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Desperate to Have it All

Ecclesiastes 1:1-9, 13-17, 2:1, 8-11

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Last week we had a ministry fair “Jump on Board—Go to the Extreme!” The theme was extreme sports. Sociologists believe extreme sports are so popular because in an age of meaninglessness people today are desperate to feel anything. They crave adventure, no matter how meaningless or death defying.

Did you hear about Reg Mellor? At age 72, Reg was the reigning world champion of “ferret legging.” It is a contest involving tying a competitor's trousers at the ankles and subsequent insertion into those trousers of a couple of ferrets. The brave contestant's belt is then pulled tight, and he proceeds to stand in front of the judges as long as he can, while the ferrets claw and chew their way out. Reg's world record is five hours, twenty-six minutes. Now that's an extreme sport!...or maybe it's just a desperate man trying to find meaning...

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 1:1-9, “*The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: 2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." 3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? 4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. 6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. 7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. 8 All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. 9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.*”

Solomon is one of the most fascinating people in the Bible. In addition to writing the popular lyrics for the Byrds' song “Turn, Turn, Turn,” we know about his life in 1 Kings, and his own writings. Song of Solomon was about love, written in his youth. Proverbs is about rules for living, written as a mature man. Ecclesiastes was Solomon's book of regrets, written in old age.

Solomon was the son of King David. After David's death he became King of Israel. God spoke to Solomon when he was a young man, to grant him anything he would want. Solomon asked to be made wise—personal wisdom. What a great request! It only leaves one question: why write *this* book? Ecclesiastes is Solomon's apology for his life. How sad that his last recorded words are an apology! When you and I stop and look at our lives, will we need to write an apology? Will I too be another desperate man searching for meaning?

Here's what I can't figure out: Solomon wasn't filling his life with stupid stuff like ferret-legging. He (like *many* of us) sought true satisfaction and meaning throughout his life, searching “everywhere under the sun”. He sought to apply his wisdom to thought, thrill, and things. What's wrong with that?

First, Solomon sought the world of thought. Things of the mind fascinated him. He writes in 1:13) “*I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on people! 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. 15 What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. 16 I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge."*”

17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. 18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

- Solomon was the greatest mind of the 900's BC.
- He organized the building of the city of Jerusalem, making it one of the greatest of the ancient cities. He constructed the massive temple, equal to any of the ancient wonders of the world.
- His proverbs were known world-wide, so much so that his proverbs are considered basic human knowledge today.
- He says in Ecclesiastes "*So what?*" It left him empty.
- The world of thought was not big enough to satisfy his desperate craving to get all this world has to offer.

Second, he sought the world of thrills. *2:1 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well-- the delights of the heart of a man."* Solomon applied his wisdom to everything.

- He abandoned himself to it.
- He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. That's like a new wife every two weeks of his life! E-television could have had a weekly program "Wild on Jerusalem" or "Desperate Harem Wives."
- Every sensual pleasure known to man was tried by Solomon.
- And it wasn't enough. Even in all his wisdom, it didn't satisfy him. Even after satiating himself, he was left desperate, empty, and craving more, still looking for meaning. The world of thrills was like chasing the wind.

Third, Solomon sought the world of things. *9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 11 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."* Solomon had affluence—even decadence.

- The bible talks about the taxes Solomon charged, which were so high they eventually helped cause the rebellion that split the nation in two. He was the wealthiest king of his day.
- He had one of everything. He had 10 of everything! The Bible gives some incredible lists of things owned by Solomon.
- He had achieved SUCCESS, as defined by our culture and every other culture throughout history.
- Yet he says "I hated life." What really drove Solomon crazy was that all those around him were telling him what a huge success he was. Yet inside he was starving; he had nothing!

Solomon's desperate aim for meaning was the aim of the best people today.

- Is your aim to get all this world has to offer: education, fun, and affluence? Is that your goal? To be self-sufficient and upwardly mobile?
- Even the purpose of modern education is to get it all.

- Now, most people desperately will try and fool you and themselves, thinking this is what they want all along. And the networks pour a lot of dough into you so you'll believe it's true. They say "Any burning emptiness and loneliness inside must be some sort of delusion. Just ignore it, or drown it out with what we have to offer."
- Solomon, though, who had more resources, more knowledge, more power, and literally Godly wisdom, than anyone today, after a lifetime of the quest and the success of having it all, calls this vanity, a chasing after the wind.

Having lots of things can do that to you. Solomon prospered, but prosperity will not bring happiness. A *young spider* lived in a barn. He lowered himself from the rafters by his thread and landed himself in a corner of the barn where he built a web. It was a busy, active corner of the barn, and the spider prospered, living high on the hog, eating all the time, and continually adding to his web. One day, he was surveying his lap of luxury and noticed one small strand stretching way, way up into the darkness where the rafters of the barn were. He looked at his massive web and thought to himself, "I don't need that." With that he cut the strand, and his web unraveled and fell to pieces. He lost everything he had. Solomon, over the course of his life, broke that strand that linked him with God.

Over the course of his life Solomon had many wives from many countries with many different religions. Solomon dabbled with these other things, until he went too far. (That's exactly how sin works: you never start out with the intent to sin). He wasn't strong enough to withstand the temptations that come with God's great blessings. One wife wasn't enough. His present income wasn't enough. Maybe he relied on God's gift of wisdom more than God. He grew apart from God. We do that too, don't we? When we get blessed, our apparent need for God decreases to the point of total apathy. Laziness, indifference, and boredom set in. I think that's it. We're bored. We're indifferent. We're tired and get lazy. And we don't look to God. We lose our grip on his purpose for us.

There comes a point where even the good things in your life can separate you from God. The blessings that helped bring meaning to your life become the very idols that separate you from your ultimate meaning in Him. It's a point at which you are never satisfied. It's there you face a choice—do you trust God to provide the meaning for your life, or do you break His Law and His will, *as if* there is some meaning in life or death you can achieve apart from God?

Solomon talks about life being like "*vanity*" or "*meaningless*" 35 times in 12 chapters. It is the Hebrew word *hebel*, which literally means "*vapor*" or "*breath*," *chasing after the wind*.

There is an old drawing I was able to locate on the internet. I want to warn you, it's a bit scary.

Gruesome, isn't it? But look closer. It's more than it appears. Do you see it? It's not really a skull at all. It's a vanity mirror. It's not two eye sockets. It's a beautiful woman with long dark hair held up in a clip—and her reflection. The teeth? Lots of vials of perfume and make up on the table. The title of the picture is one word: VANITY. Like Solomon wrote, vanity leads to death.

Solomon sought it all, and saw it all. In the midst of it he also saw death. He saw that despite his wealth, wisdom, and power, he had no power over death. He wrote in Ecclesiastes 9:4 "*Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!*" Nothing matters in the face of death: not wisdom, experiences, or culture. This was the ghost that haunted him: how was he going to explain his life to God?

The sad, sad thing *was* that Solomon *had it all*. He'd had a relationship with God. He knew about everything under the sun. He searched his whole life for meaning; yet his final words are "*Vanity of vanities, all is but a chasing after the wind.*" And he was right. That is what everything UNDER the sun leads to.

The other clue as to what can happen even to the wisest, is how Solomon talks about "everything under the sun". Solomon forgot—he was engineered for *eternity* by God, who created the sun! Don't ever let God's blessings here on earth keep your mind *off* of things above. You'll get desperate for all the wrong things.

That's what makes the Gospel even more amazing. In a world of desperate people ignoring God and doing desperate things to find meaning and have it all, Jesus enters in with God's amazing gift of *unconditional* love. Hey, if Jesus is not number one in your life, realize how desperate that will make you eventually, in life or death.

In contrast to Solomon, the Apostle Paul at his death, could look at his life and see the churches he helped plant. The lives he helped touch. The people he helped encourage. He could see the younger disciples going places he had never been. As an old man, Paul wrote of his excitement of going through Rome and on to Spain with the Good News that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again, to free us from desperately chasing everything under the sun (Rom. 15:24, 28). Through Him, we can have a relationship with the One who created the sun, everything under, and everything over it.

If you have everything, but don't have Jesus, you have nothing.

If you have nothing, but have Jesus, you have everything.

How do you want to end up? Like Solomon? Or Paul?

(into "I'd Rather Have Jesus)