

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] Much of life is spent in search of the good life. We would define the good life as a life that works. A life that is enjoyable. The ideal life that you are longing for and wish that you good have. And Everyone has a different definition of what the good life is. Some will tell you that the good life is found in financial freedom. If you could be debt free and have some money in the bank, then you could experience life as it should be. Some will tell you that the good life is found in yourself. That if you gain enough spiritual wisdom and insight, then any life you have could live the good life. Or some would even tell you that the good life can be found in Nebraska. Because that is the unofficial slogan of the state you see when you drive across the state line. You'll see that nice big green sign telling you "Welcome to the good life." You made it.
2. [Need] The problem is that there are lots of options that people present as "the good life." Everything from Nebraska to fame. But where is the good life found? We might believe because we are Christians that we have the right vision of the good life. But the problem is that we need our vision check. Too often our vision of the good life is not correct at all. If you want to live the good life, then you need to pay attention to this chapter.
3. [Subject] So this morning we are going to look for the true location of the good life. Solomon, or the author of Ecclesiastes, spends this chapter detailing his search for the good life. He wants a life with meaning, enjoyment, and lasting success. And this man who was smarter than all of us will tell us all the places he found that didn't work and point us towards where we can find it.
4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 2
5. [Preview] 3 places the good life is not and the one place it is.

Our first point is this. **The good life cannot be found in hedonism. The good life cannot be found in hedonism.**

Hedonism is the philosophy that believes the good life is found in pleasure.

That doing things that are fun and feel good is what life is about.

If you could just spend doing stuff in your life that makes you happy, then you will have a good life.

So Solomon decided to fully embrace hedonism.

Verse 1 **"I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself. But behold this was also vanity."**

He decides to try and find the good life in doing whatever makes him happy.

But he spoils the end right away to tell us that it didn't work.

And then he goes on to give us a list of everything that he tested his heart with to see if it would satisfy.

First, he tried humor and laughter.

He thinks that maybe the good life is just found in lots of laughter and joy.

Verse 2 **"I said of laughter, It is mad, and of pleasure what use is it?"**

It didn't last very long.

Maybe he hired a bunch of comedians or court jesters, but it didn't last.

If you study comedians very closely you will discover that large numbers of them are incredibly depressed and almost mad.

So he moves on to find the good life somewhere else.

In verse 3 he tries to find it in substances like alcohol.

"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."

He is careful to note that he is not descending into uncontrolled alcoholism.

He still has all of his wisdom and wits.

He knowingly chooses to drink more and laugh.

He wants to see if maybe that can help.

After all substances have always promised to give life meaning.

But it doesn't last and doesn't work.
He always needs another glass
And the next glass is not enough.

In verse 4 he decides to find pleasure in accomplishing things.
Instead of just drinking he wants to be productive and build awesome things.

"I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself."

So he makes impressive things.
He builds the kind of buildings that amaze and draw tourists.
But these are not buildings for other people to use,
They are all for himself and his own pleasure.
Just for the joy of creating.
Presumably, the vineyard is so that he can make himself the best wine imaginable.

But it isn't just buildings and wineries.
Look at what else he builds.
See if it reminds you of anywhere

Verse 5 **"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."**

He builds the most beautiful garden he can imagine.
And ultimately he is trying to recreated the garden of Eden.
Not just because the word for garden is mentioned twice.
But it also repeatedly mentions trees.

"all kinds of fruit trees."

And Genesis describes Eden as having every kind of fruit tree.
He is searching and trying to recover what Adam and Eve lost.

Yet it fails.
He builds the most beautiful thing he can imagine.
Fields of flowers and forests of trees.
He gets to go out every day and soak up nature.

But it's not the good life.

So he continues and accumulates wealth.

Verse 7 **"I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house."**

Like most ancient kings he has plenty of slaves.

And they do all of his biddings so that he doesn't have to work.

His every pleasure and desire can be met by an army at his command.

His wealth doesn't stop there.

"I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem."

He has more cattle and animals than anyone who has ever lived.

In a time period where wealth would be measured by animals, he wins.

Verse 8 **"I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kinds and provinces."**

His wealth is not just found in animals but in money.

He has a massive treasure hoard like a dragon, or Scrooge McDuck.

Verse 8 continues **"I got singers, both men and women,"**

He has hired people to sing music for him whenever he wants.

Remember this is before apple music, iPods, or the radio.

He gets a private concert every day he wants.

And he can tell them to play that song again

And he hires people for other purposes as well.

"and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man."

It's clear that Solomon is talking about sexual pleasures.

He is primarily thinking of women but only as sexual objects.

He loses himself in having as much sex as he wants with as many women as he wants.

One way that people do this today is through pornography.

It makes it more efficient and faster to objectify human beings for your pleasure.

But it is no more satisfying today than it was in this day.

The result in verse 9 **"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me."**

He was not just being a fool.

And he was the greatest man that had been in Israel yet.

Verse 10 **"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."**

He did whatever he wanted.

He took anything he wanted.

He bought anything he wanted.

He had sex with anyone he wanted.

He chased all of his desires.

He was more true to himself than anyone could be.

And if you notice it seems like he is doing all of these things at once.

He isn't just trying them all one at a time.

He is fully immersed in drinking, sex, work, music, all of it.

And the result of all of this?

Verse 11 **"Then I considered all 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."**

The result is that it isn't the good life.

It does not satisfy.

This word **"vanity"** appears again.

It is actually used to describe the vaporousness and meaninglessness of idols in other passages.

It is not that idols, or pleasure provide no meaning or satisfaction.

It is that it does not last.
Ultimately it is all unsatisfying.

You cannot find the good life in hedonism. So hedonism fails, but where else does Solomon look?

Point number 2 **The good life can't be found in spirituality. The good life can't be found in spirituality.**

Throughout this section, he describes his journey to find wisdom. But you can think about wisdom in terms of a generic spirituality. Our world today is not necessarily concerned with wisdom. But people do long for a vague spiritual ness. They want to be enlightened and know the truth about life. You see this in the way that people want a little bit from each religion. They want to be enlightened by something as long as you don't label it. So we still seek the good life through wisdom, we might just call it something else. I don't think many today would say that they can find the good life through wisdom, but they would say you can find it in being a spiritual person.

Verse 12 **"So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly."**

He decides to find the good life through wisdom. And since I think this is Solomon it means he already has more wisdom than anyone else who had ever lived. So he would be a good guide to tell us if wisdom is the secret to the good life.

"For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done."

Honestly, this verse confuses me. My best interpretation is that he is saying since there is nothing new under the sun and his other paths have failed, then he might as well try wisdom.

After all Verse 13 says, **"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."**

Being wise is better than being a fool.

Being a spiritually aware and conscious person is better than knowing nothing.

He uses the example of being able to see.

Wisdom and spirituality are lights that make walking through a dark world easier.

The fool is like a person without eyes trying to walk in darkness.

But the rest of the verse **"And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them."**

The problem is that the wise spiritual person dies just like the fool.

You can do everything right in life.

You could always make wise decisions.

Go to the best schools and graduate at the top of your class.

Publish books and be a world-renowned wisdom expert.

You could have every person from Hollywood calling to come and sit at your feet and learn your wisdom.

And yet you could still get hit by a drunk driver and die.

Or get cancer, have a heart attack, or stroke.

Death still comes for all of us.

Verse 15 **"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."**

This leads him to see that the good life isn't really found here.

All of his wisdom and spirituality can't save him from death.

And it isn't just that it can't keep him alive.

It is that spirituality provides no lasting value or remembrance.

Verse 16 *"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!"*

He will just be forgotten and passed on.

And this makes him wonder what the point is.

Verse 17 *"So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind."*

Partially it sounds like depression.

But I don't think it is just personal depression about how sad his own life is. It sounds deeper than that.

This is a hatred of all life as it is.

He hates the way that life works for people.

It seems like you cannot find the good life anywhere.

You will not be able to find the good life in wise living, or in some sense of spirituality.

None of it can possibly save you.

And I don't just mean eternally I mean presently.

You could have all the wisdom of Dali Llama, Buddha.

You could have the most enlightened perspective on life.

You could embrace carpe diem and gratitude, but it will not keep the suffering and pain of life away from you.

It will not save you from death.

[**transition**] The good life can't be found in wisdom, or spirituality so where does the preacher turn next?

Point number 3 **The good life can't be found in materialism or productivity. The good life can't be found in materialism or productivity.**

After trying to find high-minded spirituality he comes back down to earth.

He tries to find the good life in accomplishing or gaining things.

I think we find both productivity and materialism here as visions of what he chases.

Verse 18 **"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?"**

He hates his own toil, which is his work.

He asks, "Why am I working so hard?"

All that will happen is that all this work and stuff passes on to someone else.

"Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity."

All the work built up getting things and then they pass on.

And that car you worked your whole life for and took great care of goes to a grandkid who never changes the oil and wrecks it.

"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."

He someone repeats himself here again because it is so frustrating.

Everything that you gain and get will not last.

You cannot take any of it with you.

If you want to recognize the foolishness of amassing possessions just go to one of the green girls' estate sales.

You can walk through a house and see it's just stuff.

What mattered to someone is not junk that will be discounted till someone takes it.

When we die our stuff stays here.

Even if you are buried like an ancient pharaoh in a pyramid.

And all of your possessions get buried with you in a massive monument.

You are still dead.

And years later someone will dig it and you up and take everything valuable.

Verse 22 **"What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?"**

Verse 23 **"For all his days are full of sorrow, and even his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest, this also is vanity."**

The problem is that being productive.

A life filled only with hard work and workaholism cannot sustain you.

There is a lie told that "find something you love and then you never work a day in your life."

Part of that lie is that the good life is found in meaningful work.

If you have the right occupation, then suffering will pass and life gets easier.

But Solomon tells you it isn't true.

Your days will still be filled with sorrow.

Then even your work will become an enemy.

And you won't be able to sleep at night.

You will no longer rest.

Some of us are unable to rest and always need to do something.

I'm not saying that's sinful.

But you might want to examine your heart.

Because you might believe that the good life is found in accomplishing something.

You might subconsciously believe that as long as you have something to show for yourself today, then you have worth.

But the problem is you will never do enough.

You will never be productive enough.

It's vanity and vaporous like the wind.

Verse 20 **"So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun."**

Work and possessions did not lead to the good life.
It only led to more despair and suffering.

I learned this week that the official slogan of the state of Oklahoma is Labor omnia vincit, or "work conquers all."

It's a good slogan.

You can accomplish anything through hard work.

The problem is that hard work will not lead you to the good life.

It cannot conquer death.

[**Transition**] But there is someone who can and has conquered all. And that person is where we can finally find the good life.

Point number 4 **The good life is found in Jesus. The good life is found in Jesus.**

Solomon, or the Preacher, has tried to find the good life everywhere and in everything he can think of, but it has all left him empty.

The only place that we can truly find the good life is in Christ.

The book of Ecclesiastes is an idol buster.

Looking for the good life is another way to think about idolatry.

It is not just that we are worshipping these things,

But it that we look to them to give us meaning and to make our lives what we dream.

And Ecclesiastes wants us to see that everything we look to instead of Christ will fail

It will not work.

Verse 24 **"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,**

Wait a second.

What did he say?

Did he say that eating drinking and toil should bring enjoyment?

He just spent the whole chapter saying that this didn't work.

And this is actually a repeated theme in Ecclesiastes.

6 different times in the book we will see him say something similar.

Since we will die let's just enjoy life.

But this is not just a Dead Poet's Society "Carpe Diem/sieze the day!"

This is not simply about living each day with gratitude and a smile.

Look at the end of the verse **"this also, I saw is from the hand of God."**

He recognizes that all of these things he has been chasing are gifts.

He sees that God make food, and wine, work, and all of the beautiful things in life that we have.

They are gifts for us to enjoy.

But the problem comes when we think that they will give us the good life.

When we make turn the finite gifts into ultimate idols.

That is when they fail.

So he is not calling for us to seek the good life in things, but to recognize them as good things from God.

Look again at verse 25 **"for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?"**

He lays it out here.

This is not just saying that we wouldn't have these things if God didn't make them.

He also means that we cannot enjoy them rightly **"apart from him."**

It is only through God that we get to have true enjoyment.

Verse 26 **"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.

The only way we can please God is not through works, but through faith. So those who put their faith in God and in His revealed Son Jesus Christ can have true wisdom, knowledge, and joy. And what he means by those is that they find the good life.

But the sinner without faith will not find the good life. They will only have **the business of gathering and collecting**. This seems to mean they will just chase the world's gifts. They will try to find the good life in themselves and in the world.

And whatever they find will **"only to give to one who pleases God."** This means it goes back to God. And all of the possessions unbelievers are so proud of will end up back in the hands of believers on that last day.

Because life apart from Jesus is just **"vanity and a striving after wind."** You can't trap the wind in your hand any more than you can find the good life apart from Christ.

Ultimately Solomon is calling for us as Christians to have a gospel-fueled enjoyment of life. That the gospel informs how we participate in eating and darkening and in our work. This doesn't just mean that we pray before we eat. That act alone does not make something Christian. It is that the gospel informs the beginning the middle and the end of the meal.

What does this mean?

Let me give you some ideas.

Part of what I think this means is that everything that is good about the world points towards the beauty and wonder of God.

When you bite into an incredible burger,
Or a perfectly cooked fried peach from Johnny's,
You are getting a foretaste of heaven.
The goodness of God is being sensed by your taste buds.

Food and drink and work reflect the beauty of God must like the
mountains of Montana.
We should gaze at them,
Eat them,
Taste them,
Participate in them,
And see God's beauty.

And the pain of the world also points us to Christ.
It makes us long for Jesus to come back and fix the world.
The suffering and trials remind us that our world has been shattered by sin.
We need the redeemer.
So even the pain and the hard things of life can be viewed through Jesus.
We can look at the reality of the vanity of life like Solomon without falling
into Nihilism and the belief that life is meaningless,
Instead, we fall into the arms of Jesus.

Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross to redeem us from our sins.
Our world and our lives are dead and broken.
We cannot fix it ourselves and we needed Him to save us.
And life with Jesus is where the good life is found.

If you have not embraced Jesus, then life won't work.
This is not just a self-help tip to make life more bearable.
This sermon doesn't apply and won't help you unless you repent of your
sins and give your life to Christ.
It is not just a heightened spiritual consciousness.
It will not work without the Savior of the cross.

It only comes through being born again.

And being born again does not just mean that Jesus saved us from sin.

His death on the cross was actually about redeeming all of creation

But Colossians 1:20 **"And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earthy or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross."**

Our call to worship says something similar

Ephesians 1:10 **"a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."**

What does this mean?

It means that Christ redeems the gifts as they were meant to be enjoyed.

Part of being born again is that we can now find enjoyment in the giver.

Instead of turning the gifts into idols and trying to find our good life there we can use the gifts as fuel for our own worship.

Every act is an act of gospel-informed worship.

Every day at work.

Every meal.

Every drink is a small act of reconciliation made possible but the blood of the cross.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] The good life can't be found in hedonism, it can't be found in materialism or productivity, it can't be found in vague spirituality. It can only be found in Jesus.
2. [Challenge] I want to close by sharing a piece of my testimony of how I came to faith in Christ. I grew up in a Christian home being a pastor's kid, but I never really embraced Jesus. I believed in Him intellectually, but I thought the good life was somewhere else. And I was in a lot of pain. I was sexually abused as a child by an older cousin. And it left me totally broken. I was deeply depressed and suicidal. I got to a place

where like Solomon I felt that life was just vanity, vaporous, and meaningless. I didn't want to be alive anymore. And I started coming up with a plan. But I thought I'd try one more thing before dying. I figured that I had tried a lot, so maybe I could give Jesus a try. Maybe I could let down my walls and let Him in. After all, what did I have to lose? So I decided to give up and give my life to Jesus. And if He couldn't help me, then I could always kill myself so I had nothing to lose. So that's what I did. And here I stand today still alive as a preacher of the gospel. Because I found the good life. And it's only found in Jesus. If that's you, come to Jesus. Give Him everything. You will not find the good life anywhere else.