

WHAT ABOUT NOW?, ECCL 2

Something Worth Living For #2

◆ **Intro:** Winona Ryder wrote, "When I was 18, I was driving around at two in the morning, completely crying and alone and scared. I drove by this magazine stand that had this Rolling Stone that I was on the cover of, and it said, 'Winona Ryder: The Luckiest Girl in the World.' And there I was feeling more alone than I ever had." Like many an actress, Wynona was well known, and well paid. But empty. She checked herself in to a hospital at age 20 for depression and anxiety attacks. Like many a searcher, The Teacher in Ecclesiastes is looking for value and meaning too. What he discovers is that there are several myths floating around the world about finding happiness.

◆ **1. The Retirement Myth:** A lot of people live life looking solely at the future. When I'm on my own... When I find Mrs. Right... When I make a million dollars... When the kids are grown... When my stock price rises... When I retire... When I get that cabin.... It's a rough way to live, yet many folks live it hard. But what about meaning, value, joy, in the moment?

◆ **A. Don't tell yourself that happiness is found at some future point or end.** The end of financial struggle. The end of work altogether. The end of life. In the first three verses of our text, the Teacher is pondering "what is worthwhile for men to do", so he tries out the doing of nothing at all. No more contributing to society. Let's drop the go-to-work routine. Let's just try pleasure alone, or laughter. How about booz, or doing "wild and crazy" things (folly). In fact we can summarize that this myth basically

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says "beer is better." There's an old saying I'm pretty sure a woman developed: "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man how to fish, and he will sit in a boat and drink beer for a day." There's something tempting about believing that our moments and minutes are just to be endured *on the way to* a future pleasure. "Everybody's working for the weekend." they say. "Thank-God-It's-Friday.", they say, subtly implying "Curse God on MTWTH."

◆ Is it true or is it a myth? Maybe it really is the codes of behavior, the rules, the work ethic that's holding me back from fulfillment. Maybe I should just lose it more often. Maybe the next bar down will be more fun, or the next date. But what the Teacher finds, and what many a school boy also finds at the end of Summer, is that aiming at doing nothing, or mere pleasure does not satisfy a person's soul. Many physically healthy people arrive at retirement and die shortly thereafter.

◆ **2. The More Myth:** You can tell someone has bought into this myth when he says, "I want to leave my mark." Or "What can I do so that I will be remembered." This is the subtopic of verse 4-11. This myth says that bigger is better. Alan Alda once quipped, "It isn't necessary to be rich and famous to be happy. It's only necessary to be rich." Have more, and find the satisfaction so elusive to the Rolling Stones. The commercials tell us to "be the first to collect all 4 Halloween Barbies." Or buy two artichoke peelers and get 1 free! Or purchase new, improved

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Bounty Paper towels. Picks up more! Wring it out and use it again! Oh happy day!

◆ So the writer decides to experiment with this social philosophy and go big or go home.

◆ v4: *I made greater my doings.*

◆ v9: *I became greater.*

◆ Certainly sounds like Solomon. 1Kings 4-11 describe his “doings”. It took him 13 years to build his palace. It had 15 foot stone blocks, a 75’ colonnade to the front door, 4 rows of 15 cedar columns. The daily provisions for his court were 185 bushels of flour, 375 bushels of meal, 30 head of cattle, and 100 sheep/goats. He didn’t have a 3 car garage but he did have 4000 chariots! He amassed 25 tons of gold, made silver as common as stones in the street, had 900 shields of hammered gold lining the palace walls, 700 wives, 300 concubines. All that, and a person can still be empty.

◆ But you know this already to be true. Have you ever experienced Christmas let-down? The egg nog is gone, the record player... sorry, thumb drive of mp3s is done. There’s little Jonny wading through waist-high package wrapping, torn in a frenzy from every box. And he’s crying by the pile of meaningless toys because there aren’t *more*. Don’t believe the More Myth. More of anything has never satisfied the human soul.

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
we people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,

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clean, favored, and imperially slim.
And he was always quietly arrayed,
and he was always human when he talked;
but still he fluttered pulses when he said
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.
And he was rich- yes, richer than a king,
and admirably schooled in every grace;
In fine, we thought that he was everything
to make us wish that we were in his place.
So on we worked, and waited for the light,
and went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
and Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
went home and put a bullet through his head.

◆ Friend, if you are living the rat race, jumping from head to head over the crowd, relatively certain that bigger is better, and driven to achieve that, please reconsider what your life is about. You will be disappointed.

◆ **3. The Ability Myth:** our text takes this up in verses 12-16. What our seeker ponders is knowing more, being wiser, more knowledgeable than the next guy. This myth believes that brains are better. Improve your education. Learn how to invest, travel and discover. Get another degree because that will make you different, memorable, an expert that everyone should listen to. Broaden yourself. Buy art, eat fish eggs and say, "Wow that must be expensive."

◆ There's just a little problem here. The Wall Street Journal once reported that unskilled laborers were much less likely to have chronic health problems. That's interesting. According to the

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National Center for Health Statistics, twice as many have high blood pressure in managerial or administrative positions that do laborers. There's something philosophically defeating about this myth because Albert Einstein and Jeffrey Dahmer are both dead and their bodies are disintegrated. Albert's smarts didn't prevent that. Doctors get buried in the dirt just like garbage collectors.

◆ Simon Biles has been in the news because of the 2020 Olympics. She's the most decorated gymnast ever. She has great skill, more skill than most others. But she has all the fears, the demons, the mental taxing other people have too. Her parallel bar ability doesn't solve or even really address her emotional, mental, or spiritual state. So why do we buy these myths that if I just didn't have to work, or if I just had more than I presently do, or if I just was more skilled or knew more -then I'd be a content and satisfied person?

◆ Do you work so much that all you are is a farm animal hitched to your task? Do you think all about work when you are fishing or golfing? Do you eat while you're driving or put your makeup on then? Is it hard for you to sit still on a park bench? Does life always feel like the carrot on the stick, just a little out of reach? Well God's Word has some wisdom for us.

◆ **4. The True Scoop:** Existence takes value from it's purpose and meaning. And only God can give that gift to you because he is the Creator of existence, yours and mine. What the Teacher is beginning to conclude is that "earth is crammed with heaven" as

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Elizabeth Browning would one day say. Let's look at his conclusion.

◆ *There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? Eccl 2:24-25*

◆ This conclusion will be repeated six more times throughout Ecclesiastes. It's good news! This truth says that nothing is better than joy in the moment from God. For it reminds us that there is this phenomena we call "joy". Humans can have it. We are different from horses who do their job, and eat, and do their job. And there is this odd capacity for "enjoyment" even in seemingly insignificant things. There is in fact this thing we call a "feeling of accomplishment" after a job is done. Do beavers have that, I wonder?

◆ Think of art for example. Something fashioned from mud or clay, or colored juices. How unnecessary is art? It doesn't do a thing. It can't perform for you! Yet humans make art. Humans buy other peoples' art and say it *means* something.

◆ Think of eating. No creature has the capacity for such complicated delight as humans. I read a review the other day...

◆ "It is an unexpected delight of being human that a bowl of pasta could make you cry; but the thing was just so unbelievably

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good that tears welled up in my eyes. It had been one of those meals where its perfection frees us from the thick coat of daily worry.

◆The bacon fat and white wine draw the sweetness and pugnacity out of onion and garlic; over time, they reduce into a new creation, a rich thickness that now asks to be baptized, and so elevated to a higher life, by the blood of the tomato. The liquors of beef and the spirit of carrots and celery prepare the way for the milk that, like familial love, makes a harmonious whole out of contrasting parts. This is pasta as poetry.”

◆OK, when I read that I thought it was kinda weird too. But do you see what I mean? There is a theme of the gift of joy in Ecclesiastes. Do not live postponing enjoyment to some future time. It is a gift that God can give you in the moment. Any moment. You know how good a ripe tomato tastes? And your face smiles and you think “wow”!? That is a hint of a greater reality crammed into your everyday moments. That delight is God’s gift. You know the smile that crosses your face at a photo of your child or grandchild, and that warmish feeling the moment gives you? And you whisper at the picture of how you love the person? That is a hint of a greater reality crammed into your everyday moments. That delight is God’s gift. Just listen to other biblical writers.

◆*Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways. You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you. Psalm 128:1–2*

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- ◆ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; ... My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain Isa.65:21-23
- ◆ Enjoyment is a gift from God your Maker. Listen.
 - ◆ *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 1Tim. 6:17*
- ◆ In the same chapter Paul says
 - ◆ But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. V6-8
- ◆ **Conclusion:** Sounds like the conclusion of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes, doesn't it? Wisdom, pleasure, possessions –these do not give the human soul joy in the moment, much as we try to make them do so. It's a myth. But there is joy to be had, yes! It is possible even now. Don't set the sights of your life so far out in the future that you miss the pieces of heaven in the Now. Also here's another thing. Do I have mechanisms in my life that create space for paying attention to heaven now? Learn to name and respond to all the places God makes himself evident: "God sightings." Why? Because Jesus, God's Son, is resurrected. He

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lives. He is eternal as are all those who hitch the wagon of their heart to him! Hitch your heart to him today! Ask him to take over your life! That's what Paul preached in 1Corinthians 15. Our Lord died for our sins. Our Lord is raised from the dead. Our Lord is alive. That means that our now is part of our eternity. It matters. Here's how he closes that chapter.

*◆Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.
1 Corinthians 15:58.*