

Catching Smoke : Living Life Under the Sun Part 2

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[0:00] We look above the sun. Listen, I am thrilled to continue our brand new sermon series in Ecclesiastes.

We started last week. Let me ask you all this. How many of you are figure it out people? A couple of hands shot right up. Think about it now. How many of you are figure it out people?

How many of your spouses would say, yeah, he or she is a figure it out person? You're not going to call somebody to fix it for you. You're going to figure it out. That's what you're going to do. You don't need directions. You don't need an instructions manual.

You definitely don't need GPS telling you where to go. You know the way there. I was telling my son recently about the Rand McNally Atlas maps.

I used to be the navigator. That was fun. We were traveling all over America. It's just different back then, you know? Missed exits happened a whole lot more, I think.

[1:03] Wait, that was the one? Well, you got to tell me sooner. All right. Figure it out people, man. You don't need directions. You don't need GPS. You definitely don't need somebody standing over your shoulder telling you how to do something.

You'll figure it out. And truthfully, that's not always a bad thing. You learn from that. You gain experience. You pick up wisdom from that. You know how stuff works because you've lived a little.

Most of us have figured out a lot about different things. Maybe you're somebody who knows a little bit about a lot of things. But if you live long enough, you eventually figure something else out, too.

And that is this. Figuring it out doesn't fix it. It's the truth of it. You can figure it out.

But that doesn't mean it's fixed. What do we mean? You can know exactly what's wrong. You can understand why it's happening, where it went wrong. You might even have a pretty good idea of what should be done.

[2:07] But still, nothing changes. It might be in the lives of those around you. It might be in your own heart. Marriage is still strained.

The anxiety is still there. The diagnosis doesn't go away. The family dynamic is still broken. The situation at work hasn't improved. And those are the problems that mess with us the most, aren't they?

Not the ones we can't figure out. The ones we can figure out but can't fix. So, this is where the teacher, the writer of Ecclesiastes, picks up in Ecclesiastes chapter 2.

So, if you would take your Bibles and turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 2. We're going to read from verses 12 down through verse 17. These are the problems that can keep us up at night.

The ones that bring us fear, anxiety, depression. Somewhere along the way, we realize that wisdom by itself is not the solution. It can't be.

[3 :13] Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. As you're turning to Ecclesiastes 2, understand that wisdom matters. The Bible makes it very clear. And life itself would make it very clear that wisdom matters.

The Bible values matter. Wisdom. Proverbs. If we accept Solomon, King Solomon, as the writer of Ecclesiastes, we also understand that he wrote Proverbs.

And in the Proverbs, we see admonishments toward wisdom over and over again. Particularly in Proverbs 4, he's teaching his son, wisdom matters so much.

Make it be your goal. Pursue it. And you realize that Solomon did do that. He asked God for wisdom. God granted it to him. Possibly more than anyone else in his time.

More than anyone else in recorded history, it's possible that Solomon gained wisdom from God. And so he's teaching his son in Proverbs, hey, wisdom's a big deal. It'll protect you. It'll guide you.

[4 :13] It'll look out for you. It'll keep you from stumbling. It'll help you be successful in your life. Just look at me, son. Look at me. I have been wise. And look at all I've accomplished. And then you get to Ecclesiastes.

And we got a very different picture from Solomon on the subject of wisdom. So let's look at Ecclesiastes chapter 2 as we pick up our series, Catching Smoke.

How do we live this life under the sun? Verse 12. So I decided, the teacher is speaking, he's writing here, and he says, I decided to compare wisdom with foolishness and madness.

For who can do this better than I, the king? I thought, wisdom is better than foolishness, just as light is better than darkness. Obviously, right?

Verse 14. Verse 14. For the wise can see where they're going, but fools walk in the dark. Yet I saw that the wise and the foolish share the same fate.

[5 :27] Both will die. So I said to myself, since I will end up the same as the fool, what's the value of all my wisdom? This is all so meaningless.

Anybody ever been there? You're surrounded by something that you've pursued. You've gone after it. You've achieved it. You've gained it. You've got it.

You see it every day. And at some point, you look at it and say, what good did this really do me? It's all pretty meaningless, isn't it? That's what we're getting from Solomon.

Y'all, I told you last week, this is a weird book of the Bible. It's different than most of them. But it's so important. It's so crucial. It's not what we're used to when we're reading the scriptures.

But we can gain so much from it. Let's pick it up in verse 16. For the wise and the foolish both die. The wise will not be remembered any longer than the fool.

[6 :29] In the days to come, both will be forgotten. In my Wednesday night, Pastor's Life group, they got a little sneak peek of this. And toward the end of it, we just touched a little bit on, as we go back and dig a little deeper into the text of the sermon on Sundays.

We dug into, what does Solomon mean? This is all so meaningless. We started looking at the different experiences that you have in life and how you want them and you think they're great and then you taste them.

And it's like, yeah, well, what's the next thing? On to the next thing. So verse 17. After he realizes this, he says, I came to hate life.

Because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless. Like chasing the wind. Something you can never catch.

Like trying to catch smoke in your hand. So, where does this leave us? Let's look at number one. What can we draw from this? What are some main truths that we can take away from this unsettling passage in Ecclesiastes 2?

[7:41] Number one, wisdom can explain life, but it can't fix it. Wisdom can explain life, but it can't fix it. Look back at verse 14.

The wise can see where they're going, but fools walk in the dark. So I saw the wise and the foolish share the same fate. Fools don't know what's coming next.

They miss the life lessons. They don't learn the moral of the story. They just blindly go through their life trying to appease their own desires, trying to get what they want, trying to make themselves feel better, more comfortable.

And they miss so much along the way that wisdom can teach them. But even the wise eventually share the same fate as the foolish.

So they may have understood far more along the way. They may have learned valuable lessons, but the value in the end doesn't come from wisdom. It doesn't come from the learning.

[8:40] So the teacher speaks as someone who has reached the pinnacle, the ceiling of wisdom. He's gotten the wisdom part down.

God gave it to him. This is not earthly wisdom. This isn't the wisdom that the world considers wise, but it's actually foolishness. This wisdom came from God. This is real, genuine, valuable wisdom from God.

And Solomon had it in excess. And he gets to the end of his life and he says, man, it was all pretty meaningless. Didn't really help me all that much.

Why? Why is that? He had all the lived experience. He had all the broad knowledge. He had deep insights.

You can look at the ancient text, the wisdom of Solomon, and you can see all the records of Solomon's righteous judgment. Of course, we've got the famous one with the two women fighting over the baby.

[9:44] And Solomon says, okay, I'll cut the baby in half. And each of you can take half if we can't dispute over whose baby this is. And of course, the real mother said, no, no, no, don't do that. She can have it. And then he realized it was hers and awarded the baby to her.

Wisdom was something that Solomon knew. The kind of wisdom that people assume should make life work.

It should make you highly successful. But Ecclesiastes is honest enough to say, the teacher teaches us that wisdom alone cannot save us.

There's a British corporate coach named Rashid Ogunlaru. And he says it this way, intelligence is overrated. Wisdom is underapplied.

Intelligence is overrated. And wisdom is underapplied. I thought that was a very appropriate and applicable sentiment to share with you in our study of Ecclesiastes 2 this morning.

[10:44] Because intelligence just means gaining more information. But it's what you, what? Do with that information that matters. And wisdom can be gained but not used.

Not utilized. Not applied to our lives. How many of us know a thing or two about life? And how many of us don't follow those things that we know all the time?

Have you ever heard the phrase, well, I knew better? Or I should have known better. Of course you did. That means wisdom not applied.

And I think this is where Solomon found himself. And I almost wonder if he overstated a little bit in Proverbs when he said, wisdom's going to do it, man. Wisdom's going to go before you.

It's going to do, basically, the sentiment, he didn't put it in these words, but the sentiment that you could glean from it is, wisdom's going to do all the work. You just hang on to wisdom. And the truth is, wisdom can only get you so far.

[11:53] So, the teacher tells us that as his wisdom increased, so did his sorrow. Why would that be the case? As I got wiser, I got sadder.

I got more sorrowful. Why? Because wisdom helps you see what's broken. It helps you see what's broken in the world around you, and it helps you see what's broken in your own heart, in your own soul, in your own mind, in your own relationships, in you.

Wisdom helps you see yourself more clearly, but it doesn't always give you the power to heal it. Wisdom explains why relationships fall apart.

Wisdom explains why injustice persists. Wisdom explains why systems fail. Wisdom reveals why life is unfair.

And I hate to say that to some of the younger people in the room. Man, life's just not fair. Look, you're going to learn it at some point. That's why Jesus is so great, because he is. That's why he stands apart from everybody else, because he's different than this broken world around us.

[13:04] So, wisdom can reveal the brokenness, but it can't help you heal it. So, Matthew chapter 11, verses 28 and 29.

This is where Jesus steps into the gap. Ecclesiastes needs some help here, and it points us ahead to Jesus. Jesus never criticizes wisdom, but he refuses to make it the solution.

He doesn't say, figure it out. He doesn't say, learn more. He doesn't say, become more wise. You will become more wise the longer you spend with the Holy Spirit, the longer you spend in the Word of God, the longer you spend around those who have learned wisdom from God and applied it.

You will become more wise. But Jesus says, this is not the end goal. This is not what you should be chasing. You should be chasing me. He says, come to me. The invitation is to me.

He says, come to me, all of you who are weary, and carry heavy burdens. Maybe you've learned a little bit. Maybe it's increased your sorrow. Maybe you've realized the truth about the world around you and the truth about yourself.

[14:14] And he says, come to me. Carry those heavy burdens over here to me and give them to me. I will give you rest. He said, trade those heavy burdens for my burden, for my yoke.

It's light. It's easy comparatively. Trust me. Let me teach you because I'm humble and I'm gentle at heart, and you'll find rest for your souls.

Wisdom can name your weariness. Jesus invites you to bring that to him. Ecclesiastes helps us understand why we're tired.

Jesus says, give me your tiredness. I can give you energy that you don't understand. It doesn't make any sense. I can give you peace that surpasses your understanding.

So wisdom diagnoses problems, but Jesus delivers people. Let's say that one more time. Wisdom diagnoses problems, but Jesus is in the people delivering business.

[15:17] He can deliver your heart. He can free your soul. And I could ask for a show of hands. Let's do that. How many people in this room today would testify by just slipping your hand up and say, Jesus has delivered me?

Yeah. All across this room. Those are testimonies, and you're probably thinking of something in your mind right now, if not many things, that allowed you to raise your hand and say, Jesus delivered me from that.

Time and time throughout the pages of Scripture, we see the deliverance of the one they called Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us, who took on human flesh to walk among us and say, this is how you live this life.

There were some wise rabbis, some wise Pharisees who came before him and who were his contemporaries there during his time on earth, and they would go toe-to-toe with him in the Scriptures, and with all their wisdom, they were broken.

And their whole system of religion, which was based on wisdom from God in the Old Testament, they knew it inside and out.

[16:30] They'd studied it. Their study habits put ours to shame. These kids growing up in synagogue school, rabbi school, they knew it all.

They could quote massive portions of the Old Testament. But it didn't do them any good because Jesus hadn't changed their hearts. What good does your knowledge, your information, your intelligence, your wisdom that you've gained, do you if Jesus hasn't freed you?

So, that's number one. Jesus delivers people. This is discipleship. This is learning how to follow something else, how to pursue someone different.

Discipleship is not about knowing more information. It's about learning how to follow. A church can grow smarter without growing more faithful. Direction, not perfection.

We've been talking about it every week and we'll continue to do so. Direction, not perfection, means we pursue the person of Jesus wisely only through obedience and trust. We don't chase wisdom by itself that leaves us informed but exhausted.

[17:47] And that's going to lead us to our next main point. Main truth number two, wisdom without God eventually leads to despair. Wisdom without God eventually leads to despair.

Would you turn back a page in Ecclesiastes? Let's go to Ecclesiastes 1. Wisdom without God eventually leads to despair. We were in Ecclesiastes 1 last week. We're going to jump ahead.

I think we hit verses 1 through 11. We're going to jump into verse 12 now. Verse 12, Ecclesiastes 1. I, the teacher, was king of Israel and I lived in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under the heaven.

I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. I observed everything going on under the sun. And really, it's all meaningless, like chasing the wind.

He repeats himself a lot in this book, doesn't he? This is the theme that we see throughout Ecclesiastes. What is wrong cannot be made right. What's missing cannot be recovered. So I said to myself, look, I'm wiser than any of the kings who ruled Jerusalem before me, including his father David.

[18:54] That's a big statement, isn't it? He's kind of flexing on all of them, saying, look at me, man. God has given me so much wisdom, so much wealth, so much success. I've gone higher than any of them did.

I've got greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them. Verse 17, so I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind.

And he did. You read about Solomon? He couldn't get enough wives to marry. And then he wasn't satisfied with that. He had a stable of what you'd call concubines in his palace.

He had everything that the flesh could desire. And it left him saying, it's like chasing the wind.

I keep chasing it and I can't catch it. The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.

[20 : 03] So wisdom without God eventually will lead you to despair. Being right doesn't keep you from being empty.

You can be right and it doesn't always feel good, does it? You can be right and you can even win and sometimes it's not very satisfying.

Gaining wisdom and knowing the end result, knowing the outcome, knowing how it should go and knowing what the problem is does not guarantee you joy.

Doesn't guarantee you fulfillment. That's what the teacher is trying to teach us in Ecclesiastes. He's comparing wisdom and foolishness honestly. He's not saying foolishness is better than wisdom.

He's saying none of it is going to fulfill you. None of it is going to help you. Wisdom is better than foolishness. Light is better than darkness. But wisdom still runs into a wall that it can't get through.

[21 : 14] It still slams up against a wall that there's no doorway through until Jesus steps in and says, I'm the door. I'm the way. The wisdom should lead you to me.

And if it doesn't, you'll never be happy. It'll never do you any real good. It must lead you to me because death is coming. Death is coming for you.

It's coming for me and it doesn't care how smart you are. It doesn't care how much wisdom you've gained or how much you accomplished or how successful or unsuccessful you were on this earth. It comes for all of us.

The wise and the foolish share the same ending. Both are eventually forgotten. Both lose control of what they've built, of what they've accomplished on this earth and your family and your job, your career, your friendships, your hobbies.

It's where wisdom runs out. And so if wisdom is your ultimate hope, what happens when it can't save you? It's a gift, but it's never meant to be God.

[22 : 20] Wisdom cannot be God. But here's the good news that Ecclesiastes cannot yet announce. Go to John chapter six. Jesus steps directly into this limitation.

This is the good news that it was too soon for the teacher to write about in Ecclesiastes. John six, chapter six, chapter six, verse 64. Jesus is teaching his followers, large group of followers gathered around Jesus, many more than just his 12.

He had a large group of those who had jumped on board and said, man, this guy's great. I love his teaching. He's teaching something different. We want to follow him. And Jesus says, some of you, some of you don't believe me.

Y'all, I'm sorry to say we could probably look out across a group this large, statistics would say and say some of us, some of us probably don't believe Jesus. We'll act like we do.

But just like this large group of followers that Jesus attracted, he said, some of you don't believe me. And then he said, this is why I said people can't come to me unless the Father gives them to me.

[23 : 29] At this point, many of these disciples turned away and deserted him. They quit following. Said, oh, well, this is a different vibe here, Jesus.

Thought you were just teaching all the feel-good stuff. You're going to bring life and peace and joy and hope and this is all great. What do you mean some of us don't believe you?

What do you mean we can't follow you unless the Father has given us to you? And they started to drift away. And then Jesus turned to his 12 that he called out specifically and he said, are you also going to leave?

And Simon Peter, of course, the spokesman of the group speaks up and what does he say? Lord, to whom would we go? you have the words of eternal life.

We believe and we know that you are the Holy One of God. Notice what Peter said. Notice what he didn't say.

[24 : 32] He doesn't say, Jesus, you explain everything. You make it all make sense. Y'all, the truth is if you've ever opened up the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and you've got a red letter Bible and you see the words of Jesus in red but even if you don't, you go read the words of Jesus, he usually didn't explain everything.

He usually didn't make it all fit together. He was pretty cryptic. He was pretty hard to understand about a lot of things. And so this wasn't based on Peter saying, oh wow Jesus, you just overwhelm us with all this wisdom.

Half the time they couldn't figure out what he was saying. But what they did figure out was he's got the words of eternal life. This is different. This means something.

He's different than all these other rabbis just spouting their wisdom. He's giving us real hope. He's giving us real truth. Peter doesn't say your teaching, Jesus, lines up with the historical Jewish doctrine handed down to us from generation to generation.

He doesn't say, Jesus, you are everything that we've been studying about and how it all, you make it all fit together, Jesus. Funny thing is, Jesus did make it all fit together but they couldn't even understand all that back then.

[25 : 53] But instead, Peter says, you have the words of eternal life. We believe and so that's how we know.

Because we believe, you have born faith in our hearts. How many of you remember the day when you said, I believe in Jesus and faith was birthed in your heart by the Holy Spirit of God that day?

Can you remember that day? Yeah. Stoney just gave testimony of that day when he was a child and he stood up and said, yes, I believed then, I still believe today, I have this faith that God gave to me and he has established it in my life.

I'm going to get up and testify and identify as a follower, a disciple of Jesus. And he set the example for his family and many others to come who are going to do the same thing.

Peter said, we believe and now we have this wisdom from you. This knowledge of you has come from us believing you and the faith that you have given then to us.

[26 : 59] We believe so this is how we know. Our faith in you has unlocked wisdom for us. Wisdom runs out but Jesus does not.

The teacher in Ecclesiastes shows us the wall and Jesus says, I'm the door through the wall. We don't follow Jesus because we have all the answers. We follow him because we believe he is the answer.

So even when wisdom runs out and certainty is not available, we follow the direction of Jesus and that is what I believe God has laid out for our church. Jamie referenced it in her prayer just a moment ago.

God has been working in this church. I can only testify for the last few years since I've been here but I've seen with my own eyes God working in our church throughout our Sunday school classes, throughout our small groups, the men's group that meets on Monday night, the couples group that meets on Tuesday night.

Penny has her Bible study that she leads over in Lily's. Listen, God is working through the people of this church. That's what he does. He doesn't use institutions. He uses people and he called a bunch of people together to say fellowship together, stick together, do this life together as a church.

[28 : 17] You're my church. I died for you. I love you. I care about you. Care about each other the same way. So that's the wisest direction for our church. Practically speaking, what does this look like?

Discipleship. God, help me follow you more closely and if we're all doing that together then our church will follow you more closely. God, make me more hospitable to each other.

Make me actually care enough to go out of my way to help somebody. You want to see what Jesus was on this earth? He was hospitable. He was kind. He would help people. He would meet their immediate needs. They were hungry.

He would feed them. They were hurting. He would heal them. Their souls were broken. He would speak life to them. How can we be hospitable in the way of Jesus?

And then the mission. We've seen the mission clearly laid out for our church. We love God best by loving whom he loves. So we go share the gospel, the good news of Jesus with anyone that once we were all sinners and Jesus came and died for the punishment for our sin.

[29 : 25] He took our place when he hung on that cross and allowed himself to be killed, put to death, suffer all that torment for your sin, for mine, so we wouldn't have to face the eternal wrath of God.

And instead, we get to place hope not in just the one who died, but also the one who rose from the dead and said, I'm alive today. I've proved I'm God.

I've walked with you. I've showed you how to live this life. Put your faith in me, Jesus says. Come to me and I will give you hope. I will give you rest. And that's the mission.

We take that message to everybody who will listen and we show them hospitality. That's how we become more and closer disciples of Jesus. That's how we obey him.

That is the direction for our church. We obey God and we strive to walk more closely with him. We're kind and loving and going out of our way to help those around us and we keep his mission above our own.

[30 : 27] That's wisdom unlocked by our faith. Ecclesiastes does not instruct us to abandon wisdom. It warns us to stop worshiping it.

Wisdom matters, but it was never meant to carry the weight of eternal meaning. Only God can handle the weight of eternal meaning.

That weight belongs to him alone. Ecclesiastes shows us the limits of wisdom under the sun. Jesus invites us to take all of our wisdom, our earthly wisdom, all of our understanding, even that which we've gained from him and say, God, thank you for teaching me in this life.

Thank you for showing me things, for guiding me through, for helping me learn valuable lessons, but God, that's not the end goal, not to say, look how much I know. That puffs us up.

Paul teaches us that knowledge puffs up. I get the picture of a balloon head, you know, just getting bigger and bigger the more it learns.

[31 : 42] And I just want to stick a pin in it sometimes. Watch it pop. That's not how God wants us to live this life. Just puffing ourselves up with more knowledge, more wisdom.

He says, take all that wisdom, hand it back to me and say, God, teach me how this will lead me to you. Teach me how this will make a difference in your kingdom on this earth.

Teach me how this will help accomplish your mission on this earth. Then we can get to the end of our life and we don't have to look back and say, man, I did it all, I gained it all, and it didn't really mean anything.

We can look back and say, all the wisdom that God gave me, all the resources he gave me, all the experiences, good and bad, he gave me, he used to make a difference in something that matters.

So when we live life under the sun, what do we do? We look above the sun. Can we say it together, church? We're going to keep asking this question and answering it together throughout this series. How do we live under the sun?

[32:50] Let's say it together. We look above the sun. One more time, how do we live under the sun? We look above the sun. God, that's what we're doing right now. We're casting our eyes above the sun, above this world, above the highest point that we can see.

We're casting our eyes on you. Hebrews 12 says, we look to Jesus. He's the author of our faith. He'll be the finisher of our faith. And until that day, teach us how to keep our eyes fixed above the sun.

because everything under it is meaningless. But you bring the meaning. You bring what matters.

You bring the why. Help us to never forget it. There's somebody here today who doesn't know you. Help them to make this the day.

Speak to their hearts right now. Convict them of their need for you. And let this be the day that they make the decision and say, I believe. I put my faith in you.

[33:58] We'll give you the glory for it. Church, while your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed, I'm going to ask that question. If there's somebody here, maybe a guest or maybe somebody who's been coming for a long time, but you say, today is the day that I want to make this decision for myself, not because I was raised around the church or not because I always figured I was a Christian, but I'm going to, for myself and my family, today, I'm going to put my faith in Jesus.

Would you slip your hand up? I'd love to talk with you. I'd love to pray with you. If that's you right now, I want to put my faith in Jesus today, I believe. And slip your hand up now. Thank you.

For the rest of you, let me ask you this question. If God's working on your heart to keep your eyes fixed on him, to not chase what you think will fulfill you, what you think you need in your life, but to chase Jesus first, whether it's wisdom, whether it's wealth, whether it's anything else.

You say, God's working on me. I need to place him as the most important thing that I can gain on this world. Would you slip your hand up now and I'll pray for you as well. Thank you. Thank you.

God, across the room, your people are in an attitude of prayer with you. Your spirit has free reign in this place.

[35:17] I pray that you would move in our hearts, that you would reveal to us how we can learn from this valuable writing centuries ago. It says, don't fix your eyes on wisdom.

Don't fix your eyes on anything else. Fix your eyes above the sun on God himself, Jesus Christ, the one who will always care. We'll give you the glory for it.

church, let me close us in prayer this morning. God, we thank you for worshiping with us today.

We thank you for joining us as we gather together. We don't want this to be a one time. We meet on Sundays and then we get back to the rest of our week. We want to carry you with us when we go home, to carry you with us whatever we're doing in this life.

That's what will make the impact. That's how we apply the wisdom we learn is when we live it out through the filter of Jesus, guiding our thoughts, guiding our words, guiding our actions.

[36:28] Would you remain in an attitude of prayer for me for just a minute longer? Linda's going to keep playing and if there's something God's working on your heart about right now, give him time to speak to you clearly in the stillness of this moment.