

## Jesus is Better Than... Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

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Steve DeWitt

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

*So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 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." (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11)*

We worked our way through this passage last weekend. The message is available at the media page of [bethelweb.org](http://bethelweb.org). Today's message is all application from last week. I won't repeat it, but I will summarize. This is Solomon on a search. He is searching for meaning in life. He doesn't search like a saint; he searches like a sinner—a sinner who doesn't have God in his life. Still, something inside him says life should have significance. Something should matter about his existence. But what does he have to derive meaning from? Only this world. Only material things.

So Solomon engages in a series of experiments. He wants to see if any pleasure in this world can meet the ache and longing of his heart. Here in 2:1-11, he explores some of the most pleasurable experiences life has to offer. Laughter. Alcohol. Great buildings and accomplishments. Great wealth. Aesthetic experiences of music and beauty. Sexual pleasure on a staggering scale.

Does that list sound familiar? Drugs. Sex. Rock and roll. Unchecked Hedonism. He was a gazillionaire playboy with more money than he knew what to do with. He let himself go. He filled his life with the same things that people run after today—perhaps the same things you are pursuing. Yet he retained his discernment as he did it. He kept his spiritual objectivity. He evaluated the experiences as he was experiencing them, constantly asking his soul, *does this make you happy?*

In spite of his legendary wealth, possessions, and women, Solomon concludes about all of these that they are vanity, futility, vapor.

Might that echo in your discontentment with life? Are you running after something hoping it will satisfy you? Maybe you've achieved something and you are left wondering, *is this all there is?*

Don't take from Ecclesiastes 2 that the Bible is down on pleasure or down on money or laughter or other things on this list. If you look ahead to verse 24 he says, "*There is nothing better for a person that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.*" We will hit this the weekend after Easter with a message entitled, "*Life's Too Short to Drink Bad Coffee.*"

The Bible celebrates pleasure and enjoyment. It just doesn't do so without God. So, if all these very popular motivations for life are empty, where is real meaning found? Our eyes have to go from the futility of Ecclesiastes 2 to satisfaction found in Jesus. How is Jesus better than laughter, alcohol, wealth, possessions and even sexual pleasure?

## **Earthly Pleasures vs. Jesus**

### ***Fleeting vs. eternal joy***

This is Solomon's main complaint about his list of pleasures. How do you feel after you've experienced them? The word he uses means *vapor*. Futility. What is he longing for? The same thing the ache in our hearts is searching for. A satisfaction that outlasts the buzz from the alcohol or the feeling of buying the new car or getting married or a million dollars in the bank. We want joy that lasts.

We have to realize that having Jesus by faith and all the blessings that come with salvation by faith all have this quality. They do not diminish.

Everything material in this world is experienced according to the law of diminishing returns. It's not so much a law as a reality. Whatever buzz you get from anything in this world, the next time you experience it, it's not quite the same. Think of the first time you get into your new car. Wow! The second time it's cool. The third time, you like it. The 1000<sup>th</sup> time, you don't think about it much at all.

Ever go to a restaurant and you think, *this is amazing!* You tell all your friends. You can't wait to go back. It's great the second time and it may be really good every time. But over time, something isn't the same as that magical first time.

Ecclesiastes will describe this in chapter 12 in very sober language. The elderly man who once was successful, now he can't hear or see or sleep like he used to. His joy in things is diminished. Over time, nothing stays the same. Either it changes or we do.

I said last week that this includes every human pleasure, even sexual pleasure. C.S. Lewis addresses a certain question that maybe we have thought but we've been embarrassed to ask. Will we miss sexual pleasure in eternity? Jesus told us that there is no marriage in heaven. We assume that means the present purpose for sexual intimacy in marriage will also not be part of the new created order. Should that make us sad? Here is what he wrote:

*"The letter and spirit of scripture, and of all Christianity, forbid us to suppose that life in the New Creation will be a sexual life; and this reduces our imagination to the withering alternative either of bodies which are hardly recognizable as human bodies at all or else of a perpetual [sexual] fast. As regards the fast, I think our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time. On receiving the answer 'No,' he might regard absence of chocolates as the chief*

*characteristic of sexuality. In vain would you tell him that the reason why lovers in their carnal raptures don't bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolate: he does not know the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know the sexual life; we do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it. Hence where fullness awaits us we anticipate [sexual] fasting. In denying that sexual life, as we now understand it, makes any part of the final beatitude, it is not of course necessary to suppose that the distinction of sexes will disappear. What is no longer needed for biological purposes may be expected to survive for splendor. Sexuality is the instrument both of virginity and of conjugal virtue; neither men nor women will be asked to throw away weapons they have used victoriously. It is the beaten and the fugitives who throw away their swords. The conquerors sheathe theirs and retain them." (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, pp. 260-261.)*

Lewis dances around a delicate subject with his typical brilliance. The boy could hear that there is no chocolate during marital intimacy and think, "That sounds terrible! How can I enjoy anything without chocolate?" What he doesn't realize is that a greater pleasure removes the need for the lesser.

We only know a little about what eternal pleasures await us. Little glimpses. What we have is our present experience of joy in Jesus. *"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory."* (1 Peter 1:8) And promises of even greater future joy in 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."*

The Christian experiences present joy but it is an incomplete and imperfect joy. Someday we will be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, and our capacity for fullness and joy will expand beyond what we can conceive of here.

Eternity as a child of God in a glorified body living on the new earth will be such a joyous experience that we won't miss anything—not a part of it—not even sexual pleasure. Now that's hard to understand like it's hard for a boy to understand happiness without chocolate.

### ***Ominous happiness vs. joy even in pain and suffering***

There looms over earthly pleasures a cloud. Always an ominous cloud. Your best vacation or best concert. As you experience them, you know the days are ticking when you have to go home. We say, *I wish it wouldn't end!* We know it does. It always does. Everything does. Even our best pleasures have an expiration date. Ominous happiness.

There's an old African American spiritual about the joy we have in Jesus that says, *"The world didn't give it, and the world can't take it away."* This is granite joy. Joy that sticks with us when life hurts. Even Jesus operated by this confidence in future grace and joy, *"Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Hebrews 12:2)

### ***Worst at death vs. best one second before you die (and every second after)***

For the unbeliever, death is all loss. It is the loss of everything that made you happy. Loss of every relationship. Every possession. The loss of all beauty and the experience of it.

But for the Christian, Jesus is better than an earthly pleasure because the greatest experience of joy in Jesus is one second before you die and every second after.

Death is not to be feared because death is the gaining of what our joy in Jesus really longs for. The Bible says this is real treasure. Wealth in eternity is who you know and more importantly, who knows you. Many will step into eternity with nothing and nobody but Satan saying, I know him. That's eternal poverty and condemnation.

But wealth is to know Jesus fully. To see him. To be loved by him. To experience full acceptance and intimacy with the glorious Son of God is wealth you wouldn't trade for all the money, drugs, or fame in all the world. *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* (Phil. 1:21) How? When I die I get what I want more than anything, I get Him. I get Jesus. I get to see him. I get to touch him. I get to feel his love in all its fullness. Death is gain. Death means more pleasure, not less.

### ***Salt water vs. living water***

If you've ever seen a survival movie where people are adrift at sea, it's not long before their thirst makes them consider drinking the ocean water. They nearly go crazy. Dying of thirst in an ocean of water. But there's something about that water. It's salt water. The more they drink, the more they want.

All the pleasures this world has to offer are salt water. You always want more. Yet somehow the more you have the more dissatisfied you are.

Jesus is the opposite. He satisfies our thirst by quenching it with the glory of forgiveness of sins, new life in Christ, and eternal life forever with him. He explains this to the woman at the well in John 4, *"Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"* (John 4:13-14) He is pointing to earthly water. Drink it. You want more. Then he uses it as a metaphor for what he offers. I am living water. Drink me. Believe in me. Receive me. You'll never spiritually thirst again.

What is that like practically? I don't often do this but I am going to let a guest speaker take it over. If you click on the link below, you will see Pete Maravich speaking at a Billy Graham event in 1987. Pistol Pete is one the greatest basketball players of all time. Listen to his story.

#### **[Pete Maravich Testimony](#)**

A few months after sharing his testimony, Pete Maravich died of a heart attack at age 40.

Did you hear what he said? I had this and this and this. I was empty. That's Ecclesiastes 2. That's things and pleasures without God.

*But then I found Christ.* There is the key.

I wonder, friend, if you heard your own life story in the life of Pistol Pete. I wonder if you hear it in the words of Solomon. And I wonder if what they're urging, might be the answer that you're looking for in your life. Pete said I had this, and this, and this, and I was empty. But then I met Jesus and my life changed. And I wouldn't trade all of that stuff for what I have in Jesus for anything.

That could be your story as well if you will put your faith and your trust in Christ just like Pete Maravich did. Just like so many of us have done. To trust in Christ to be the actual Savior of the world. It's not a fairy tale. It's not pretend. He was a real person who died on a real cross who died for your sins and for mine. Believe in him and be saved. You can know that today. I would urge you to put your faith and your trust in him today.

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