

Joy (at the Bottom of the Ladder)

Ecclesiastes 2

#2 in our series from Ecclesiastes

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Prayer

Lord God, we ask that you would cause *us* to preach your Word in Jesus' name, through the power of your Spirit.

Message

Last week we began preaching through Solomon's words in the book of Ecclesiastes. In 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles we learn that Solomon asked God for Wisdom, and God gave Solomon Wisdom and basically all things *with* Wisdom. Saint Paul writes that God has "*given us his son*" and "*will he not also give us all things with him.*"

Well, Solomon got Wisdom and at the end of Ecclesiastes chapter one, we read this:

And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

—Ecclesiastes 1:17-18

Last week we preached that

- Our experience with wisdom begins as sorrow.
- Wisdom calls to us from our sorrow.
- And Jesus, the Prince of Peace said, "*Your sorrow will turn into Joy.*"

We preached on that last week, looked at a fascinating picture, and noted something rather astounding.

This is what we noted:

- The New Testament clearly states that Jesus is the "Wisdom of God,"
- And Jesus said, "God is The Good."
- And the Spirit of God is the Wind of God.

And this is the picture: (See the next page)

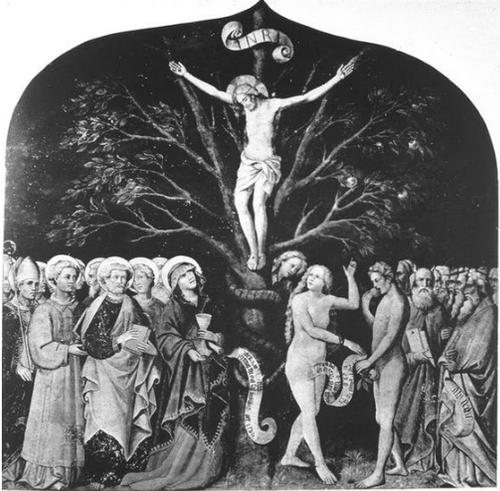


Figure 1 "The Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

This painting is from the 15th century and titled The Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man. All of space and time swirls around Jesus on a tree—that we sometimes call a cross—and then passes through Jesus like water swirling through a drain. On the other side of that drain is the eternally new creation united under one head as the Body of Christ.

A friend of mine had an amazing and detailed vision of basically just that—ten years ago during worship (It's included in my book "*The History of Time and The Genesis of You.*") Yet, I think it's been the testimony of Scripture for 2000 years. Although in recent years we haven't really believed it.

For the last several hundred years, the Church has suffered from bad science, which taught that space and time are constant and meaning is relative—like a vapor that vanishes—vanity.

But now it's become clear that space and time are relative and meaning—you can call it Wisdom—is not.

Get the picture? With Wisdom God created the heavens and the earth—that includes all space and time and you.

Well, as we said, we find Wisdom or Wisdom finds us, on a tree in a garden. Wisdom begins as fear and sorrow, and Wisdom calls to us from our sorrow and in our sorrow...In chapter 2 of Ecclesiastes, Solomon describes how this happens.

Verse 1

“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.’”

— Ecclesiastes 2:1

Literally Solomon says, *“Come let me test you with joy and see the good.”*

“See the good” carries the force of the verb “test,” so Solomon is basically saying, “Let’s take knowledge of the good and see if it makes us good.”

And that statement should sound a bit familiar to the children of Adam.

It’s like Solomon says, Let’s bite a sandwich and then judge the Good.

It’s like Solomon takes knowledge of the good and starts a journey with Wisdom.

It’s like he’s walking through life or climbing a ladder in order to know the Good, in order to know God.

[Peter sets up a ladder]

Verse 2

“I said of laughter, ‘It is mad,’ and of pleasure, ‘What use is it?’”

— Ecclesiastes 2:2

He’s asking, “What is the Good, good for?”

Verse 3

“I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom.”

— Ecclesiastes 2:3

Isn’t that incredible? Wisdom hasn’t left him.

It’s like Wisdom has gone on this journey with Solomon and is asking Solomon, “So Solomon, that was fun, but now you’ve got a hangover . . . what did you learn from that?”

[Peter takes one step up the ladder in front of him and continues preaching from there.]

I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. (It’s like he’s making Eden.) I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been

before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

—Ecclesiastes 2:3-8

According to Scripture Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. If he didn't have a headache from the wine, I'm sure he got one from the women.

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. (that would include David and Melchizedek). Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.

—Ecclesiastes 2:9-10

Genesis 3:6 reads like this: *“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes . . . Like Solomon, she saw the good, she took the good, and she ate the good.*

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.”

You know, God is not against pleasure.

He's not against cheeseburgers and corn dogs, bread and wine.

He's not against beautiful houses and nice cars. He's not against sex.

God is not against pleasure. In fact, you are his pleasure—His Joy.

The word for “pleasure” is also translated “joy,” and Joy is a gift of the Spirit, the Wind that Solomon strives after.

Well, Solomon takes some good, and he experiences some pleasure,
but then it's like the pleasure dies...

As if he picks the fruit and the fruit dies... What Happened?

Verse 11

“Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

He enjoyed the good, but then he considered the good to be the work of his own hands and the good, like, died . . . it evaporated—vanity!

As we mentioned last time, in Scripture, Idols are referred to as the vanity of vanities—like the breath of the breaths

They are the gods that we create.

Idols are good things that we make into bad things

Things like cows or calves or sex .

A man makes an idol with his hands—like a golden calf and then worships the idol, as if it were his creator—so he is the creator of his own creator—that’s vanity.

Idols are blessings, like calves that become a curse.
We make good things into idols and everything dies.
It’s not only something the ancients did. We all do it all the time.

When I was a boy, I thought, “If only I had a microscope, I’d be happy.”
Then I got a microscope and looked through the microscope for hours.
Then I thought, “If only I had an electric race track,
I’d be happy, I’d be complete.”
Then I got an electric race track.
At first it made me happy, but then I “got no satisfaction.”
[round and round] I got bored.
Then I thought, “If only I could get my driver’s license,
everything would be new.”
Then I drove and drove and drove and driving got old... It got old.
Then I thought if only I got a girlfriend... Snd now I need to change the subject.
But you understand: I saw that girls were a “delight to the eyes” and thought, “I bet they’re good for food.” I should take one, consume one...

When we make idols we kill the idols, which is killing ourselves.
When we make idols we’re really idolizing ourselves—we’re trying to use the good to make ourselves in the image of God...
And everything dies...including the idol.

It’s just like catching the wind in a jar.
It was the wind, and now, it’s only vapor in a jar.

Solomon writes:

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. So I turned...
—Ecclesiastes 2:11 and 12a

Now Solomon is going to take a new tack.
He’s going to try a different strategy, as if He’s entering a new stage in His quest to comprehend the Good.
[Peter climbs up to the second step on the ladder and continues preaching.]

So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.

That sentence is a bit confusing, but along with several commentators this is what I think it means—Solomon is saying: “I’m the King, who else could run an experiment like this with 600 wives and 300 concubines...and I have Wisdom. I need to dissect this Wisdom and turn it into virtues, values and proverbs. I need to reduce this wisdom to some laws, that I could put in a book. One could call it, ‘the knowledge of good and evil,’ and use it to make one’s self good.”

Now the law has some value, but it doesn’t decrease the trespass.
Like Paul writes: It actually “increases the trespass.”
Think about it: People who try to live by the law think “the good” is managing their desire for the bad with bad desire.

So they end up telling themselves stuff like this:
If I just renounce my lust for gold, God will reward me with streets of Gold.
If I just renounce my lust for women, God will reward me with 70 virgins.
If I just renounce my lust for vengeance and love my enemies,
 God will reward me by torturing my enemies forever without end.
If I just renounce my pride, I can be forever proud that I renounced my pride.
If I just *will* to renounce my will, God will reward my will.

You know, if you hear that you “*Should* love your enemy,” it just reveals that you don’t love your enemy.

As long as Love is a law, it reveals that love is not your nature.

So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?”¹

Ecclesiastes 2:12-15

As you know, I’ve taught that we all must pass through judgment.
 Which means we all must lose our lives for Jesus and the gospel,
 and find them.
 Which means every knee will bow and every tongue will confess...
 Which means the same event:
 Salvation by grace through faith will happen to all.

¹ Ultimately we can only do what King Jesus has done.

Sometimes when people hear that, they say, “Well then, why be good?”
Which clearly reveals that they don’t love the Good or trust the Good.
They have only been taking knowledge of the good to make themselves good,
which means they are not good...

And the degree to which you’re not good
Is the degree to which you are not saved,
And the degree to which you still walk in darkness
And the degree to which the wrath of God remains on you, for you still
believe the lie of the devil, that you are your own creator and savior.

See? When people ask “*Why be good?*” they confess that they don’t want the
good and that’s not good... So they are not good.
They have evil hearts, but pretend that they are good.

*Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me
also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that
this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring
remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long
forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because
what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a
striving after wind.*

—Ecclesiastes 2:15-17

Now let me remind you:

- The Wind is the Spirit.
- And the Good... is God
- His Word is Wisdom, our Lord Jesus.

So, Solomon couldn’t use these words, but this is what he’s saying:

I hated my life because I saw that,

- All of man’s toil is striving . . . to capture the Wind.
- All of man’s toil is taking . . . knowledge of the good, to make himself the good.
- All of man’s toil is using . . . wisdom, to justify himself.
- All of man’s toil is the crucifixion of Christ on a tree in a garden.
- All of man’s toil is sin.

In Genesis 3 The woman sees that the fruit of the tree is good for food and
takes it—that’s like Solomon’s first stage. Then she sees that it is desired to
make one wise and takes it—that’s like Solomon’s second stage.

She took the life of Wisdom to make herself in the image of God.

I think we are all that woman . . . and this is humanity's toil under the sun: taking the life of Wisdom, which makes us hate wisdom, and hate our own lives.

Solomon writes:

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. I hated all my toil (or some translate it, "the fruit of my toil") in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. —"using my wisdom is vanity."

—Ecclesiastes 2:17-19

Let me rephrase: "Using my Jesus, to make myself God, and capture His Spirit, is vanity. It's pride."

Next verse:

So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because [or "for"] sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This (toiling) also is vanity and a great evil.

In the last chapter Solomon said that it is "an evil business that God has given to the children of Adam" . . . Crucifying Christ is the evil business.

This (this toiling) . . . is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

—Ecclesiastes 2:20-23

Now, it's like Solomon enters a third stage [Peter steps up to the third step on the ladder and continues preaching] in this next verse. And for the first time he mentions God.

He has climbed the ladder, and now, he tells us what is *very best* . . . Ready?

Verse 24

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.” Literally, “eat and drink and see good in his toil” (not make good with his toil, see good in his toil)... “eat drink and see good in his toil.

—Ecclesiastes 2:24

This is the very best: “Enjoy your sandwich”

Now remember this is Solomon, the dude with 700 wives, 300 concubines, gardens, houses, riches and wisdom like none before or after. And according to Solomon, this is *the very best*, and isn't it weird?

It's not something that only a king can achieve...

It's not at the top of the ladder,

but back where we started at the bottom...

[Peter steps down to the very bottom of the ladder]

“Enjoy your sandwich and your... Diet Coke.”

What's the difference, now? What has Solomon gained in all his toil?

There is nothing better for a person (an adam) than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God has given (it's not taken, it's given) wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting (cars, houses and concubines), only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

—Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 & 3:1

What follows is perhaps the most beautiful, hopeful, and encouraging chapter in all of Scripture . . .

But for now, let's just note: there is a time for the “evil business” and it reveals “God's business,” which is making everything Good in His time.

So what has Solomon gained with all his toil under the sun?

Wisdom in his heart. I think it's called faith.

Well, as I've chewed on Ecclesiastes, over and over I've been reminded of Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was a Danish Philosopher who wrote at the end of the 19th century. He never published a book while he was alive, yet he's considered by some to be the greatest philosopher of the 20th century. Indeed, I think he predicted the end of the modern era as he spoke to the bored and

despairing hearts of modern people... people just like Solomon. Kierkegaard was a passionate Christian, deeply disturbed by the passionless civil protestant Christianity of his day.

My Dad loved Kierkegaard. Karl Barth loved Kierkegaard. I studied Kierkegaard in philosophy at CU and took a course on Kierkegaard at Regent Seminary years later. Long ago, through one of Tony Campolo's books, I learned something from Kierkegaard that's helped me understand the Bible for the last thirty years.

Kierkegaard proposed that there are three stages along life's way. The *aesthetic stage*, The *ethical stage*, and what He called the *religious stage*— (but by religious, he doesn't mean human religion but true religion, that is Faith—working through love . . . Faith.)

He would argue that we may traffic in all three stages at once, or rise from one into another and fall back again, but the last stage is what it means "to be saved."

The first two stages are characterized by sorrow:
The aesthetic stage [climb ladder] ends in boredom.
The ethical stage [climb ladder] ends in despair.

In the *aesthetic stage* a person seeks salvation through pleasure.
—In other words they see the good and then consume the good.
—They are a consumer of the good.

I think the Gospels might refer to these folks as "tax collectors and sinners."
But a person in the aesthetic phase may desire goods that are far more refined than money or sex. They may live for the symphony, fine art museums, and great theology but . . . they are consumers and spectators—so they see the good, consume the good, but won't commit themselves to the good.
The aesthetic person believes that Wisdom is consuming the Good to make yourself good, like a cannibal consumes his victim to acquire the traits of his victim.

The aesthetic stage ends in boredom, for when one consumes the good, one kills the good, and it's no longer good. Once you trap the wind in your jar, it's no longer really the wind . . . only vapor (dead wind).

A person gets trapped in the aesthetic stage, when they won't face the sorrow of their own boredom, but keep sucking the life out of drinks, concubines and churches, with ever diminishing returns—for the life has died.

Kierkegaard would not be at all surprised at the suicide rate in a wealthy consumer society like the United States of America.

The second stage is the *ethical stage*.

- The person in the ethical stage seeks salvation through ethics and duty—laws and willpower.
- They try to save themselves by taking wisdom and using wisdom to make themselves good...
 - And yet they still don't *know* the Good, they only know *about* the good.
 - They still don't *know* Wisdom, they only know about good and evil.
 - They still don't know the Wind . . . they think it's only vapor in their jar.

I think the Gospels refer to folks like this as the “scribes and Pharisees.”
The Scribes and Pharisees loved wisdom that they had reduced to laws in their books, but when wisdom took on flesh and stood in their midst . . .
They mocked Him, reviled Him and took His life on a tree in a garden . . .
and everything died . . . even the sun went black.

Most people think that's exactly what Christianity is and what my job is: “Pastor give me some knowledge of Love, so I can make myself Love, so I can get into the kingdom of Love, walk those streets of gold and feast on roast lamb and red wine, while I watch my enemies tortured forever in the valley of Gehenna... by God, who is Love.” “Give me knowledge of love!”

Well true knowledge of love burns like fire and leads to despair, for you realize you don't love Love, and you can't make yourself love Love. In fact, with your very desire to conquer love, you have crucified love . . . And living by law, in the power of your flesh, you continue to crucify love.

You cannot make yourself good, when your every effort is the “evil business”—
Trapping wind in a jar, taking the life of the Good on a tree,
That is, crucifying Wisdom in a garden.

People get trapped in despair, when they refuse to face their despair, and so hear wisdom in the midst of despair—“*Lose your life and you will find it.*”

In his book *Falling Upward*, Father Richard Rohr writes, “In our work with men, we have found that in many men this inability or refusal to feel their deep sadness takes the form of aimless anger.”

Aimless anger turns to violence, and with violence we turn people into things,
We turn subjects into objects.

Kierkegaard taught that the first two stages were characterized by “objective knowledge” as opposed to “subjective knowledge.” To seek objective knowledge is to assume that the thing you want to know is an object . . . to assume that it is less than you, and so can be comprehended by you—that is something less than you .

It's like catching the Wind in a jar,
The Word in a book,
Or trying to nail the Good to a tree.

It's the way science knows about things . . .
Which is great, as long as they are things—that is, objects.

Many years ago, I was sitting on a plane somewhere over Nevada.
The pilot interrupted the silence to tell us about something directly below.
With great wonder he said, "Directly below us is Mt. Wheeler, the sight of the world's oldest living thing: Prometheus, a bristlecone pine, 4,862 years old."

And then he paused, changed his tone, and said,
"Well, it was the oldest living thing. They cut it down to count its rings."

They turned a tree of life into a tree of knowledge about life, but no longer living.

Let's say that you wanted to know a girl, how could you know that girl?

1. Well you could cut her down and count her rings.

I mean, you could take her and dissect her.
And you could learn all about her, but you wouldn't know her,
for she'd be dead.
That's objective knowledge—you could rape her as an object

OR

2. You could know her because she chooses to know you.

Maybe she'd even form a covenant with you and commune with you in the sanctuary of that covenant producing the fruit that is life—by that I mean a baby.
That's subjective knowledge.

Obtaining objective knowledge looks like science and feels like rape.
Obtaining subjective knowledge looks like romance (worship) and feels like ecstasy.

In the first two stages, if the Good isn't dead, we'll kill it in order to know it.
And when we see it, our boredom will turn to absolute despair.
Then, according to Kierkegaard, we're ready for the third stage.

I found a video on line that explains it like this:

[A lady narrates while drawing pictures to accompany what she's saying throughout her explanation]

Female voice: Kierkegaard thought that there were three stages to life. He believed in this idea. I thought it is kind of like a ladder. At the bottom of the ladder you're in the aesthetic stage, in the middle you're in the ethical stage and at the very top you're in the religious phase. The whole point of life is to go up this ladder. Now we meet Bob. Bob is in the aesthetic stage of the ladder. His life is all about happiness and pleasure so naturally Bob parties a lot. He dances and he doesn't really care about his life that much. It's all about him and satisfying his needs. One day, Bob isn't happy anymore. He's not satisfied with the happiness and pleasure he's getting so he tries to find a solution. Maybe he thinks he should get a job. Maybe that will solve his issues. He'll become a committed person. So, Bob gets a job and he starts a family. With this, Bob enters the ethical stage. The ethical stage is all about commitment—commitment to oneself, one's family, to your job and the community. He's in the middle of the ladder now. So, next Bob thinks to himself, "What is the purpose of my life?" He goes towards God. By doing this he is sacrificing his happiness to devote himself fully to God. With that he enters the religious stage. Now Bob has reached the top of the ladder. He will continue to be in that stage until he dies.

That's what most people think religion is, and what she thought Kierkegaard said, but that is absolutely not what Kierkegaard said. She said "Bob will be in that stage until He dies..." But Kierkegaard would say, "Until Bob dies—to himself—he can't enter that stage."

She said that she pictured it as climbing a ladder:

- But entering the third stage isn't climbing the ladder. It's falling off of the ladder.
- Better, it's like realizing the whole time that you were climbing the ladder, you were going the wrong way.
- Better, it's no longer being able to climb the ladder, for God has utterly obliterated the ladder and utterly obliterated you.

[Peter kicks over ladder and it crashes to the floor.]

The third stage is not something you can do.
It's something that Wisdom does to you.

Listen to Kierkegaard:

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What is a human being after all?... And what is his power? What is the highest he is able to will? Well, we do not want to defraud the highest of its price, but we cannot conceal the fact that the highest is realized only when a person is fully convinced that he himself is capable of nothing, nothing at all... We sometimes speak of learning to know God from events of past history. We open up the chronicles and read and read. Well, that may be fine, but how much time it takes, and how dubious the outcome frequently is! But someone who is conscious that he is capable of nothing has every day and every moment the precious opportunity to experience that God lives.

If he does not experience it often enough, he knows very well why that is. It is because his understanding is faulty and he believes that he himself is, after all, capable of something.”

You might say, “Well does that mean I try to do nothing?”

No! Absolutely not.

- Unless you try to do something, your heart will never know that you are capable of nothing.
- And until you believe that you are capable of nothing, you cannot believe in the something.
- And that something is Grace. Grace is the Wisdom of God—
That is, the Logic of Love—in flesh, Jesus.

You can't *know* Jesus, until you *know* that you are *known* by Jesus, and you have done nothing.

You *can* crucify Jesus, which is *the evil business*, but you can't *know* Jesus, until you know that you are known by Jesus—and that's not your business, that's *God's business*, that's Easter in your heart, that's faith.

Listen to Kierkegaard's student Karl Barth:

What is pleasing to God comes into being when all human righteousness is gone, irretrievably gone, when men are uncertain and lost, when they have abandoned all ethical and religious illusions, and when they have renounced every hope in this world and in this heaven.

That thing that is pleasing to God that “comes into being” is Faith by Grace.

Kierkegaard's model of the third stage was the Father of Faith, Abraham.

His Faith was counted as righteousness 'cause it is righteousness...

And it was counted as righteousness on Mt. Moriah—

Where Solomon would build the temple on a rock called the foundation stone, for on that rock the Jews believed that God created Adam in the garden of Eden.

Toward the end of Abraham's life God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Mt. Moriah, on a pile of wood—that's dead tree. I don't believe that command was merely a relic of ancient society or God simply accommodating himself to the culture of Abraham's day—in which people sacrificed children to vain idols, like we sacrifice children to our own egos today. I think that Word from God was spoken by God to obliterate the ladder on which Abraham was standing.

You see? Isaac was God's promised blessing.
Abraham had spent his entire life, climbing the ladder, for the sake that blessing .

For old Abraham, Isaac was everything he considered good.
And all his knowledge of the good told him that he must save Isaac.

To sacrifice Isaac was to sacrifice himself and his knowledge of the good...
But what else could he do? It was God that created Isaac and God that led him, all his life, to this mountain. His wisdom failed, but according to Kierkegaard, he encountered God's Wisdom in the garden of his heart. And in that place of utter despair, He took a leap of faith...

See? Faith is not passive:
You can't work faith, but faith will work you.
Faith is like the death and resurrection of Wisdom within you.

In faith, Abraham lifted the knife and at that point God stopped him and supplied a Ram—that's a full-grown lamb—and God told Abraham to sacrifice that lamb.

And what did Abraham gain from all his toil under the sun?
He gained knowledge of the Good.
But He didn't just learn "knowledge of the good."
He came to know the Good,
Because the Good had come to know Abraham on Mt. Moriah.

See? It's not the kind of knowledge one can learn in a book.
It's given to you at a tree, in an ancient garden, on Mt. Moriah.

Isaac was Abraham's life, and on Mt. Moriah, Abraham lost his life, and found it.

Every time you are forced to sacrifice the Good or your knowledge of the Good . . . That is, every time you suffer and you don't know why . . . every time you suffer, God is fixing to show you something on Mt. Moriah. . . I mean, we do believe God is sovereign. He numbers our days and is sovereign over death. If you lose something that happens under His sovereign command.

It was 2,000 years later that Jesus, the promised blessing, and only begotten son of God, road up Mt. Moriah on a donkey, like Abraham and Isaac did 2,000 years before. Of course it was no longer called Moriah, but the Temple Mount, Mount Zion . . . or Calvary.

To His followers, Jesus was everything that they knew to be good, and the fact that He would willingly walk up that Mountain violated all their knowledge of the good.

- So at a tree, called the cross, in a garden called Calvary, they were forced to surrender the good and their knowledge of the good.
- And at a tree called the cross in a garden called Calvary, scribes and Pharisees took the life of the good, according to their knowledge of the good.
- Jesus said, "*No one takes my life, I freely give my life.*" Jesus is the Father's Life, freely given for all of us tax collectors and sinners, scribes and Pharisees.

- So at a tree called the cross in a garden called Calvary, God gave His life for the sins of the world, and in this is Love.
- Jesus is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.
- We try to take His life, but in truth we can't take His life for God has already given His life.

We try to take His life, but God forgives His life, in a garden on a tree.

And what do we gain from all our toil under the sun?

Knowledge that our taking is evil.

And knowledge that God's giving is Good.

But more than just knowledge of the Good,

We know the Good . . .

Because the Good has known us on Mt. Moriah, on a tree in a garden—

In the garden of our heart. He is Life.

The cross is the great reversal. At the cross we see that:

- We strive after Wind, but the Wind has always been striving after us.
- In despair we realize that we can't make ourselves Good,

And in Joy we realize that God—the Good—has made us Good...

He is the Good. By giving us Himself, He is the Good.

And that's Wisdom rising from the dead in the garden of our hearts, and we are His body. We are His Body, and so God's will becomes our will.

- Abraham glimpsed that on Mt. Moriah.
- Solomon glimpsed that in the temple on Mt. Moriah.
- Jesus was crucified on a tree in a garden on Mt. Moriah.
- Yet we each learn faith in the garden of our own heart, by Faith and as Faith.

And, did you notice that for Solomon seemed to experience that third stage at the bottom of the ladder? He experienced heaven at the bottom of the ladder.

He didn't achieve Joy at the top of the ladder.
He was surprised by Joy at the bottom of the ladder.

It wasn't upon constructing a marvelous and glorious self, that he knew Joy.
It was after he lost Himself, that he was surprised by Joy...
Perhaps the Joy had been there all along.

Now he knows:

1. He doesn't own the good
2. He hasn't earned the good
3. He can only receive the good.

He wrote, "*There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and see good in all his toil. This also is from the hand of God.*"

In His heart, Solomon sees that the Good is absolute gift. Everything is Grace
Those new eyes, in his new heart, are called FAITH.

In his book, *Fear and Trembling*, after Kierkegaard describes Abraham, He describes a man he calls "The Knight of Faith."
He looks like any other man.
He doesn't have any palaces or 1,000 women,
And he hasn't written any Proverbs.
He experiences what every man experiences . . .
Yet, he experiences it in an extraordinary way.
He eats, and drinks, and sees good in all his toil.

Kierkegaard wrote:

He takes delight in everything, and whenever one sees him [the knight of faith] taking part in a particular pleasure, he does it with the persistence, which is the mark of the earthly man whose soul is absorbed in such things. He tends to his work... He takes a holiday on Sunday. He goes to church... if one did not know him, it would be

impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the congregation, for his healthy and vigorous hymn-singing proves at the most that he has a good chest...he enjoys everything he sees... to see him eat would be the envy of the elite and an inspiration to the common man, for his appetite is keener than that of Esau's...And yet he is no genius...With infinite resignation he has drained the cup of life's profound sadness, he knows the bliss of the infinite, he senses the pain of renouncing everything, the dearest things he possesses in the world...and yet he has this sense of security in enjoying it, as though the finite life were the surest thing of all. And yet, and yet the whole earthly form he exhibits is a new creation.

He has faith in Love.

And this is how God makes faith. [Peter points to the communion table.]

Communion

On the night Wisdom was betrayed, He took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "This is my body which is for you."

And in the same way after supper and having given thanks He took the cup saying, "This cup is the covenant in my blood. Drink of it all of you. Do it in remembrance of me."

God said that He would give Solomon wisdom and with wisdom all things. Saint Paul said, "God has given you his Son, and that with His Son he will give you all things."

You see? Jesus death on a tree in a garden and His resurrection in the same garden, is not simply the way God deals with a few sins, it is the way God gives us all things and through all things, gives us Himself. He is the Good.

As Paul says, "All things are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's"

So God is saying, *I* give you this bread, and it means I love you.

I give you this wine, and it means I love you.

I give you every sandwich, and each means I love you.

I give you the moon, and it means I love you.

I give you the stars, and they mean I love you.

I give you myself, and it all means I am Love and I love you.

Now, if you ask, "How do I apply this?" LISTEN!

You *don't* apply this. This is applying you.

THIS IS WISDOM.

Benediction

You know sometimes I feel like I need to apologize for yelling during the sermon. But I'm only yelling because I'm preaching to myself—seriously. I have been feeling convicted by God, for quite awhile, that I just don't enjoy stuff. My soul is not singing.

I think if Kierkegaard were here he'd say, "Peter, that's because you think you are capable of something. That's stressing you out. But don't let that knowledge stress you out. Because while I was alive, I told everybody I'd never entered the third stage. I glimpsed the third stage. It's like I had a mustard seed of faith. So, don't worry. You are afraid of being a failure, but I have good news for you. You're already a failure, but God love you. I think that's what *Kierkegaard* would say.

BUT if Jesus were here I think He'd say something like, "Peter, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. At the bottom of the ladder it's at hand. But how are you going to enjoy it if you won't even enjoy a sandwich? You know what you do? You bite the sandwich. You think, 'Oh! This is good!' But then you worry about whether or not you're going to get another sandwich and so you no longer taste the sandwich. You don't taste the sandwich because you're afflicted with fear. And one day you may not taste the sandwich. One day you will die; I'll take all the sandwiches away. But Peter, that's to show you that every sandwich is a gift. Then I give everything back. Peter, you don't taste the sandwich because you think you think to yourself, 'I don't deserve the sandwich. I bet God will take it away because of what I did the other night...' You think you don't deserve the sandwich. If you think that way, the Kingdom of Heaven will burn you like fire. Oh Peter, one more thing: you know the good in your toil, that's me. You're giving birth to me. When you see that you'll be happy and you'll find good in your toil. Peter, in my name believe the gospel. Amen

Oh! And I think He might also say, "You want a practical application point Peter? Next time you have a sandwich, just say, 'Thank you!' And enjoy it." Believe the Gospel. Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.