

Come to the Table of Life

Have you ever played the game of “**Life**.” It is sort of a simplified version of monopoly.

The point of the game is to earn the most life points. Life points come in the form of more money, bigger houses, more cars, getting married, having kids, as well as other experiences of life.

It’s a fun enough game I guess, but unfortunately there are people who actually believe that is how life really works. Try to get more money, bigger homes, more cars, and have more life experiences so that you will win the game of life.

In fact that seems to be what people perceive as the successful life, as the American Dream. If I can have a healthy family and own my home and a couple of cars and have a good paying job, I will win the game of life, I will be successful.

Now none of those things are bad things. Who doesn’t want to be healthy and owning a home is a good thing and we all want to earn a decent living. But when we find our life identity in our worldly success, we are building on very shaky ground.

Have you ever wondered what is really important in life? For what purpose were you put on this earth? **And if so, what is your purpose?** Maybe we should try to figure this out because life is short.

Psalms 90:12 says, *“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* Maybe we need to reevaluate what we think about our time here on earth.

Last week we talked about idolatry and how we should not eat at Jezebel’s table like the idol worshippers did, maybe today we should take a seat at **Solomon’s table** and listen to some of his wisdom.

One of the great philosophical questions of all time is **“What is the purpose of life.”** Philosophers have struggled with this for thousands of years. And Solomon with all his wisdom decided he was going to find out.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-3, *I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. “Laughter,” I said, “is foolish. 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 worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

1. (Pleasure). In his search for meaning Solomon seemed to dive right into sensuality. Verse 8, *“I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.”*

Remember, this guy already had 700 wives and 300 concubines! He had 1,000 women but he wasn't sure that was enough so he had a harem as well, and he told himself, *“I will try more and more of this sex thing – maybe more and more pleasure will make me happy and content!”*

And in verse 10 he says, *“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.”*

And what did he find? The pursuit of pleasure will never satisfy the human soul because it will always cause you to want more of it. And so one of the first things he figured out was that living just for pleasure was meaningless and can actually lead to despair.

The pursuit of sexual pleasure is an empty experience when God is not involved and His ways are not observed.

We live in a **society today** that says: *“If it feels good do it – then do more of it and more of it and you will then find true happiness and meaning in life!”* But this is a lie and many more than Solomon have testified to that fact.

We find the message that physical pleasure is the answer being flashed on TV and Movie screens. It comes across in advertisements in papers, magazines and from the radio and the internet. You see it on t-shirts, bumper stickers, bill boards. You hear it promoted in songs.

We see and hear this message everywhere but is the message true?

Solomon found out that it is a lie. He found that chasing after sexual pleasure does not satisfy the human soul and give a person meaning in life.

Solomon pursued a lifestyle of pleasure: but, he found, it had no lasting eternal value, it was meaningless and it left a void in his life and heart. And Solomon tells us this to keep us from following this well disguised lie that is still with us today.

He told us that ultimately it was all tiresome, meaningless, and of no eternal value but yet many today still seek it for fulfillment in life.

Jesus said in Luke 8:14, *“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”*

2. (Accomplishments). Next Solomon thought he would try accomplishing great things, and maybe that would bring meaning to his life. Maybe keeping busy was the answer.

Ecclesiastes 2:4-6, *“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.”* And in verse 9 he says, *“I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me.”*

He was very ambitious; remember all these things took a tremendous amount of manpower as there was no heavy equipment in his day. Those reservoirs he had made were dug out one shovelful at a time and the dirt hauled away by carts pulled by oxen. So 100's, maybe 1,000's of men were used in his projects.

These were projects on a grand scale and when they were accomplished he could lean back and say *“look at what I did, look at what I caused to happen.”* Did this bring his life meaning? Was he now satisfied that he had found true joy and purpose in life?

Verse 11, *“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.”*

There is certainly **nothing wrong** with being ambitious. In our society, we make heroes out of people who are ambitious. We hold them up as models for our kids and put their pictures on magazine covers, and rightly so.

This world would be in sad shape without people who dream of reaching for the sky.

Ambition creates disenchantment with the ordinary and dares one to dream. But **left unchecked** it becomes an insatiable addiction to power and prestige and things. It becomes a roaring hunger for achievement that devours people as a lion eats a meal, leaving behind only the remnants of relationships.

The biggest problem with ambition is that it can distort your values.

It can lead to the parent who feeds their career with twelve-hour workdays, meetings and apologies for being gone so much. And he or she tells their family, *"It's only a matter of time before things will get better."* But the more successful they become the worse it gets.

It can turn into the very purpose of your life with no place for God. You can't be involved with any ministry because you are working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.

It **may cause you to do anything to gain an edge**. This leads to a businessman who lies in his business dealings and justifies it by saying, *"I'll only need to do it this for a little while."*

So how did Solomon feel after he had accomplished all his big projects?

Ecclesiastes 2:17-23, *"So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for...So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor..."*

For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it...What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest."

3. (Materialism). Okay, so maybe Solomon thought sex and big accomplishments don't bring lasting satisfaction but maybe if I accumulate a lot of stuff and that will do it.

Verses 7 & 8, *"I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces."*

You think Bill Gates is rich; he couldn't even carry this guy's wallet. He was the richest man on earth and could and did buy anything he wanted. Verse 10 says, *"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired."*

Isn't this the way we measure success today? If I make more than you, then I'm more successful than you. If my house is bigger than yours and in a better neighborhood then I'm more successful than you.

If I buy a boat bigger than your boat then I'm more successful than you. But many times as people chase the god of "MORE" and accumulate more money and bigger and more expensive stuff; the successful life they were striving for seems to crumble around them.

The desire for more has led to affairs and broken marriages, drug and alcohol use, power struggles and a lack of contentment. And what they thought was the promise of what a successful life would be like; has turned out to be empty promises.

But we are not really talking about possessions though; we are talking about a person's **heart condition**.

You could have a lot of money and a lot of stuff and still have your heart focused on Christ or you could be as poor as dirt and still have your focus on money or possessions, on what you don't have, or how your life would be better if you just had more stuff.

Solomon understood this and wrote in Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income."*

Research shows that the average American believes he needs an additional \$8,000 to \$11,000 a year to live comfortably. However, studies also show that when the person reached that level they still claimed they needed another \$8,000 to \$11,000 to live comfortably.

Proverbs 23:4 says, *"Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint."*

When we are striving to find our identity in money or possessions, our identity is being stolen by an illusion of what success really means. And when you think about it, we could define **"failure"** as **succeeding at something that doesn't really matter**.

"It's almost impossible to overestimate the unimportance of most things".

When we succeed at something that doesn't leave a lasting mark in eternity, and even though we may get accolades and awards for it, the reality is that you can't take it with you and it doesn't really matter.

Jesus says in Luke 9:25, *“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”*

Success in the world without success for eternity is really no success at all. It will mean failure eternally and it means failure internally as well.

It is amazing that when we strive to gather things that we think are important, we find it doesn't bring the success we thought or hoped for, **but when we stop focusing on the externals**, and instead focus on our internal relationship with Christ, we end up storing up treasure that is truly valuable, treasure in heaven.

I am not sure where you are this morning. Have you been living life for pleasure, driven to perform, and focused on possessions? While those things will provide temporary happiness, I guarantee it will leave you feeling empty.

Don't let your identity be stolen by the apparent success that the world chases after. Instead, find the full life available when you trust Christ as your Savior and live your life centered on Him.

Okay, so it looks like we will never find lasting satisfaction in what we accomplish or in chasing after pleasure and sex or in money and stuff, maybe we can find real satisfaction in religion.

4. (Religion). What did Solomon, who was known as the wisest man who had ever lived, have to say about this? Solomon understood that just going to church wasn't the answer. Just practicing religion doesn't do it.

Ecclesiastes 5:1, *“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.”*

You can't substitute religion for a relationship. This may be why many find religion to be un-fulfilling. They sought fulfillment in religious practice and found it empty. Now, there is certainly nothing wrong with going to church or with liturgy, ritual and ceremony but it can't take the place of having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you don't have the relationship then just practicing religion can lead to self-righteousness, emptiness and burn-out.

In Ecclesiastes 5:2, Solomon says, that when you go to church, *“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”*

He is saying take your faith seriously. There really is a God and He really is in heaven and He really knows all and sees all that you do and say.

After trying everything what conclusion did Solomon come to about what is really important?

Ecclesiastes 2: 24-26, *“A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. **This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.**”*

Solomon recognized how very important it was, first and foremost, to be right with God.

And at the end of Ecclesiastes we find **“The Conclusion of the Matter”**. Here is what it says Ecclesiastes 12:9-14, *“Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs.*

*The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true...Now all has been heard; **here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.** For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”*

What is the whole duty of man? ***“Fear God and keep His commandments.”***

Fear God: stand in awe of Him and give Him the respect, honor, and glory due Him for who He is and what He has done.

Keep His commandments: And then we are to do what He says, and Jesus told us the greatest commandment of all was to love God and love people. We are to keep all His commandments but especially this one. This kind of love expresses itself in taking action in your life.

Come to the table of life...Are you eating at the table of a meaningful life?

What have you put on your plate? What is on your plate physically? What is on your plate intellectually? What is on your plate spiritually?

Jeremiah 9:23-24

This is what the LORD says:

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
or the strong man boast of his strength
or the rich man boast of his riches,

but let him who boasts boast about this:
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,"
declares the LORD.