

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] All right, very good. Please take your copy of God Word out and turn to the book of Ecclesiastes. Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes chapter 2. We've had some technical challenges as of late around here, so I imagine there'll be some fluctuation in the sound of my voice.

A couple of weeks ago, the projector literally shook itself to death. And in the midst of all that time, also a piece of our soundboard, which I don't understand, went out, and it has been shipped away. And we are using a tiny little mini board back there right now, and I think the guys are all, there's a cluster trying to sort out what's happening with our sound this morning.

At some point, we may just can it, and I'll yell a lot this morning. We're going to continue our study of Ecclesiastes today in chapter 2. But before we get there, before I read the text for this morning, I just want to remind you that this book is, in a sense, a sermon.

In fact, the title Ecclesiastes is our Anglicanized version of the Latin Vulgate of the translation of the preacher.

[1:23] Quoholeth from Hebrew is where we get this idea, this Ecclesiastes. It's a sermon preached by the preacher. Most presume that the preacher is Solomon, but we don't know that for a fact, and so I'm going to maintain calling him the preacher throughout our study of this text.

And he begins his sermon in chapter 1, verses 2 and 3 by saying, Vanity of vanities. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun, that is, on the earth?

And then the preacher gives us a personal biography of his search for gain under the sun. We see the beginning of this in verse 13 of chapter 1 and into 14.

And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun.

And behold, all this vanity or meaningless and a striving after wind. He begins the story of his search with a number of self-indulgent pleasures.

[2:37] These are his experiments in gain. He looks at the things that men seem to find satisfaction in in the world. And he picks up those things and he chases them out to their very end, only to find that they're all vain.

They're all a chasing after the wind, that none of them are ultimate gain. And beloved, as we look at these things together, we need to recognize that there is no new thing.

New forms of the same old things. And we need to let God's word speak to us about the things that we chase in this world to find pleasure and gain.

So I'm going to read to you the first 11 verses of chapter 2. And this will be our text for some coming weeks. I don't know how many it will be, but we're going to kind of take it a piece at a time.

So let me read to you chapter 2, beginning in verse 1. I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself.

[3:45] But behold, this was also vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad. And of pleasure, what use is it? I searched 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 eye 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.

[5:04] 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.

This is God's word to us. It was written for His glory and our good, and we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Now this morning my remarks on this text are going to be brief. For the sake of time, I've promised you'll be able to get to the Life Chain event at 1215, but also because I believe it's important for us to take some considerable time to consider this phrase in verse 2, I said of laughter, it is mad.

We as American people have much time for leisure, much time for frivolity. We don't live in a place where we're concerned that we may be bombed on our way home.

We don't live in a place where the ravages of disease run rampant. We typically live in a place that's fairly comfortable.

[6:28] And so for us to stop and consider what place does laughter have in our lives, I think it's important for us this morning. This is the preacher's first experiment and self-indulgent pleasure.

Laughter. This word for laughter in Hebrew has a very broad and varied meaning to it. It means to play, to act clumsy, to joke, mock, deride, to make a laughing stock of an individual.

It could be thought of as the pleasure of comedy. If there's a noun given to this pursuit that he goes into, the pleasure of comedy, or we could think of it as just general silliness.

So it's an experiment with this type of thing that he picks up and he takes a look at and he runs it out and considers, is this a thing to be gained under the sun?

Comedy is often an entertainment that many people use to make it through life. It could take the form of jokes that mask insecurities, the abuse of others for the sake of one's own esteem, countless wasted hours to numb boredom, and the making light of grievous sin in order to justify it.

[7:55] After all, something laughed at can't be something serious, can it? It is this type of laughter that the preacher calls mad.

Mad in Hebrew does not refer to being out of one's mind. The late Old Testament theologian Derek Kidner says that it indicates moral perversity rather than mental oddity.

He's saying that this is a thing not fitting to one who follows God. God. This makes no sense for the godly. So, it is improper or misplaced laughter.

Now, as children, we all had, and probably even still have, some form of acquaintance that are always misplacing inappropriate jokes.

Being silly at the wrong times. they just don't seem to know when to stop. In fact, I would define maturity just for the average individual.

[9:00] Not Christian maturity, but just maturity. Not somebody who no longer has fun, but they know when it's right and proper to have fun and when it's not okay to have fun. Some of you may be thinking of those people now in your own mind.

You may be that person. But as the people of God, are we meant to laugh? We've already laughed some together this morning.

Here, in Ecclesiastes, he seems to be very point blank about it though. Laughter is madness. So, we need to understand rightly. It's of course okay for us to laugh, but we need to do a bit of work to suss out what he means by this.

What is the place? What is the proper use and proper place of laughter in our lives? After all, the preacher goes on to say in Ecclesiastes 3, 4, that there is a time to laugh.

In Proverbs 31, 25, it is said of the excellent wife that she laughs at the time to come. You have likely heard the folk wisdom that laughter is the best medicine or maybe heard a story of someone who laughed themselves back to hell.

[10:13] I am incredibly thankful for my family for the laughter they bring to my life. I tend to be a bit of a dark cloud and they are rays of sunshine in my day.

Apart from my wife and my two children, my home is a really dreary place. I don't need to be left there by myself for very long because they are constantly filling our home with laughter.

This is one of the great blessings of children. Judah now is a little over three and a half months and maybe six, six to eight months ago, we learned that he knows how to cross his eyes and nobody taught him how to do that.

He calls them crazy eyes. Judah, will you do crazy eyes for everybody? Will you stand up and do it? Stand up and do it. Will you? Okay. Going to be shy this morning? We discovered this at dinner one night where he said, look, crazy eyes.

He crosses his eyes and he opens his mouth really wide. It's really, really cute. And we laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed as he did it over and over until we became concerned that they would stick that way and we made him stop.

[11:19] It was so precious. I still can think about it. It just brings me joy. Try to get him to do it for you individually later on. But healthy laughter is a timely laughter put in its proper place.

Ecclesiastes 3, 4 I'll reference again. Healthy laughter has its source in the goodness of God.

Proverbs 31, 25 Healthy laughter does not have as its source coarse joking.

There's so much comedy in our day that is entirely inappropriate. Have you ever watched a show and found yourself laughing at something? You're going, I shouldn't be laughing at that. Stop watching such things.

Stop laughing at such things. Ephesians 5, 4 says let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking. We ought not joke in that way and we ought not laugh at those who drew.

But the trouble with laughter the madness of it is when we try to find our gain in it. When we look to frivolity for ultimate satisfaction we will come up lacking.

[12:27] We will say with the preacher laughter is meaningless. The preacher talks more in the book of Ecclesiastes about laughter. Turn with me a few pages over to Ecclesiastes chapter 7.

Beginning in verse 2. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. For this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter. For by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot so is the laughter of the fools.

This is also vanity. It's sobering words that he's saying to us here. It's better to mourn than to laugh. It's better to be around people who are mourning.

[13:48] The house of mourning as was the constant and likely habit of visiting one who had somebody die in a household they would gather there at the house to pay their respects.

This is the house of mourning a home in which someone has died. It's better to be there than to go to the place where feasting is taking place. It's better to have sorrow than laughter.

He says by sadness of face the heart is made glad. Why? What is he talking about here?

What he's saying is that for us to be around the reality of this life this once Eden the place in which we live that has been corrupted by sin and the major corruption the final corruptive work is death.

To be around that and to be reminded that this is a place of lesser joy. That the house of mourning teaches us to be wise in the way we live and in the way we prepare to die.

[14:56] If you go to the house of feasting you go to a birthday party people never talk about the serious things. You never at a birthday party celebrate somebody's birth and also mourn their coming death.

It's a reality that still exists but we don't talk about these things. It's light and it's jovial. Rather than being in a place where people say this is the reality of life someday like a vapor passes I will pass

and do I live my life wisely now for the kingdom of God preparing myself for the coming day when I will die.

Recall the preacher's conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12 verse 13 fear God understand who he is and his created order understand your place in that created order see yourself rightly as his creation made to worship him and the proper response of that is then the keeping of his commandments to recognize this the house of mourning is a benefit to us in that sorrow the sorrow of the heart that looks at this world and says it is broken serves us in this way so what do we do with the joy of the scripture because it's everywhere in the scripture one fantastic example psalm 34 8 says oh taste and see that the lord is good blessed which is to say happy truly and lastingly happy is the man who takes refuge in him there's much language in the scripture about this

I came across a fun article this week that asked the question what was Jonathan Edwards favorite word and this man had done quite a bit of studying to realize that it was the word joy or some variation of it to rightly see that the response of the Christian to the gospel of Jesus Christ is joy so we've got to make some reconciliation of all of this let me read to you the quote that's on the front of your bulletin this morning by Edwards he says God is the highest good of the reasonable creature the enjoyment of him is our proper and is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied to go to heaven fully to enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here better than fathers and mothers husbands wives or children or the company of any or all earthly friends these are but shadows but the enjoyment of God is the substance these are but scattered beams but God is the sun these are but streams but God is the fountain these are but drops but God is the ocean so recognize we look at psalm 34 8 and then hear what

Edwards has to say about the high good of enjoyment in God is that for us as we walk in this world and we're sorrowful in it we see the broken nature of it we see this once eaten place in which we live that we can be blessed we can be happy truly and lastingly happy because we take refuge in God because we take refuge in the promises of God to us in Christ that happy person the one who laughs out of joy because of their happiness does so because of the goodness of God in Christ we rest from our sorrow in him most of you are probably familiar with Jesus title the man of sorrows and this comes from Isaiah 53 3 which reads he was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not and then verse 4 says surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by

[19:47] God and afflicted John Calvin wrote verse 4 Christ has put on our feelings along with our flesh and as people made aware of the state of this once eaten in which we live we are apt to be sorrowful rightly but we can err toward hopelessness as we are people of the cross and we consider the cross the darkest moment in all of history we can be apt to that we can err in that way to be hopeless to see the brokenness of the world and to see the great high climax of the brokenness of the world the death of the Savior Jesus Christ we can be hopeless if we fail to look beyond the cross if we fail to remember on the third day Jesus rose from the grave an old

Latin phrase says post tenebrous lux which means after darkness light if we fail to remember the light of the resurrection the death of the cross leaves us with no hope at all John says of Jesus Christ in John 1 5 the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it so as followers of Jesus Christ we need to recognize that this broken world in which we walk will rightly bring us sorrow we know what this world was meant to be we have had this restored ability to love and to worship God and be brought into relationship with him and everything around us is spiraling down to rightly bring us sorrow but we have great reason for great joy beyond it in the goodness of God to us in Christ so we must walk wisely we must consider how we are to spend our time are we a people entertained by the frivolity of the world or are we a people who fear

God and keep his commandments are we a people who live for today in the momentary fleeting joy of today or are we a people who live for eternity and in the coming weeks I'm going to read to you probably a fair amount from a book called the pilgrim's progress progress I hope as I say that title you're very familiar with this I want you as a person of Christ to read the word of Christ more than anything else absolutely wear the pages of your scripture thin if you're going to read another book this is the one I think you should read I know many of you are not readers read these two well

reading Bunyan and reading this story which is an allegory of the journey of a character called Christian to the celestial city is much like reading the scripture as it is just full and full of quotes from it as we look at chapter 2

I'm going to drive you to I'm going to pull you into a bit of the story where Christian and his travel mate at the time faithful into a place called Vanity Fair where all of the things the world has to offer is there being sold but before we get that I want to read you a story when Christian goes to the house of interpreter it's very early in his Christian journey and there he's taught many of the basic things of Christian faith and there's this wonderful little interchange as they're in this house of the interpreter looking at scenes and the interpreter is interpreting for him what these things mean and so I read then I saw in my dream that the interpreter took Christian by the hand and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall that is not the right page I'm so sorry that is also a really good part of the interpreter singing I bookmarked it and I missed my bookmark by a page all right I saw moreover in my dream that the interpreter took him by the hand and had him into a little room where sat two children each one in his chair the name of the eldest was passion and the name of the other patience passion seemed to be much discontented but patience was very quiet then

Christian asked what is the reason of the discontent of passion interpreter says the governor of them would have him stay for his best things till the beginning of next year but he will have all now but patience is willing to wait then I saw that one came to passion and brought him a bag of treasure and poured it down at his feet the which he took up and rejoiced therein!

[24:58] and withal laughed patience to scorn but I beheld but a while and he had lavished all away and had nothing left him but rags and Christian says expound this matter more fully to me interpreter responds these two lads are figures passion of the men of this world and patience of the men of that which is to come as here thou seest passion will have all now this year that is to say in this world so are the men of this world they must have all their good things now they cannot stay till the next year that is until the next world for their portion of good that proverb a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush is of more authority with them than all the divine testimonies of the good of the world to come but as thou sawst that he had quickly lavished all away and had presently left him nothing but rags so will it be with all such men at the end of this world

Christian says now I see that patience has the best wisdom and that upon many accounts first because he stays for the best things and second also because he will have the glory of his when the other has nothing but rags interpreter says nay you may add another to wit the glory of the next world will never wear out but these are suddenly gone therefore passion had not so much a reason to laugh at patience because he had his good things first as patience will have to laugh at passion because he had his best things last for first must give place to last because last must have his time to come but last gives place to nothing for there is not another to succeed he therefore that hath his portion first need to have to spend it but he that hath his portion last must have it lastingly

I love that sentence therefore it is said of him in thy lifetime receivest thy good things and likewise Lazarus evil things but now he is comforted and thou art tormented!

Christian says then I perceive! it is not best to covet things that are now but to wait for things to come interpreter responds you say truth for the things that are seen are temporal but the things that are not seen are eternal let's pray together let's