

## **All Things New: *Living with Eternity in Focus***

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Sept. 5, 2021

I have lived long enough to admit that there were things that I never thought would happen. Things have changed in ways I never would have anticipated. I found this list with a few that might be familiar to us.

1. You remember when you memorized phone numbers or looked in the phone book
2. You remember when you looked up words in a dictionary
3. You remember when you use to stay home to watch a TV show.
5. You remember when you would call time when setting a clock
6. You remember when you paid your bills by a check
7. You remember when you used a map for directions
8. You remember Blockbuster Video, would you ever think they would go out of business?
9. You remember Montgomery Ward....it's gone, *but I guess we did see that one coming!*

I want to talk about something we often don't see coming. We may have a great weekend of fun, or a wonderful week at work, which for some is hard to imagine. We may have a great time at church on a Sunday morning, and then it's like we get the wind knocked out of us Sunday afternoon. It may be a feeling of emptiness that we really can't figure where it came from or why we can't snap out of, when just hours before we were feeling great.

There can be other times when we get a feeling emptiness. We may start a new career with joy and promise to use our potential, we've landed our dream job, but then after just a couple of years we start feeling restless. Why is that?

How often have we considered our lives and thought, if I just had this, then I'd be happy? Why do we move the finish line? Or keep moving the finish line?

Maybe for you it's relationships. Maybe you're saying unconsciously to yourself, "*When my kids are finally happy, then I'll be happy.*"

It's very common for you and I to keep moving the finish line for what will make us fulfilled and happy. But then eventually our attitude can be, "*When I die, then I'll be happy!*"

This ongoing struggle for happiness and fulfillment is not new. This is a problem that's been around for thousands of years. This morning as we soon enter into a new season of Autumn with hopes for joy in new schedules and cooler weather, I want us to consider an Old Testament guy named Solomon, who lived 3000 years ago. The reason I want to look at Solomon is because he had the life all of us want!

3000 yrs ago... Solomon was the wealthiest man in the world. He was Bill Gates, and Jeff Bezos, and Warren

Buffet. He was the wealthiest of the wealthy. At the same time, he was the most powerful person in the world. And because of his wealth and because of his power, Solomon was able to take Israel (this tiny runt of a nation) and turn them into a global superpower.

On top of his wealth and power, Solomon had incredible amounts of knowledge on an endless list of topics. Solomon ended up writing several books with his thoughts and observations about life. Three of the books ended up in our Bible. One of them is called the book of Ecclesiastes.

Even though we call it a book, it's really the journal of a guy who had it all, but came up empty. You get the gist of the book in the second verse, **“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”** Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NIV)

Now if you've never read Ecclesiastes. It's just 12 chapters long, but 37 or 38 times in this short little book Solomon makes this statement, **“Everything is meaningless.”** And throughout his first chapter Solomon gives us several examples of why he thinks everything is meaningless. **Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.** Ecclesiastes 1:4 (NIV)

He is saying “here today, gone tomorrow” – Not a cheery thought. Then he gets ever more depressing. **All things are**

**wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. Ecclesiastes 1:8 (NIV)**

In the New Living translation it says, **Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.**  
Ecclesiastes 1:8

Isn't that true?

Maybe you took a vacation this summer and it was great, but now it's been a couple of months and you're thinking about your next vacation and where it's going to be!

Maybe you were hired for a position and that was great, but now you want a promotion.

No matter how much we see, no matter how much we hear... we're not satisfied. We're not content. Why is that? The question Solomon is asking is really the question that all of us are asking. Regardless of where you're at in your journey with God, all of us are asking this question, How do I fill the gap inside of me?

How do I deal with this ongoing restlessness? How do I address the lack of satisfaction? How do I fill the hole that seems to be in my heart?

Ok, if you weren't depressed enough by Solomon's writing, it goes on from here, **Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had**

done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. Ecclesiastes 2:11 (NIV)

He's singing, *"I can't get no satisfaction... 'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try... I can't get no, I can't get no satisfaction!"*

Now of course all of us would love to have an opportunity with Solomon's money, power, and fame, because we've convinced ourselves that we could find a way for it to fill us.

But in reality, when we look at the happiest moments of our lives... the thrill didn't last nearly as long as we thought it would!

Well there is no doubt that Solomon was struggling and has some angst. He needs help. And we may too, so I'm going to give you a short self-check up for how you're feeling. Here are some...

## **SYMPTOMS OF EMPTY**

### **1. Chronic Boredom**

How many parents and grandparents heard this at least one time already this summer, *"I am bored."* *Let me try that again, "I'MMMM Bored"*. But that is not what I am talking about. I am not talking about having nothing to do

for a day or a moment, I'm talking about a life that can move to restlessness.

Many people, including many Christians, are utterly bored with life. One survey reports that 54% of all Americans go to work primarily to escape the boredom of life at home. And 70% of American teenagers say they are bored with school.

There is also another symptom of empty...

## **2. Emotional Numbness**

I know for some of us it's not that we don't feel great joy, or peace, it's that we don't feel much at all. Everything seems to just sort of be. It's not a sign of sophistication to be emotionally withdrawn or hesitant, it's a sign that nothing matters that much to us.

What do we sometimes say in our culture, "*Take it...Easy,*" "*Don't care to much about anything*" or "*Don't get your hopes up.*" We think that is the answer to our happiness.

It can be even celebrated in our culture. What kind of chair do we all want to sit on when we watch football? A Lazy Boy.

The reality is we need activities that are life giving.

By the way, if someone in your family is acting this way, what they need is not recriminations for their apathy, but compassion for what this signifies. Of course the opposite end of this are addiction behaviors.

### **3. Addictive Behaviors**

Many people deal with addictive behaviors. At their root they are a bad substitute for something that is missing in our lives. That's why although many secular people don't like AA or NA because of their God focus, the truth is nothing else really works like they do. God needs to be in focus to fill what's missing in our lives. I'll come back to this.

Then the number four symptom of empty is one that we don't often see in ourselves, but others see in us and that is we become...

### **4. Easily Irritated**

Any of you get easily irritated? Any of you married to someone who gets easily irritated? *I didn't ask you to raise your hand, but thank you for identifying yourself.*

We get irritated for many reasons, but one can be that sense of emptiness which ultimately is found in number five...

### **5. Lack of Purpose**

And before I go any further I want to acknowledge, that some of you are living lives of courageous faith in the midst of huge challenges. And I want to say “Way to go,” and know this - you have good reason to do so. God has proved Himself faithful before and He will do that again. You can hold firm to God.

Still, for many of us there is more. God made you for more, He wants you, no matter what you are going through, to be able to bring His peace and joy with you. There are a couple places where we see that antidote to emptiness, one that is not so intuitive at first is Ecclesiastes 3:12-14, let me read it,

**I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. Ecclesiastes 3:12-14 (NIV)**

So what we find in this passage is....

## **THE ANTIDOTE TO EMPTINESS**

### **1. Find Your Mission**

Ever known a trust fund baby? I've known a few. I went to college in Santa Barbara and I think there were a lot of them there. The problem is that they can be in their 30's,

40's or 50's and almost to a person, they've struggled with life emotionally, relationally, vocationally and spiritually.

Even with great wealth and opportunity, life did not make sense. Now I'm sure you and I could do better if we inherited great wealth, at least I'd like to try that. But there are really two aspects to this. You need to find your mission as an antidote to emptiness and that has two parts: First, understand God's mission in the world and then second, find your place in that mission.

But to do this, you're going to have to step out and try a few things. It's a "try before you buy" mentality. What that means is: we are all called to participate in God's mission, but not in the same way. And here is the deal, don't feel pressure to serve God in a way that is not right for you, but find that place that is right for you.

We are not one of those churches where you have to stop going to church to avoid serving on a committee. You get to enjoy our church family. You don't have to do more than that. I know I've spoken a lot about needing Sunday school teachers, so let me say the kids will know if you're there teaching because I guilted you. You can enjoy our church family without guilt, without needing to volunteer, but what I'm talking about in this sermon is you can't get rid of God's purpose for your life. Serving others is a great way to find joy and fulfillment and is a great antidote to emptiness.

Another antidote to emptiness is...

## **2. Go Further in Your Work - Vocationally and Spiritually**

In Ecclesiastes 9 we are told, ***“Whatever work you do, Do it with all your might.”***

Tackle something with gusto. The Puritans talked often about the importance of earnestness. That’s an old word, one we don’t hear much today, but it perfectly describes how Christians should approach life. Life is too short, too fragile, and too precious to take lightly. *Seize the Day! Carpe Diem!*

The biblical view of work is that all work is noble, if it is done for the glory of God.

Here is the deal, often times we play obedience roulette with God as if we are trying to distract him. We will pray, *“God, what should I do?”*

To which God says,

Forgive... and so we pray God, *“No, I really want to hear from you...”*

Serve ... *“Well I am busy right now God, but what is your will?....”*

Be generous... *“No, God I am asking for your will for my life, not for other people...”*

Rather than engage in that kind of narrow conversation, I'd like to suggest we learn to notice God's nudges and grow your understanding of God's love. Grow our understanding of God's love, so we'll trust God enough to follow His nudges.

That then, to me, is when life will become more full, because we're not trying to fit God into our tiny box and vision. Our regular prayers are often, "God I want to have comfort and all my needs met." Then what, I want that too, but then boredom sets in. Man does not live by comfort alone, yet we spend most of our time desiring that. I propose we were not made for comfort, we were made for adventure. And since life has its ups and downs, its hardships and painful times, I think we were made for just this kind of life by holding the hand of the One who made us for it.

That kind of God journey is what we need if we are going to overcome the empty feeling we have inside us. We can say, "*Father, reveal Your love for me.*" Pray that daily. Then as you grow that relationship, notice God's nudges. You'll probably miss most of them, and that's OK, we all do. But this is about relationship, not a checklist for spiritual growth.

Now back to Solomon and work. It is interesting that although Solomon says a lot about work, purpose and God, he also says...

### 3. Have Some Fun

Do you know what the difference between Joy and Pessimism is? How about Entitlement and Gratitude? It is viewing life as a gift from God. See some of us can't enjoy life because we believe it is all up to us, "All up to me." We then just see people as help or a hindrance. That's not fun. That's not a relationship people want. You'll find co-dependent people, but not loving relationships.

You see your abilities, your family background, and much more of your life is actually nothing you earned, but a gift from God. Start again with gratitude and find some joy in your gifts from God. Then laugh, rest, play, and have fun. Start with gratitude.

Finally, another antidote to emptiness is...

### 4. Live with Eternity in Focus

Keep eternity in focus. That's the biggest story we live in. That's why I'm teaching a series on Genesis 1-11. That's the story of how our stories start. We need that large of a story. John Eldredge writes in his first book, *The Sacred Romance*,

*"Without a past that was planned for us and a future that waits for us, we are trapped in the present. There's not enough room for our souls in the present."*

Many theologians would say that by the end of Solomon's life he had turned away from God, he had lost his faith, and his hope.

That's because he pursued the wrong kingdom. There are really two kingdoms that we can pursue: The Kingdom of Me & The Kingdom of God.

The kingdom of me is external. It's about my house, my resume, and my reputation. Of course, none of those things are bad, but when they are the focus of my life they will destroy me. As a foundation for living, they lead to anxiety or despair, because they're a shaky ground foundation.

The kingdom of God is different. It's internal. It's a pursuit of love, joy, and peace, and patience and gentleness, and goodness, and kindness, and self-control. It is focused on a future, that cannot spoil, perish or fade. Do you know that one of the most practical things we can do is focus on the eternal and let it shape our lives? We read in the scripture....

**“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV)**

**Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere...  
Psalm 84:10 (NIV)**

**'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Revelation 21:4 (NIV)**

**Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:21-23 (NIV)**

Jesus also said, *I am the bread of life, he who takes this bread will never be hungry again.* He was not talking about a physical hunger, but a spiritual one. Still, He knew that it is hard for us to conceive of what that would be like and so what Jesus did is institute communion, with each other and with God as a physical reminder of that spiritual reality.

The purpose was to remember and to renew. So what we are going to do is that very thing, as we receive communion together. If this is new to you, there is no special requirement to take communion here, if you have said "Yes" to Jesus and want Him in your life, then you are welcome to receive communion today. We will come forward to receive the juice and the bread and partake of it here, before returning to your seats.