

“Solomon: Lose Idols”

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bible to the middle of your Bible to the Book of Ecclesiastes. It may be a book in the Bible that you may have never been in before, but if you will find the middle; Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. We come to one of the books today that the Holy Spirit inspired through a person by the name of Solomon, a man whose name is so recognizable in the world's history that whether one has a relationship to Biblical Christianity or not, or even to Judaism, whether it be orthodox or not, knows of him. It's about his wealth; it's about his prestige. There are all kinds of movies and stories speculating some of the things he did and did not do. At least we can say this was a man who possessed and had almost anything and everything that a person could have in life. If you want to attain status, if you want to attain reputation, if you want to attain having something in life, Solomon far surpassed anything any of us have ever seen.

Today he serves as a model for us of what we need to lose in form of idols. And we're going to discuss this more at length in just a moment, but when we hear that term “idols,” we think of that which takes place on a far other country, that which takes place in a very rudimentary setting. But I think we're going to see from the Word of God today that a man who was of the most pristine, of the most calibered of backgrounds fell into the trap of idolatry and who are we to say we cannot as well.

We're going to be in Ecclesiastes chapter 2. If you will hold there just a moment, I promise we're going to get there because when you study the Book of Ecclesiastes, it really is the summation of the life of a man by the name of Solomon. The Holy Spirit inspires him to communicate to us everything we need to know about how to live this thing called life. In chapter 1, he says basically vanity of vanities, all is vanity; everything that we attain, everything we acquire, everything we want to have in life, when life is over it's gone.

Beginning in chapter 3 he talks about everything in life has a season and you begin to progress through different times of life. But it is in chapter 2 where we will be today where King Solomon just lays his heart out and says, “Here it is, folks, I tried everything you can try; I did everything you can do; I had everything you can have and in the end, it was completely, absolutely unfulfilling apart from God Himself moving and working in my life.”

Before we get to Ecclesiastes 2, there is a simple question we need to ask that will set this up: who was or who is Solomon? For chapter 2 to really be understandable, we need to know who this man was. The first thing we need to recognize is this: he was a man of incredible privilege. His dad was King David, the man who had expanded the kingdom further than anybody else. King Solomon had wealth beyond wealth. Money was not an issue. And this may not seem like much to you, but the Bible records that he had over 20,000 and in some cases up to 40,000 horses and chariots. You say what’s the big deal about that? Have you ever seen these celebrities on television who have nine Ferraris and fifteen Bentleys? Can you imagine having 25,000 Rolls Royces? That’s the caliber of who this individual was. It talks about all the houses he had and the land he possessed. He was privileged.

And I know we tease and laugh about Solomon and the fact that he had 700 wives and 300 concubines at one time and people joke that if this really was a wise man, what was he doing with 1,000 women? And I know we joke about that but he had privilege. Every ruler on the planet wanted his daughter to be married to Solomon. Every country wanted to do business with Solomon. Every bank wanted him as a client. He literally was a one-man force in the world. He was a man of incredible privilege.

He was also a man of incredible priority. Early in life, as recorded in the Book of 1 Kings, Solomon becomes the king. Obviously, David, his dad, passes away. When he becomes king, he has a dream, a vision; but out of that he has a conversation with the Lord, face to face. The Lord asks, “What do you want Solomon?” And it’s almost as if He’s baiting him with a carrot, so to speak.

“Do you want riches; do you want fame? What do you want?” And Solomon says, “I want to be able to understand between good and evil. I want to have (what we today call) wisdom.” And God said, “Because you’ve asked for this and not that which would make you “better” in the sense of having more, I will not only give you wisdom, but I will give you all the other things in advance.”

One of the classic stories that has been told so many thousands of different ways in our culture is the story of the two women who have the babies. Both of them have a child about three months of age. In the night one of the ladies’ baby dies. So later, the woman with the dead child exchanges her child with living child of the other woman. There is only one living child but there are two mothers. They come before King Solomon and ask what do we do? King Solomon in his wisdom takes a sword and says, “Bring the baby to me and allow me to cut it in half. I’ll give one-half to one mother and the other half to the other mother.” One of the women cries out and says, “No, give her the baby.” And King Solomon says give the child to her because only the real mother would say preserve the life no matter what.

He was just a man of incredible wisdom. He had his priorities right in the sense that he understood that doing the right thing and possessing the right attitude and philosophy were more important even than all the possessions he had. But here’s the kicker with Solomon: yes, he was a man of privilege; yes, he was a man of having the right priorities; he had a problem. And here was Solomon’s problem: he had everything in order, he had everything lined up; he had a problem with idolatry. Now throughout the Book of 1 Kings as you study his life, the Lord warns him, “As you expand your territory, as you get all these individuals and countries and women in your life, as you get all this stuff, there is going to come the temptation in your life to begin to practice idolatry. You’re going to begin to worship false gods.” And that’s exactly what happened.

And when we come to Ecclesiastes chapter 2 we come, I believe, on the end of an incredibly lived life; a man who has had everything, been

everywhere and done everything. He's looking back on his life and he's saying let me show you where I got side-tracked so that you and I, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, can say this is how I do not get side-tracked. And what we see in chapter 2 is that he tells us to avoid idolatry, avoid the things in life that will become idols in our lives.

Now before we dig into Ecclesiastes 2, I want to ask a simple question: what is idolatry? Because there are two major definitions we have in our society that I don't believe either one is completely, one hundred percent accurate alone. On one side we've got pop-culture idolatry. We've got this show called American Idol. What that means is an idol is someone you admire for their ability; you admire them for their athleticism, their music ability, their job performance. You idolize them in the sense of "I wish I could attain what they have." Then there is idolatry in the most classical form. I call it the Indiana Jones definition: the idea of a crystal skull or a gold head to which people are literally bowing down and worshipping and singing. We usually don't see that in our society and we think, particularly in a church or Biblical setting, that I'm not bowing down or singing songs to whatever it is so obviously I don't have an idolatry problem. Allow me to define idolatry, I believe according to the Book of Ecclesiastes chapter 2: idolatry is anything that gets between God and you.

Let me demonstrate that for you. I know for those of you who are first time guests or visitors, you are shocked at how tall I was when I got on this platform! I have not been this tall my whole life. But growing up in Texas there is a rite of passage that every young man has to do whether they want to or not. It's called play football. Everybody in Texas has to play football at some point. So I came to that point in my rite of passage and I was obviously much smaller than all the other kids going out for football, but there was one thing I possessed that most kids my age didn't. I possessed an "arm" because I was a baseball player and I could throw. We had, even in my early days, good quarterbacks and in particular one who was great at running the offense, he was a great leader, he was great at

doing what we would call screen-passes and short-drops and such. But we were basically a running offense and if we got in third and eight or third and ten, third and twelve, he just did not have the arm. He didn't have the zip to do it. So through all kinds of different things, they decided to see if this guy named Meyers, who is a little on the short side but has a cannon of an arm, could be a third-down quarterback because sometimes you've just got to throw it forty yards down the field and see if somebody can jump for it.

We were at practice one day and we've got everybody lined up. I'm in a position I never thought I would be; I'm under center. The center was down and I was at eye-level with him and I'm thinking this is just not normal. I'll never forget this day because we go through the play, I get the ball and I drop back and I just drop the ball to my side. The coaches yell and scream, "What's going on?" I said, "Coach, I can't see anything. All these guys are like six feet-four. I drop back and I can't see." He said, "What do you mean you can't see?" I said, "Come here." He literally gets down on his knees and says, "Oh, you can't see, can you? Here's what we're going to do. We're going to run this route and the receiver is going to be about twenty yards right there. I know you can't see there, I just want you to throw it there." I think we ran that play about eight times and I got intercepted about eight times because I couldn't see; I was just throwing the ball aimlessly. Then at the last resort they said what if we did a rolling out play. I actually rolled out but the problem is do you know who rolls out with you? The six-foot five guard! Finally they said this isn't going to work and I never played a snap as a quarterback even once in football.

But I want to tell you what that illustration is: an idol is anything in your life that when you step back and look in the direction of God and you can't see Him. It's blocking your view to hear from God and to see God. And when we come to Ecclesiastes chapter 2, what we discover through the life of Solomon, is there were some things in his life that were keeping him from hearing from God, keeping him from seeing God, and ultimately as he looks back on his life he says, "Oh, if I had just never allowed those things to creep

in.” As we go through these, let me to share with you two simple concepts.

The first one is this: I want to talk about the properties of these items because I want you to know they’re not inherently evil. We’re going to talk about possessions in just a moment. The Bible says the love of money is the root of all evil, not actually possessing anything is the root of all evil. We’re going to talk about parenting and legacies in a moment and there is obviously nothing Biblically wrong with being a godly man or woman and passing on your faith to ultimate generations but even things that are good can become idols if they block our view of who God is in our lives and what He wants to do and speak to in our lives. So when I talk about the properties, please understand none of these items is inherently evil. None of them is anti-God. The problem is when they rise up and block us from seeing the One who desires them to be in our lives. So there are really five of these listed in Ecclesiastes and there is really a process here because they build upon one another and we’ll discuss that in a moment.

The first one is in verses 1-3. “1I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. 2I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? 3I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.”

The first thing that got in Solomon’s way, the first idol that crept up was the idol of pleasure. He says I just want to experience what I can experience, do what I want to do, drink what I want to drink; I just want to have fun and enjoy life. Now listen: the Bible teaches us in John 10:10 that we are to have abundant life through Jesus Christ. There is nothing wrong with enjoying life; I personally enjoy life a lot. The problem is the pursuits and the pleasures of life, the laughter of life, the fun of life, the enjoyment of life can become such that we so desire to be entertained that we never actually see God in the midst of the entertainment. We have a

culture today, a society, even among Bible-believing Christians that we so crave to have fun, we so crave to have pleasure and those things that oftentimes our pursuit just to enjoy life keeps us from seeing God in our lives. So the first idol that he really dealt with was this idol of pleasure.

The second one that He dealt with is the idol I like to call progress. This is where it is really going to start hitting us today. Verses 4-6, “4I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: 5I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: 6I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that brings forth trees:” This is one of the things that Solomon is most noted for; he was an engineer of sorts. He took his resources and he prospered them to such that he built anything he wanted to build. In fact, his house, according to the Old Testament in 1 Kings took thirteen years to build. It was an incredible mansion, an incredible facility. He is the same man who ultimately would build and lay out in gold what we know as the Temple of Solomon there in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount. He says I planted anything I wanted to plant; I built anything I wanted to build; I did anything I wanted to do. It was the idol of progress.

How is that an idol? When getting to the next step of the ladder, getting the next promotion, receiving the next trophy, winning the next prize, having the next accolade placed upon you, if that is why you live your life, to get the next whatever, it becomes idolatry. Because what we’re wanting is not God moving in our lives, but we want a trophy in the trophy case. We want a ribbon to hang on the wall or whatever that may mean. And we get trapped into this in our businesses, and even in our families, when we say I want to attain something more, I need something else, I need to go to the next level. And it’s almost as if I built a house for thirteen years and it wasn’t big enough; I did this and it wasn’t enough; I tried this and it wasn’t enough. And it was this idol of I’ve got to have a little more.

Now whether you recognize it or not, and I’m not just referring to substances, we have become an incredibly addictive culture. No matter

what we get it's just not enough. The sandwich needs to be bigger; the workout needs to be harder; the whatever needs to be more whatever. So we see that Solomon said it wasn't just about enjoying life; it was my pursuits and progress in life that I just wanted more, I wanted something else and it got in the way of my seeing God move in my life.

There is a third one in verse 7, and this is the one that we're most familiar with. "7I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: 8I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I got me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me."

If there is one item in this list of chapter 2 that we probably most identify with the traditional definition of idolatry, it is having a possession. It is having something of substance, something we would classify as stuff that gets in our way of seeing God. Oftentimes that can be a job; it can be a car, a house, something where we are so focused on that one thing that the one thing takes more priority than anything God could give us. That is the pursuit of financial gain, the acquisition of a certain amount of resources in our lives when that becomes the goal, to have a certain number and there is a commercial out there that asks what's your number? Now I'm not against retirement planning, I think it's fine to have goals financially in life, but when that number gets between you and God then you miss God because you're so busy focusing on the number.

And Solomon said I had everything I wanted to possess; I had people in my life I could control; I had power; I had authority; I had anything I wanted; I possessed anything I wanted to possess and the problem was all those possession got in the way. And I'm not going to focus on this one too terribly because we spent so much time in the past, but it's amazing

that any amount of stuff you receive more than you already have never does make you any happier except for a fleeting moment. And there has been a recent study that once you and I get above the “poverty level” then any more acquisition of “material items” makes us inherently no happier than what we had before. But it’s amazing that the commercials are still working, are they not? The items are still being desired. And it becomes an idol when we care more about having that item, possessing that item, or having it in our lives than having God speaking in our lives.

So it can be pleasure; it can be progress; it can be possessions. Then there’s this one beginning in verse 12 that I like to call philosophy, that we can get a certain philosophy in our lives. And without reading verses 12-17, allow me to allude to what it really says. Solomon says I had everything I wanted to have, I did everything I wanted to do, I experienced everything I could ever experience in life and so I realized that was futile. You can only own so many “chariots;” you can only have so many “family members;” you can only have so many houses, so I’m going to go with the pursuit of philosophy and wisdom. I’m going to get wise; I’m going to see how much can I know.

Sometimes that’s what happens later in the stages of life; it becomes an acquisition of knowledge and information and passing it on. Do you know what Solomon recognized? That knowledge is very finite. You can only absorb so much; you can only learn so much; you can only possess so much skill in a certain area. In fact, when you get to chapter 12 at the very end of the Book of Ecclesiastes, he says you can read every book that there is on the planet and you still won’t know everything. Then one of the things he brings up in verse 12-17 is this: one of the problems with wisdom and knowledge and information is that after you die, one hundred years later they’re going to find out more than you ever thought about learning. We live in a world today where that’s happening about every two years; people are learning so much information that is out there it’s almost futile. And I will confess to you one of the most depressing things I can do (and this is why I order most of my books online), is go to a bookstore because I don’t

see the book I want to read – I see all the books I’ll never get to read. There are not enough days in my life to go through all of that information. And Solomon recognized that. He said you can’t learn all you want to learn, you can’t experience all you want to experience, but oftentimes the pursuit of that knowledge, the pursuit of that expertise, the pursuit of having that something gets in the way of our seeing God and Him moving in our lives.

Then there is this last one beginning in verse 18. “Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.” Now what I’m about to share with you may not appear to be an idol but I’m seeing it more and more every day. We can talk about the idols of pleasure, progress, possessions, and even philosophy, and I’m going to put quotes around this word, how about the idol of “parenting?” We so desire something to happen, exist or occur in our children or grandchildren’s lives that it doesn’t matter what God thinks, I want to provide it. It doesn’t matter what the principle of God’s Word is on it, I cannot imagine leaving this earth without them having it. I must provide; I must do it.

And what Solomon is saying is do you know what one of the problems of leaving an inheritance to your kids is? You can’t control what they do with it. One of my favorite bumper stickers (and God bless them if my parents ever do it), is “I am currently spending my children’s inheritance.” Now don’t get any wild ideas and don’t call my parents, please! But ultimately you can’t control that. And Solomon says I can leave all this stuff to my kids and do you know what happened to his kids? They had a big fight. Jeroboam and Rehoboam went two separate ways; they split the kingdom between the north and the south and they never got along again. He said I gave them everything you can imagine; the best schooling, the best education, enough money, all the resources and they still blew it.

Not only that, one of the things you see and this may hit some of us hard, it wasn’t just the inheritance of “parenting,” it was the interest. Let me tell you something I notice is becoming an idol of our culture: what our kids

and grandkids are interested in, their hobbies, desires and passions, get in the way of us seeing God. We're more interested that they are successful at something than we are if they are godly. I see a lot of sports training, academic training, and all kinds of personality training out there, but the church of Jesus Christ is the only place that says we want you to come in and we want to give you some godly training, how to live a godly life. And I know my kids are still young, I don't have the maturity that most of you in this room, I understand that, but what good does it do to raise a young man or a young woman who has all the stuff of the world, all the accolades of the world and they don't know Jesus? Jesus Himself said what good does it do to gain the whole world and yet lose your soul, it's better for a man to lose everything in the world and to maintain and keep his soul.

So there is really a process here that takes place. I know there are different age grades here, different levels of maturity, but I want to just quickly show you how these things work in progression because when we come to the time of invitation, I want you to diagnose where you are. Typically we can say this happens in a certain time in one's lifetime, but it doesn't really matter as much about time as the process here. We start out in life wanting to enjoy life, to have pleasure in life, right? And once we've had all the fun of sowing our wild oats then it's all about how much can I attain, how much can I get, and how can I get to the top of the ladder? Then once I start getting to the top of the ladder, how much stuff can I actually acquire? And then once I have all this stuff, I say I don't want to have a third garage anymore so I want to get rid of this stuff and I just want to get smart. And once I get smart, I realize I'm getting dumb. And now what I'm going to do is just pass it on to all of my kids. Then we get to the end of life and ask, "What did I do all of that for? What was the point?" And Solomon is basically saying to us is do you realize almost every single item that the world sells us or tells us we need has the potential of getting between us and God.

So I want you to turn to the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, chapter 12 and I'm going to conclude with this. A man who had all the privilege, all

the possessions, all the priorities, he had everything in his life. He had everything most of us wish we could have one day. I don't know if you're like me and ever joked with somebody, "I know the Lord has never trusted me with it, but I'd like to give me a try, God!" Verse 13-14: "13Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

The conclusion of life is fear God and keep His commandments. It doesn't matter what trophies we attain, it doesn't matter what experiences we possess, it doesn't matter what items we can put in our hands. It doesn't even matter what we're able to pass on to future generations. In all of that striving, if somehow we allow any of those things to get in the way of us seeing God in our lives, guess what has happened? We have allowed an idol to creep in, and we don't need to end up like Solomon. The message of losing idols today is literally ending our lives without regret, to be able to say I gave it all to God.

Understand, we're all going to make mistakes, we're all going to do some things we wish we hadn't done – that's why we have forgiveness and this thing called grace and mercy. But just like the video you saw earlier, I think I would be very remiss if I did not conclude before our invitation with saying this: no matter who you are or what you've done, or where you've been, or where you think you're going, it doesn't matter what you do, or attain, or possess, if you get to the end of this thing called life and at one point you have never come to a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ then you've missed it all. You've missed it all. You say but I had this or I experienced this. Experiences are fleeting, possessions rust, and inheritances go wasted, but the Bible makes it very clear that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved and they shall possess, according to John 3:16, everlasting life.

Before I pray, notice what that man said on the video. He owned three sports teams. He was the CEO of Blockbuster video. He could go anywhere he wanted to go, even places he would be ashamed to tell his mother. And nothing

satisfied like Jesus Christ. Nothing could forgive him, nothing could solve his sin problem, and nothing could guarantee him that when he breathed his last breath he would step into a place called Heaven versus a place called hell. Wherever you are on the progress of life, whatever it is that's gotten between you and God, would today be the last day that you let it stand in the way. Let's pray.