

## Pleasure is Meaningless [Ecclesiastes 2:1-11]

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### INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by introducing two songs to you this morning.

1. One of the songs is from 2013 and became one of the most well known peppy songs.
  - a. For the movie *Despicable Me 2*, the song *Happy* by Pharrell was the perfect fit.
  - b. It really broke when a new video was created with people dancing along to the tune.
  - c. The lyrics generate a vibe of happiness:
    - Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
    - Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
    - Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
2. The second is a little more obscure: *Farrakhan Hair* by the band Capital Cities.
  - a. It's basically a listing of many different things that people find pleasurable.
  - b. The song proclaims the virtues of "Good Stuff"
    - I like it when you're under the ocean and all you can feel is calm*
    - I like it when I'm sleeping*
    - I like it when I'm listening to music*
    - I like it when public bathrooms have scented candles*
    - I like it when my hair is fluffy*
    - I like it when it rains at night and I'm curled up in bed with a good book*
3. We humans tend to construct our lives around things that we like.
  - a. We embrace the phrase from TV's *Parks and Rec*, "Treat Yo Self;" it encourages this.
  - b. The Declaration of Independence's inalienable rights: life, liberty, pursuit of happiness
  - c. This morning, we continue our blatantly honest look at the meaning of life, Ecclesiastes.
  - d. As the author pursues the meaning of life, he now approaches issues of **pleasure**.

### VERSES 1-3

*I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. <sup>2</sup> "Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?" <sup>3</sup> 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.*

1. The Teacher decided it was time to put pleasure to the test.
  - a. The reflections here are the accumulation of a life long pursuit of pleasure.
  - b. I used to work at a college and it put this into perspective.
    - 1) You see, college is an unparalleled pleasure-fest.
    - 2) In the early stages of adulthood, the goal is to use freedom to pursue pleasure
    - 3) College students will drink, sex, spend their way into oblivion.
    - 4) It's the point of The Story of the Prodigal Son from **Luke 15:13**.
      - "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living."
  - c. Thus begins an examination of pleasurable pursuits which the Teachers investigated.
2. VS 2: **Comedy**
  - a. I enjoy good, thoughtful comedy more than most other things in life.
    - 1) I'm blessed to be able to use sermons to add humor [insert lame joke here].
    - 2) As Roald Dahl noted in his book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*:
      - "A little *nonsense* now and then is *relished by the wisest men*."
  - b. The Teacher's of the over pursuit of comedy: are you able take anything seriously?
3. VS 3: **Alcohol**
  - a. We aren't a teetotaler church because it's not the biblical to alcohol.
    - 1) Maybe of you grew up in a family (like mine) where alcohol was taboo.
    - 2) This approach wasn't always like popular. Things changed during Prohibition.
  - b. Still, the Scriptures outline that alcohol is a serious issue: See **Proverbs 20:1**.
    - 1) As much as it can be a release, it won't deliver happiness.
    - 2) Bars are littered with sad stories of people seeking to drown their sorrows.
    - 3) This wisdom is thousands of years old. Alcohol won't deliver happiness.

## **VERSES 4-8**

<sup>4</sup>I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. <sup>5</sup>I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. <sup>6</sup>I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. <sup>7</sup>I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. <sup>8</sup>I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart.

The Teacher continues to examine a list of pleasurable things.

### **1. VS4: Accomplishments**

- a. When all else fails, we can look back on what we've produced.
- b. It's impressive to look at the trophy rooms of celebrities. See Elvis in Graceland.
- c. The issue: once you accomplish something, you struggle to move on beyond it.
  - 1) How many of you still have trophies from you childhood anymore?
  - 2) Time rolls on. At some point, your accomplishments will feel hollow.

### **2. VS7,8: Possessions**

- a. In ancient times, they wouldn't have had space to collect stuff. It was for the opulent.
- b. Today, there are hoarders who can't let go of anything because it makes them happy.
  - 1) If you watch these shows, you see it becomes more of a sickness than anything
  - 2) Unfortunately for them, accumulating STUFF does not guarantee happiness.

### **3. VS8: Sex**

- a. It's one of the greatest commodities in existence today.
  - 1) People will sacrifice everything (even their reputations and family) for it.
- b. It proves the point more than others: euphoric pleasure causes people to act dumb.

## **VERSES 9-11**

<sup>9</sup>I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. <sup>10</sup>I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. <sup>11</sup>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.

One more item in the pursuit of pleasure:

### **1. VS 9: Fame**

- a. A 2012 study revealed 10-12 year olds wanted fame more than anything.
  - b. WHY DO PEOPLE WANT FAME? A Scientific American study revealed . . .
    - 1) To be seen/valued.
    - 2) To live an elite, high status lifestyle.
    - 3) To use fame to help others or make them proud.
  - c. Something that speaks to this phenomenon: how athletes deal with losing fame.
    - 1) In nearly all sports, athletes are forced into retirement far before they'd like.
    - 2) Many athletes can't deal with no longer being who they once were.
    - 3) I encountered a mid-forties man this week who was formerly a professional athlete.
      - a) He introduced himself by giving his name and his sport/team.
      - b) This guy hadn't played in over a decade, but it was still his identity.
2. Verse 10 is a summation that the Teacher truly pursued any pleasure possible.
  3. What's the result of this pursuit of pleasure: nothing was gained.
    - a. Yes, it might have brought temporary enjoyment, but the pleasure wasn't permanent.

## **CONCLUSION**

1. While this is where the text stops, I think there's more for you and I to ponder here.
2. We Christians misunderstand happiness.
  - a. Victoria Osteen recently said that happiness was key to the Christian experience.
  - b. We see, however, that this perspective is countered in a story that Jesus told.
  - c. **Luke 12:16-21**

<sup>16</sup> And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. <sup>17</sup> He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' <sup>18</sup> "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. <sup>19</sup> And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' <sup>21</sup> "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

2. So how are you and I supposed to live our lives. Understand that:

- a. Happiness isn't bad. God enjoys that we enjoy life.
- b. So try to avoid feeling guilty about it. Some of you know what I'm talking about.
- c. Over-pursuit of happiness is an egocentric exercise. Don't worship your own happiness.
- d. Serve others. True happiness will come.
- e. **Psalm 1:1-3**

*"Blessed is the one  
who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.  
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.*