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Ecclesiastes: Here's the point!
Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

George Orwell wrote an essay entitled "A Severed Wasp; " In it he describes a wasp that flew in through the window and landed on his toast while eating breakfast. He writes, "while the wasp was sucking jam on my plate and I cut him in half. He paid no attention, merely went on with his meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of his severed esophagus. Only when he tried to fly away did he begin to grasp the dreadful predicament he now faced." The wasp like people in the midst of their pursuit of satisfaction, have severed their souls from God, yet they are so addicted and unaware that they continue to try sucking the sweetness of life's pleasures, never waking up to the fact it will not satisfy. It's only when they try to fly away that they begin to grasp their dreadful condition.

This is exactly the condition that the writer of Ecclesiastes wants to spare us from. Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived on this earth wrote Ecclesiastes as a wake up call for all of us who have at one time or another decided that we can someone gain purpose and satisfaction and joy apart from God.

You can turn to the very last chapter in the book of Ecclesiastes, the last few verses and hear a recap of what his plan was. Ecclesiastes is really a personal journal of a guy who had all the resources and money and power and ability to try it all. To try out all the world has to offer and find what really satisfies. His conclusion apart from God is that all is vanity...not only that... its super vanity as the Hebrews would say, multiplied vanity; "Vanity of vanity." In Ecclesiastes chapter 2 he begins recording his journey; He tried working hard and building parks and large monuments but it didn't satisfy. He tried education and while there

was some merit in learning things, it had its limits. He discovered the more he knew the more he despaired. Knowledge is pain. The greater your knowledge the more painful your perception of reality. There were times he would prefer to be blissfully ignorant. He tried money and more money. And when he had more money than he could ever dream of spending...he decided that didn't even come close to satisfying. Buy all the stuff you could ever dream up and when you have it, you just want more. Something new might make you smile today and then tomorrow you are bored with the new thing you just bought. He admits he would rather be rich than poor. Having money can answer a lot of problems, but having money also creates a lot of problems. In the end it's all the same because it doesn't satisfy. He tried all sorts of mind altering drugs and alcohol. He tried laughter. He tried forms of pleasure, food, sex, vacations, all sorts of hobbies and entertainment. He tried power and influence. He tried popularity. He tried and he tried and he tried, but he just could get no satisfaction. Perhaps some of us have tried a few of those things in Solomons list and too have come up empty. Perhaps some of us are still trying to suck the sweetness out of life and need to wake up to the realization that it is simply being wasted in a steady stream out the severed esophagus of our soul.

So Solomon is blatantly honest with us in his evaluation. He says, "here is what I tried. I tried it all. I've wrote it all down in order to save you a whole load of pain. Please learn on my dime. If you are someone who has an empty heart from searching for something that will truly satisfy, then come to school on me. This is a wake up call for those who think that there is something better out there that will satisfy apart from God. This is a wake up call to those who are still chasing up the corporate ladder thinking that when they get to the top its going to land them in the comfortable rest of satisfaction. It will not. If you do happen to be one of the few who make it to the top of the ladder, Solomon tells us we will simply discover that our ladder has been placed against the

wrong building, we've been climbing toward the wrong goal. Solomon speaks to the one who has never succeeded at the worlds games of popularity, beauty, athleticism, intelligence, power and money. Solomon wants to encourage us by letting us in on a secret. That is not where true satisfaction and lasting fulfillment comes from. Solomon wants to wake us up and realize our desperate condition and make us long for something of value and worth...and He has only one answer for that; it is the fear of God and following God's truth...strange as it may seem, but that is where true satisfaction and purpose lie. For the heart of man will continue to be restless until it finds its rest in him. Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has also set eternity in the their hearts." That is the God shaped vacuum or God shaped empty space that He has placed inside all of us and our hearts will continue to be restless until it is filled with God himself. Just as a car is designed to run on gasoline, man is designed to run on God Himself. He is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, to feed on and no other. It is ridiculous to think that we can discover lasting satisfaction and happiness apart from Him. That is Solomon's main point. He speaks to our need and hunger for finding purpose and satisfaction in life. He wants to nudge us toward the answer when we look at life and ask, "So what's the point?" Solomon does not offer us in his journal here a list of tips and tricks to make it happen. He simply observes and raises a whole lot of questions and exposes the multiplied dead-ends for us to avoid.

Last chapter 12 he recaps what his plan was for in writing. Lets read the last 6 verses, then we are going to take a quick helicopter tour back over the book. After we have had a nice leisurely stroll through the trees and details of each chapter of the book, I really like to go back and see the book in its wholeness. So lets read Ecc 12:9-14 (READ) Verse 9, He was a wise man, he taught the people what he had learned. It seemed to be his ambition to search for Proverbs, those short memorable bits of practical wisdom. He enjoyed finding truth he calls "delightful words"

and enjoyed arranging them and writing them down for us to read. He does offer a caution in v.12 “be warned, the writing of many books is endless and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.” And all the students in school read this verse and all say, “amen”. I don’t think Solomons point was that books are a waste of time, don’t bother studying. There are a lot of good books and we can learn much from them. There are many good Christian books. I’m glad so many of you take advantage of borrowing books from the church library. I believe Solomon may be offering us a caution here, for us to not let good books take place of the Very Good book. It is not the Christian books about the Book that is the power. It is the word of God that is the power to salvation. It is from the Word of God that we discover the truth of God. Are you reading God’s word more then people who are writing about God’s word? God to the source. Read the Bible that is the genuine source of truth.

Back up in v.11 one thing Solomon discovered. The words of the wise men, Solomon says are like goads. Now a goad is a sharp stick that was used to prod cattle. It was especially used during plowing time. A goad was used to make the cattle go where they would not ordinarily go on their own. A goad prodded the cattle to go in a right direction when they either didn’t want to go right, didn’t care about going right or didn’t know the right way to go. Solomon says that is what these Proverbs of practical wisdom from God will do for us. The wisdom God gives us makes us go where we would not ordinarily go on our own. The wisdom of God may at times not make sense to us. Our own idea of where we ought pursue life purpose might be in a totally different direction then what the Bible has to say. Following God’s truth may even cause pain for us as it prods us in the right direction. We may want to go our own way, but God’s truth will poke us along toward the right direction.

Solomon says the Masters of these collections. The people who have mastered the truth, the know it, live it and do it will be like well

driven nails. The truth may have to be pounded in their heads and hearts, but once its in it will stick in and stay for a long time and accomplish the purpose intended for. Some of us are knot heads, we are not teachable and when God drives his nail of truth into our hearts we stiffen and reject. The nail bends and the pieces are not firmly joined together, we don't get it. Its no fun getting pounded on, but it even less fun getting the bent nail pulled out and then pounded in the same area again, or even drilled when it won't go in straight. Are we going to accept that God's truth is right for us even when we don't personally think it looks right? Are we going to be soft and teachable when God's wants to hammer a nail of truth into our lives so that we can be stable and secure and satisfied with purpose?

Look at the last line there in v.11. They are given by the one shepherd. I believe Solomon may have a double meaning here. In early Israel the king was called the shepherd of the people. King David was referred to as a shepherd of the people he led. Shepherds were to lead and protect and provide and guide the people just as a shepherd would lead and protect and provide and guide the sheep. Solomon may be subtly referring to himself as the wise shepherd leader king who gives wisdom, but I think he is pointing at an even more wise shepherd. Even more often in the Bible, God is referred to as our shepherd. Psalm 23 Solomons father King David writes, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Isaiah 40:11 the Lord God, "Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in his arm he will gather the lambs". In the New Testament John 10:11 it says "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Then in v.14 Jesus makes a very strong claim as he says "I am the good shepherd and I know my own and my own know me." All wisdom comes from God and these goads of truth that move to encourage and rebuke us to move us in along the right path, they all come from the One True Shepherd who laid down His life for us, the sheep. Who are you going to follow? Turn the AM dial and you will hear quite a few opinions about

how life should be lived. Flip on the late morning shows and there will be plenty of voices. Friends will give their opinion, relatives, Teachers. Who are you going to listen to?

Before we hit the climax conclusion to Solomon's personal journal in v.13 I want to review some of the major themes of wisdom he has hit on through his book. In 1:13 Solomon says he is going to "set his mind to seek and explore by wisdom..." He is going to check it all out and try to make sense of life. In chapter 2 he says, "I tried it all...heres a list, check it twice. Are you pursuing any of these things to try and bring satisfaction and purpose to your life? If so, then check them off your list. Let me save you the trouble. Many of them look on the front side like they will be the thing that brings satisfaction, but they simply don't deliver. None of these things will satisfy; not beauty, money, popularity, education, hard work, sex, drugs, alcohol, laughter, pleasure, building projects, landscaping, All bring a certain amount of pleasure, but none will bring the ultimate satisfaction that we all long for.

Chapter 3 Solomon writes there is an appropriate time for just about everything under the sun. A time to laugh and a time to cry. A time to give birth and a time to die. Man can get pretty frustrated by the endless cycles of life. but in v.11 Solomon slips in another tidbit of truth, "God has set eternity in their hearts." There is something about man that has a nagging suspicion deep inside of him that this world is not all there is...there must be more. That is what makes life on this earth livable, the hope that there is more beyond in the forever world. This is not the end. God has something for us that is far better then this present life. Right now you and I can experience His presence and grace and forgiveness and peace along with many other men and women of faith down through the centuries who look forward to this hope.

But we are not going to discover it all right now. Solomon wants us to know that Life is unpredictable. We never fully figure out here on earth all of what God is doing (end of v.11) but v.14 we know that everything

that God does will remain forever.” Chapter 8 there are some things in our life that are simply out of our control. You may have a surly boss you can’t control. You may have a defiant child that is roaring her rebel yell. Certain things in life are out of our control. We cannot restrain the wind. We do not have control over which day we will die. There will be people in power that will abuse their control. Life doesn’t always make sense. The fastest don’t always win the race 9:11. The smartest are not always the ones who make all the money. The best team doesn’t always win. Yet we trust in God when we are reminded that natural gifts alone are not enough to lead to successful living. Ask Terrell Owens this week. Incredible natural physical ability and 25 million reasons are not enough to hand him a satisfied life. In fact 6:2 it is God who gives things and blesses people, but He is also the one who gives us the ability to enjoy them. Life is unjust at times. We don’t get what we deserve at times. Sometimes the righteous ones get blasted while the sinner are getting blessed. And its really tempting for us to say “ What is up with that God.” Yet, 8:12 “still I know says Solomon that is will be well for those who fear God and fear him openly.” God is in control.

Ecclesiastes 6:12 Solomon tells us it might be very hard for us to tell what is truly good for us or bad for us. (7:14). Chapter 7 lists a whole lot of things that look bad that may be actually the best thing for us. Or things that we think look good for us that are not at all good. I remember in High School wishing I wasn’t so skinny and homely, that I could be more buff and handsome and popular. But God knew what I thought was bad was actually good and it protected me and developed my character and saved me for the far, far better. Talk to beautiful people they will tell you its not always a great blessing. The attention they get is often unwanted. If they happen to be shy, people will accuse them of being. I have not appreciated the painful things that have come into my life. I look at them and say “defiantly bad” yet God has used those in my life to teach me things I desperately needed to know so how can I really say

that they are all bad? Over 60 percent of the people that come to this church have come out of very painful experiences and addictions. I have heard many of your stories and often it is those same painful things we experience that move us to a place where we start thinking about God. We wouldn't want to go through them again, but they might actually be a good thing? William Couper wrote a hymn many years ago just after he was so depressed he attempted to take his life, "judge not the Lord by feeble sense. But trust him for his grace: Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his work in vain. God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain. Perhaps at times, a rebuke is better then praise. Perhaps waiting is better then getting something right away? Perhaps a time of financial crunch is better for you then prosperity? Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace, behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.

Even in the realistic admission all through the book that life is unfair and confusing and simply doesn't make sense to us at times. Solomon encourages us to recognize even the little things as blessings from God. Enjoy the journey he has given you. Eat your bread, be cheerful, be merry with the food and be blessed with the all through the book Solomon. True pleasure is not something man can produce and to and the ability to enjoy them is a gift from God. Ecc. 11:9 Follow the impulses of your heart, and desires of your eyes, but know that God will hold you accountable. Love God and do whatever you want. For whoever truly loves God would not do anything to hurt or damage that relationship.

Chapter 12. WE are all getting older. All of us will get to the point where our motivation is low, our eyes are growing dim and grasshopper is dragging. Because we will get older far quicker then we dare to admit, we need to wake up and get right with God and get going for God before its too late. We need to remember our Creator in the days of our youth.

Certainly we need to be prepared and train and anticipate and be wise about the future, but there are times we simply need to plunge in and 'cast our bread upon the water". If we wait to pursue God until all the conditions are perfect, the wind and rain is just right before we plant the seeds, then we will never get right with God and get going for God. We will be infected by the paralysis of analysis and never move forward with God. That is where faith comes in. And this is the first step toward the fear of God.

Look at Solomon's conclusion in v.13 "The conclusion when all has been heard is: Fear God and keep His commandments...this applies to everyone." What does it mean to fear God? I like Ray Stedman acronym. FEAR start with an "F" or faith. It takes faith. Hebrews 11:6 "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is." You can't come to God unless you know that He is there, that He exists. Look around at creation, the mountains, the trees, the stars all declares the glory of a Creator God. The Word of God the Bible declares there is a God and He has communicated with mankind.

The "E" in fear stands for experiencing His grace. Until you have experienced his grace you cannot properly fear God. Until you have discovered first hand God's forgiveness and mercy and love and grace you cannot fully be able to fear God. Until you have stood before him filled with shame and admitted your guilt and sin in the face of His holiness and then heard his soothing words say from Romans 8 "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." You will understand what it means to fear the Lord God.

That brings us to "A". This is the awe and wonder and amazement of God and all His power and wisdom. This is the part that stands in His courtroom of heaven with jaw dropping astonishment at His majesty and glory.

The final letter in FEAR is "R" that stands for resolve. That is to resolve to follow him, to obey his commandments. To fear God is to

resolve to live with an awareness that all I do, everything I value, everything I hold on to, my priorities, my loves, my affections are all noticed by God. V. 14 To fear God means that I am going to act like God is always watching and will reward me and judge me accordingly. The fool lives like God doesn't exist, or know or even care what I'm doing, but the wise one who fears God knows that God sees what you look on your computer late at night. He sees the duplicity in your words and actions. He hears your deception. The one who fears God knows we cannot hide from God. But also knows that God is searching for when we get it right. Like a great parent, He wants to say yes, He wants to say well done. He delights to bless and reward.

After it is all said and done, Solomon who has tried it all says this. Simply: Fear God and you will find that life is not vanity of vanity, but satisfaction upon satisfaction. Enjoy the journey with God, savor its delights. There will be many things in life that will not be fair and won't make sense, don't let those things trip you up and cause you to stumble away from God. Fear God. Follow God. Jim Elliott, "Only on life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."