

Pleasure, wisdom & work are meaningless without Jesus

Lesson for Sunday, May 19, 2024

Text: Ecclesiastes 2

INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ Discuss: What are some of the lies we believe as we go through life? *Allow for discussion...*
 - It could be something as trivial as Santa, or something more serious such as believing you can work your way to Heaven.
- ⇒ One lie that we have all fallen prey to at some point in our lives is: *What will ultimately satisfy me is more of what I already have.*
 - As we stated in last week's lesson, there was a time when we begged God in prayer for things we now have and take for granted.
- ⇒ Solomon is driving home a point in Ecclesiastes: When we look at the world "under the sun," nothing ultimately satisfies.
 - The challenge we face as we study Ecclesiastes is actually believing Solomon's point as true.

CONTEXT:

- ⇒ In chapter 1, Solomon introduces himself to his readers and invites us to go along with him as he searches for meaning in this life. Two thoughts are key for us to remember.
- ⇒ First, remember who Solomon was. He was the wisest man to live and he had everything we wish we had.
- ⇒ Second, Solomon is looking for meaning in this world as if God didn't exist ("under the sun").

BIBLE STUDY:

1. Pleasure is meaningless (2:1-11)
 - a. Solomon begins his search by exhausting the area so many are trying to pursue: PLEASURE. But notice in verse 1 that Solomon tells us up front that the pursuit of pleasure is meaningless.
 - i. Another name for pleasure is hedonism, or the pursuit of self-indulgence.
 - ii. Most of us have pursued pleasure at one time or another.
 - b. Question: Can pleasure provide a solid foundation for the rest of your life?
 - i. Many people know that pleasure is only temporary, but they still default to pleasure so they will be distracted from the lack of meaning in their lives.
 - ii. Still, most people will make decisions based on what will maximize their pleasure or happiness.
 - c. Let's look through the text and learn about Solomon's pursuit of pleasure:
 - i. Vs. 2: Solomon takes us to the comedy club.
 - ii. Vs. 3 Solomon takes us to the bar.
 - iii. Vs. 4: He built houses – even cities (see 2 Chronicles 8:1-6).
 - iv. Vs. 4-6: He had the best of architecture – vineyards, gardens, parks, irrigation systems.
 1. Interestingly, the word Solomon uses for "gardens" is the same phrase used to describe the Garden of Eden. It must have been beautiful!
 2. If you are interested, Google "Solomon's pools".
 - v. Vs. 6: He had servants galore!
 - vi. Vs. 7: He had herds and flocks.
 - vii. Vs. 8: He had gold and silver (cf 2 Chronicles 9:27).
 - viii. Vs. 8: He bought his own choir and band!
 - ix. Vs. 8: He had all the sexual pleasure one could imagine.
 - d. Solomon tried it all (vs. 10), and he concluded that it was all empty (vs. 11).

- i. Don't miss the point: Solomon outdid anything we could ever do and nothing brought him lasting fulfillment. Pleasure cannot be our final guide.
 - ii. Many aspects of pleasure are good. But when a good thing is turned into a God thing it becomes an enslaving thing.
- 2. Wisdom is meaningless (2:12-17)
 - a. Solomon turns his attention to wisdom and challenges us in verse 12, "Don't try to out do me!" He wants us to learn from his mistakes. Do what he says – not what he did!
 - b. Read vs. 13-14 and ask your class: What is Solomon trying to say to us?
 - i. Wisdom is better than folly – but the value is relative – it doesn't last.
 - ii. What is the "one event that happens to the all"? It is death! Death is the great equalizer.
 - c. In verse 16 he reminds us of something we don't like to think about – we die and eventually no one will remember us at all.
 - d. Look at his powerful conclusion in verse 17. "I hated my life!" Pursuing pleasure, pursuing wisdom – without the Lord – leads to a hatred of life.
- 3. Work is meaningless (2:18-23)
 - a. One commentator labeled these verses, "Confessions of a Workaholic."
 - b. What is Solomon saying in these verses?
 - i. We live our lives exerting all this energy and effort to amass possessions we never really get to enjoy because we are working all the time. In verse 23 he points out that we even cheat ourselves out of rest.
 - ii. Then we die and leave them to someone else who will most likely squander it all. (See Solomon's son Rehoboam!)
 - c. Solomon is depressing, isn't he? But God is gracious to Solomon and to us in exposing the failure of everything and anything else to satisfy. God allows us to feel the meaningless in order to drive us to Him!
 - d. We only find meaning in pleasure, wisdom and work when we view them from God's perspective.
- 4. Find contentment in God and in His gifts (2:24-26)
 - a. Solomon calls us to be content with God and the gifts from His hand. What a powerful reminder – it is God who give us every good thing! (See James 1:17.)
 - b. The things God has given us ought to drive us to praise Him. Instead, we often worship the gift and not the Gift-Giver.
 - c. Solomon says it one more time in verse 25. Apart from God there is no satisfaction. Everything is meaningless without Jesus!

APPLICATION/DISCUSSION:

- ⇒ Out of the three avenues Solomon pursued in chapter 2, which one are you most likely to pursue? What have you learned in your personal pursuits? Have you seen how they do not bring ultimate satisfaction?
- ⇒ How do we find our satisfaction in the Lord? What does that look like?
- ⇒ Can you think of popular advertisements that sell the message that meaning can be found in pleasure? What are they?
- ⇒ How do we see in our culture an unhealthy attitude toward a career?