

Sam.

Thank you. Ecclesiastes, chapter 2, verses 1 to 11. I said to myself, come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good. That also proved meaningless. Laughter, I said, is madness.

And what does pleasure accomplish? I tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly, my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives. So I undertook great projects. I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.

I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more, more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself and the treasure of kings and provinces.

I acquired male and female singers and a harem as well. The delights of a man's heart. I became great, greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this, my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired.

I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor. And this was the reward for my toil.

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless. A chasing after the wind. Nothing was gained under the sun.

Thank you, Paula. A few days ago, a man came into my office to talk about regeneration. The 12 step discipleship program that we're going to launch to the public in the fall. We had a 13 week sermon series about that to begin this year. There was something unusual about this man.

He was. He was 80 years old. That's not unusual. But he came in and there was just a sense of peace, humility and calmness about him that he could just see and sense beyond what was usual. And as I talked to him, I learned that he was a retired doctor.

He had a practice as a family physician in a small community for decades. And we talked a lot about that. And as we talked about that and went further into the conversation, he revealed that years and years ago, he had marriage trouble.

And it led to divorce, which led to a deep, dark depression, which led to a problem with alcohol, which led to a problem with the medical community, which led to a rehab facility in another state, which led

to him discovering the 12 steps, which led to him finding God in a very intimate and deeper way, far more than he ever had before. And so he left that facility and he reconciled with his wife and remarried her. It was a very compelling story. He sat There. And he had a few medical issues of his own, it was pretty obvious.

Came in with a device.

So we talked. And I said, so, what do you want to do with the rest of your life? I said it with a smile because I thought he would say, well, I want to help with regeneration. That's not what he said. He caught me off guard.

I said, what do you want to do with the rest of your life? He said, well, I'm ready to go to heaven. My wife is there. Oh, okay.

I'm sure I was awkward. And I said, well, assuming that doesn't happen today or in the next little while, what do you want to do? And he, with a very peaceful smile, said, I just want to help people in any way I can using my life's experiences. And I thought, wow. And I said, you know, a wounded healer is the best healer.

And he agreed and knew that. And so we talked about ways he can serve. But we kept talking, and he went back further into his life and he said, you know, most of my life, it was about striving and succeeding, achieving and accomplishing, just trying to pursue success. It was about getting degrees and medical school and certificates, recognition, accolades of various kinds of. He said, that's the way I live my life.

And he went back further and he said, you know, from the time I was a little boy, my mother. And he loved her dearly. He said, my mother early on and repeatedly said, son, the more certificates you have on the wall, the more successful you'll be. And he said, I live that way. That's how I lived most of my life.

And I think he was saying, if he didn't say it directly, he said that that's really what led to my divorce, my depression, and my dependency upon alcohol. He was living by a formula that says, your self worth, your value, is based on what you do, your performance, and how other people see you and perceive you. It's like saying, the more certificates you have on the wall, the more successful you are and the more people will be impressed by you, and that's how you live. My old doctor friend, after telling me about his mom's encouragement of having more certificates equals success, he looked at me and he said it in a respectful way. My mom was wrong.

My mom was wrong about that. Now this guy is accomplished. And I think he would say, in many ways, all those certificates on my wall and all that relative to the eternity that God's placed in my heart, all that

stuff's meaningless. It doesn't amount to a whole lot. And so Recognizing that, he goes back to say, I'm ready to go to heaven.

That's my goal. A long time ago, a thousand BC, about 3,000 years ago, there was a very rich queen who lived. We believe she lived in North Africa, doesn't really say. And she heard about a very rich king who lived in Jerusalem. His name was Solomon.

Probably heard of Solomon. Solomon had so many certificates that he had to build a palace to hold them all. He was accomplished. He had achievements and successes like no one else had ever seen. His performance was off the charts.

And so the Queen of Sheba wanted to check him out, just to make a little comparison about how he was and how she was. So in First Kings 10, it says, when the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, which brought honor to the name of the Lord, she came to test it with hard questions. She arrived in Jerusalem with a large group of attendants and a great caravan of camels loaded with spices, large quantities of gold, and precious jewels. When she met Solomon, she talked with him about everything she had on her mind.

Solomon had answers for all her questions. Nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the Queen of Sheba realized how wise Solomon was, and when she saw the palace he had built, she was overwhelmed. Now, this is that word, overwhelmed kind of cracks me up. In the Hebrew, it says, there was no more breath in her.

She was breathless. She was taken away. She was overwhelmed. And she was also amazed at the food on his tables, the organization of his officials and their splendid clothing, the cup bearers and the burnt offerings. Burnt offerings Solomon made at the Temple of the Lord.

So if you know a little bit of stuff you've heard that Solomon succeeded his father, King David, the first king, or Saul was first king, and then David, then Solomon. And as Solomon was about to assume the throne, he did something very humble. He. He prayed to God and said, I don't know what I'm doing, so I would really like the gift of wisdom. Well, God was pleased with his request.

God gave him wisdom, and God blessed him over. From that humble position, from that relationship that he had with God, Solomon achieved. He accomplished like no other. Solomon really is an impressive, impressive character. There are Bible citations for all the things I'm about to say, but I'll spare you the references.

Solomon had wisdom. It says that he was greater than any person in the world. And people from all over the world came to experience the wisdom of Solomon. Solomon had influence. He wrote 3,000 proverbs.

We have some of them. He wrote a thousand Songs. It says he had wealth. He had 666 talents of gold every year as an annual income. That's billions of dollars.

His annual income was billions of dollars. He had pleasure in excess. And we talked about it there in Ecclesiastes 2. He had 700 wives. He had 300 conc.

He had power. He had 1400 chariots. He had 12,000 horsemen. He had 4,000 horse stables or stalls. Probably most significant to us is he had spiritual accomplishments.

He was allowed by God to build the temple, which was the intersection of heaven and earth. And by today's value, the temple is estimated to be a billion dollar structure. It had gold everywhere. It was a billion dollar structure. And when they dedicated the temple, they sacrificed 142,000 animals, 22,000 oxen, 120,000 sheep were sacrificed in this extravagant dedication to this structure that represented God's presence on earth.

And it was all about Solomon helping out, you know. He sums it up in Ecclesiastes 2:10. He says, I denied myself. No, I deny myself nothing. I went after it.

I pursued it all with all my heart. And somewhere along the line, though, in this journey of success, something begins to change. It begins with God's blessing, but something changes, and it's Solomon. Solomon changes. He left his humble position and posture of trusting God.

And I think. I think he started believing in his own ability, his own performance, and the perception of others just kind of fueled that. Everybody said, man, you're great. You're great, you're great. Look at you.

Wow, I can't believe all that you've done. And the Queen of Sheba is the ultimate validation because she comes in skeptical. She has power and influence. She comes in skeptical and says, show me what you got. And she leaves without her breath.

She's breathless. It's so. It's like, I've never seen anything like this. Solomon's wisdom, his kingdom, exceeded every expectation. And I think it's ironic because she, looking at all that, what does she do?

She says, your Lord, your God, has really blessed you. But see, I'm not so sure Solomon at this point really would say, maybe God did it. But, hey, look at me, look at me. I'm not so sure at this point that Solomon had that relationship with Lord and would give him Credit. Solomon changed first Kings 11 says his heart was not wholly true to the Lord, his God.

Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord. So we believe Ecclesiastes 2 is a reflection of Solomon's life. We don't know if Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes. It seems like whoever wrote it and it's by God's inspiration is portraying themselves kind of like Solomon. Solomon like character.

And in Ecclesiastes 2, he looks back over life, and it seems to me the whole book is a certain sadness. It's kind of like, you know, he's an older man now and he's reflecting back over his life and he says, well, look at. Look at all the stuff that I did. And there's a certain sadness because it's kind of like, what's the point? Just going to die and somebody else is going to take it and mess it up.

What's the point? And so there's this sadness that kind of is present in our text today from Ecclesiastes 2, which I think lines up very well with the Queen of Sheba's visit and her observation of all the certificates. I think Solomon would say, you know what? I had pleasure that none of you have ever experienced. It's meaningless.

I had achievement. It's left me empty. I had wealth. It's not satisfying. I had possessions.

They're temporary. I had success. It's a chasing after the wind. Solomon had everything that most of us desire. He had wisdom.

He had wealth, he had pleasure. He had power. He had all these things. And yet he says it's meaningless. It's a chasing after the wind.

It's all in vain. Vanity of vanities, it's just not. What's the point of it?

He succeeded beyond imagination, and still he found it wasn't enough. This formula will leave you empty. When you say that my value and my worth is based on what I do and what other people think of me, it'll leave you empty.

At the end of Ecclesiastes, after it's all been said and done, it says this in chapter 12. Here now is my final conclusion. Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty. There's nothing wrong at all with certificates. There's nothing wrong with degrees.

There's nothing wrong with credentials. There's nothing wrong with skills. There's nothing wrong with awards and accomplishments. The problem is not the certificate on the wall. The problem is what we ask it to do.

If we ask the certificate of achievement to tell us who we are, tell us that we matter, tell us that other people think we're great, then we've got a problem. It'll leave us empty. It will not satisfy. But

when achievement flows from a healthy relationship with God, a healthy fear of God, A reverent awe that leads to love and trust. Then what we do, if it flows from our identity, becomes an act of worship, a way of worshipping God.

So there are two ways to hold a certificate. One says, this is who I am. Look at my wall. This is who I am. Here's my certificate.

But there's another way. And it begins with fearing God, standing in awe of him, knowing that he is God and I am not. And from that place we receive our true identity. First, John 3. See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.

That is what we are. I love that song we started with Child of Love. I am a child of God, a child of love. Our identity is not achiever, it is, you are a beloved son. You are a beloved daughter.

You're a beloved child of God. And from that identity, this is what a certificate can do. From that identity, everything else flows. God is not saying, stop doing. He is saying, start from here and get your certificates from your identity as a beloved child of God.

Fear God. Rest in who he is. Hear him tell you, you are my beloved child. Then go do stuff. Get your certificates.

When achievement flows from identity, it brings joy. But when identity is built on achievement, it brings emptiness. So chasing after the wind. So Colossians 3 and First Corinthians 10. Whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Jesus says something very interesting in Matthew 12 that ties into our story today.

He says, the Queen of Sheba will stand up against this generation Judgment Day and condemn it, for she came from a distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Now someone greater than Solomon is here, but you refuse to listen.

You know who Jesus is talking to? He's talking to religious people. He's talking to the religious leaders of the day who derived their identity, who derived their value from their performance, what they did, works of law, so on and so forth, and what other people thought of them. So there's a lot of talk by Jesus saying they. They make themselves so that people will look at them, say, wow.

And Jesus is saying, listen, that is not the way it is. They believe that was a way to relate to God. And Jesus says, no, it's not. He challenges it, he condemns it. And he says, I have a better way for

you, but you're not listening.

And that better way of relating to God is through an identity that's given to us. You are. You are my child. By my grace, you are My precious child. And so when we come to communion, which we're about to do in just a few moments, we don't come as performers, we don't come as achievers.

We come as receivers, receivers of God's grace. And communion reminds us that grace, while it's free, is not cheap. It cost Jesus his life, and that's how much he loves us. Jesus had to die, but he was glad to die because he loves us. And so when we take this little piece of bread and our communion is open, so you're welcome to take it, it's a reminder of the incarnation, reminder that Jesus came and become one of us, became one of us.

And he lived our lives, but he lived him to perfection. So he positioned himself to be a sin offering. And the blood, we take the cup to remind us of the blood, that shows us the price of salvation. The life is in the blood. So Jesus pours out his life for us.

So at this table, as we take communion, we're reminded that we are beloved children of God. And from that core identity as a child of God, let your life flow upward to God as a praise, as an expression of worship, by doing whatever you do, doing it well to the glory of God, and let it be an outward flow toward others in loving service. So let me pray, and we'll take communion together. God, thank you for telling us who we are, who you are, too. And we have a hard time hearing it sometimes.

But you do call us your beloved children over and over again in Scripture. We are your children. And we know that we can't earn it, we don't deserve it, but it's by your grace that we receive it. So as we take communion today, that little piece of bread, help us to remember that Jesus entered our world for a reason, to show us what you were like, and also to show us what we should be like and to show us how important it is to give your life for someone else. And we thank you for that.

As we take the cup, we are reminded of the blood. We know that throughout history, the sacrificial system is the giving of one life for another, pouring out blood. So we thank you that Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice to save us from our sins. So we thank you for that. As we take communion, help us to remember who we are and that we are your children.

And from that identity, help us to be the kind of people we need to be. We thank you for your grace. We thank you for your mercy. Maybe some here today who have not been living like they should, and maybe Today is the day that we all kind of renew our time and effort to

present to you. So just lead us and guide us in this time in Jesus name.

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