the media's going to talk about nothing but that for the next two years. But let me ask you a question about politics and time. Basic simple question: Who was our 22nd president? I bet you don't know and I bet you don't care. It was Grover Cleveland. Now do you care? I mean do you see how time has made him more or less pointless? I mean I guarantee you that he was not pointless in 1885 when he was elected. All it took was the passage of time and Grover Cleveland has become almost completely meaningless.

Well what about something more important than football or politics? What about someone who actually labored in the field of life itself? Surely that's a life with meaning. Let me tell you about

a man who excelled in celebrating preserving life itself. This was a man who claimed to be a Christian but actually he held rather heretical views of Christ. I've spoken about this man before. He was incredibly significant in his time and that was really only a short time ago. I just want to see how many of us remember him, see if his life still has meaning. So I'm going to describe him.

First of all, he was a theologian, in my view a very bad one; but he published lots of different books about the Bible. He was a scholar, he was the pastor of a Lutheran church, he was also a classical musician so gifted that his reinterpretation of Bach revolutionized the whole genera. He was a philosopher. He actually started the Reverence for Life movement. And lastly he was a physician. This is a guy who later in life decided to take up medicine and he became a surgeon. This is a guy who earned doctorates, four separate earned doctorates in philosophy, theology, music and medicine. Earned doctorates means you don't just show up and get an honorary degree at a commencement exercise, you submit your thesis and you defend it, all of that stuff. He had four of them. He won the Nobel peace prize in 1952 for his reverence for life. And he took that money and he used the proceeds to set up clinics in Africa where he healed thousands and thousands of people. He spent most of the end of his life working among the poorest of poor in Africa. I mean you talk about a

significant life. For many, many years he was known by everyone and he only died in 1965. And so I'm looking for a show of hands here. How many of you know who I'm talking about? Two. Two. Okay. How many of you have ever heard about Albert Schweitzer? Even having heard the name?

You know, way back when, this was years ago when I was preparing my message, I said, do you know who Albert Schweitzer was? And one of my kids who will remain nameless said, "Doesn't he go to our church?" The man only died in 1965. I mean he lived a marvelous life, but he's dead and gone. He did wonderful things to help preserve life but look what time has done. I mean all those people that he helped, they're all gone as well. All the people that he went to Africa to save, all of the people in all of the clinics that he had established back in the 50's and 60's, they're all dead now. Time has made their lives insignificant.

So tell me, what was the meaning of Albert Schweitzer's life? What was the point of all the good that he did? I mean it's a little more than half a century since his death and he's pretty much been forgotten. I mean, his name is well on its way to Solomon's point in *Ecclesiastes 1:11*, he says: *There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them.*

You see, Steve was right, football really is pointless but time makes everything in life ultimately pointless. That's the big secret that Solomon discovered. You see Solomon's wisdom was Solomon's curse. He saw what everybody else refuses to look at. He saw what we cover up with busyness and endlessly repeated cycles of life that appear to give us meaning but don't. They don't have meaning because they're merely temporary. Solomon said: *And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

If you remember, last time I asked you if you could remember your great great great great grandfather on your mother or your father's side and I don't think anybody could. And we can't because time has made their lives pointless as well. Solomon in his wisdom saw that and it distressed him greatly. I mean he spent most of his time trying to find the point of his life and he learned that much of life was simply a pursuit of pleasure as a distraction from the meaninglessness of life. You know, Solomon could have written us last week instead of centuries ago because the exact same situation exists today. Solomon tried to embrace each of life's pleasures with his mind -- quote -- *"still guided by wisdom."* And after all

was said and done, he found that pleasure was a gift of God given only as a means to an end and never, never as an end in itself.

Solomon found that pleasure as an end in itself was completely meaningless. And then he took a step back at laughter as a solution to the meaninglessness of pleasure. This is what he said. He said: *I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?"* Again we're not talking about the laughter of a good joke or a funny story. The Hebrew term for laughter here is the word "sehoq," it means the laughter of derision, of making sport, of mockery. Today we call it cynicism. You know, if you're bitter and angry you are what the Bible calls a mocker or a scoffer. If you're bitter and funny, you're a cynic. Solomon spoke of this type of laughter, he said this, he said: *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.* You see, the humor of the cynic, it's not healthy humor, it's the laughter that it produces is derisive laughter. It's not healthy at all. It's a laughter with no affection between the laugher and the laughee.

We have folks today who are known for being cynical. We have folks like Ricky Gervais, we have Dave Chappelle, most of you remember

radio personality Don Imus. He's what I would call a classic cynic. He was both a bitter and funny man. And you know, a few years ago he stepped over the line one time too many, made a derisive joke about blacks and he wound up getting fired. I mean, his was actually the first real exposure to what we now call cancel culture. And after he was fired the very people, the very guests on his own show, they bit and devoured him and the response took him completely by surprise because Don Imus is no Solomon. You see, Solomon knew that true cynicism offers and expects no mercy and no grace, and he embraced it wide-eyed and open-minded and in his wisdom he found laughter also just didn't deliver. After he said it was foolishness.

And what does this cynical pleasure accomplish? Well, cynicism produces one thing, it produces cynics. Cynicism never knows joy, it seldom knows faith. In fact cynicism and faith are antithetical, I mean, one precludes the other because the very things that trigger faith, things like trials and difficulties, they are what produces the bitter laughter of the cynic. Life under the sun, that's life as we find it here on planet earth without any inclusion of God whatsoever favors the cynic a lot more than the faithful. Because under the sun there's far more bitter evidence than there is sweet. Again Solomon saw that. Listen to what he says. He says: *Again I saw that under the sun the race is*

not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

We too, we see it. I mean we know this life is bafflingly unfair. We look at Buffalo, New York and Uvalde, Texas and the mass murders that took place there in the last few weeks and we can't help but wonder where are you God in all of this? Why shouldn't we be cynical? I mean why shouldn't we just laugh at what a bitter joke this life really is. I mean, *like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.*

You think, is that the best that wisdom can do? I mean if time and chance happens to us all, why not trust in L-U-C-K instead of G-O-D because at least you can curse your luck when it goes south. When awful the things like this happen you frequently hear people say, "I just can't believe in a God that would allow that to happen." Well, whether God exists or not, the fact is terrible things still happen. And so for the cynic whether God exists or not, nothing changes when it comes to these types of tragedies. I mean it

really doesn't matter whether you're a believer or not, says Solomon, the same fate overtakes them both. Well that's encouraging.

But if there really is no God, if we really are just the most highly evolved of all the animals, if that's so then your answer will be to no one and nothing greater than ourselves, then, then we truly are alone. And if that's true who is to say that those crazed -- what those crazed gunmen did that morning was even wrong or evil? I mean, you have to say wrong according to whom? You know, predators kill. We're the top predator. Some of us kill when we're frustrated or angry. And if there's no higher authority than man himself, who's to say that might doesn't make right. If I can kill you to get what I want, so be it. Isn't that what animals do?

A few years back there was an article about a gruesome discovery. There was found a dead female polar bear and its cubs. The female and the cubs were killed and partially eaten by what turned out to be a male polar bear. So far as I know no one has accused the male bear of murder, infanticide and cannibalism because after all, a bear is just an animal; animals don't make moral choices. In fact the article identified what it said the real culprit was in all of it. You know what it said it was? It was global warming. Because

animals answer to no moral authority whatsoever.

My cat recently caught a bird. Because it was toying with it before killing it, my wife Janice was able to grab the bird and get it out of its claws. But because the cat's just an animal it had no moral guilt whatsoever. It was an animal killing for pleasure and I've seen it do it often. Once the animal's dead, it just loses interest and walks away. Well, if the cynic is right and there really is no God, then a crazed murderer, he's just a highly evolved animal. And just like any other animal, he answers to no one for his behavior. And from that point on, it simply becomes a matter of power. I mean, if the citizens had enough power they can punish him; but if not, he gets to do whatever he wants. I mean, Kim Yong-Moon is a murderer. He happens to rule North Korea. So he basically kills whomever he wants and nobody can bat an eye because he has the power. Therefore without God he has the right to do what any other animal including that polar bear does, he takes what he wants regardless the consequences. And if you're a cynic, you get to laugh at that. Instead of wrestling with God about why stuff happens, instead of understanding as a believer that in the end God will give everyone their just due, you get to wrestle with a godless vacuum that can only cynically laugh at evil.

You see, if there's no God, immediately bad situations become far, far worse. Solomon tells us what that amounts to; he says laughter is foolishness. Allow me to paraphrase what he's really saying. Solomon says cynicism is literally insane. It's the philosophical equivalent of gleefully jumping from the frying pan into the fire. Instead of opting for struggling to grasp God's grace in the face of tragedy, we decide that a godless universe with no hope of mercy or grace is a far better option because at least we can laugh at it. Solomon's wisdom saw right through that. Guided by wisdom Solomon saw in everyday living what we often see only in catastrophe. Again over the years I've seen it again and again. I saw it at the Oklahoma City bombings, I saw it to an incredible degree in 9/11, I saw it when a madman shot and killed 32 people at Virginia Tech. I saw it during the Challenger and Columbia disasters. These are times of appalling circumstances when people could have embraced the "laughter" -- quote, unquote -- of cynicism and bitterness but they didn't. The fact is they never do. You know what they do? They flock back to God. And I think I know why, I mean, it's captured in *Psalm 46* which says: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

You see, cynicism is a luxury that's indulged in when times are easy and the meaninglessness of life isn't shouting at us. And when catastrophe or unspeakable evil falls -- quote --

"unexpectedly" on us, we flee to God, we gather to pray, we gather to sing hymns. And I would suggest to you that the hymn heard most often in those terrible time of troubles is a hymn whose lyrics have nothing to do with comfort in a disaster. Time and again I've seen crowds gather at tragedies and sing these words: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." That's a hymn that has nothing to say about comfort in a disaster, it's a hymn that talks all about my wretchedness and God's grace. I mean it's the polar opposite of what laughter and cynicism is all about. So why do we sing that hymn? Well, could it be that there's a truth buried in all of us that only gets bared and exposed when some awful event strips away all of our efforts at pretending? Could it be that God has placed its truth deep in the hearts of every single person on this planet regardless of what faith they claim or God they believe or don't believe in?

Listen to what God said in *Romans 2:14*. He said: *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ*

Jesus. See, God tells us his law is written on the hearts of every single person. We just cover it up. And we cover it up like Solomon tried to with laughter and wine and folly and amusement and sex until some kind of unspeakable tragedy rips that cover away for a while and we see ourselves as we really are, desperate and needy for God, blind but now at least for a moment seeing. But then you know what happens? But then the morning comes, as Solomon observes. He says: *The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.* Life just goes on. The horror fades. We cover up all over again. According to Solomon that's the story of our lives.

I mean if you've ever seen the Discovery Channel series on earth, you saw their overhead camera work as they watch lions in the tall grass hunting. This one particular scene, there's this huge herd of wildebeests and we see the lions creeping up on them in the tall grass until they get within range. When they get in range they spring and the herd panics, and it runs and the lions run and they

cut off the young and the weak and they pounce on them. We see the dust fly and the lions roar and the herd is ravaged, everything's in an uproar, but before long everybody just goes back to grazing. And Solomon understood that. He said that's us. And that's death itself stalking us. God used the terror of a hunting lion as a simile for Satan himself because death is the ultimate predator that's always right there in the tall grass, lurking. *1 Peter* says: *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* And when the lion springs, it usually captures the old or the sick and the weak and we kind of expect that. But when it attacks at random or when it attacks the young like it did in Buffalo and Uvalde, we get blown away. The dust flies, the lions roar, the herd is ravaged but then time passes and we just go back to grazing again, waiting for the lion to attack the next time. Solomon is saying, folks, that's no way to live. I mean the cynic looks at tragedy and he sees what Solomon saw when he embraced his cynical laughter. This is what he said. He said: *There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.*

Bad stuff happens to good people and good stuff happens to bad

people. There's no rhyme, there's no reason, there's no pattern, there's no justice and it's so bad it's actually funny, according to the cynic. I mean, the cynic has no comfort except for cynicism itself because the cynic has no comforter, just grief itself folded in on itself. And wise man or fool, it makes no difference, life is one big bad joke because there's no context to fit life into, no bigger picture that life is connected to. And Solomon saw it all. This is what he said. He said: *The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

This is Solomon reaching stage two. You see, the delusion of life is gone and what it leaves is depression. Everything under the sun is grievous. If some random event doesn't take you out, then don't worry, the passage of time is going to make your life utterly meaningless simply because every single thing life offers us is ultimately pointless in time. Solomon saw precisely what time

would do to everything because his wisdom allowed him to see it in the here and now. And his wisdom, his wisdom realized that the only solution to the ravage of time was a God who had conquered time itself.

You see, creatures like us are rooted in timelessness, and because of that we will never be satisfied with pleasures that are rooted in time. Solomon tasted all of the pleasures of life including the pleasures of cynicism and his wisdom which was a gift from God eventually lead him from depression to discernment. Speaking of God, this is what he said. He said: *He has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.* You see, it's that discernment of timelessness that brought Solomon into deliverance that pointed to the only thing that ever made sense to him, and that was *fear God and obey his commandments.* Aim your life at God and his kingdom and the picture doesn't just become bigger, it becomes timeless.

Randy Alcorn in his book *The Treasure Principle* describes what he calls the difference between the dot and the line. I quote him all the time when I do funerals because that's when it really matters. He pointed out that a dot is just a point on a line. I mean, theoretically every line starts with a dot. The pencil touches the paper at a dot but if it keeps going that dot becomes a line, and

that line can go on forever, and so it is with life. Every one of us starts with the dot of our birth. And how we view eternity determines whether we live by the dot or by the line. See, those who live by the dot, they see life as Solomon first did when he spoke of life under the sun. They see birth, life and death as the sum of their existence. You're born, you're here, you die, you rot, period, end of story. Those who live by the line see birth as the first dot and the line that goes on forever. We start in time at an appointed time, our birthdays but we're eternal creatures and we're designed for an eternity with Christ. And when Solomon saw that, it moved him from discernment to deliverance. He said: *I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.*

You see as Christians we were creatures born into time who will live in timelessness, in eternity. *"Whatever God does endures forever."* Folks, that changes everything. See that's why Paul could say: *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* You see, for unbelievers time is the most bitter enemy they have. It renders all things useless. For believers, time is our greatest ally because it puts all things into perspective. Look at the disciples, for example. The disciples were all martyred about

2,000 years ago. They were on earth it varied from 60 to 90 years but we know they've been in heaven now for over 2,000 years. That means their time on earth, that is now the time that they spent is represented by less than five percent of their total existence. That means 95 percent of their existence has now been in heaven. So no matter how difficult their life on earth was, it is becoming every day more and more -- quote -- "momentary." And that's only after 2,000 years. If you put them into geological time where people talk easily about billions and billions of years, just pick 300 million years. In 300 million years the disciples will have spent three ten-thousandths of one percent of their existence on earth and the rest of it enjoying eternal life. And we still haven't scratched the surface of what eternal life really means. For Christians earthly time is an infinitely diminishing resource. It's no wonder that God repeatedly tells us we're here for an instant. In *James 4* he says: *Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Psalm 39* says: *Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!* God says that because he sees us through eternity's eyes and this life is nothing but this teeny little blip on the radar of time.

What does that have to do with Solomon? I mean he told us time

makes everything pointless. Wisdom, work, people, pleasure, time steals away any meaning they might have. Well, it's Jesus Christ, the word, the logos, the one to whom the word logic is infinitely connected who gives it back to us. Solomon points us to wisdom and wisdom personified is Jesus Christ. Paul says: *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* See, it's Christ alone who gives meaning to life no matter whose life it is. It's Jesus Christ's death on the cross and his payment for my sins that restores us to what we were designed to be: creatures made in God's image designed by God to glorify him and enjoy him forever. That's the eternal pleasure that God has reserved for us, and we can't begin to unpack the depths of that while we're still here rooted in time.

A while ago I passed on the question John Piper had asked about pleasure in heaven. It was an extremely important question. Let me just paraphrase what he said. He said if you could have a heaven in which every single aspect of earthly pleasure was yours forever, a heaven where real laughter and wine and folly, amusement, sex, whatever it is you want was yours in abundance but Christ was not part of it, would you still want it? Now if you said or if you thought yes, I would commend your honesty but you may as well have said I just prefer going to hell because hell by

definition is where God isn't.

So the question begs the big question. How long do you think the pleasure of an earthly heaven would last? I mean after you've golfed for a thousand years and all you do is shoot eighteen every time you go golfing, after you fished for a thousand years and you've caught every fish there is to catch, after you danced and partied for a thousand years, what do you do next for an encore? I'm not only talking about 3,000 years here.. God says: *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* So what do we do after a mere three days of earthly pleasure? Jesus is giving us eternal life. That's time that goes on forever. And the big question is: Doing what? Solomon was given the wisdom to see that earthly pleasure is no substitute for God himself. This is what he said. He said: *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 a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*

I mean it took Solomon just a matter of a few years to see that everything including pleasure and laughter apart from God is

utterly meaningless. He learned what we're still in the process of learning, that the only genuine pleasure that will satisfy eternally is God. God will be constantly expanding our ability to take in at an ever-expanding capacity the ability to understand the glory of God and that process is never going to stop. I mean we get a hint of it in *2 Corinthians 3*. It says: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* We can't begin to understand what that's about. As creatures rooted in time, this timelessness goes right over our head. Just trust it's going to be better beyond comprehension. But while we're here on earth, you have to understand that part of the consequences of Adam's fall is that it stole our appetite for God. It stole the pure pleasure of God away and in its place it gave us this bitter, empty laugh of cynicism. And even as God's own children, we, too, battle our flesh that still says Solomon's laughter is pretty attractive. See, we need to work to get back the pure pleasure of God, to capture what John Piper says when he says, "God is most glorified in us when we're most satisfied in him."

And so on a practical level, okay, well, how do we grow that satisfaction? Well, the fact is it starts right here, it starts right now. I've said many, many times. There's a thousand other

places that you could be this morning but you're not. You're here worshipping your King. So that's a great way to start your week in worship. You see, the King of the universe for the joy that was set before him, he suffered an unspeakable loss to replace cynicism with joy eternal for his sheep. And so we take Solomon's advice: We aim our life at God. And we, the church, can help. We aim our lives at discovering and growing in the love of God in Christ Jesus, and that means understanding that our default drive is always away and not towards God. To counter it, we nurture our appetite for God just like we nurture any other good appetite. We go to fellowship and prayer and scripture daily for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. We work at developing our appetite for God. We aim our lives at God and his kingdom for the pure pleasure of it. It's a pleasure whose line goes on forever, but it starts with the dot of the life that we're in right now. It's an appetite that is higher, deeper, wider and broader than we could ever imagine, and God longs to satisfy it continually. He died on the cross to make it possible for us to literally have the last laugh at the sting of death. And because our king has defeated it, we don't have that bitter, empty cackling laugh of the cynic that Solomon experienced. But instead we have the full-throated genuine laugh of the victor in Christ, and as I said last week, he who laughs last laughs best. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for Solomon. I thank you for appointing someone to go through all of life in ways that we could only imagine. To appoint someone who has unbelievable brilliance and wealth and power and say he's experienced it, listen to what he has to say. And Lord, we just thank you about hearing about Solomon's understanding of pleasure and laughter, of cynicism and what "benefits" -- quote, unquote -- it supplies. I just pray, Lord, that you would give us the ability to recognize the gift that we have been given, and along with that, Lord, the will and the desire to nurture and grow our appetite for you. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.