

## **What's Your Pleasure?** by Jeff Strite

Ecclesiastes 2:1-2:11

OPEN: It was a 4th of July weekend and the family had gathered for a big meal together. In the kitchen was little 4 year old Johnny... and there on the edge of the cabinet sat the one thing he loved so much. It was a big, round, sure to be juicy, watermelon.

He just couldn't stop staring at it.

But everyone told him to leave it alone. That Mom and Dad would cut it up later. It was explained that it would be too hard for him to lift it and that if he tried he would drop it and it might split open on the floor.

But sure that he understood the danger, everyone went on about their business.

That is, until there was a loud thump. And there it was... watermelon on the floor cracked right down the middle.

Everyone turned around and saw what had happened. You could sense the various feelings among the adults: disappointment, frustration, surprise, and anger.

But before anyone could do or say anything, the four-year-old looked up and said, "Well, I never saw that happening."

(Daily Heartlight for 06/24/2015 by Steve Ridgell)

Now why did that little boy do what he did?

He did what he did because he WANTED that watermelon, and he wanted that watermelon NOW. He couldn't understand why the object of his affection should be denied him.

For that little boy that watermelon represented pleasure.

But when he attempted to take hold of the pleasure...everything fell apart.

And that's what Solomon is telling us about here in Ecclesiastes.

He's telling us that he sought to take hold of pleasure in his life. But when he did... everything fell apart.

"... What does pleasure accomplish?" he asks. (Ecclesiastes 2:2)

"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 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." (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

And then Solomon goes thru a whole litany of things that he'd done to find pleasure.

He tried to find pleasure in accomplishments:

He built houses and planted vineyards. He made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. And he made reservoirs to water all of his trees.

And he found that none of those accomplishments brought him pleasure.

And he tried to find pleasure in his possessions:

He had slaves. He owned herds and flocks. He hoarded silver and gold and all kinds of treasure.

But none of those possessions brought him pleasure.

He even tried wine, women and song (vs 3 and 8)

But that didn't even work.

At the end of experimenting with in all those pursuits to seek pleasure, it's almost as if Solomon sighed and said:

"... everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained..."

Now, it helps to know that these were not just errant musings by Solomon.

He actually has a purpose in telling us about the failure of pleasure to please.

But before we get into examining exactly what Solomon is trying to get at here, we need to begin with one basic biblical truth.

And that truth is this:

There is nothing wrong with pleasure.

God designed us to have pleasure in this world.

In fact, when God created Adam and Eve – He prepared a special place for them to live.

What was the name of that special place God prepared for Adam and Eve?

The Garden of Eden.

Do you know what the word Eden means?

"Eden" means – "pleasure"

When God created Adam and Eve He created a place for them to have pleasure.

In Psalm 36:7-8 David wrote this praise of God

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,

And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.

God loves us so much that He wants to satisfy us.

And he wants to let us drink for the RIVER OF HIS PLEASURES.

So, there is nothing wrong with wanting pleasure in our lives.

In fact, in Psalm 16:11 David praises God with these words:

"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy;

At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

God wants to give us pleasure.

But what exactly IS "pleasure".

I searched several resources and found these definitions:

♣ Satisfaction

♣ Enjoyment

♣ Delight

- ♣ Happiness
- ♣ Joy
- ♣ Contentment

Did you realize that one of God's objectives when He saved you was to give you pleasure?  
To give you enjoyment, satisfaction and contentment in this world?

The problem for many Christians is that we look in all the wrong places for that pleasure. As Christians we live in the world... and so there are times that we THINK like those in the world. In other words... we've been so surrounded by a pagan world for so long that we tend to think like pagans.

So, the Bible gets right to the heart of things.  
It gives you the secret of joy and contentment and pleasure.  
It gives you the key to satisfaction and happiness in this world.

Do you WANT to know what that key is for pleasure and happiness?  
Do you WANT to know what that secret is for joy and contentment?

Well, Paul tells us he discovered it. He wrote:  
"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. Philippians 4:11b-12

He discovered the secret to being content.  
Do you want to know what that secret is?

Well, here it is:  
(Dramatic Pause)

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Philippians 4:4

That's it!!  
That's the secret of being content in any and every situation!!

(Pause... then with a puzzled expression)  
That's it?  
That's all there is to it?  
It can't possibly be that simple, can it?

Hmmm.  
Did you notice that Paul repeats himself here?  
He says "REJOICE in the Lord always... I'll say it again REJOICE"  
WHY is Paul repeating himself?

ILLUS: Well, he's repeating himself for the same reason parents repeat themselves with their kids. Have you noticed parents do that? They say things like:  
"If I've told you once, I've told you a 1000 times..."  
But why do parents repeat themselves?

Because the kids aren't paying attention.  
The kids don't think what their parents are saying is important.  
And so the parents repeat themselves to emphasize that it IS important.

And that's why Paul repeats himself here in Philippians 4.  
What he's saying just seems too easy. Too simple.  
You couldn't possibly gain happiness just by rejoicing, could you?  
And because it seems so easy/simple - a lot of folks overlook it.

I read an article by atheist who made an interesting observation:  
"Over the years, I've come to think I'm missing out. My friends and relatives who rely on God - the real believers, not just the churchgoers - have an expansiveness of spirit. When they walk along a stream, they don't JUST see water falling over rocks; the sight fills them with ecstasy.  
They see a realm of hope beyond this world. I just see a babbling brook. I don't get the message."  
(Dana Tierney, R.Digest May 2004)

What that atheist was seeing in those "real believers"... was a "spirit of rejoicing".  
The real believers had seen something she did not.  
And that is ONE of the real problems for folks that aren't content. They don't see, what we see.

ILLUS: A wealthy man stopped at a travel agency and said he wanted to go on a cruise. Where to?" he was asked.  
"I don't know," was his reply.  
Realizing this man was extremely wealthy, the travel agent suggested that he take a look at a large globe that was in the room. "If you can find a place that interests you, I can get you a cruise there" the agent said.  
So, the man went over to the globe and studied it for some time.  
After a while he looked up in frustration and exclaimed,  
"Is this all you have to offer?"

Unhappy people are often unhappy because they're never satisfied with what they have. They could have the whole world at their fingertips... and they'd still not be content. And that's because they've never learned to rejoice in what they have.

Biblically, rejoicing is not so much an emotion.  
It's a conscious DECISION to be happy with what you have.

Those who don't consciously decide to rejoice will never be happy no matter they have.

ILLUS: I've always said that if I gave a person a tablet of paper and asked them write down the things that disappoint them in life, that frustrate them about their life, or the things they wished they had but didn't ... they could fill out the entire tablet and ask for another. But if I gave them a single piece of paper and asked them to write down the things they

were thankful for, they'd struggle to write down even 10 things.

Why?

Because they're not used to being thankful for what they have.

Why should they be thankful for their hands? They've always had two hands.

Why should they be thankful for being able to see? They've always been able to do that.

Why should they be thankful for being able to walk, or talk, or sing or dance...? They've always been able to do those things.

But they can't reach those other things – those things of life that disappoint and frustrate them because they don't have them. And that's what makes them unhappy. They focus on what they don't have rather than what they do have.

That's part of the reason that Solomon was so frustrated by the fact that...

- His accomplishments
- His possessions
- And his entertainment in life

He HAS all those things.

In fact, those items are easy for a man in his position and power and possessions to obtain.

Thus, nothing that he mentioned was capable of giving him pleasure, because he's not learned to be satisfied and happy with what he had.

But there's one more aspect to this frustration on Solomon's part with pleasure.

There's one more thing Solomon wants us to see that is missing in people's lives.

Paul said "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

Do you remember what I said that secret was?

(In both services they responded "Rejoice")

Ah yes... but rejoice in what?

Rejoice IN THE LORD.

You see, in all of his discussion about seeking pleasure Solomon hadn't mentioned God once. And I believe he did that on purpose.

Because at the very end of the book of Ecclesiastes he says this:

"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."

Ecclesiastes 12:13

The conclusion of the matter (says Solomon)...

The reason everything else seems so empty and worthless and boring in life is because you haven't included God in the picture.

If God is not at the center of your joy life is going to be empty.

One of the scholars that writes in the Jewish Encyclopedia (Kaufmann Kohler) says that no language has as many words for joy and rejoicing as does Hebrew. In the Old Testament there are 27 different words, used primarily for some aspect of joy or joyful participation in religious worship.

In contrast to the rituals of other faiths of the East (he says), Israelite worship was essentially a joyous proclamation and celebration. The good Israelite regarded the act of thanking God as the supreme joy of his life.

Pure joy is joy in God as both its source and object.

As the psalmist says in Psalm 16:11

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy IN YOUR PRESENCE, with eternal pleasures At Your Right Hand."

Where is the joy? (In His Presence)

Where are the eternal pleasures? (at His right hand).

ILLUS: If you recall I told you that Paul wrote that he had found the secret to contentment. And I told you that secret was to "rejoice in the Lord always." But that phrase is actually the opening statement for Paul in discussion of how a Christian should rejoice. Then Paul ends that section with these words of what was truly the secret of his contentment:

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Wait for it) I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength." Philippians 4:12-13

You see, what Paul is saying?

He's saying that it is Jesus who gives him the contentment.

It is Jesus who gives him his joy and pleasure in life.

That's because - without Jesus there is no lasting contentment.

But Paul realized he could do everything through Christ who gave him strength.

Commenting on Ecclesiastes Chuck Swindoll noted the fact that Solomon went through a whole litany of things that should give life purpose but don't. In the end Solomon repeats again and again... it's all emptiness and worthless. Then Swindoll wrote:

"If there is nothing but nothing under the sun, our only hope must be above it."

Our true hope for meaning in this world lies above this world... not in it.

ILLUS: I learned this lesson - by accident - back when I was in Bible College. I'd just been through a class where they focused on Ephesians 5:15-21. And the teacher told us that the passage talked about 3 ways in which we can be filled with the Spirit of God:

1. By surrounding ourselves with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
2. By giving thanks to God always.
3. And by submitting to others. Serving others.

About that same time I was working part time for a furniture store. The owner would buy old chairs and tables and such from garage sales and used goods stores and bring them

back to his shop. My job was to take those old pieces of furniture and strip the old paint and varnish off of them.

I worked in a cement block room about 30 feet long and 15 feet wide. At one end was a horse trough filled with Methylene Chloride. How many of you know what Methylene Chloride is? (a few held up their hands). Well, for those of you who don't know what it is, it's kind of like acetone with an attitude.

I was required to wear long gauntlets over my hands and forearms and safety goggles over my eyes... because if this liquid splashed up on you, it hurt like the dickens. Then I'd take the old chair or other piece of wood and dip it down into the horse trough and let it soak for a while. The Methylene Chloride would eventually eat away at the varnish or paint, and then I'd pull the wood out and take it over to a shower and spray it down, washing away all the gunk that was left.

And I did that for 3 hours a day.

As you can imagine, it got boring after a while.

But then I remembered what my teacher had said about Ephesians 5 in class... and I decided I'd take a shot at it. I began just talking with God, and thanking Him for my blessings. Then I'd sing some old hymns, and then I'd talk to God for a while, and then I'd sing for a little longer.

I ended up having a 3 hour worship service back there every time I went into work.

One day, my boss pulled me aside as I was walking out of my work room ready to go back to my dorm.

"Strite", he said. "What are you doing back there?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Every day you've come out of there smiling and happy. No one ever does that! What are you doing back there?"

And I didn't know. I honestly didn't understand what he was talking about.

But then I began to look back over the past few times I'd been working and realized – what my boss was seeing was the joy and pleasure I was experiencing from spending all that time with God in praise and prayer.

CLOSE: It was night time, and a huge fireworks display lit up the sky.

A man told of noticing a small boy about three years old perched on his father's shoulder.

The child sat mesmerized, aware only of what was exploding in the heavens.

When the fireworks were over, the little boy looked up into the sky again and said,

"Thank you, God."

Of course, we realize that the God didn't shoot off those fireworks. But this small child had learned the value of thanking God even for the works of men, and it was in that thankfulness he showed the beauty of a grateful heart. That was why he was so filled with wonder and joy as he watched the fireworks display.

That little boy put God at the center of his joy.

And that's what we need to do if we truly want pleasure in our lives.

But you can't have pleasure in your life until you have Jesus.

That's why we offer an invitation at the end of every service.