

Wisdom From The Dissatisfied Life
Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

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As you know, we've been in a series on James' letter to the saints in Jerusalem. This week "Pastor James" invites a guest preacher who will focus on this same topic of wisdom that he's has been focused on thus far. Our guest today is King Solomon. What James has been teaching about in the previous verses concerning the brevity of life and how it relates to those who are rich - (which again would be you and I)...Solomon lived this. And so If this guest preacher, this voice from the past, could stand in the presence of James' hearers, he *might* say some of the same things James says, but if you know anything about guest preachers, you know that they tend to say things you don't typically hear every Sunday (and this can be both good and bad) - they have more examples, more illustrations, more pointed statements at time....and more stories. They're only preaching one time and therefore they don't have anything to lose. "The pastor can clean it up"....And so that's just what this guest preacher does here... with nothing to lose, with no reason to soften the force of his words, King Solomon proceeds to give his sermon....an example of what James is talking about, an illustration,.....a case study.

If what James is teaching on could be called ***Wisdom for the Resurrected Life***, Solomon's sermon here in Ecclesiastes could be called ***Wisdom from the Dissatisfied Life***.

So why this? Why take a break to hear what Solomon thinks?

- 1) Solomon was the wisest man to ever live. He could probably be in the running of actually being “The Most Interesting Man In The World.” To hear what he has to say about *anything* will probably benefit us in some way.
- 2) James is often considered the Proverbs of the New Testament, and that's largely due to the fact that he focuses on and even quotes from topics seen in the Proverbs of the Old Testament, many of them written by this man Solomon.
- 3) Solomon's sermon here will be sandwiched in between Pastor James' words to the rich about the fleeting pursuits and pleasures of this life and seducing voice of our own desires that seek to lead us down the road to dissatisfaction and death.

And so in giving our ears to hear out Solomon's Wisdom from the Dissatisfied Life, we want to ultimately be pointed to Wisdom for the Resurrected Life.

Welcome to King Solomon's Wonderful World of Dissatisfaction Under the Sun.

Here he is locked in this themepark of life under the sun - and now, a place where he once thought unending pleasures resided has now become a meaningless and melancholy prison to Solomon - and now after years and years of pleasure and self-indulgence, he's found himself dull and life unfulfilling. But how does he get himself here? If you know Solomon, you know that here is a man who had everything. As Israel's greatest King He has all the resources one needs in order to have a fulfilling life in this world. Where does he miss it? How does someone whose life once seemed so promising, so fulfilled, now come to the place where now uses the words “Vanity” and “Meaningless” in verse 11 to describe his existence?

Well, that's what this Preacher, Solomon wants to teach us about this life that we have.

Whatever you do today, don't distance yourself from King Solomon. Don't see his wealth, his power or his resources and conclude that if that were you, you'd do things differently. **His quest is our quest.** We have so much available to us in this country in

the realm of pleasure - all kinds of food and drink available to us, excess of possessions, music and art at our fingertips, access to anywhere in the world in a matter of hours, all kinds of ways to indulge our minds and our bodies with whatever we desire....and yet so many people in our day reach the very same conclusion about life that Solomon does: vanity, meaninglessness.

And so it might be easier than you think for you to place yourself in Solomon's shoes. The question for us this morning is **“Would you be fulfilled if you had everything you've ever wanted and needed? If you could indulge yourself in the pleasures of your relationships, your career, your possessions, your desires, would you be satisfied?”**

Solomon's experience here in Eccl. 2 is an experiment. It's the second among many in this book. This is an experiment with pleasure. It's the experiment of a man who is wiser than anyone who's ever lived, but he's also a man who's turned his back on God, a man who is now seeking to experiment with finding lasting fulfillment in his life apart from God. And so as we look at Solomon's second experiment, we'll see just two things from it. **We'll see his Venture into Pleasure and we'll see his Verdict about Pleasure.**

And so his venture:

Solomon's Venture

Experiment number two: Verse 1 *“I said in my heart ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; Finding no fulfillment in his wisdom, Solomon now tests himself with unlimited pleasure. As James will say in chapter 2:14, Solomon has become lured and enticed by his own desires. And Forget moderation - what Solomon says to himself here is “let me make you experience pleasure” and now he subjects himself to only one charge: enjoy yourself. Now this wasn't a purposeless plunging into pleasure. No, this is the world's wisest man strategically attempting to find the most pleasure possible that he can consume in an effort to find fulfillment. This is a case study, albeit one that will be enjoyable for Solomon. In verse 1 he states the intent of his study and then he also*

briefly states his conclusion up front, *“But behold, this also was vanity.”* It's this verdict that we'll see again in verse 11 that will bookend this entire experience of Solomons.

Laughter & Pleasure

In verse 2, he then begins to describe his quest for pleasure starting from *within* himself - Solomon's quest begins with laughter. *“I said of laughter, “It is mad, and of pleasure, ‘What use is it?’”* Solomon addresses laughter and pleasure as two worthless friends that accompany him down the road to fulfillment. Now, this isn't the kind of laughter that gives comfort or expresses fondness for someone. This is different. Its a superficial laughter of discontent, a dark laughter that attempts to numb the conscience., Its like hitting the comedy club or binge watching a favorite sitcom or comedy looking to escape sadness or frustration or pain. We all know the cliché well, “Laughter is the best medicine”..... but is this really true? Can enough laughter truly satisfy the soul or bring healing to our brokenness? In all seriousness I wish for a moment we could just ask some of the people who were gifted to give us such laughter about its ability to satisfy . Robin Williams, Richard Pryor, Chris Farley, John Belushi, Tony Hancock.....the list could go on. People who were being crushed internally while they hid behind masks of laughter. Solomon has stated something similar before in Proverbs , saying *“Even in laughter, the heart may ache, and at the end of joy may be grief.”*And This is why Solomon concludes *“Its mad. It's foolish!”* And pleasure? It's useless in the same sense because of its short-term fulfillment.

Intoxication

Solomon then proceeds to tell us that his quest for pleasure now turns from laughter to intoxication. In Verse 3 he says *“ I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine...”* and so now Solomon begins to explore the pleasures of intoxication particularly through wine and alcohol, but look, we could just as easily include food as well. Solomon isn't just talking about merely becoming a wine connoisseur here. He's not talking about tasting wine occasionally or socially...He talking about inhaling it - *“laying*

hold of folly” as he says ...yet not quite staggering and stumbling into it - because as he states before that that *“my heart was still guiding me with wisdom”*. The question for him is how much pleasure can my body experience through my subjecting it, giving it over to the pull and the influence of inebriation? Solomon’s insatiable thirst for wine reveals an even deeper thirst for pleasure and satisfaction.

We have so many terms for what Solomon’s doing here don’t we? Turnt up, lit, bent, blasted, wasted, hammered, gassed, juiced. ...you get the picture. If I keep my cup full; If I keep the river of alcohol flowing will it drown me in the waves of fulfillment? Its what is so popular in our day today isnt it? It's almost synonymous with the word “party”. Which is why we know Solomon isn't alone in this specific pursuit. He’s sharing this pursuit of pleasure with others, He partying night after night after night after night,.... looking to feel. 1 Kings 4 describes Solomon’s daily food provision, saying that *it was thirty cors of flour and sixty cors of meal, ten fat oxen and twenty pasture-fed cattle (No GMO’s), a hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl*. In short, this was literally “tons” of food, enough to feed roughly 50,000 people. I’m sure some of you have gone hard in the paint, but you don't party harder than Solomon. This man threw every resource that he had into the largest, most intoxicating, folly-filled, euphoric nights of his era. He didn't just “lay hold of folly” he tackled it in the pursuit to be fulfilled.

Has this ever been you? Some of us, you’ve been here. Is this why you drink? Why you eat? To drown away some pain, or callousness, or unfulfillment? The commercials display all kinds of lasting pleasure that wine and alcohol promise us, but we all know that they fail to show us the complete picture. They don't show us the abuse, they dont show us the hangovers, the guilt and the shame from DUI’s, the alcoholics anonymous classes..... They don't show us the unfulfillment. Hear out this Preacher. Solomon’s heart is searching.... and even with his careful and strategic wisdom - which again, is still guiding him in this moment, Solomon continues to search for ,as verse 3 says *“what was good for the children of man.”* This is what he’s after in food, in drink, in pleasure....,

something we are all after in this life: what's good, what brings us ultimate fulfillment during the few days that we have here on earth.

Solomon is looking for ultimate *good* through the pursuit of *good* things: laughter, cheer, wine, pleasure. This isn't Solomon's sermon about abstaining from alcohol. Listen, you don't even have to confine this to alcohol. Just because you don't drink doesn't mean that you can't put yourself in Solomon's shoes here. The wine that Solomon drinks is only a means to an end. **What is it that you use to “cheer” yourself in the pursuit of ultimate satisfaction? What have you given yourself to in an attempt to secure fulfillment?**

Creation

Solomon's quest now takes a different turn. He's gone from the pursuit of finding pleasure from within himself through food and drink, to finding pleasure from things outside of himself. He says in verses 4-6, *“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.”* So now Solomon turns to the works of his hands. He turns to finding pleasure through his own creations and in God's creation. 1 Kings 7 tells us that Solomon took thirteen years to build a house for himself. In addition to this, he built another house in the Forest of Lebanon. and he built a house for Pharaoh's daughter. Mansions is an understatement. 1 Kings 7:9 tells us that the stones which built these houses were 12-20 feet long each. This lavishness and luxury points us to the fact that Solomon is going all in with this experiment. These are no mere “stick to the budget” construction projects. There is no budget,. Solomon's wealth, which is documented in 1 Kings, was all but unlimited. Concerning his resources, he was the richest King in the richest nation on earth. There was nothing he couldn't purchase twice! And so in addition to building these houses, he planted vineyards. He made gardens and parks for himself and for his subjects - places to take in the beauty of nature, to be captured by the allure of

creation., He also planted forests filled with all kinds of fruit trees and he also built irrigation systems for them -pools in the middle of the desert that would support this paradise that he had built.. Paradise. What Solomon does here echoes of what God did in making Himself a garden in Genesis, filled with every kind of tree with its fruit. Again, Solomon is *making* his heart experience the pleasures of creation in their fullness. The pleasures of experiencing the beauty of the forests, the sounds and sights of nature. 1 Kings tells us again that Solomon spoke of all kinds of birds and reptiles, beasts, and fish.

Labor

Furthermore, in verses 7-8 Solomon's quest included the pursuit of economic pleasures. In addition to building these parks and vineyards, he wanted people to occupy and tend to them.....and to him. He says *"I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house."* Furthermore, Solomon established an economic workforce that surpassed any other empire during that day. He employed thousands of horsemen, thousands of servants who were drafted as forced labor, thousands of architects, sculptors, and construction workers. He was the mastermind, the brilliant engineer and businessman who brought Israel into its greatest era. The pleasures of Solomon's pursuit here the pleasures of productivity: what we imagine when we think about diving into our careers or tasks, throwing ourselves into becoming the most skilled, and most proficient in our professions, organizing, goal-setting, executing, and accomplishing what you set out to do. Solomon now transitions from long nights of partying to giving himself to long days of planning and executing - making plans and watching them come to fruition.

In addition to this, he says *"I had 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."* Next we see Solomon the rancher, the agriculturist, the shepherd, the banker, and the collector of treasures. He acquires

cattle, horses, sheep. He raises them, breeds them. . He leans into the work of farming, the tranquility, the care for the animals, the cultivation of the land, the building of pens and stables. **How does he accumulate so much?** He pursues gathering silver and gold from nations around the world. He gathers so much gold for the kingdom that silver is regarded as nothing in Jerusalem. He's looking to accumulate as much wealth as he can - seeking to be satisfied in it. Looking to obtain worth, value, and greatness. And we know it's not just *having* the money that's pleasurable, it's what money can buy. Solomon's riches make rap videos and Hollywood look like the Children's Museum.

If we take a step back for a moment, In one sense, Solomon is just doing his job as King. In this particular time, this is what kings did and it's what their subjects expected from them. But Solomon is not just any king. As he's building all of these great edifices and accomplishing all of these projects throwing all possible resources behind them, he's not satisfied...he's not bored, but the unnerving itch of pleasure is there at the end of every day, at the end of every accomplishment, at the end of every party and after party. He's after something else in this quest besides the praise and adoration from his subjects, or the world renown reputation that comes with these feats of greatness . At the bottom of all this, this is really all about him. In a sense his quest is purely selfish. "I built houses and planted vineyards *for myself.*" "*I made myself* gardens and parks." "*I made myself* pools to water the forest of trees." "*I gathered for myself* silver and gold and the treasure of kings..." Remember this is all an experiment. This is all a test for maximizing Solomon's satisfaction. And although Solomon replicated his own version of Eden, one has to question, was he really just attempting to play God? Is what he's after in this pursuit really the desire to be self-sufficient by any means necessary? Do you share this same desire with Solomon?

In verse 8 Solomon also states that "*I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.*" Solomon now pursues the pleasures of music, not just listening to it, but writing it as well...- including one of his songs that's just

a few pages to your left. Solomon owns the bands and they play whatever he requests at any time. He now gives music the reins to lead his journey for ultimate pleasure. And it must have been quite the experience. Its safe to assume that the pleasures of music were present and being pursued even throughout some of Solomon's activities, the feasts, the accomplishments, the parks and gardens, It's here, through the melodic pleasures of all types of songs and instruments that Solomon looks to be inspired, motivated, encouraged, calmed, comforted, and moved hoping to find ultimate satisfaction....but the music stops once the song is over and with each new song comes the same questions of ultimate satisfaction.

Sex & Sensual Pleasure

Lastly, verse 8 says, *Solomon also got for himself many wives and concubines*. To be exact, the number was 700 wives and 300 concubines to explore the pleasures of sex. (That's 1000 women). Solomon wasn't just looking for deep conversation when he made the decision to marry 700 women and take 300 concubines. Solomons pursuit of pleasure is now steered by sex. "Heart, How much sexual pleasure will bring you to a place of lasting delight and satisfaction?" Now look, this was a man who as 1 Kings 11 tells us had turned from the Lord, a man who was searching for fulfillment and pleasure with his back towards God. There's no one man, one woman standard for Solomon. He's not an atheist or an agnostic, he's a full on hedonist. The restraints were off. The morality was out of the window. . He was attempting to drown and exhaust himself in the pleasures of sex in attempt to find lasting fulfillment. Day after day,night after night Solomon is looking to be quenched through the means of sexual intimacy.

I don't think we need to work too hard to draw the lines between Solomon's harem and the plethora of ways that we can access sexual pleasure in our day. Just a few swipes on a smartphone, clicks of a mouse or maybe a trip to the bookstore and our minds and hearts are guided down the same path Solomon finds himself on - accumulating for ourselves a harem in our minds.

Although we are really no different from Solomon, and although you might be shocked by this particular part of his pursuit, the question that could be asked of us is are we seeking to find fulfillment in giving ourselves to relational intimacy? Maybe you haven't committed your body, but what about your mind, your emotions - believing that complete sufficiency and satisfaction might be found not in the pursuit of hundreds of men or women like Solomon here....but maybe in just one? *If the right one just comes along? If my spouse just got it together....then I'd be satisfied...then life would be fulfilling.*

So this brings us to the end of Solomon's venture for pleasure, and now we see Solomons verdict about pleasure.

Solomon's Verdict

Solomon concludes his quest in verse 9 by summarizing, saying *"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me."* Notice the last part of that verse, - that throughout all of this experiment, Solomon has been able to rationally and wisely evaluate the success or failure of his pursuits. *His wisdom remained with him*, not detaching him from the reality of the experiences, but shaping and evaluating the results of his efforts. Now you would think that the kind of wisdom Solomon refers to here would be the godly wisdom that he writes about in Proverbs - a wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord, and that would keep him from the abuse of many of these things in the first place, but this wisdom that he possesses is closer to his rationality, and while it doesn't restrain him from sin, it redirects him to the truth. And so, while it's Solomon's desires that lead him into this venture, its wisdom that brings him to this verdict. Let it be said - He's succeeded largely in the sense of productivity, surpassing all who were before him in Jerusalem, but what about in the sense of pleasure?

Solomon tells us that *"Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure"* which means that he was successful in giving himself without

restriction to finding pleasure - he went full force with no restraints. He kept his eyes from nothing and his heart from nothing! And he continues, giving the reason for his continued pursuit, saying *“for my heart found pleasure in all my toil,....He found real pleasure in these things* and so therefore he continued to pursue pleasure in these things....but what was the conclusion? What did he earn in the end? What was gained? *...and this was my reward for all my toil.”*

The pleasure is the reward! The pleasure that he experienced through the pursuit of laughter, drink, work, music, and sex was enjoyable and was itself the reward for the work he did in pursuing it. Make no mistake, you will find pleasure in good pleasurable things. There isn't anything wrong with these things in themselves, but if you're looking to obtain ultimate satisfaction, lasting meaning, and gain worth and value from these things...**your pursuit will disappoint you..** That's when the abuse of these good things begins to happen - when we take these things (good things) and believe that they will bring us ultimate fulfillment. That's where sin begins to lead you down a road that will result in unfulfillment and death.

Solomon goes on to conclude something more about his entire experience. Yes, he experienced pleasure, but what was the meaning of it? What did it add to him personally? What worth or substance did he gain from the pleasure he experienced from these things? This is what Solomon is looking for - meaning, sufficiency, lasting satisfaction -----which is why he doesn't leave us hanging after verse 10. It's why he comes to this ultimate verdict in verse 11. *“Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, it was all vanity, a striving after the wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”*

Solomon is now facing the facts. Looking his experiment in the eyes and making a conclusion. *Yes, I took pleasure in my work. Yes I took pleasure in the toil and in the finished product, but what was it really worth? What did I really gain?* In attempts to gather together all my accomplishments and all the pleasure I received from them, there

is nothing more to these accomplishments than just that. Solomon expects a greater return on his investment, but he's let down when he recognizes that in spite of all of this he's gained nothing - the pleasure is fleeting, the pursuits add nothing to him.

So what do we do? *Should I just not pursue these things at all? Where do we find meaning if not in these things? James says they'll fade away. Solomon says they're meaningless.* What are we supposed to learn from this seemingly hopeless conclusion?

We can conclude two things from Solomon's conclusion here.

Contentment

Firstly we can learn **contentment**. Perhaps you're looking at your life and evaluating its meaning and worth through your accomplishments and pleasures as Solomon did, and you aren't sure what to conclude? **Be content.** Enjoy the gifts that you've been given by God in this life and keep them in proper perspective. While these things give us pleasure, they cannot and aren't meant to give us complete and total satisfaction. These things don't define us or add worth and value to us. Their meaning is only a shadow of what is truly substantial. **Be satisfied in the enjoyment of these things, the pleasure that they give and the purpose to which they point.** I think Solomon would encourage us to do the same. He says in a few places later in this book

“So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot.” (Ecc 3:22)

“Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil - this is the gift of God.” (Ecc 5:18-19)

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. (Ecc 9:9)

The next thing we learn from Solomon's conclusion is where we can find meaning. Contentment is great, but ***Are we simply supposed to just be content under the sun until we die, and that's it?*** How is meaning achieved? Some of the last words Solomon uses in this text and a phrase that he uses throughout the book of Ecclesiastes is this phrase "*under the sun*" indicating this world that we live in, this earthly life that we have been given - the world, its people, its kingdoms, its systems, its treasures. As all of these things are "under the sun" and we see that nothing can be gained by them. And so in Solomon's venting of frustration, we see the problem. Everything in this created order, everything *under the sun* is not the way it should be. His pursuit for pleasure is only an indicator of something that resides within us all - to be infinitely satisfied, with joy, with life, with contentment, with purpose. And the reality is that we've all missed it in our pursuits for other things. We've all abused the gifts God has given us by seeking lasting pleasure and sufficiency in them. And so in these cries of dissatisfaction, In these moments of frustration with everything under the sun, we see the Creator: God, who shows us our need for a new created order. He shows us our need for all things to be made right - including us broken pleasure seekers. And although the wisdom of Solomon here doesn't give us the answer, his frustration points to one who is greater than he is. Solomon could attempt to create a second Eden, but he couldn't create a second Adam. Solomon could attempt to find sufficiency outside of himself, but he was unable to be sufficient in himself. Solomon could purchase the the finest of things and the buy the greatest treasures in the world, but he couldn't pay the price for his own life or rescue himself from the prison of unfulfillment or the inevitability of death.

Christ

But there's one who is greater than Solomon. God. And God Himself, the author of all Wisdom and the source of all Pleasure, Joy, Life, Peace, and Sufficiency, has come from beyond the sun into this world to live under the sun. Jesus, the Son of God, comes into this world and lives a perfect God-pleasing, God pursuing life, demonstrating what it means to truly fear God and keep His commandments. When he is tempted to succumb to the futility of this world's fleeting pleasures, He resists perfectly when we don't. Instead of looking to find life and joy outside of Himself, He has life in Himself. Instead of making Himself great, attempting to surpass those before Him by accumulating the treasures of this world, He humbles Himself, not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped and He takes the form of a servant and becoming poor, so that we might become rich and have treasures in heaven. Instead of purchasing all the things that we think will bring us fulfillment, He purchases us, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with His own life, with His blood ---- and then leads us to the source of actual fulfillment: God Himself, in whose presence there is fullness of joy and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore.

In the Wisdom of Jesus, instead of the frustrating cries of “vanity, vanity”, He cries “Meaning, Meaning” “Fullness, Fullness! Whoever thirsts, let him come and drink! Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

It's in Jesus that we find true meaning and purpose. It's through union with him through faith in His sacrificial death, that we become sons and daughters of God being given value and identity we could have never achieved with an infinite number of earthly pleasures. It's through the resurrection of Jesus that God ultimately displays that our lives have meaning both now and throughout eternity. In Christ there is satisfaction and meaning; pleasure and purpose.

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