

Refuge City Church — February 5, 2023
Ecclesiastes — “The Failure of ‘Me-ism’” (Chapter 2)

Introduction

- Have you ever held or been to a party [for any occasion], and were stuck cleaning up after everyone?
 - Trash, cups, plates, leftover food, smashed dessert on the floor, spilled drinks, someone’s shoes in the corner they somehow forgot, decorations/streamers falling down, wrapping paper literally everywhere, the dog rifling through eating all the dropped food... And not a single soul offered to help clean up!
 - Ever just stand there and go, “What just happened??”
 - **Example:** Arriving for church and having to clean up last night’s party.
- Ever wonder, what was all this for? The fun, laughter, craziness, partying, mess...
 - What was the ultimate gain that those who attended will utilize later in life?
- For the situation I’m describing, the answer is = self-indulgence.
- **REMINDER:** “All is vanity.”
 - A vapor [cold breath—here for a moment, gone the next]; unsubstantial, worthless, *no enduring value*, emptiness.

“Party like its 1999” [Verses I-II]

“I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. 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. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also 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. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

- **“I said in my heart”:** think about the “inner monologues” you have with yourself when it comes to making decisions.
 - A lot of the time you’re going to be inclined to do what will immediately make *you* happy.
 - Prior to even making decisions about what you do in life, understand that our sinful nature is present, waiting to deceive and manipulate you into sin.
 - **Jeremiah 17:9**, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

- The moment we seek our own thoughts and wisdom, *apart from the Lord*, we set ourselves up for failure.
- **Testimony [‘College’ Experience]**
 - We need to stop justifying statements like “Everyone experiments in college.”
 - It has nothing to do with college, and everything to do with gratifying sinful desires.
 - **QUOTE:** “Pleasure-seeking usually becomes a selfish endeavor; and selfishness destroys true joy.” [Warren Wiersbe]
 - The relentless pursuit of pleasure and happiness is an endless pit.
- **Verse 10:** “And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.”
- Solomon experimented with it all [sex, partying, drinking, materialism, money/riches, even worshipping the idols of other gods]
 - **1 Kings 11:1-6**, “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father...So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.”
- The more and more we involve ourselves in the hedonistic pleasures [indulgent, unrestrained pleasure-seeking], this world has to offer, no matter what the source of pleasure, you’ll find yourself in a downward spiral of addictive behaviors.
- *Anything* can welcome in addictive behavior that once tasted and enjoyed, only leaves a wider gap to fill.
 - Therefore needing more & stronger means of pleasure that leads to further destructive behavior, all based on the heart’s desire for unfulfilled satisfaction.
- Consider the story of the Prodigal Son **[Luke 15]**
 - “And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.”
- Not for a moment should we believe this can’t happen to those of us who follow the Lord!
 - This son lived in his father’s house. He was under the care of a faithful father who loved and provided for him in every way.
- We are all susceptible to the failures of Solomon and the Prodigal son.
 - [parable of the sower] **Luke 8:13-14**, “And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but

as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

- How many times did Jesus end his teachings with these words of warning, “*For those who have ears to hear, let him hear.*”
- One of the biggest battles we face is to get caught up in the desire for experimentation for gratification, all for the knowledge of experience, and forsake the wisdom of those trying to steer us away from moral or material failure.

“Employment and Enjoyment” [Verses 12-23]

“So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.”

- Simply put, the more you do or try to accomplish apart from obedience to the Lord, will never equate to lasting fulfillment.
- Solomon reflects on his life of vanity.
 - It’s all for not! No matter what you do or accomplish, will be left in the hands of those who *may* squander all you’ve done.
 - **Luke 12:15-21**, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”
 - What happened to all of Solomon’s kingdom, wealth and possessions?
 - His son Rehoboam squandered everything due to his arrogance, and the kingdom was divided in half.
- **Matthew 6:24**, “... You cannot serve God and money.”
- **Matthew 6:21**, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

“The Realization” [Verses 24-26; Conclusion]

“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

- What Solomon realized is what we need today! We need to take some steps to help refocus our attention on where it needs to be.
- As with Solomon, his failure in the pursuit of a ‘me-centric’ lifestyle started with “I said in my heart”.
- So let’s search our heart this morning and pursue a ‘theistic’ lifestyle instead.
 - **Step 1:** Repent of the things you’ve done/pursued that were not pleasing to the Lord and the life He has given to you.
 - **Psalms 51:15-17 NLT**, “Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you. You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.”
 - **Step 2:** Ask the Lord to instill in you a proper heart of perspective towards the things of this world.
 - **Psalm 139:23-24**, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”
 - **Psalm 51:10**, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”
 - **Step 3:** Believe in and act on the promises of what He gives you.
 - **Ezekiel 36:25-27**, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”
 - **Step 4:** As you walk in Him, keep your focus and attention on Him. Keep yourself in a posture of following Him, and not the ways of the world.
 - **Proverbs 4:23-27**, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.”
 - In that, understand that you may trip and fall, but God’s grace is ever-flowing.
 - **Psalm 73:26**, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”
 - Accept His grace [don’t take advantage of it], get up, press on, and have joy in the life God has given to you!