

If today's Old Testament lesson and sermon could be summed up in just one word it would be: Contentment. That's it: Contentment. Any questions? Okay. End of sermon, let's sing our next hymn! Just kidding, but I would like to talk briefly about **how** the Lord brings us this contentment. We'll have help along the way from the man whom God inspired to write down today's text. He was a man who learned a big lesson from God about contentment. His name is Solomon.

Solomon, the teacher, as he refers to himself at the beginning of the book was a man who simply put, **had it all**, at least from a worldly point of view. He was king over Israel when Israel was at the height of its power. Solomon had wealth beyond imagination. Even kings and queens of other countries who came to visit stood in awe of Solomon's vast fortune: piles of gold, stashes of bronze and silver, and a practically unlimited supply of strong, beautiful Cedar wood. With all these supplies Solomon built a giant, beautiful temple for the LORD and a grand, spectacular palace for himself. What's more, God gave to Solomon wisdom far above anyone else. Then there was his love life: 700 wives! (Can you imagine all the anniversaries and birthdays this man had to remember?)

In short, Solomon had everything: Power, money, smarts, women, the list goes on. Still, he wasn't satisfied. He wasn't content. Read all 12 chapters of Ecclesiastes and it's clear: All of Solomon's many possessions did not make him happy.

If this was true for old rich King Solomon, then it is certainly true for each of us: Accumulating stuff, no matter what it is and how much of it, will never make you truly happy.

Let's listen to the Teacher. In verse ten he says, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless." Now there's a word Solomon uses a lot in this book: Meaningless. This is a word that's hard to translate, but, the Hebrew word here might better be translated as vapor or smoke. Smoke may look solid, but try grasping it, and it will slip right through your fingers. So, whenever you hear the word "meaningless" in Ecclesiastes think of vapor or smoke, something you can't hold on to.

In this book, Solomon talks a lot about his pursuit of power and pleasure, **but** all of it only led him to a terrible sense of emptiness. It was all meaningless, "a chasing after the wind," as he calls it. Like trying to catch a handful of smoke, you can't do it.

The reason for Solomon calling everything meaningless, no doubt stemmed from all his experiences pursuing wealth, power, and prestige while at the same time losing sight of God and falling away from faith in Him. The book of 1 Kings is brutally honest about the fact that Solomon turned away from the LORD. It says, "Solomon...turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been" (1 Kings 11:4). Solomon, the great, wise Teacher had done a very foolish thing by allowing himself to fall into idolatry. Solomon had lost the devoted faith in the Lord that he once had.

So, what does this have to do with us today? After all, **we** don't bow down to idols like Solomon and others did back in the days of old. No, but we can still have false gods. Instead of wooden statues or golden calves today's false gods tend to take the form of cars,

houses, weekend getaways, even one's own family. **Anything** that takes our focus off of God and His commandments, anything which becomes top priority over Him, anything to which our heart looks for security and trust above God is a false god. That's why Jesus says, "How difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." There is a great temptation, especially for the rich, to turn to possessions for security rather than to God.

As believers in Christ we face many challenges that threaten our faith. This is true whether we think we're rich or not. We live in a country, after all, with a tremendous amount of material blessings. There are so many things that we have that we all take for granted like cell phones, indoor plumbing, electric lights, and central air; luxuries that were far beyond the wildest dreams of the kings and queens of old. Besides living in comfortable homes, we live in a materialistic culture which tries to avoid all thoughts of what our ultimate purpose is in life. Instead of going to God's Word, most people would rather go shopping. That temptation is there for us, too.

But, the time will come when we all have to stop and ask "What's going to happen when I die?" "What does my life really mean in the face of death?" Ecclesiastes forces us to think about that: Starting at verse 15, the teacher says: "Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand. This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind? All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger" (15-17). These are hard words; **challenging** words. This text makes us ask, "What **is** my life really all about?"

Solomon discovered that life and all the success a person can ever have, ultimately have no real and lasting significance, like smoke or dust in the wind. Life is dissatisfying, the teacher says and we're all going to die eventually. How's that for uplifting? "Who then can be saved?" we ask along with Jesus' disciples in today's Gospel. "With man it is impossible, but not with God," is the comforting answer our Lord gives. "For all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:26-27)

Life without God **is** meaningless, like a vapor that soon vanishes, that's the lesson Solomon, the teacher, learned. Life without God means we're stuck in the useless, futility of the daily grind **and** we're stuck in our sins. But with God all things **are** possible. There **is** hope. It's found in Jesus Christ; God's Son sent to save us from the futility of sin.

I think we have good reason to believe that Solomon turned back to faith in the Lord before he died. One big reason is this book which he wrote late in life and, despite all the negativity and his sometimes bitter tone, comes around to this conclusion at the very end of the book: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). And in our text, which is the main point for us to take away this morning: "Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him- for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God" (18-19, NIV).

Being content with what God gives you is what life on this earth is all about. After all of his years and all of his failings, the Teacher finally got it figured out: Be content with

what God graciously provides you. Find enjoyment in the work you've been given to do. Because, if you do not enjoy what God has given you, then you will not be happy.

Solomon *could* rejoice and be content because God did not treat him as his sins deserved, nor does God treat us as *our* sins deserve. In the closing verses of our text, Solomon offers hope that there is more to life, that our days now lived "under the sun" are short. Something better awaits those who fear, love, and trust in God above all things. It's eternal life '*above*' the sun, you could say, with the *Son* of God.

In Matthew chapter 12 Jesus says that "one greater than Solomon" has appeared. He's talking about Himself, Solomon's descendant; the Son of David and the Son of God Who came into this world for us. Through His perfect life, He did what we could not do. Through His loving death on a cross, He paid the price for all the wrong we have done, including not being content with what God has given us, and also for the sin of putting anything above God, as Solomon did. Through His rising to life on the third day, Jesus, Solomon's descendant won for us eternal life. **The great good news is that Jesus Christ is the answer to the questions and mysteries that the book of Ecclesiastes poses about life.**

Our real purpose in life is finding contentment and joy in God and what He has provided, not only our possessions and work, but most importantly in His Son, Jesus Christ. Because we have the forgiveness of sins and the sure and certain hope of eternal life in heaven with God, we can now truly be content doing all the work God gives us to do on this earth until we receive our final gift in its fullness- eternal life in heaven where we will be with the Lord forever. Amen!