

The Bonfire of the Vanities
“The Satisfied Life, Part 2”
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Introduction

- [Slide #1] Let’s talk about what happened last week for a few minutes. First off, let me say, Corey, I am so glad you are okay. A lot of prayers have been answered in the last week and for that God is to be praised.
- Life is so fragile isn’t it? When David says in Psalm 31:15 *My times are in your hands*, events like last week remind all of us that control is an illusion. Why are we so easily deceived into thinking we are masters of our own fates? We have no idea what this year will bring, this month, this week, or even this hour. How much control did any of us have in being swept up in the events that transpired last Sunday? None.
- Let me also say that I’m absolutely confident that what happened last Sunday happened for a reason and purpose according to God’s design. Do we always understand that plan? Absolutely not. Which is why Qoheleth says in [verse 11](#) *yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end*. However, just because we can’t understand what happens doesn’t mean we should doubt God or his goodness.
- [John Calvin](#) says it like this; “Though God’s kindness (as well as his severity) can sometimes be clearly discerned in history, other times the causes of events are hidden. This prompts some to imagine that human affairs are whirled about by the blind impulse of Fortune, and others to talk as if God were amusing himself by tossing men up and down like balls. When it comes to providence, many display monstrous foolishness. They subject the works of God to their reasoning and presume to know his secret counsels.”¹
- Corey and Gretchen, I can’t even begin to know why God allowed last week to happen. But I trust and rest on this. Psalm 71:5. *For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth*. Psalm 73:28. *I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge*. What happened last week wasn’t the result of blind impulse or Fortune. God sovereignly orders all of life. Ecclesiastes 3:11. Look at the text. *He has made everything beautiful in its time*. He will make even last week beautiful in its time if we trust him. To my simple mind it is much more comforting to know that God is in control and that I may not understand what happens than to think that last week was beyond God’s control, that he was powerless to stop it.
- Because God is sovereign over all that happens, I want to suggest to you [eight principles](#) to remember when you face difficult circumstances like last week, circumstances we can’t understand. I’m adapting these things from an article [John Piper](#) wrote called *Don’t Waste Your Cancer*.² If you’re interested in the full article talk to me after the service. Again, [eight principles](#) when facing difficult circumstances.

¹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, as quoted in *Christianity Today*, February 2009, p. 54.

² © 2006 John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Cancer*, www.PreachingToday.com.

- **Number 1.** [Slide #2] **You waste difficult circumstances if you do not believe they are designed for you by God.** It's not sufficient to say that God only uses our difficult circumstances but does not design them. What God permits, he permits for a reason. And that reason is his design. If God foresees a tragedy or difficulty in your life, he can stop it or not. If he doesn't, he has a purpose. Since he is infinitely wise, it is right to call this purpose a design. So, for instance, when Satan strikes Job with boils, Job 2:7, Job attributes it ultimately to God in 2:10 and the writer of Job agrees. Job 42:11. *They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him.* If you don't believe your difficult circumstances are designed for you by God, you will waste them.
- **Number 2.** [Slide #3] **You will waste your difficult circumstances if you believe they are a curse and not a gift.** Romans 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Psalm 84:11 *The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.* That applies to even the difficult things of life. God is not out to get you his purpose is to refine you.
- **Number 3.** [Slide #4] **You will waste your difficult circumstances if you seek comfort in things other than God.** The design of God in your difficult circumstances is not to drive you away from God but to him. The world gets comfort from everything else but God. Not Christians. Psalm 20:7. *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* God's design is clear from 2 Corinthians 1:9. *Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.* The aim of God in your difficult circumstances (among a thousand other good things) is to knock props out from under our hearts so that we rely utterly on him.
- **Number 4.** [Slide #5] **You will waste your difficult circumstances if you refuse to think about your own mortality.** We will all die, unless Christ should return first. Not to think about what it will be like to leave this life and meet God is folly. Qoheleth will say later on in Ecclesiastes 7:2, *It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.* How can you take your own mortality to heart if you won't think about it? Psalm 90:12 says, *Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* Numbering your days means thinking about how few there are and that they will end. What a waste, if we do not think about our own mortality.
- **Number 5.** [Slide #6] **You will waste your difficult circumstances you fail to cherish Christ.** Satan's and God's designs in your difficult circumstances are not the same. Satan designs to destroy your love for Christ. God designs to deepen your love for Christ. Satan wins if you fail to cherish Christ through your circumstances. God's design is to wean you off the breast of the world and feast you on the sufficiency of Christ. Your circumstances are meant to help you say and feel Philippians 3:8, *I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*
- **Number 6.** [Slide #7] **You will waste your difficult circumstances if you let them drive you into solitude instead of deeper relationships.** When Epaphroditus brought gifts to Paul from the Philippian church he became ill and almost died. Paul tells the Philippians, *He has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.*³ Did you catch that? It does not say *they* were distressed that he was ill, but that *he* was distressed

³ Philippians 2:26-27

because they heard he was ill. That is the kind of heart God is aiming to create through difficult circumstances: a deeply affectionate, caring heart for people. Don't waste your difficulties by retreating into yourself.

- **Number 7.** [Slide #8] **You will waste your difficult circumstances if you treat sin as casually as before.** God designs difficulties for the Christian in order to destroy the appetite for sin. Pride, greed, lust, hatred, unforgiveness, impatience, laziness, procrastination, you name it—all of these are your real enemies. Not your circumstances. Don't waste the opportunity to harness God's power working through your circumstances to crush these foes.
- **Number 8.** [Slide #9] **You will waste your difficult circumstances if you fail to use the difficulties of life as a means of witness to the truth and glory of Christ.** Christians are never anywhere by divine accident. There are reasons for why we wind up where we do. Consider what Jesus said about painful, unplanned circumstances: *They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness.*⁴ What happens, good or bad, is an opportunity to bear witness to Christ.
- My prayer for you, Corey and Gretchen, and all of us this past week has been all of these things and especially the last; that more people will come to know Christ. God was and is and will always be in control, which is the whole point of the first half of the passage we looked at last week in Ecclesiastes 3.

Transition

Let's transition back to Ecclesiastes 3. Last week we looked at the first eight verses of chapter 3. *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.* If you'll remember, the purpose of this poem in summarizing the full spectrum of human experience, birth, death, war, peace, love, laughter, weeping, is to remind us that we have little or no control over what happens. God sovereignly orders all of life. Even last week. He is in charge of the seasons, the times for all of us. Let's pick up where we left off. Look at **verse 9**. *What does the worker gain from his toil? 10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. 13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God. 14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. 15 Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.* The **second reason** this life will never satisfy us apart from God is because you and I were **made for eternity**.

Main Points

- We are terribly conflicted creatures. Do you realize that? On the one hand, life is too big for us, **verses 1-8**. Things are way beyond our control like last week. There's birth and death and war and losing and tearing and silence and peace and hating and building and tearing down and embracing and scattering and weeping and killing. Life in this world is just too big, too scary sometimes. That feeling of smallness, of feeling out of control, is meant to

⁴ Luke 21:12–13

drive us to God. So on the one hand, things feel too big for us. We will never find the satisfied life until we find the God who is bigger than our circumstances. That's verses 1-8.

- But on the other hand, [verses 9-15](#), this world is too small. [Verse 11](#). God has *set eternity in the hearts of men*. Do you remember what that means? It means that God has put into all our hearts a capacity for eternal things...we have an innate sense of something which transcends our immediate situation.⁵ The reason Qoheleth says this life will never satisfy us apart from God is because we were made for another world; we were **made for eternity**. We are frustrated by being placed in time, by being placed in circumstances beyond our control and understanding. We long for something more, we long for eternity even if we do not understand it. As [Augustine](#) said, “you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.”⁶
- Because you were made for life beyond this world you will always be frustrated by this life under the sun. 1 Corinthians 7:31. *For this world in its present form is passing away*. This world and all that is in it will not last forever. But you will. You were made in the image of God. And like him, the Everlasting God, you will last forever. And because of that you will be frustrated. However, just like the feeling of smallness that comes from events beyond our control, those frustrations and longings for something more beyond this world are meant to drive us to God. Look at [verse 14](#). *I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him*.
- God has placed eternity in our hearts so that we might seek him out and find him. And when we come to him we find that he calls everyone everywhere to repent and turn from their sins of disbelief and lack of trust to believe in the one he sent—Jesus Christ.
- We are made for something more. But you will never find what you're looking for until you realize what's been lost and what's been done about it. As [Michael Eaton](#) says, “An eternal life has been lost. An eternal covenant has been initiated by an eternal God. An eternal priesthood and an eternal kingdom have been conferred by a God eternally merciful, giving his people eternal joy.”⁷
- We need not understand everything in life. We just need Christ. God has purposed *to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth*.⁸ **Life will be satisfying to us, if and only if, we are first satisfied to find our meaning in God**. And God has chosen to direct and funnel all questers, all who come to him, to Jesus. It's through Christ that life really begins to take on meaning and significance and purpose which is why Jesus says of himself, *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*.⁹

Conclusion

- I think that Qoheleth, in all his searching, in all his questing, anticipates what God is going to do in Christ. He knows this life is bogus. He knows there's something more. So here's the deal. Qoheleth has pointed you in the direction of God. Good. You realize you need him in

⁵ Eaton, p. 81.

⁶ Eaton, p. 81.

⁷ Eaton, p. 81.

⁸ Ephesians 1:10

⁹ John 10:10

your life. Good. But what about Christ? Because when we come to God we find that he calls everyone everywhere to repent and believe in the one he sent—Jesus Christ.

- *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.*¹⁰ A time's coming when all of us will have to give an account to God for how we've lived life under the sun. **Verse 15.** *Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.* The question will be what have you done with his answer to your search for meaning.
- See, here's the thing. It's possible to agree with everything Qoheleth says, even all that I've talked about last week and this morning, and miss out on the satisfied life by rejecting Christ. Someone once said, "The difference between involvement and commitment is like an eggs-and-ham breakfast. The chicken was involved. The pig was committed." In the end, you gain nothing if you only dabble with Christ, if your involvement with him is secondary. God is asking you to commit to giving up everything and throw your life away on Him who is Life itself. You do that and you will really and truly live.
- For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.¹¹ Abundant life. A satisfied life is found in Christ alone. What are you waiting for? Pray with me.

¹⁰ Acts 17:30

¹¹ Romans 5:17