

# How to Enjoy Life

Ecclesiastes 2:1-26  
*Halifax: 10 November 2013*

## **Introduction:**

Today is our third week in Ecclesiastes and already we have been through the entire first chapter...

- But Solomon has had nothing good to say about life under the sun.
- In fact he seems to be saying that it is impossible to enjoy life and that life has no meaning—
  - He has stressed that it is all vanity—there is nothing in it but frustration...
  - We have seen that the word he uses—vanity—refers to something like the breath that you can see on a cold day that quickly disappears...
    - That is how substantive he has found life to be.
      - He has had nothing positive to say about it at all.
- Now you will remember that I had mercy on you in preaching to you from this book...
  - I could not preach a message that ended where our text ended and that did not take us to Christ...
    - It would not even be right for me to do so.
    - We must remember that Solomon wrote the book to be read in one sitting.
  - So I cheated and took a look at the end of the book where Solomon shows us the conclusion...
    - That true meaning is found in this world when we bring the eternal God into our purview...
      - When we learn to live life not merely under the sun, but also before the face of God—
        - to fear God and to keep His commandments.
        - to realise that everything we do will be judged by Him, and that it is our privilege to live our lives for Him.
          - This is where true meaning will be found.

But as for the progress of Solomon's quest to find meaning—as far as that goes...

- he ended chapter one on a note of complete despair...that all was vanity.
- And as we move into chapter 2, we will find that the theme continues and actually worsens to the point where he starts to express bitterness...
  - It looks like is only going to get worse and worse until we are swallowed up in bitter despair and cynicism.

But just as that point is reached, there is a pleasant surprise—right at the end of chapter 2!

- In the last three verses, Solomon, for the first time, strikes a positive note!
  - I agree with Luther who says that in these verses we find the theme of the whole book!

- It is here that Solomon tells us how to enjoy life under the sun!
  - He will say more about this in chapter 12 and along the way, but here he opens up the solution to us for the first time...
  - So we will not have to cheat this week and go to chapter 12.
    - We can find resolution right here in our text.

Here, let me read the text to you...Ecclesiastes 2:1-26...

- Listen reverently because this is the very Word of God.

**Ecc 2:1-26: I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity. <sup>2</sup> I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” <sup>3</sup> I searched in my heart *how* to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. <sup>4</sup> I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. <sup>5</sup> I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all *kinds* of fruit trees in them. <sup>6</sup> I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. <sup>7</sup> I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. <sup>8</sup> I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, *and* musical instruments of all kinds. <sup>9</sup> So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. <sup>10</sup> Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. <sup>11</sup> Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind. *There was* no profit under the sun.**

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what *can* the man *do* who succeeds the king? — *Only* what he has already done. <sup>13</sup> Then I

saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. <sup>14</sup> The wise man’s eyes *are* in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all. <sup>15</sup> So I said in my heart, “As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart, “This also *is* vanity.” <sup>16</sup> For *there is* no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now *is* will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise *man* die? As the fool!

<sup>17</sup> Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun *was* distressing to me, for all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind. <sup>18</sup> Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. <sup>19</sup> And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also *is* vanity. <sup>20</sup> Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. <sup>21</sup> For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. <sup>22</sup> For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? <sup>23</sup> For all his days *are* sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also *is* vanity. <sup>24</sup> Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. <sup>25</sup> For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? <sup>26</sup> For

**God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

May the LORD bless to us the reading of His Holy Word.

Last week, Solomon had endeavoured to sort everything out and find answers by study.

- He had employed all the means that were at his disposal...
  - (and there were many such means with his unlimited wealth, his access to wise men of the world, and his own matchless gifts of intellect and wisdom).
  - With all of these advantages, he studied as to what profit could be had from all of man's toil and labour under the sun.
    - But he could only conclude at last that it was all vanity.
      - There was no way to straighten out all that was crooked.
- And you will remember that he even concluded that his whole study project itself was vanity and chasing after the wind.
  - All he gained by it was weariness and grief,
    - because the more he looked into solving things by education, the more he saw how deep and unsolvable the problems are and how many there are.
    - He would have been happier to be without this knowledge...
    - Rationalism has failed him.

So now as we come to chapter 2, he does what many do when rationalism has failed them.

- He does, in fact what we have done in the west...
  - Remember, I mentioned last week that in the early 1900s we were hoping to solve all our problems by education...
    - We were arrogant enough to suppose that we could and would end war and poverty and such—and that we would figure out the way to happiness...
      - but as with Solomon, our learning failed us.
      - Like Solomon we became disillusioned...
  - So what have we done?
    - We have done what Solomon does at the beginning of our text...
    - Rationalism has failed us so we have turned to irrationalism...
    - Greg Singer, my history professor in seminary,
      - wrote a book on this which has a title that captures this...
        - “From Rationalism to Irrationalism.”

**I. Because education has failed him, Solomon turns to madness—to laughter.**

- Look at the opening verses of chapter 2 where this little jaunt is described.

- **Ecc 2:1: I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity. <sup>2</sup> I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?”**
- A. Understand that he refers here to pouring himself out into pleasures.
1. You know how Paul speaks of pouring out his life for the gospel,
    - well Solomon is pouring out his soul into pleasure.
      - The language employed conveys the idea of total abandonment—of giving oneself up to it.
      - He is directing his heart to this way of living.
  2. Having seen all the unsolvable problems of life, he figures,
    - What’s the use of worrying about it?
      - I will just indulge myself in merriment—and forget all the problems.
      - I will enjoy unlimited entertainment, wine, women, and song.
      - I will grab all the pleasure I can find and I won’t even think about what the outcome will be...
        - I will drink without considering the hangover—I can always just drink some more...
    - This is what so many in our society are doing today...
      - Even with Christmas approaching—their idea is, I will buy what I want for the moment—
        - I can put it on the credit card and I won’t have to worry about paying it back until after the holidays.
      - A mom who ought to be teaching her children and caring for them says, “I want to text my friends and I want to watch my videos...
        - I can catch up on my work later...
      - A young man who needs to be preparing for the future says,
        - I will play the new video game today—I can study tomorrow.
      - A young married man says,
        - I will gamble all my money today because today I might win—tomorrow I can work.
        - Another says, I will look my pornography just one more time—I can read my Bible tomorrow—it’s just that right now I must do this...
        - Another—I will just take another drink now—one more day won’t make any difference.
      - Right now is everything to those in this mode...
        - A movie now, a bag of chips now, a novel now, a YouTube now...
      - You pour out your life—your soul—into this or that and forget about the consequences.
        - Sometimes it is one thing that we pour our souls into...
        - Sometimes, as with Solomon here, it is whatever strikes our fancy at the moment...
  3. Solomon calls it giving himself up to laughter and madness.

- This is the kind of laughter transports the mind out of reason and destroys all sound judgement.
  - Underneath the laughter there is deep sorrow, and the more the laughter increases, the deeper the sorrow grows.
- Before his conversion William Wilberforce describes his own laughter as madness...he says:
  - “Often, while in the full enjoyment of all that this world could bestow, my conscience told me, that in the true sense of the word I was not a Christian. I laughed. I sang. I was apparently gay and happy. But the thought would steal across me—‘What madness is all this! to continue easy in a state, in which a sudden call out of the world would consign me to everlasting misery, and that when eternal happiness is within my grasp!’”
- There is nothing wrong with laughing at our smallness before God—
  - In fact, it is healthy for us to do so...
  - Proverbs says that laughter can also be used as a good medicine...
    - but as with any good medicine, we can become addicted to it.
    - It is sheer folly—madness—to abandon ourselves to a frivolous irrational attitude that laughs at danger and goes on blindly ignoring every warning and with no thought for others.

B. Solomon quickly comes to a conclusion that mad laughter is not the way to true happiness under the sun.

- He realises what Kidner calls *the paradox of hedonism*...
  - that the more you hunt for pleasure, the less you find of it!
- Solomon quickly concludes that the way of irrationality is vanity and asks, “What does it accomplish?”
  - It does nothing to make you happy in this world—it makes you more and more miserable.
  - Just for a moment of pleasure, you keep digging yourself into a deeper and deeper hole of sorrow.

TRANS> There are many who know this, but who continue on in the folly.

- They call it addiction. Solomon calls it madness!
- They cannot give up their yearning for the ecstasy of the moment.
  - We see many very weak men and women like this in our day.
  - They are in bondage to their own lusts!
- But Solomon rejects this way of living as capable of making anyone happy...

## **II. He will now pursue more refined pleasure—pleasure that is tempered by wisdom and wisdom that is softened by pleasure.**

A. Perhaps the answer is here!

- He describes his plan in verse 3...

- **Ecc 2:3: I searched in my heart *how* to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.**
1. Do you see that—*while guiding my heart with wisdom*...
    - It will be a pleasure-seeking that is directed by wisdom...
      - He is not talking about giving himself up to drunkenness at this point.
        - Wine here represents feasting and enjoying the finer things of life.
        - He won't be all about study and prudence—he will use his wisdom to pursue noble and excellent things for happiness.
      - He will use his wine to fullest enjoyment...
        - not abandoning himself to it so as to destroy his life,
        - but using it in such way that it maximises long term pleasure and good.
  2. He has learned that study and work alone make one weary and grieved, while pleasure alone only leads to trouble and disappointment...
    - But surely the way to true happiness is to wed the two so that you can have best of both.
  3. This could be called a quest for the good life!
    - It involves getting all you can out of life—working hard, but not so hard that you don't take time to enjoy things—to find pleasure in them.
      - as he says, **“till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.”**
    - Surely this would be the key to true happiness and fulfillment!
- B. He goes on to describe how he followed through with his plan.
1. The good life involves being industrious—achieving things by honest labour that bring you happiness and pleasure.
    - And of course Solomon, with all of the wealth and the abilities that God had given him, was able to do a whole lot more than most people can do...
    - But we need to be careful about envy...
      - I think envy is one of the greatest vices of our day.
        - Is it not the way of almost all of us to use our gifts, both our abilities and our resources, to full measure?
          - And then to quickly turn and criticise those who do exactly the same thing that we are doing, but who have greater ability and success?
        - Do most people not try to get the best job they can and to purchase the best food that they can afford and live in the best house they can afford and go on the best vacation they can afford?
          - In fact, is it not the normal way of most Canadians to actually overreach and to spend more than what we have been given?
            - We spend so much that we cannot tithe?

- We spend so much that we must go into debt?
  - Solomon was here seeking to use what he had been given with wisdom to enjoy good in a responsible way.
2. Look at some of the splendid things that he accomplished!
- Many of these things are actually praised in the Bible...
    - a. He says that he built houses and planted vineyards...
      - Indeed he did—he spent over ten years building his palace, complete with a throne of ivory and the finest furnishings.
      - He built other houses too—for entertaining guests, for pleasure, and for habitation (after all, he had 700 wives with their servants and children, not to mention his 300 concubines).
    - b. In verse 5 & 6 he speaks of his gardens and orchards complete with water pools for beauty and for irrigation.
      - He brought together what was lovely with what was productive and fruitful—and was able to provide fresh fruits for his entire household...
        - Wouldn't you like to do that if you could?
        - He is just able to do it better.
    - c. And he says that he acquired many servants and both flocks and herds...
      - In 1 Kings 4:7, we are told that
        - **1 Kings 4:7: Solomon had twelve governors over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household; each one made provision for one month of the year.**
      - And in 1 Kings 4:22-23 we are told what his daily provision was (which some have estimated to be enough to feed about 35,000 people):
        - **1 Kings 4:22-23: Now Solomon's provision for one day was thirty kors of fine flour, sixty kors of meal, 23 ten fatted oxen, twenty oxen from the pastures, and one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl.**
      - I would not have the ability to manage all of these people and all this wealth—but Solomon did and he is not condemned for this.
    - d. In verse 8, he tells how he also gathered things of beauty and ornamentation—fine treasures to enjoy...
      - **Ecc 2:8: I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.**
      - Do we not also enjoy many such things that we do not really need.
        - We have gold and silver jewelry and we have pictures on our walls and ornaments on our tables...
          - we have televisions and telephones and cars...
          - We have more chairs than we need for our entire family...and they are very comfortable ones at that.

- We even have thermostats with central heating along with running water and flush toilets and computers...
  - And again, often we are guilty of overextending ourselves—there is no indication that Solomon did that—
    - except in the matter of his wives and of multiplying horses and chariots which God had prohibited.
3. Solomon truly did achieve the good life that everyone seems to seek...
- a. In verse 9 he explains that he became greater than all who had gone before him, *but still retained his wisdom!*
    - In Timothy, Paul warned about the dangers of drowning in the midst of much wealth—but Solomon retained at least, his worldly wisdom...
    - He managed what he had with wisdom and discretion.
      - He did not get swallowed up by irrational pleasures and perversions...
      - He did not become a cruel dictator, but caused those like the Queen of Sheba to marvel at the happiness of his servants to live in such a prosperous, beautiful, and well-ordered household.
  - b. In verse 10, Solomon tells how he did indeed rejoice in all of his acquisitions and in his labour...
    - **Ecc 2:10: Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor.**
    - This pursuit of pleasure was not abandonment to vice—that was clearly not the way...
      - but the pursuit of the good life—putting your talents and all your resources into service for pleasure and beauty.
        - He had his Garden of Eden.
    - In the economy of God, all of this is used as a type of the glory of Christ's kingdom.
      - He does His work and He obtains His reward!

TRANS> Surely in this Solomon had found the good that he sought—true happiness and contentment!

### III. But now it is time for assessment...

- Solomon will be brutally honest in evaluating all that he had achieved and assessing all that he had gotten by his labours.
    - We need to be brutally honest about what we have too—what we *really* have.
- A. He was surrounded by pleasures (just as we all are), but he was still not satisfied!
1. He might have boasted in his achievements and pretended contentment, but instead he says quite honestly (v. 11):
    - **Ecc 2:11: Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind. *There was no profit under the sun.***



- There is that word *vanity* again—nothing more than a wisp of smoke or than steam from a kettle...
  - He realised that all that he had achieved was but a perishing, withering, dying comfort...
  - It was, with respect to eternity, as lasting as a vapour...
    - He had done nothing more than attempt to herd the wind.
    - There was no profit under the sun!
- 2. So many who achieve the good life have a similar assessment...
  - Philip Ryken has collected some great illustrations about this...
    - a. He tells of Peggy Lee who went to the circus as a child...
      - It was dubbed the greatest show on earth.
        - She went with eager anticipation, but was disappointed...
        - Then she croons her famous refrain:
          - **“Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that’s all there is, my friends, then let’s keep dancing. Let’s break out the booze and have a ball if that’s all there is.”**
      - She was looking for more than the circus could deliver.
    - b. Gregg Easterbrook wrote *The Progress Paradox* which is subtitled *How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.
      - The title says it all.
        - In the book, he proves that we have more of almost everything today... except happiness!
        - If wealth and achievement make people happy, we ought to be the happiest people who ever lived—but we are not!
          - Mr. Easterbrook shows that the more we have, the more new things we want. Our appetite always exceeds our possessions.
      - We look in our possessions and experiences for more than they are able to deliver...more than they are meant to deliver.
    - c. Rabbi Harold Kurhner wrote *When all You’ve ever Wanted Isn’t Enough*.
      - It is about a woman who married a corporate executive and got her dream house and now goes around saying, “Is this all there is to life?”
      - She looked for more from the good life than it can deliver.
    - d. And then there is the interview that *60 Minutes* did with Tom Brady, the quarterback who led the New England Patriots to three Super Bowl victories.
      - In the interview he said, **“I reached my goal, my dream, my life...”**
        - All his friends expected him to be the happiest man in the world...
          - But he said, **“I think, it’s got to be more than this...I mean, this isn’t, this can’t be what it’s all cracked up to be.”**
        - When asked what the answer is, he said,
          - **“I wish I knew. I wish I knew.”**

TRANS> Like Tom Brady,

- B. Solomon has a bitter assessment when he looks at what he has really gotten out of all his achievements.
- He is bitter because he has simply not found the fulfillment he expected to find from all that he had achieved...
1. In verse 12-16, he compares wisdom to madness and folly...and concludes that wisdom is really no better in the end...
- perhaps along the way—but not in the end.
- a. Here he has worked hard and has obtained the good life,
- but would it really be any different in the end if he had gone on recklessly abandoning himself to live for the moment?
  - In verse 12, he considers that no one who comes after him will be able to do all the things that he has done...
    - Will anyone then, be able to find true satisfaction from his achievements in this world?
      - If it did not come to Solomon and to Tom Brady and to our whole society with our unprecedented wealth—
        - with our motorized heated chariots and our instant access to a world of entertainment—
          - will anyone find fulfillment from the good life?
- b. Sure, Solomon says, **“Wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness...”**
- The wise man does not run up his credit card to satisfy today’s cravings...
    - He can see that that will lead to sorrow when he has to pay off his debt...
    - He does not enter into an affair that will destroy his family.
    - He does not make unreasonable demands on his servants so that they all turn against him...
      - His life in this world goes along better than the fool’s...
  - As he says in verse 14—**“The wise man’s eyes are in his head...”**
    - He sees where his actions will lead—unlike the fool who “walks in darkness...”
- c. Yet there is no escape from the damning conclusion...at the end of v. 14:
- **v. 14—The same event happens to them all!**
  - He is talking about death! The worldly wise man dies the same as the fool so what difference does it make that he was wise!
    - **v. 15: So I said in my heart, “As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart, “This also is vanity.”**
      - The fool has his pleasure for a day—when he gets his booze or his harlot...or his cheque...
        - And then it is over—but the wise man has nothing but a longer jaunt with his pleasures and then he dies anyway...
          - and nobody really cares that he had the good life...

- The wise man is like the ant that ridicules the cricket for playing in the summer and dying in the winter because he made no provision...
  - But in time the ant dies anyway and then there is no difference.
- Alexander the Great was taught this lesson by the Greek philosopher Diogenes when Diogenes stood in a field gazing intently at a pile of bones and drew out an inquiry as to what he was doing from Alexander...
  - He replied, "I am looking for your father Philip, but I cannot seem to distinguish his bones from the bones of the slaves!"
- **v. 16: For *there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool!***
  - Oblivion and death happen to them all

TRANS> Now his bitterness goes a step further...

2. Now he expresses a disdain for life.
  - a. It has let him down—and he is angry.
    - He has achieved the good life and it was all a lie so now he says that he hates life because it is all adds up to vanity...
      - He has despaired of finding anything truly satisfying under the sun.
    - Look at verse 17
      - **Ecc 2:17: Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.**
      - The old theme of vanity and herding the wind comes up again.
  - b. Many people express this same bitterness about life even when they attain the good life.
    - We saw that in those examples.
    - Not only do they gain no real satisfaction from it,
      - but they also realise that they have spent their whole life labouring for it and then must leave it all to someone else who very likely will not appreciate all the work they put into it.
    - Verses 18 through 21 lament this reality...calling it a *great evil*:
      - **Ecc 2:18-21: Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. <sup>19</sup> And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. <sup>20</sup> Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. <sup>21</sup> For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.**
    - In many ways, this is the reality of the last several generations among our peoples...

- Our forefathers laboured and toiled to get ahead and we inherited their fortunes...
  - But we have not been able to even sustain what they left us so that now most of us have spent our way into debt.
  - We have squandered the inheritance that they left to us.
- c. Solomon finds it unfair that he has toiled and laboured so hard and faced sleepless nights because of his labours...
  - only to know that in the end, he gains nothing from it all...
    - Verses 22-23 state this:
      - **Ecc 2:22-23: For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? <sup>23</sup> For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.**
    - The language here is quite strong...
      - His work are said to be sorrowful and his work burdensome...
        - The word **sorrowful** expresses a very painful grief—
          - it is used of Israel’s hard and bitter bondage in Egypt and in Babylon and even of the grief that Christ suffered on the cross in Isaiah 53...
        - In the original, it is abstract—
          - his days are not only sorrowful, but literally, they are **sorrow itself**...
        - And it is also plural—his days are **sorrows**...and his work burdensome—
          - the process of the labour itself was a heavy load to bear and there is nothing—nothing to show for it!

TRANS> You are in great danger when such thoughts dominate your mind...

- You are in danger of the bitterness of Cain...
  - You are in danger of hating God and hating your brother because of your dissatisfaction.
  - You have spent yourself in your labour, trying to gain some true happiness by it—and it has eluded you...
    - You have asked for life under the sun more than it can ever deliver...
      - And you are in danger of becoming hardened and embittered toward your Maker!
- But know my brothers and sisters that is it the mercy of God that you cannot get all that you want out of life...
  - Even when you get all that you thought would make you happy!
  - It is a mercy that God does not let us get satisfaction from the world that we might turn to Him.
    - Do not let bitterness for this mercy keep you from seeing it as a mercy and turning to God.

- You are asking what this world cannot deliver even if it were paradise!
  - Solomon had a virtual paradise—but he sought more from it than it could deliver.

#### **IV. But just when it looks like Solomon is about to be drowned in bitterness, the light breaks forth!**

##### A. It is a wonderful break through!

1. Out of all of this bitterness, Solomon suddenly sees that we actually can enjoy our labour after all...He says so in verse 24:
  - **Ecc 2:24: Nothing is better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor.**
  - This is the first time he has been positive in Ecclesiastes!
    - This is the theme of the entire book—*that we can have joy in our work under the sun in the Lord!*
    - That we can find meaning in it...
2. It is a wonderful surprise—
  - This is the way that it often happens...
    - God uses life in this world to break us—
      - sometimes it is because we cannot reach our goals...
      - sometimes it is because we realise that even though we have reached them and attained many things, it is still not satisfying.
    - And just when bitterness and despair are about to destroy us, the light of the gospel breaks into our lives and we get it!
      - That is what happens here with Solomon!
      - I hope that it is happened to you...
        - I hope you are not living in the delusion that you can find what you are looking for in this vain world.
        - You are asking the world for what it was never created to deliver!

TRANS> So you can actually enjoy this world...

##### B. Where does this joy come from?

1. Solomon goes on to tell us—picking up at the end of verse 24...
  - **v. 24: This also, I saw, was from the hand of God!**
  - This ability to eat and drink and to enjoy good in our labour!
    - God is the one who enables us to do that.
    - We cannot do it without Him! It is not in us to do it.
  - Verse 25 is difficult to translate...
    - The first part is clear enough—
      - “for who can eat, or who can have enjoyment...”
      - but the difficulty comes with the “more than I” which is hardly a translation—it is more like “without me.”
      - That would make sense if God were talking, but He is not.

- There is a variation in the manuscripts and the Septuagint follows this variant which reads...
    - “without Him”
      - Who can eat and have enjoyment without Him—without God in whose hand our eating and drinking and joy come from.
2. Whatever the details of translation, though, the meaning is clear enough with verse 26...where it tells us that God is the one who gives joy to His people!
- **Ecc 2:26: For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.**
    - a. God gives to all men many good things under the sun to all men—both the just and the unjust...
      - and though all men have them, only those who are good in God’s sight are given the ability to enjoy them!
      - As Doug Wilson put it,
        - Everyone is given a can of peaches (good things)...
          - but only the good are given a can opener so that they not only have the peaches, but can also enjoy them!
          - The wicked don’t have the can opener that enables them to enjoy what they have.
    - b. Solomon actually depicts the wicked as gathering and collecting a great pile of this world’s treasure—for the righteous to enjoy!
      - He does not mean that they do not get to live in their houses and drive their cars and even to find the awesome...
        - or to have their marriages and their children and their achievements and all the rest...that is the peaches...
      - But what they cannot do is enjoy these things.
        - It is the righteous that are enabled to receive all of these things with wisdom, knowledge and joy—
          - so that we alone can have true pleasure in them!
        - The wicked often build wonderful things and write wonderful books and make wonderful movies...
          - but we who are pleasing to God are the ones who get to truly enjoy them.
3. So what is it that makes such a difference in the way we interact with the world?
- a. It is this...
    - The righteous have been reconciled to God’s favour and they know that they have.
    - God has come to us in His mercy and He has shown us our sin and convinced us of our condemnation because of it...

- And He has lovingly, graciously, and marvellously provided the way of reconciliation through Jesus Christ crucified...
  - And He has brought us to trust in Jesus and to know that our sins are forgiven and that we have eternal life in His house.
  - We know that through Jesus Christ, we please the Father!
- b. And all of this completely changes the way we look at this world in such a way that we can truly enjoy life...
- 1) We can enjoy life, first of all, because we know not to ask too much of life...
- We know that we are in a fallen world because of our sin and that this world has been subjected to vanity.
  - We are not looking to find ultimate satisfaction and meaning in this present world—we are just passing through...
    - so we are not set up for disappointment by expecting too much.
      - Even though our achievements are not as great as we would like, we can rejoice in them whatever they are...
      - Even though we may have difficulty in our labour, we can rejoice even that we are able to labour for God and others.
      - We have no need to get bent out of shape over our losses either... we can be thankful for whatever we have had.
    - Our citizenship is in heaven and we are just passing through.
      - Our treasure is hidden with Christ in glory.
      - The worldling who is looking to find his treasure in this life is unhappy with a banquet because it is still not enough...
        - it wouldn't be enough for us either without Christ...
        - but because our treasure is in heaven, we can rejoice with a crust of dry bread.
- 2) Secondly, we can enjoy life here because we know that we do not deserve any of it.
- We know, as Jacob said, that we are not worthy of the least of God's mercies...
    - And yet, we meet with thousands of mercies each day from the gracious hand of our God!
    - And therefore, whatever mercies we receive, small or great, we can rejoice in them as tokens of God's grace and goodness...
      - Even as harbingers of the manifold mercy that is yet to come to us in the resurrection.
  - The man of the world is bitter because he has not faced his sin before God—and he feels that he deserves better than he has gotten.
    - In Christ, at least when we are thinking in the right way, we are overwhelmed that we have so much more than we deserve.
      - That enables us to fully enjoy all that we have.

- c. So here is a chance for you to take your spiritual temperature...
- 1) Are you able to enjoy life under the sun?
    - Has the Lord given you joy?
    - Are you able to enjoy it while you are here because you have been reconciled to God who is above the sun and above the heavens?
    - Are you always dissatisfied and looking for more from the world?
      - Or are you filled with gratitude for God's mercy that ever flows to us here?
  - 2) Here is a beautiful testimony from a dear simple saint in the 18<sup>th</sup> century whose name is not known—but who had the key to joy from God. She wrote:
    - I do not know when I have had happier times in my soul than when I have been sitting at my work, with nothing before me but a candle and a white cloth, and hearing no sound but that of my own breath, with God in my soul and heaven in my eye. I rejoice in being exactly what I am—a creature capable of knowing God, and who, as long as God lives, must be happy. I get up and look a while out the window. I gaze at the moon and the stars, the work of an Almighty Hand. I think of the grandeur of the universe and then sit down and think myself one of the happiest beings in it.
- Truly, my brothers and sisters, godliness with contentment is great gain!
    - Is it your possession?
    - Has that light that broke through to Solomon broken through to your soul?