

Now, let me warn you out of the gate. Ecclesiastes has been chipper and happy compared to where we're going tonight. So, I want to warn you out of the gate that tonight is heavy, not happy, but it's a warm blanket to the soul. And I'm preaching this tonight, and I knew we were going to get into this stuff when I was like, "Okay, let's do Ecclesiastes." I'm saying this tonight because more than the happy, fun, candy stuff, the deep, meaty, hard stuff will save you. Are you tracking with me? And so, my commitment is to preach the Word as it is, and there's hard stuff in here. And we're just going to dive into it and let it be it, and the rest will be up to the Holy Spirit in you.

So, let's go. Ecclesiastes 2, starting in verse 12. Verse 12 will help us review. "So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done." Now, if this is kind of your first time with us and you haven't heard any of the other Ecclesiastes talk, here's what's kind of happening. Our boy, Solomon, is unbelievably wealthy and powerful. And he has set his life's goal to experiment with everything under the sun, to see if any of it has any real value. And so, if it's out there and can be tasted, he wants to taste it. If it has any kind of aroma, he wants to smell it. If it can be touched, he wants to touch it. If it has a sound, he wants to hear it. He wants to test everything that is, and then he wants to come back and tell us if there's really any intrinsic value within it. And so, a couple of weeks ago, he took his first step out and he tested out hedonism. He tested out pleasure and the pursuit of pleasure. And so, he started the first quarter of his life and just partied, man. I mean epic, unbelievable parties. The Scripture tells us, almost seven nights a week, he's packing the palace with nearly 15,000 people, he's bringing in comedians, he's bringing in bands, he's bringing in as many kegs as he can get his hands on. This thing is epic, alright. And then, he's going to compare it to your life and my life. He's going to say, "Please! Your little 4th of July soiree is comical. I didn't play the Coldplay record, I charioted them in." And he's going to say, "You have not partied like I have partied." And for over a decade, he throws these massive, 15,000 people, music, wine extravaganzas that the world has yet to see again. And at the end of it, he goes, "It can't get any bigger, and it's kind of lost its luster for me. I can't make it any bigger, I can't fit anybody else into the palace, I can't get any more wines, we're wiping out vineyards. I can't do anything else. I can't make this thing any bigger." And so, he moves on from there and goes, "Okay, I'm going to build then. If I can't just party and find meaning or long-term satisfaction, I'm just going to build." And so, he builds his house, and it takes him fourteen years to build this house. He builds all his wives' houses. For the record, that's 700 wives. That's a lot of houses. He plants vineyards. He plants gardens. He plants forests, the Scriptures tell us.

And once again, you've got to compare that to who you are and where you are so you can see if he has something to teach us here. So, if you've got a nice house that didn't take fourteen years to build, Solomon wins. If you're really proud of the seven Crape-myrtles you planted in front of your fence, then I'm proud of you too. But unless your yard has the word "National" in front of it, you lost. Solomon one upped you. He went beyond you, he went beyond what you're able to do. So now in terms of partying, no one in here can toe to toe with him. He's like, "Okay, so you were drunk for a decade. I got 15,000 people drunk for a decade." So, you move on from there and go, "Oh, I've got a nice house." Solomon goes, "Please. You've got one of my bathrooms. That's what you've got." And if you're proud of what you planted and built, he's like, "I planted national forests."

And so, he moves on from there. He moves on from the party scene to the building scene, now to the life of ease. He's just going to enjoy his wealth. That's all he's going to do. He's going to do nothing but enjoy his wealth. He doesn't do

anything. He's waited on hand and foot, he has chefs, he has drivers. He doesn't do anything. He just enjoys his wealth. And he comes back, and he goes, "This too is a boring and predictable life."

In the middle of all of these three episodes, he is marrying women repeatedly. We find out that he has 700 wives and 300 concubines. So, uninhibited sexuality is Solomon's. I don't know if you're watching this, but he is derailing and short circuiting all of our pursuits by saying, "I've done it. It doesn't work." And he's doing it in such a way that he's going to say in verse 12, that there is nothing that you will be able to do on earth that is not a repeat of what he's already done. That's what he's saying. "Okay, dream it up. What do you want to do? Oh, you want a big house? Please. I could fit two of those inside of my garage. Oh, you want to party? You want to have all the fun that you can? I did it, and it got predictable. It got boring eventually. Oh, you want to get to that place where you just don't have anything to do?" And his thing was, "Listen, all of this is in vain. And in the end, you're going to die, and no one's going to remember you. And we kind of proved that point. Of the 3,000 adults on campus that weekend, four could raise their hands and tell me their great great grandfather's name. Which means you are sixty years away from being forgotten. Are you tracking with me? And that's when he was happy.

And so, now we'll move in to tonight. Are you ready? Are you feeling warm? Are you excited about this? Are you punching your friend in the face, "Why did you bring me here? I was feeling great." So, here we go. He's saying, "You haven't done anything that's not on repeat. I've done it all. It doesn't work. I've kind of lived this thing out." Now, here are the objections to Solomon, because there are philosophies that want to object to Solomon's world view. And here's one of the biggest objections. This was meticulously planned out by Solomon. We found that out two weeks ago when I was here. He planned it all out. He goes, "I'm going to do the party thing, and I'm going to see if it works." And he planned out the parties and the guest lists and who was invited. And then, he moved on to the building. He planned it out. And his hedonism or his pursuit of pleasure was very organized and on purpose. And there's this segment of philosophers that say, "Herein lies the problem of Solomon's philosophy. The problem with Solomon's philosophy was that his pleasure was planned, and the best way to experience pleasure is just to roll with it, just to ride the wave, just to do whatever feels good to you and right to you. You can't plan it. You can't go, 'I'm going to go out tonight and I'm going to get drunk and I'm going to try to find a woman.' You can't do it that way. You just have to go out with the crew and see what happens. And if you'll do it that way, then it will have more meaning, and there will be more fullness to it." Are you serious? I mean, how do you even say that without grinning? I mean, honestly. E-mail me, how do you do it?

Here we go, let's read, because he's got an answer for that. He's not going to let you do that. He's going to go, "Okay, let's talk about this. Let's talk about what's wise and what's not wise here." Look at verse 13, "Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness." Solomon's just going to do this. He's going to say, "Please, that's madness. If you check out of the results of your own pursuits, you have doomed yourself to go farther than you ever imagined you would go. If you check out and you're not weighing in on the results of what you are pursuing, what the results are of the pursuits of your life. If you're not taking a step back and going, 'What is the fruit of this behavior? What is the fruit of this action?,' then you're like a man who's closing his eyes and running full speed through a room. So, you're just a fool." His philosophy is simply this, "It's better to have you eyes opened than your eyes shut." I don't think anyone wants to argue with that. I never met the guy who's like, "Moron! Blind people, they got it going on. Us sight people, we're the ones who are all screwed up." Philosophically, he's going, "You can not afford to not pay attention to your life. You can coast on a lot of things; don't coast on this one."

Last week, me and a couple of the team were out in San Diego, suffering for Jesus, and I was riding up the Pacific Coast Highway. You know we're a bunch of posers, so we were like, "You surf?" "Yeah, I've been surfing." You know? And here's the thing that I noticed, and I don't know why I haven't noticed this before. But if you ride the wave to the end, you get

killed. I never saw that before. Like if you stay on the wave, then one of two things is going to happen. You're going to get slammed into the coral or slammed into the beach. If you ride the wave to the end, it goes bad. Here's Solomon's wisdom. "Pay attention to the pursuit of your life. If you will, you might be able to save yourself from some of sin's bigger consequences. This doesn't bring life, this doesn't bring health, this doesn't bring fullness. If you'll pay attention to how you're behaving, how you're living, what the results of your living are, you might escape some of the harder consequences." It's wisdom. He's wise. That's hard to argue with. I have yet to meet the man or the philosopher that says, "I disagree. I believe that it's by ignoring the outcome of your action that you excel in life." We know he's wrong.

Okay now, Solomon seems to be making sense here, doesn't he? He seems to be making sense, but he is confronted then with the obstacle of life. Do you know what the obstacle of life is? Death. There's no way around it. So, let's look at what he says next, starting with verse 14 again, "The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!" I have this really good friend who pastors a church in Seattle, one of the hardest places, I think, to do church in the country, and he has this saying. He says that "Death is the great equalizer." Death is the great equalizer because no matter how high you ascend, you'll eventually descend six feet under. I mean, I don't hang out with him a lot. He's kind of morbid like that, alright. But this is kind of one of the things he talks about a lot. He's like, "Death will sort it out, man." And here's Solomon's frustration, angst, this thing that's haunting him. He's going, "Okay, even though I'm smart, even though I'm living wise, even though I'm learning all this stuff, I'm still going to die with all the morons. It doesn't matter how I play it, I die like everyone else." And here's a little by thing on death. Our culture, we want to push death as far from our mind as we can. And listen, I'm 32, I feel immortal, man. I mean, I don't ever go, "Hmm, that's coming for me."

On Thursday of last week, I was going up to see a friend up near Oklahoma (God bless him). You want to hear something funny? I've been pastor of this place for three and a half years, and I've been to the hospital five times. That's A, how young we are and B, how good our people are at loving people. Because most of the time, I find out somebody's gone home from people that loved on them and took care of their family and took care of meals to them while they were in the hospital. That's a great testimony for you guys. You guys are great at that. But I got an e-mail from a buddy of mine saying, "Hey, this family that's real loosely connected to the Village have had some weird things happen. She's in ICU up at Denton." So I hopped in my car, and just on my way to see my friend, I swung by the ICU at Denton Regional. And when I walked in, the rooms were on my left side. And when you walk by, you know, you kind of look in the rooms. I can't help it. Maybe you can, maybe you're on the ground, but I gotta do it. It's something in me, it draws me. And so, I looked and there was this extremely elderly man gasping for air, like fighting to breathe. So I walked by and just thought to myself, "I hope he's headed home." I thought that just really quickly in my head. And I went into her room, a young lady, struggling. And we prayed and we cried and we prayed and then I headed out. Now, while I was on my way back out, there was a woman in the room with this man. She looked to be fifty or sixty, too young to be his wife, so I thought it was probably his daughter. And she had his hand, and he's completely unconscious. And she's stroking his head and talking to him. And I thought, "Must be his daughter." And I go and I hit the down arrow at the elevator, and I'm sitting there, waiting for the elevator to come up when I have the thought, "That's coming for me. If God is gracious, I will be a very old man gasping for air, while my daughter says goodbye to me." And it completely freaked me out. So, I'm trying to get it out of my head. I'm trying to think of songs, I'm trying to do just anything I can do to get that thought out of my head. And for the rest of the day, that thought chases me. Do you know what I'm talking about? Have you ever been able to put it out of your head for 30 minutes, then all of a sudden BAM! Right there, right back on top of you and you gotta shake it out and try to not think of it. And I'm going, "Oh man, I've got to get this thought out of my head." Because it was a really weird thought to, to think that if I live to be 90, that's less than 60 years away. But here was a thought I had, and we all buy into this. Here's

what we all buy into. Everybody, I mean, we're all so terrified of death right now. I'm into it and I agree with the health kick, and I think it's smart and right and you need to be a good steward of your body. But there ain't enough leafy spinach out there to keep you alive forever. And you can do all the pilates you want, you're going to die, lose flexibility and die. And I'm not telling you to not to do those things. I think you should be a good steward, but it's coming. Whether you like it or not, you are, as of now, 45 minutes closer than you were when you walked in here. It's coming.

Now, what instead of ignoring death, what if we dwelt on it a little bit more than we do? Maybe thinking about our own mortality would make us better people. So, I drive home from Sherman, Texas, and I walk in the front door with this thought chasing me all day long. And it's amazing what the idea of your own mortality does to your perspective on life. Are you tracking with me? So I walk in and grab my wife and give her a hug. I always give her a hug and a kiss when I get home, but I did kind of that extended one, close-mouthed but extended. And then, I go get on the floor, and for the next hour and a half to two hours, I play Dora and anything else she wants to play. And I'm trying to drink in that moment. Like, my daughter's three and a half, she doesn't smell like she used to. She used to smell like baby. Now she smells like sweat and suntan lotion, which is a great smell in itself. If you're a parent, you'll know the smell, but she doesn't smell like a baby. Already, her smell has changed. I want to remember though. I want to drink that in, this moment that Christ has given me, this thing full of sights and smells. I want to drink them in. They were gifts. So, I'm probably freaking everyone in my house out (sniffing sound). I just want to be there and I want to drink it in. Jonathan Edwards, one of my heroes says that he resolved that he was going to think on his own death often and the circumstances therein. Because he wanted right relationships, and he wanted right standing before God. And he found that thinking about his own death drove him to do what is right. And the truth is, most of us feel immortal, man. Most of us do. But the truth is, you are unbelievably fragile and could develop flu-like symptoms tomorrow that take your life in eight weeks.

So, he moves on from death, and he slips into some really bad despair here. Look at verse 17, "So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil." Let me try to explain what's happening to him here. There is a diminishing return on the pleasure he's seeking, so he's starting to hate life. He's disliking life because he's sucked all the marrow out of life and he's in his 30's. So first, he's grieved about it. First, he's grieved that he's done everything there is to do and has found no satisfaction for his soul. So then, he moves on from being grieved to being frustrated. Here's what he's frustrated about. What we know from history is that after Solomon, the nation of Israel completely dissolves. We know that it completely dissolves, so what he's doing is, he is noticing his sons. Let's be honest about what is happening here. He has been wise, he has built Israel to be wealthy and powerful, and he has built all these things and he's looking at his boys and he's going, "We're in trouble. I have done nothing but manage this thing wisely, and whoever's behind me will destroy it." And he is utterly frustrated that he is powerless to control what happens to the wealth he has accumulated. Then, he gives his heart over to despair.

Let me try to help you with this one. I'll date myself a little bit here. I was/am a huge Nirvana fan. I know, some of you get offended by that...I don't care. Like, my deal is if you have something to say, I love listening to you. Even if you're proving Ecclesiastes. And so, I loved that band. And throughout history, there have been prominent figures who, very young in life, achieve everything they could have ever dreamed, and they're out of dreams. And when that happens, despair takes root. And I think this is what probably happened to Kurt Cobain. What's he going to do, make another platinum record? Is he going to buy another house, another trinket? You think the little things that make us go numb to the lameness of our own lives would have worked with him? Do you think the new cell phone would perk him up? He entered into a despair

that writing music could no longer lift. That's what I believe happened. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's what I believe happened. And throughout history, you have men and women who, like Thoreau said, lived deliberately and sucked out all the marrow of life. And they're so young, they've got nothing left to do but chew on the bone, and they can't stand it. And this is what happened to Solomon. "I have achieved it, I have done it, I have accomplished it, and I'm going to have to leave it all to my idiot sons.

Okay, watch this. Verse 22, he's going to ask the eternal questions here, "What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow,..." He's talking about those who get everything they want. If you'll remember back to week one, Job is book about a guy who loses everything, Ecclesiastes is about a guy who gets everything. And he says, "There's nothing but sorrow, because I've got everything I want. So now, every day just increases my sorrow because I'm gathering stuff and building stuff that I know people behind me are going to destroy. And there's nothing I can do about it." Let's start back with 22, "What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation." Why is his work vexation? Because it's not going to matter in the end. That's what he's saying. And then look at this. Boy, this is such an indictment on so many of our hearts, "Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity." And so, what he's saying here is that he's working, he's doing good things, he's continuing to accumulate, he's continuing to add to his dream, and yet his heart every night goes, "Something's not right." What he's doing in these two verse is, he's asking the two questions with a statement. He's saying, "Is there an answer?" and "Is it all hopeless?"

And now finally, he's going to answer it. Now, let me chat with you because I want to warn you about what's coming. For those of you who are not believers in Jesus or ascribe to a more universal mindset, what I'm about to say and what Solomon's about to say is going to sound horrifically arrogant. But I'll ask you not to turn me off until we're done, because I think Solomon does an unbelievable job of proving his point in such a way that he's hard to argue with. I'm not saying he can't be argued with, I'm saying it's hard to. So, let's look at how he answers it. "Is there any answer. Is it all hopeless?"

Starting in verse 24, "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil." Now, I want to stop there. Here's what he's saying in this verse. It's kind of jumbled because of how the Hebrew works. How many of you know another language? Do you ever get bogged down when you're trying to translate something because there's this one word that you have to translate with like twelve words over here? That's what's happening here in this text, because here's what he's saying. He's saying, "Is there any hope? Is there any answer? Is it all hopeless?" Here's the first part of his answer, "There is nothing intrinsic within a man's soul that will allow him lasting enjoyment anywhere on earth." There is nothing intrinsic within the soul of man that will let him, for a long period of time, enjoy any of his work, any of his food, any of his toil.

And my evidence is every one of you in this room. Everybody, myself included, over and over again ascribes to the philosophy that what's going to satisfy us is more of what we already possess. This is the philosophy. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. What happens is, we fill the groove of eternity in our hearts. We keep trying by throwing all these temporary things in there, and it doesn't work. I think the example we used a couple of weeks ago is, you get the new cell phone, it's brand new, it's sleek, it's pretty, it's silver. It can start your car, "Beep...Vroom." Four months later, the next version of it comes out, and all of a sudden, it's not as effective, it's not as pretty. You need the next one. No you don't; you want it. Why? Because your phone has grown predictable and boring. So you want the new one. Now, add in any other thing that you buy. I would be that you went to the store this week because you didn't have any food in the house. And I would bank that's not true.

He's saying, "There's nothing that's going to satisfy you for any lengthy period of time. The nature of everything changes over time. You get the new car, you get the new motorcycle, it's the thing that you're like, "Oh, this is one of the coolest rides. I love this thing. It's sleek." Four months later, you're like, "What was that? What was that car?" You get your house, you like your house. Next Christmas you're driving around looking around, "Look at that house." I mean, there is nothing inside of us that's going to allow us constant enjoyment forever. We're broken. So, it's not going to work. Even marriage requires effort to sustain romance and joy as it progresses. Any man or woman who would try to live off the initial enthusiasm of the honeymoon is doomed. It has to be worked for and fought for. I know that doesn't sound romantic to you, but it's the reality of it. And the only people who would argue with me right now are those who just got back from their honeymoon. "I think you're a liar," all tan, still wearing a lei. "I don't believe you for a second." "Well, I'll see you in a couple of months, man." It has to be worked for, fought for, contended for. It changes. Nothing satisfies forever, nothing. Come on, think about it. Don't close your eyes here, open them. Is there anything that sustains forever? "Nothing" is what Solomon says. Nothing's going to do it. You get hungry again. You need to get your hair cut. Your lawn grows back out. Your (fill in the blank), nothing. Nothing satisfies. Nothing stays fixed. Everything's broken. Why am I preaching this book?

So, that's the first part of the answer. Now, let's move on. Remember, I told you I was going to say some things that sound horrifically arrogant. That's not the one. I think that's life. I don't care who you are; I don't think you can argue with that. Oprah wouldn't even try to argue with that. She'd agree with me and tell you which book to buy. Now, look at verse 24 again, "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?" Now, what the Scriptures just said and what Solomon says as the answer to this problem of nothing being lasting when it comes to enjoyment for us, is that lasting enjoyment that the soul experiences is a gift from Jesus. Here's the part that's going to sound horrifically arrogant, but I want to try to show you, even philosophically, how this works itself out. God gives gifts to all men. Whether you believe in God or not, you are living, walking and wearing His stuff. He gives gifts to all: food, drink, work, friends, family. He gives gifts to all, but only the children of God, only those who believe in Jesus receive the gift of lasting enjoyment. Why? Let me try to explain why. Because if we're living right, submitting to Jesus...Now I want to be careful here that you don't hear me say that people who go to church get this, because that's not true. Because for the follower of Jesus, the sincere, honest follower of Jesus, our satisfaction is not tied to our stuff. They are separate things. So, we do not rise or fall on the accumulation of trinkets and houses, but have instead, found our treasure in Him alone. Now, walk with me, because I know that sound horribly arrogant of the Christian faith. Listen to me. Think about how unbelievably freeing this idea is.

99% of all conflict comes from what I'm about to say. The majority of human beings believe that people and circumstances exist to make me happy. So, when they're not happy, who's to blame? People and circumstances. So if you do not ascribe enjoyment as belonging to Christ and Christ alone, you almost ensure that your reality will be filled with bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness. Here's how it plays itself out over and over and over again. A man and he's got a wife and he's got children and he's got a decent job and he's got a nice house but something's still gnawing at his soul. So, what could it be? "It can't be that something's wrong with me. It has to be someone who's supposed to be making me happy is not making me happy." So they begin to look for imperfection in the circle that's around them, and they'll always find it. So then, this is the game that we start playing, "Well, I'd be happier if my wife would have more sex with me. Oh, I'd be happier if I had a bigger house. Oh, I'd be happier if they would honor me at work. They don't appreciate me there. They don't respect me here." And everything becomes about what everyone else is doing because you're asking people to fill a void that they can never fill. And this is Solomon's big argument.

"If my wife would have more sex with me..."

"Nope. Uh uh. Seven hundred wives, three hundred concubines, it's nice, but it's not the answer."

"Well, if I could just have nicer things..."

"Nicer than what? Because I pretty much own the earth right now."

"Oh, if I could just make something of myself..."

"Make what?"

This is his big argument, that all of us are trying to fill this hole in our life with other people and other things. And it's an impossibility, so it breeds and creates conflict, resentment, bitterness, anger, the creation of this world that will never be, the perpetual grass that is always greener on the other side, despite the fact that both sides are in a drought. This is why I think he's so hard to argue with, because you can watch this play itself out over and over and over again everywhere, even in the life of Christians. You make your pursuit anything else but Jesus, and I'm telling you, you're going to have frustrating returns.

Alright, so the fullness of joy and satisfaction does come to us from Jesus. But that's kind of an ambiguous idea, so he's going to close it out. Look at this last verse, "For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy,..." Okay, so he's going to say, "Who gets lasting fulfillment? Who gets joy? Who gets this? The one who pleases God." So then, the eternal unbelievably huge question for tonight is, "What pleases God?" And listen, how you answer this question determines how much freedom you walk in versus how much bondage you walk in. This is one of my favorite questions to ask, "What pleases God?" You know what I found, is each age group has their own list of things that they think please God. A lot of them aren't spoken, they're just lived out that way. Like, when I was in college and you were a guy in a small Christian Baptist college, you better be playing the acoustic guitar. I mean, if you weren't playing G, C and D, and every worship chord that you can get your hands on, then something was wrong with your spirit, alright. If you badmouthed John Piper and didn't love "Desiring God," then something had gone horrifically wrong with you. I mean, these were things that had to be taking place. You had to be in anywhere between six to fourteen accountability groups. I mean, these were the pieces that were there, and if you didn't live them out, then something was wrong with you. "You better go to church, you better not dress this way." And this was kind of the list that was at that small Baptist college. Spoken or unspoken, it was the list. I think the ones that I joke about for the 30-40 year olds is, "You gotta be a Republican. You gotta have an ichthus right next to your W02 sticker on your car." These are kind of the unspoken, "This is what we have to do to please God." So, there's this mentality that "I gotta do this, this and this. And if I do these things, that pleases God. And if I don't do those things, that will arouse the anger of God. And He could punish me, discipline me, hurt me, kill me. He could do these things." The problem with that is it completely negates the cross of Christ and once again makes it about you. And it has never been, not will it ever be about you. Which is why even so much of Christian music drives me crazy. It's a theological train wreck. It just wants to make man central over and over again. You are not central, you will never be. This thing is about Christ, the glory of God and Christ. What pleases God? Simple... faith. That's it.

So now, if you've got any church experience here, some Sunday school pens, then you're going, "Oh, faith. Yeah, faith." It's kind of ambiguous church word, huh? Isn't it? Something we can all say, we all know the right answer for, but very few of us kind of get it. Let me kind of help you with faith as simple as I can put it. Faith is believing that God is there. For you, use the word "here," that God is here and that Everything comes from His hands, even sorrow. And that's completely unpopular with most Evangelicals. We want to believe that God gives us all the candy and that the devil's there to take it. But that's not the devil I read in Scripture. He's no bishop that can float about the board as he pleases; he's a pawn

that always needs permission. So, has God caused your sorrow? Has He allowed it? Yeah, the full brunt of it and has not abandoned you to endure it alone. Nor is this about His wrath towards you but His mercy, that your suffering just might be the mercy of God for you. "Why? How could He allow...? What kind of God would allow...?" Okay, a God who loves you so much that He refuses to let you become Verruca Salt. That's the "I want the golden goose" girl from "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory." Maybe because He does not desire that you be this anemic, weak, spoiled, self-righteous believer in self. Maybe because the only way to convert and remold is to hammer and hurt. I think you learn this when you're a parent. There are some times when you have to let your kid suffer a little bit so they'll survive. Are you tracking with me? I mean, it doesn't bring you joy nor pleasure, but you know, without it, without that discipline, without that shaping, without that allowing to fail, without some of that, it would turn out bad for them. And so, you love them so much, you let them hurt, you let them cry, let them bleed. This is what's happening here. And when you view the world like that, it's possible to have joy even in the middle of sorrow. This is what, if you'll remember the apostle Paul, he said, "Listen, I was homeless and I had a mansion, and both were okay. And I was well fed and I was really hungry, and I was alright." Our boy, Job, has everything taken from him, and he tears his clothes and he says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." If you remember, it just infuriated his wife that he would have that kind of faith. Faith is believing that He's here and that everything comes from His hands, not by wrath but by mercy and love. And that is the God of the universe. Rail against it if you want, but that's the God of the Bible.

And then, he puts this little bit at the end, it's so hard. To be honest with you, I wish he wouldn't have done it. Because then, I could just end it right here, and we'd all go, "Okay, faith." But he makes it hard. Verse 26, "For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God." Thanks Solomon. Let me try to explain this. So right now you're going, "So, are you telling me that if I don't believe in Jesus, all of my stuff is eventually going to be given to Christians?" Um, eventually. Let me give you one example of how this plays itself out, and then I'll give you, I think, the deeper meaning behind the text. How many of you got to work with "Transform" this summer? How many of you got to go downtown to the little old ghetto there and paint and mow and build? And we're going to continue to be a presence there to just a neighborhood that's fallen into just a lot of oppression and pain. and crime. And we went down there this summer and just cleaned it up. We're helping them build a community center and a sanctuary and a Minyard's. And if you're new to the Village, we believe passionately that God has not given us our resources to splurge on ourselves (as you're probably picking up), but to push back what is dark in the world. And that doesn't mean that if you believe in Jesus, we'll give you a cup of soup. It's, "We believe in Jesus, so here's a cup of soup." It's different. Well, one of the houses down there is this immaculate mansion that was built decades ago and has this unbelievable crown molding, and it's just real intricate and beautiful. And a very wealthy family built that house. And the neighborhood went south, as they would say. And they built the high-rise overpass there, and it got worse and worse and worse. And they just bailed on the house. Guess who owns it? The church does. That's one example of this happening.

Let me give you the deeper meaning behind it. There are things going on here that are impossible to see outside of the lens of Jesus. I give you examples all the time, I use story because I think story communicates better than almost any other venue. Like, my daughter was given to me not just because some cells started multiplying out. My daughter was given to me by God to teach me about God, to teach me about grace, to teach me about love, to teach me about sacrifice, to teach me about how selfish I am. So when I see my daughter and my son, there's all this depth there and there's all this meaning there that does not exist for someone who does not see with the lenses of Jesus. Are you tracking with that? Like, I'll give you an example. This is the one I give you all the time. My son, he just poops his pants and eats. That's what he brings to the table. He never comes home, throws \$100 on the bar, he doesn't have a job, you can't have good conversation with him. Like my daughter, we have great conversation. My son, he can't communicate. He can say, "Ba ba ba ba" over and over and over again. That's the extent of his language. He does not contribute to our



family. He sucks resources, time and energy and does nothing but poop. Now, here's the reality though. I don't mind. Do you know why I don't mind? I don't mind because I know that, if you will, see the future. One day, he's not going to poop his pants anymore. One day, we'll sit on the back swing and eat Popsicles and talk theology. I can see the future. I know that one day, he won't be like he is now, and I love him with every ounce of my being now. That sounds a lot like Jesus' love towards me. Alright, so there's this depth there, there's this meaning there that transcends.

You can get outside of a relationship. Like, I tell you all the time. Diner, real dinner, like good food or good wine or water or Coke or whatever, good food with good friends and tastes and smells and laughter, there's something unbelievably holy about that. And the children of God see it, but those who don't see with the lenses of Jesus can't. And so, what he's saying in this text is that there's this people who toil to create things, and they never get to fully enjoy them. But the children of God do. That's what he's saying. He's saying that there's these people who work their tails off building and creating, but they never get to enjoy the fullness of it. They might get to enjoy the taste, they might get to enjoy the sight, but they'll never enjoy the fullness of it because they don't see the deeper levels that only Jesus can allow you to see. And this is the message of Solomon. The message is, "You've got two choices: you can treadmill it or you can trust that there's something bigger than you that is not out to destroy you." He's going to take a step back and say, "Please listen to me. All that you're pursuing, I already own. It doesn't work. Put your faith in Jesus. Believe that He's here. He has not abandoned you. And all that you're experiencing has come through His hands. He'll get you through. Don't run from Him, run to Him." And I know tonight that we hear through different ears.

You know what I've found out about myself? Theologies about sorrow, I'm really confident in until it's my sorrow. Then all of a sudden, I'm like, "Whyyyy?!?" Right? I mean, I'm always so confident, "Here's what's happening, and this has passed through God's hands. He has not abandoned you." And then when it's me, I'm like, "Where are You?!?" I've learned that, I know that tonight, some of you are in the middle of just hurt. I know you hear this differently than those who aren't. But you know what I've found about Scripture? You've got two choices tonight: you can accept it or you can rail against it. I don't know what your third option is. So, I don't know what the Spirit's doing tonight. I told you it would be heavy. My hope is that you'd think a little bit about death coming for you. My hope is that you'd wonder, do you really believe that He's here and everything comes from His hands? That you would contemplate and think on whether your pursuit is Him or stuff with his name attached to it. There's a lot of cats doing that. My hope is that you would believe that He's here.