

Chasing God and Being Chased

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[0 : 00] Which we're not going to do, but it's tempting. And tonight, what we need to do is to kind of wrap up the book of Ecclesiastes.

And that is not a simple task. What I want to do is something that may seem just a little bit odd. But what I want to do tonight is look at the book of Ecclesiastes, look at several different passages in it that we read, but look at it through the lens of Matthew chapter 11.

I want to look at Ecclesiastes through the lens of our second reading. And the reason for that is that in our second reading, Jesus, in about six verses, gets right at the heart of what Ecclesiastes is about.

See, the book of Ecclesiastes covers a lot of different issues. It addresses a lot of different aspects of life.

There's complexity to it. But if you back up from it, and if you look at the whole thing, the book of Ecclesiastes is designed to chase us to Jesus.

[1 : 16] Now, that may seem a bit odd, because as we've looked through the book of Ecclesiastes, first of all, you say Ecclesiastes was written a long time before Jesus. But as you read through the book of Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes is the description of somebody who is seeking and toiling and laboring after all sorts of different things.

He searches and labors after wealth, and he searches and he labors after wisdom, and he searches and labors after pleasure.

But as we've been walking through the book, again and again we've seen that as he's pursued these things, he's found them deeply disappointing. And he's found that the thing that really he needs, the thing that really he needs to seek after, is he needs to seek after God.

But what I want to show you tonight is that the book of Ecclesiastes is designed not so much to drive us to pursue God. That is true, but it is also designed for us to see how God has to pursue us. Let me show you what I mean. We're going to, like I said, we're going to go from the Matthew text back to the Ecclesiastes text, and we're going to go back and forth a little bit. Look at Matthew chapter 11, first of all.

[2 : 43] Look at the second reading. Now in this reading, Jesus says several strange things, which is not odd for Jesus. Jesus' kind of business as usual is to say things that we don't expect him to say.

But the first thing that he says, the first kind of odd thing that he says, is in verse 25. It says this, at that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and you've revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for that was your gracious will. Now, I want you to look at that verse, and I want you to look at the word hidden. This is something that is very odd.

Jesus is thanking God that in some respect, he has hidden himself from the wise and the understanding. Now, why would Jesus say that?

Why would Jesus thank God that in some respect, God has hidden himself? Doesn't that strike you as odd? Now, we'll get to why Jesus thanks his Father in just a little bit.

[3 : 59] But, the first thing that I want to show you is that the hiddenness of God is one of the big problems in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Let me show you what I mean. Go back to Ecclesiastes, look at chapter 3, verse 11. It's right at the top of the first reading. Speaking about God, the book of Ecclesiastes says, God has made everything beautiful in its time.

He has put eternity into man's heart. Note that phrase. Yet, so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. Now, I want you to look at that verse and I want you to look at

the tension that's there.

Because on the one hand, he says that God has placed eternity in our hearts. Now, Ben Short preached on this at the very beginning of our series. So, I won't go into all the detail there, but the phrase mean has to do with the fact that as humans, part of our design, part of our kind of hard wiring is that we we desire things that are permanent.

Human beings are not satisfied with things that pass away. There's something weird in the human heart that makes us desire eternity, immortality, permanence, longevity, and when we see things that don't last, we look at them and there's something in us that is outraged by them.

[5 : 31] When we see death, we are outraged by it. When we see the fleetingness of youth, we are outraged by it. When we see the fleetingness of pleasure, we are outraged by it.

There is something in the human heart that desires eternity and inevitably that leads us to desire God. because God is the only thing that truly lasts for an eternity.

But this is where the trouble comes. Look back at the verse. Eternity in our hearts gives us enough of a clue to desire God, to know that we need God.

But verse 11, the second half of it, we can't find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. we know we desire God and yet we find that there is something enigmatic about God.

If you look through the book of Ecclesiastes, you have the speaker, the main speaker. He calls himself the preacher. And he is an extremely wise person. But he is also an extremely frustrated person.

[6 : 44] And part of the reason he is frustrated is that try as he might, he can't figure out God and he can't really figure out the fullness of God's world. Look at chapter 8, the second bit that we read.

Chapter 8, verse 17. Then I saw all the work of God and that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out.

Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out. God. Now, he is not saying there that we have no knowledge of God.

I mean, through the book of Ecclesiastes, he gives all sorts of really important, true insights about who God is. But there is this tension in the text.

On the one hand, we are only ultimately satisfied in God. We desire God. We are designed for him. But on the other hand, when we try to pursue him and seek him and grasp him, it's almost to some extent like he's slipping through our fingers.

[7 : 51] There's something hidden about God. We have clues, but the mystery is not fully resolved. Yuri Gagarin was the first Soviet cosmonaut to go into outer space and circle the globe.

Or at least he orbited for a little bit, at least. And when he came back down to Earth, what he said was, he said, comrades, I looked and I looked and I looked, but I didn't see God up there.

And that got used in Soviet propaganda and those sorts of things. And I'm sure that what he meant by that, he was just trying to mock religion. But he caught on something in the human experience that's reflected in Ecclesiastes.

I mean, even if we know we need God, there are times in which we find him utterly elusive, utterly difficult to comprehend. There is a hiddenness about God. God. And just to make the matter messier, go back to Matthew 11.

Go back to Matthew 11, because in Matthew 11, again, Jesus is thanking God for his hiddenness. Now, does that strike you as odd?

[9 : 22] Why in the world would Jesus thank God that he has hidden himself from the wise and the understanding? I mean, how could that be a good thing?

Okay, here's the second really important thing I want you to see in Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes, the hiddenness of God, not the full hiddenness, but the partial hiddenness of God drives the book of Ecclesiastes to humility.

Look at Ecclesiastes chapter 12. This is the last portion of the first reading. It's the very end of the book of Ecclesiastes. This is the last bit of the book. And all through the book of Ecclesiastes, the preacher, this main speaker, has been struggling to understand the nature of the world, the nature of God's world.

And he's been toiling and he's been straining his mind. He's been trying to figure out the significance of the whole thing. He's been trying to figure out God. He's thought hard.

He has pressed himself to the absolute limit of his wisdom. him. And then in chapter 12, in these verses, everything in the book changes.

[10:51] The preacher stops speaking, a narrator comes in, and the narrator points us to humility. It's as if this whole book has been straining with human effort, trying to figure out the world, trying to sort it all out and sort out God. And now at the end, human effort collapses into humility before God. Look at verse 13. Just listen for the humility of this verse. The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man. now, do you hear the humility in that verse?

You can hear the humility in it in its simplicity. This is a very philosophically complex book. You would have thought as you read through it, you would have thought that the preacher would have ended the book, you know, saying the end of the matter is, you know, wise people figure out God or something like that or the end of the matter, you know, is apply your mind, you know, figure out the best strategy of living and navigate through the waters of life.

[12:20] That's not it. The end of the matter in Ecclesiastes is fear God. Be humble before God. Be humble before God.

Verse 11, like a sheep is humble before a shepherd. You know, a sheep doesn't understand everything a shepherd tells it to do. But when the shepherd uses a goad to tap the sheep on the shoulder, the sheep just trusts the shepherd and starts going.

A sheep is humble before a shepherd. Verse 14, be humble as one who will stand before a judge. be humble like, because you're going to be held accountable before God at the end.

And this is something very important. Ecclesiastes is a wisdom book. And worldly wisdom, one of the ways you can tell worldly wisdom is worldly wisdom will lead us to pride.

Worldly wisdom will lead us to think that we can figure it all out and we will think much of ourselves when we have. Godly wisdom doesn't work like that. Biblical wisdom leads us to humility.

[13:40] Godly wisdom leads us to a place where we say, you are God, I am not, you haven't figured out, I don't, I'm following you. I'm going to fear you and I'm going to obey you.

And that's where Ecclesiastes leads us. leads us to this humility before God where we shut our mouth. But it doesn't just lead us there.

Humility isn't just an end in and of itself. It leads us beyond humility and ultimately what I want you to see is that it leads us to Jesus. Let me explain this.

According to Ecclesiastes, God has placed eternity in our hearts, which means among other things, that we will only be deeply satisfied when we find our satisfaction in God alone.

And that drives us very naturally to toil and labor in pursuing after God. Ecclesiastes finds that so many other things, good things, just don't satisfy.

[14:49] And so we're led to pursue God. God, and yet even in humility, even when we find ourselves on our knees before him, there's still something at the end of Ecclesiastes.

All the ribbons aren't completely tied up. We still, eternity in our hearts still drives us to desire God, to desire the hiddenness to be swept away, to desire that God would be revealed before us so that we could see him and find our ultimate satisfaction in him.

Ecclesiastes is a restless book because it wants us to find our rest finally only in God. Matthew 11 verse 27.

Jesus says, all things have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him.

Verse 28. So come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Do you see what Jesus is doing there?

[16:11] Jesus is solving the deepest problem in Ecclesiastes. Jesus is solving the deepest problem in our hearts. Humanity is designed for God.

We strain and we toil seeking after God. We find that we cannot through our efforts remove the veil that separates us from God. But wonder of wonders.

I mean, this is the wonderful thing about Christianity. God himself. it's not that he requires us to chase after him and find him. He, we find, is chasing us.

God comes to us in Jesus Christ and it is in Jesus Christ when we look at the man who is also God, that is when we see the veil removed, the mystery resolved.

That is when we see God unveiled before us. And that's why the restlessness of Ecclesiastes is designed to increase within us until we look at Jesus and find our rest in him.

[17:20] See, God placed eternity in our hearts so that when Jesus, which, when Jesus showed up, we would look at him and see he is everything I ever needed. He is everything I ever needed. Now, can you see why I want to wrap up Ecclesiastes by saying Ecclesiastes is designed to drive us to Jesus, in a sense to chase us to Jesus.

It calls us first to humility, but in our humility, it also awakens desire for God that is designed to drive us to Christ. Okay, so what do we do with this?

What should we do? How do we respond? Well, friends, there's lots of ways to respond to the book of Ecclesiastes, but I think perhaps the best way tonight is for us to look at Jesus' call to us.

We need to do three things in response to Ecclesiastes. The first thing is we need to come to Jesus. The second thing is we need to learn from Jesus. And the third thing is we need to rest in Jesus. We need to come to Jesus, first of all. Jesus says, come to me. I am the one who can reveal God the Father. Nothing else will.

[18:40] Nothing else will deeply satisfy. And through the book of Ecclesiastes, we've seen that, you know, Ecclesiastes sets before us just the best things in life, things like wisdom and youth and pleasure and work and wealth.

and in each place he said it before us and he said, these are good things, but don't let them be the center of your life. If you do, they will ruin you.

Ecclesiastes has told us you were doing in your heart is eternity and you will not be satisfied with any of these temporal things. You need to be satisfied in God alone. And when we get to Jesus, he says, come to me only when I am at the center of your life will you be deeply satisfied.

Come to Jesus. And that goes for us who have walked with Jesus a long time because one of the things that we need to do, each of us, is we need to look at our life, we need to take stock of our life and we need to be vigilant about anything that is trying to creep its way into the center and become a surrogate for Jesus.

Be ruthless with those things. Cut them out. First of all, come to Jesus. Secondly, learn from Jesus. Jesus says, learn from me.

[20:01] At the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, the bottom line is fear God and obey him. And that's what we as Christians need to do with Jesus. We need to be a people here at St.

John's who are utterly committed to looking at Jesus, learning from him, studying him, hearing him through his word, learning about him through the people of God gathered so that we become his disciples, so that we become his apprentices, so that we learn what it means to follow Jesus. things. You know, we are pretty competent people here, most of us, I mean, you know, but I didn't have anybody in mind when I said that.

Now, we're competent people, and our competence can lead us to think, you know, this kind of delusional idea that we can sort out life, that we can, through our own skill, navigate life and sort things out.

And, you know, we could probably fool a lot of people. You might even be able to fool yourself. Don't do that. Don't do that. That's pride, and it will kill you.

[21:15] Get humble. Get humble and sit at the feet of Jesus. Sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. Fear him and obey him. And while I'm at it, we're starting up home groups this year.

And one of the best ways that you can learn from Jesus is to join a home group, be around other people who are learning from Jesus, and sit under his word. So do that.

First of all, come to Jesus. Secondly, learn from Jesus, and thirdly, rest in Jesus. Jesus says, I will give you rest. I've said, the book of Ecclesiastes is a restless book, and it's a restless book because it displays how our hearts are truly only satisfied in God.

And the rest that Jesus is talking about there in Matthew, it's not, you know, kind of, come to me and I'll make your life like a perpetual retirement plan or something like that.

He's not saying your life's going to be easy at all. What he's saying is that he'll give us the rest, that deep serenity that comes from being in the relationship that we were designed for.

[22:37] I mean, most of us know, even in, you know, it's kind of popular wisdom that real satisfaction in life comes from relationships, and there's a grain of truth in that. The deepest satisfaction, the deepest rest we can have will only come from the relationship we were designed for, the relationship with God in Christ.

Rest in him. I think as we end the book of Ecclesiastes, I want to end by reading Jesus' call to us.

He says, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Amen.