

## Ecclesiastes 1-12\_2-26

Solomon was the man who had everything.

And in today's message, we are going to follow his experiments and investigations as he seeks to find the meaning behind life. To answer the question he poses himself at the start of Ecclesiastes:

1:3 "What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?"

Futile struggle is the focus of the book of Ecclesiastes. Life is "hevel" – meaningless, futile, enigmatic, a vapour, short and cyclical...

Life is frustrating because it is cursed... Because we live in a Genesis 4 world...

The world is no longer Eden, it is not as it is supposed to be ... and so we try to fix it and to fix ourselves.

We tend to resist our creator and think that we can fix things, escape the curse and pursue our own happiness.

If I just get enough money, if I progress enough in my career, if I find the right partner, if I can just raise my kids, if I can just get through school, if I can just see the kids grown up, if I can just get the right house .... If I can just get through this phase....

Then I will be satisfied....

The teacher's aim is to shatter our illusions.

It is to prick the bubble of our pretence.

He is the man who has everything ... yet finds he is not satisfied ... that it is *hevel* – a chasing after the wind...

This is the account of his thorough investigation....

He introduces himself and his credentials in 1:12

1:12 "I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem."

The natural assumption of course is that this is Solomon.

And there is no-one more qualified to carry out this experiment than him. When it comes to wealth, power, influence, pleasure, property, sex, philosophy... none of us have experienced the extraordinary levels that Solomon did...

13-15:

His investigations cover both human activity and endeavour and also philosophy and education and wisdom.

And he reaches the conclusion that he is unable to fix things, to make things right in this broken world.

15: "What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted."

If it is not possible to fix the world through what we do – through our various pursuits, maybe philosophy has the answer.

But he finds out that the more you know, the more you know that you don't know.

17-18 "Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this too is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief."

We are attempting to take hold of our life, for it not to be futile, to make sense of our brief time on earth, to be satisfied... and we are like Bono and U2 – we still haven't found what we're looking for....

So Solomon performs his experiments and tries various things to make sense of life and to find satisfaction:

## 2:1-2 Laughter and pleasure

Best comedy gigs... Michael Macintyre .... Peter Kay

The funniest sitcoms – laugh out loud funny

The best that Netflix and Amazon Prime have to offer

## 2:3 Wine/Alcohol

And while we are watching Netflix we will pour ourself a glass or two of wine...

3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.

Food and drink programmes have proliferated in the past decade or two....

I am not averse to watching Saturday Kitchen or Masterchef! For the foodies and wine aficionados among us....

Maybe this is what will give meaning to life....

Good food. Good wine.

For others, it's home improvement, houses, projects...

This group prefers Grand Designs to Masterchef...

Good Housekeeping instead of Good Food

## 2:4-6 Grand construction projects (House and DIY)

"I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees."

If I can just get that new kitchen.... That perfect house with the garden.... A nicer place to live... I will be happy...

If I can just win the Omaze competition and get that amazing house.... My life will be made.

Solomon has the most opulent of houses – self-builds with the best mod cons and solid gold bathtubs and loos....

## 2:7 Personal servants and animals

Successful employer. A house full of butlers and housemaids that cater to his every whim. And a menagerie of animals and pets.

## 2:8 Silver and gold / great wealth

Forbes rich list:

Elon Musk, 53: \$342 billion - Tesla - United States

Mark Zuckerberg, 40: \$216 billion - Meta - United States

Jeff Bezos, 61: \$215 billion - Amazon - United States

Richer than all of these was Solomon – Son of David, King of Israel

Personal concerts...

India's richest family flies in Justin Bieber for 10 million dollars

2:8 A harem – pick of the world's most beautiful women...

Basically, Solomon did whatever he wanted – and had whatever he wanted - to the nth degree

2:10 "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure."

And maybe we expect the Bible to say that it wasn't much fun – but it doesn't say that.

2:10 “**My heart took delight** in all my labour, and this was the reward for all my toil.”

He finds it all very pleasurable, but the problem is that it just doesn't last....

2:11 Yet 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.

Vapour. Hevel. Nothing was gained under the sun.

We are constantly inventing things that will give us pleasure faster – our little dopamine hits of pleasure....

TV, social media scrolling, online porn – they do make us feel better, give us a level of pleasure – but are the equivalent of morphine for our souls, masking the pain.

None of it will last. The most honest of the rich and famous will tell you that this is just what they have found.

## 2016 Golden Globe Awards

Voiceover – And to present the award for comedy, please welcome 2-time Golden Globe winner, Jim Carrey.

And then Jim Carrey says this:

“Thank you. I am 2-time Golden Globe winner, Jim Carrey. When I go to sleep at night, I am not just a guy going to sleep, I am 2-time GG winner Jim Carrey going to sleep. And when I dream, I don't just dream any old dreams. No sir. I dream about being 3x GG winner Jim Carrey, because then I would be enough – it would finally be true and I could stop this terrible search for what I know ultimately won't fulfil me...”

**“In an interview he gave a few years earlier, Jim Carrey said “I think everybody should get rich and famous and get everything they ever dreamed of so that they can see that that is not the answer...”**

So, Solomon tries all of these activities under the sun, many of them are pleasurable and give him the dopamine hits he is looking for - but it never lasts and it never satisfies... so Solomon decides to apply the ethics of the song...

**“It’s not what you do, it’s the way that you do it... that’s what get results.”**

He turns to wisdom. If stuff isn't the answer, maybe living wisely and well is... Wisdom here is not just being clever or intellectual or knowing a lot of stuff, it is living well, doing good...

## 12-15

There are benefits to living well and wisely. It is better to live that way than to be foolish. You can have a better life and better outcomes.

But what Solomon finds is that the same fate overtakes the foolish and the wise – they both die, they will both be forgotten – the one who has lived well and saved prudently will leave everything behind to someone else...

What is at all for – where is the gain? The benefit?

This is ultimately the question that Jesus asks: (in [Mark 8:36](#))

**“What good is it for someone to **gain** the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”**

## 17-23

The summary of his results – both toil and wisdom are frustrated by death.

In his mid-life crisis, **Leo Tolstoy** reflected and asked the question: **“is there any meaning to my life which the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?”**

And then we come to some conclusions that Solomon and Ecclesiastes starts to draw for us....

In the first instance, it may sound a little like hedonism... just eat and drink and have a good time – don't worry be happy.

But it is much more than that....

You see, throughout this experiment and these initial musings, Solomon – and by extension humankind – is looking to fix what is broken, and make what is crooked straight – without God.

That is our human condition. We are living in a cursed and sin-broken world – and we are desperately trying to recover Eden – paradise – and the presence of God.... In all of these things, we are ultimately looking for God – for his presence – for Eden.

Notice the language of Eden in **2:5**

**“I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.”**

But without God, we cannot beat the curse. As much as we spend our lives trying. We can plant all the fruit trees in the world, but we cannot recover Eden....

As **Father Smith** says in Bruce Marshall's 1945 novel, *The World, the Flesh and Father Smith*:

**“the young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God”**

At the end of chapter 2, God has entered the equation....

2:24-25 “A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the **hand of God**, for **without him**, who can eat or find enjoyment?”

There is a shift here from the gifts – to the giver.

Where do all these gifts come from?

Have you ever received a gift anonymously? Some flowers? Some chocolates? A hamper of food?

It has happened to me on occasion. And when it does, I want to know – who is it from? Who sent this? I want to know the giver. I want to thank the giver of the gift.

These things – these pleasurable things – these created things - are from the hand of God.

He is the giver of the gifts. He is the giver of all good things.

James 1:17 “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

The problem – for Solomon – and for us – is that, in our pursuit of the meaning of life, and satisfaction, and fulfilment – we have been focusing on the **gifts** and not the **giver**.

As we try to overcome the curse and recover Eden, we have placed our hopes in laughter, and entertainment, and sex, and alcohol, and things, and wealth, and home improvements, and career, and work....



We focus on the gifts. We worship the gifts. Idolise them. Look to them for satisfaction and fulfilment.

But the gifts themselves don't satisfy when all the time we are living apart from and ignoring the giver of the gifts, our heavenly Father...

The greater joy of love and relationship with him.

Eden was a place of rest – and we spend our lives trying to get back there...

**Augustine – “you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”**

We spend our lives making more of the gifts than the giver – this is idolatry.

The good gifts on this earth, a glass of wine and a good meal with friends, home and family and friends and fellowship and food and fun and laughter and sex and intimacy and good music and a good Netflix series all point us towards a good God, our gracious heavenly Father who gives us all things for our enjoyment. As the Apostle Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy:

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their **hope in wealth**, which is so uncertain, but **to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment**. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”  
(1 Timothy 6:17-19)

This frees us from the endless frustration and disappointment of “I will really enjoy my life when....” When I get married, when I finish school, when the kids are older, when I get a better job / when the church grows / when I retire / when I get a nicer house...”

Where are you now? In what season do you find yourself now?  
What is in your hand now?

What good gifts of God are available to you now?

But, of course, this only goes so far.

Solomon's conclusion at this stage gives us some sort of answer- but it doesn't solve the problem of death.

Even life under the sun with God in the picture will never be Eden. The world is still crooked, we still cannot fix it. And we will still die.

And this is where we see the stunning difference that knowing and following Jesus makes in the life of the believer.

The Apostle Paul expresses that his life is centred on Jesus and finds its meaning and purpose in him... He has found what Solomon is talking about:

**"For me to live is Christ"** writes Paul. Paul is focused on the giver. Rather than the gifts.

But Paul goes further – and he addresses the issue of death....

**"For me to live is Christ ... and to die is gain"** There is that Ecclesiastical word – gain. Profit.

For the Christian, **death is no longer the loss of all gain!**

To live now is Christ – loving him and serving him - and enjoying his good gifts under the sun, which point to the Heavenly Father, the giver of all good gifts ...

But then death will not destroy our life and work – as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15 as he writes about **resurrection** and **life after and beyond death**. Resurrection means that the life of the Christian is not futile.

**1 Corinthians 15:54-55**

**"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'**

55 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'"

Paul then goes on to say – in light of eternity – in light of the resurrection – in light of Jesus conquering death and rising victorious....

58: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is **not in vain**."

It is not hevel. It is not meaningless. It is not vanity.

It is not in vain.

Building up of the kingdom of God and his church.

The church will last into eternity.

And of his kingdom there will be no end....

This calls for a radical reordering of our priorities....

Enjoying the goodness of God and his good gifts now.

Labouring not to fix this world or to find satisfaction in the gifts alone - but to look to the ultimate gain of eternal life.

For me to live is Christ – and to die is gain.

### **Community group questions and discussion points:**

*Feel free to hand pick and work with a selection of these questions.*

1. What does the Teacher (Qoheleth) mean when he says he "applied [his] mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens" (1:13)? What was the result of this pursuit?

2. How does the Teacher describe the outcome of seeking wisdom and knowledge (1:17-18)? Why might increased wisdom bring sorrow?
3. In chapter 2, verses 1–11, the Teacher experiments with pleasure. What specific pleasures does he pursue, and how does he evaluate them in the end?
4. Compare the Teacher's approach to pleasure with his pursuit of wisdom and work. How are these efforts similar or different in terms of their results?
5. In 2:24–26, the tone shifts slightly. What does the Teacher say is "from the hand of God," and how does this contrast with his earlier frustrations?
6. In what ways do you see people today (or yourself) chasing after the same things the Teacher pursued—wisdom, pleasure, work, or success? What drives that pursuit?
7. When have you experienced the feeling that your efforts or accomplishments were "meaningless" or temporary? How did you respond spiritually or emotionally?
8. How do you typically measure the value or success of your work? How does Ecclesiastes 2 challenge or affirm your perspective?
9. How might recognizing the futility of certain pursuits without God lead you to live more intentionally or dependently on Him?
10. In verse 24, the Teacher says it's good to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in work—how can you cultivate gratitude for daily blessings, even in mundane tasks?
11. What rhythms or practices could help you regularly recognize and enjoy the simple gifts God gives, as highlighted in 2:24–26?
12. How does this passage deepen your understanding of the difference between living for God and living with God in your everyday decisions and work?

