

Message Series: **'Satisfied? What Does It Take For You?'**

Today's Message: **'The Main Thing...What's Yours?'**

Scripture Source: **Ecclesiastes 1-2**

Date: Sunday, January 12, 2014

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**Desperate**

Did you see yourself in the lyrics? Could you feel the ache for purpose, for hope? Could you discern the pressing need for making changes, for a new direction to be pursued? How would you 'score' your satisfaction levels currently?

Dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfied

What are the reasons for your current assessment?

Do you see any room for movement to the right? Are you a 'happy camper' or desperate for hope and meaning? If it was just you and me, what would you say? Within each of us a longing for happiness and meaning lives. That includes you.

How do we experience a deepening soul satisfaction? What does it take for you? Where do you find contentment? For many of us the 'search for satisfaction' is a frustrating trek. We think we have found the source...but then it doesn't last. We think the right relationship, the right career, a bigger house, more money, less stress...what do you think? Illustrate: Ralph Barton story: "I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes. I have gone from wife to wife, from house to house, and have visited great countries of the world. But I am fed up with devices to fill up twenty four hours of the day." (Swindoll quote) Shortly before his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday he committed suicide in his penthouse apartment.

This renowned cartoonist, one who made his mark doing caricatures of the rich and famous in his day would echo Solomon's words: "Meaningless! Meaningless...utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." Ecclesiastes 1:2.

Have you ever wondered what the 'point' was to life, to your life? You wouldn't be alone. Is there a better way forward? Yes. God has given us insights to enlighten us and the possibility of a relationship with Him to make a huge difference in the journey of life...yours included. That's what we will be exploring over these 6 weeks. We will learn about dead-end roads that we need to steer clear of. We will be reminded about the 'main thing' as foundational to a life lived with genuine and sustainable purpose and contentment. We will discover the importance of discerning the different seasons of life we experience, and the need to know when to move on. We will be strongly reminded of the corrosive effects of envy and resentment and how to replace those feelings with contentment. We will be reminded of what matters and what doesn't. I think we are in for an enriching, challenging, hope- infusing 6 week adventure in the Scriptures. I have been greatly enriched and instructed through different teaching sources...a series from Willow Creek, a book by Chuck Swindoll and other insightful study books.

So, let's open our Bibles to Ecclesiastes.

**The Author and his Summary**

The author of this book is the Jewish king Solomon, son of the most highly esteemed king in Jewish history, David. This book was probably written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It is remarkably honest and unedited. Solomon makes a raw and passionate statement about life 'under the sun.' This phrase is used 29 times. The word phrase 'meaningless' is used 35 times. The word means "useless, hollow, futile, vain." Life lived apart from a living and responsive relationship with God will illustrate that definition. Many of us would use that word to describe seasons of our lives, we have been illustrations of that harsh and blunt word. Yet, there is a better way forward. We will be reminded of that as we work through this man's honest account of his search for satisfaction.

But let's start where he does. He reminds us of the fleeting nature of life. Vss. 3-11

### **Dead End Roads...and You: Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:23**

Solomon is refreshingly honest. He tells us upfront about his agenda. 2:3 "I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives." I wanted to discover what mattered...and what doesn't. So he undertakes all sorts of life experiments and explorations. He wants to experience self-fulfillment. And nothing will stop him from fully engaging in this journey.

**Dead End Road # 1-** The Pursuit of Wisdom and Knowledge -1:12-18 . Solomon concludes that it only generates grief, confusion, and emotional pain. What's the point? There are too many mysteries to contend with...it's meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

**Dead End Road # 2 –** The Pursuit of Pleasure – 2:1-16 Basically Wine, Women, and Song...with some creative activities thrown in, generated by almost limitless resources. Imagine the life Solomon lived!

Our culture makes much of this kind of self-centered, self-gratification orientation. Yet, Solomon lives to deeply regret and dismiss these 'satisfaction-guaranteed' engagements. His level of disenchantment escalates as these self-centered journeys unfold. He is not a satisfied man. On the contrary, pessimism and despair colour his words. Vs. 11,17-22. The intensity of his disappointment is compelling.

Yet, a glimmer of hope emerges...a sense of a better way that has God at the core. 2:24-25.

### **A Fork in Road**

Solomon's life is meant to give us pause...to think about our own search for satisfaction. If we would be wise we can be steered clear of all sorts of dead end roads, sooner than later. We can discover the 'main thing' that promises purpose and fulfillment. We can avoid wasting years of our one and only life. Illustrate 'Things Fall Apart' a lament, a memoir inked with regret and yearning.

One reminder: some of these pursuits are not evil or meaningless in and of themselves. Acquiring knowledge is not a bad thing, but when it becomes the 'main thing' trouble follows. Enjoying pleasant times and pleasurable experiences aren't necessarily wrong. 1 Timothy 6:17-18. Yet, when they become the 'main thing,'... emotional, relational, and spiritual trouble follows. When these experiences are the 'fruit' of being 'rooted' in the 'main thing', that's healthy.

### **The Main Thing**

Let's skip to the end of the book...here is what Solomon learned through painful yet enlightening experiences: Ecclesiastes 12:13-14..."Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Be in a personal and responsive relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

John 10:10. This is an amazing verse. Jesus makes it plain that dead end roads are all over the place, put in place by the arch enemy of God, Satan. His goal is to enslave and destroy people. To waste people, to 'gut' people, like you and me, of truth, hope, love and wisdom. He traffics in lies and deceptions. He promises the world and delivers regret, pain, despair and death. That is his only agenda. Don't be fooled.

Jesus yearns to be our source of satisfaction, purpose, and hope. For today and tomorrow, till the day of our death and then he will welcome us home to heaven.

### **Distractions, Discernment, and Decisions**

Is this your day to make a move off a dead end road of thinking and living? Will you? Tell God you are ready to make the 'main thing' your foundation, for the first time, or a renewed time. Have you become distracted by false promises or put good things in a place they don't belong...the place of the main thing? Make the move towards the 'main thing'...towards the God who made you, loves you and yearns to guide you along a good path. Don't let anyone deter you. Let us help you make the critical move today.

When we move towards Him...his arms are wide open, and he sets a place at the table for us, to be nourished and enlightened along the way. That is why Jesus came, to forgive us our sins, to restore us relationally with God, to bring us to the table of an indestructible relationship with God. Is this your day to move to the table? Please do. Let us help you. And make 'table time' with Jesus a non-negotiable core to your daily living...read and respond to His words of life and light. That's why we have created the reading plan and the 'Between Sundays' study questions.

If we can help you, please talk with us after. Let us pray that we will be 'main thing' people moving forward.