

“Come Now, I Will Test You With Pleasure”

Sermon Notes

➤ **“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee”**

-St. Augustine, Confessions (5th cent.)

**May we heed the Preacher’s message for us concerning his...*

1. ...unbridled exploration of earthly pleasure (vv.1-8)

2. ...surprising evaluation of earthly pleasure (vv.9-11)

3. ...Christ-centered civilization of earthly pleasure (12:11-14; Psalm 16:11)

- personal pleasure (John 10:10b; 15:11)

- communal pleasure (1 John 1:4; Philemon 6)

- missional pleasure (Acts 4:20; 5:41; Luke 15:7, 10, 20-24)

- cosmological pleasure (Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

Next Week: Ecclesiastes 2:12-17 - “How the Wise Dies Just Like the Fool!”

MEFC Community Group Study Questions

For the week of October 11th-17th

Getting Started

1. American journalist and cultural critic H.L. Mencken (1880-1956) once famously defined “Puritanism” as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy.”¹ Though perhaps a bit humorous, the quip is nevertheless poorly grounded in reality (see the article at the footnote below for more detail). Puritan or not, the pursuit of pleasure is often an under-developed aspect of our theological reflection as Christians. What does the Bible say about this issue? Should the pursuit of pleasure be the aim (or even an aim) of the Christian life? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper

2. John Piper has introduced us over the last generation to the philosophy of ‘Christian hedonism’ which teaches that God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him. How does this contrast with Mencken’s (mistaken) view of Puritanism? Responding to the accusation that Christian Hedonism makes a god out of pleasure, Piper replies: “No. It says that we all make a god out of what we take most pleasure in. My life is devoted to helping people make God their God by wakening in them the greatest pleasures in him.”² Based on the explanation above, should a believer aim to be a ‘Christian hedonist’? Are you? Explain.

Open Your Bible to Ecclesiastes 2:1...

3. Ecclesiastes 2:1 begins: “I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself...’” Take a moment now to read through the entire passage (verses 1 to 11). As you read, note that there are no fewer than 36 references to the self. What are your initial reactions to this portion of Scripture? In a book as radically God-centered as the Bible, how do these 11 verses stand in such stark contrast to the rest of the canon?
4. How does the phrase “...my heart still guiding me with wisdom...” function in verse 3? Is it evidence of the Preacher’s hopeless, irrational pleasure-seeking? Or is it an indication that in the midst of his indulgence, he sought to maintain enough rational objectivity to evaluate his quest? Why do you think so? Is the second of these two options even possible? Have you ever tried this? Did it work? Explain.
5. How would you contrast the types of pleasure the Preacher chased in verses 1 to 3 as over against his pursuits in verses 4 to 6? In the sermon, the phrase “highbrow hedonism” was used to describe the latter. What’s the difference? Why does it matter? Which sort of pleasure is more tempting to you, personally? How come?
6. Verses 7 and 8 bear witness (in part) to some of the Preacher’s sexual exploits. If we understand him to be King Solomon, then a fuller backdrop is provided in 1 Kings 11:1-8. What effect do the lurid details of Solomon’s sin in 1 Kings have on your heart? How are sexual sin and religious idolatry woven together in this man’s life? Do you see evidence of this type of debauchery in the 21st century? Have you seen it in your own life? Explain.

1 Please see this wonderful article from Dr. Joel Beeke entitled: “5 Reasons the Puritans Were So Joyful” for a response to Mencken’s reckless claim: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-reasons-puritans-joyful/> .

2 For more on the philosophy of Christian hedonism, see this article from John Piper: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/christian-hedonism> . Both articles accessed 10/8/20 @ 10:30pm.

7. At the end of the day, the Preacher's assessment of his godless pursuit of earthly pleasure is absolutely dismal. Read verses 9-11. Does your life experience match up with his (i.e. have you reached the same conclusion)? If so, how far down the path of the abuse of earthly pleasures did you have to travel before you came to such a conviction? Not that far? Pretty darn far? Share with the group as you feel led.

8. The third point of Sunday's sermon urged us toward the...

...Christ-centered civilization of earthly pleasure (12:11-14; Psalm 16:11)

- personal pleasure (John 10:10b; 15:11)
- communal pleasure (1 John 1:4; Philemon 6)
- missional pleasure (Acts 4:20; 5:41; Luke 15:7, 10, 20- 24)
- cosmological pleasure (Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

Take the time to work through these texts in your group, enjoying and applying each one at each level of our life experience as believers. Which of these pleasures in your life is the most (or least) developed? What practical next steps might the Lord desire for you to take in order to cultivate greater capacities for joy in him?