

## You Are Here, pt. 2 – Ecclesiastes 2

1. We continue our search for wisdom and for the Holy Spirit of God. Last week, we began our search in Ecclesiastes. This book troubles many, for it seems to say things that believers are not to say and it seems that the Teacher (or Preacher) does things that are not wise or even allowable for believers. But this is a very necessary book. We need to learn from his example which is nothing more or less than a lesson taught in every generation and learned by...almost no one.
2. When you are young, you start a search for meaning and identity. A teen knows for certain that they are not their parents...but exactly who they are and what they are meant to be is usually not clear at all. Parents and preachers can warn about the dangers out there but even the best of our kids touches a few electric fences along the way.  
This book tries to help us get our eyes open for the journey.
3. One thing you must know about this book: God doesn't really enter into the conversation until the very end and, then, very briefly. This book bears the voice of a secular, guideless person wandering in a land without boundaries. The futility of that search and the pain and depression such searches bring is important for us to hear.
4. [Eccl. 2:1-3] This will surprise no one, but there are many things that baffle me. I understand that the variety of human experience and interests is limitless and that I, my likes and wishes, are not the standard for anyone else. That said, I've never understood why someone would want to spend one minute at a crowded dance party with pounding music and an absolute insistence that you participate without regard to limits. Raves and even the discos of the 70s and 80s were the very definition of hell to me.
5. Why people go bar hopping has also puzzled me. Drinks are cheaper if you buy your own. If you want friends, invite some. If you are with friends, hopping from bar to bar, what are you looking for? Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-3 again and see if it is likely that you are going to find what you are looking for! And if you are looking for love, I would submit that it is unlikely to be in a bar waiting for you.

6. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes shares his experience with the reader. He went for mindless laughter and found it empty. This is not enjoying a good stand up comedian or looking forward to a funny sitcom; this is pranks, sarcasm, cutting wit, snark. Over 20yrs ago, I read a sociologist's paper about the dangers of what he called the Dave Letterman Generation. He didn't say that Letterman was the cause of it; rather, he was the perfect example of it. No matter what was said, there was a spoken or inferred "Yea. Right." Nothing was taken seriously. It developed into the "whatever" and "whatevs" of the 90s and beyond.
7. If you cannot appreciate something or take the right things seriously, you will find your soul empty – just like your life. The "wine" in the verses we read isn't to be taken in isolation as if wine were the problem; it was when wine was misused so that one could engage in folly. (I did it because I was drunk is never true: we get drunk so we can do what we would not otherwise do)
8. Laughter and joy are wonderful things. The folly spoken of here is empty, destructive, and essentially joyless. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes moves on...and so shall we for now.
9. [Ecc; 2:4-9] You might strongly disagree with the Teacher when he says he did all these things (some of them reprehensible to us) but claims his wisdom never left him. What he means is that he tried all these things and watched to see what effect it would have on him and his world. He was intentional and observational. He wasn't thrashing about blindly – as most in his position do.
10. He breaks into a song or poem here to drive this home: [Eccl. 2:10-11]
11. Mindless folly didn't fill him, so he tried accomplishments. The buildings and gardens and slaves and singers he mentions were all signs of prosperity, status, class and rank in his world. Rather than pour down scorn on him for his measurements, consider how you measure success. The Irish have a proverb that says "It is better to own little than to want a lot." But that isn't how we measure success.

12. Cars now routinely cost upwards of \$70K. Homes in our area are so incredibly expensive that the poor who live among us in government housing can never escape those tiny places. They are locked out of living here. Are they valuable? Are they worthy of the respect we would show to someone we considered accomplished? Successful?
13. I have walked among statues and plinths dedicated to the greatest of men and women...and not recognized a single name. I'm not ill-read and I'm rather good at history but whoever they were, they weren't highly regarded by those who came later. A walk through the Necropolis is a good reminder of the fleeting nature of fame and importance. Builders, founders of great institutions, and the richest among us all die...so what did all that give them?
14. It brings to mind the haunting poem, Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley. [LAURIE – see attached pic. You can use it and superimpose the words over it or just show the picture after we read the poem]

"I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

15. This chapter and the previous one seem to lead all of us to nothing but the barrenness of the lands around the ancient statue where the desert and time had wiped out everything that mighty lord had accomplished...but wait...look at verse 10 again. [Eccl. 2:10]

16. The reward for our lives is not in the building of lasting monuments, not in the collection of stuff and things, and not in the bizarre and never ending call for parties, sex, drugs, alcohol...running after this and that pleasure forever. The journey is all about finding joy in the journey.
17. I almost never see wildlife when I'm driving because it was never a part of my growing up. You have to train yourself to see what is really there. [Matthew 6:19-33]