

Solomon's Twelve Secrets

Session 1: Strong Coffee for Men Intoxicated by the World

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Welcome to Man in the Mirror Bible Study. We are an intentional, intergenerational Bible study that has always celebrated diversity, so everyone is welcome. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter one verse one. Yeah, we have everybody here from alcoholics to CEOs and alcoholic CEOs. Hey, I had a really funny experience this week. I pulled into a Wawa gas station. I pulled in behind this unbelievably pristine Bentley convertible. I got out of my car, and I said, "Hey, brother. With a car that nice, you shouldn't have to pump your own gas." He said, "Well, you're right. This doesn't belong to me. I'm actually pumping gas for Mr. Fields." We're going to be talking about a man for the next 12 weeks who probably would have a fleet of Bentleys if he were alive today. Starting a new series called Solomon's 12 Secrets: Lessons on Life From Ecclesiastes.

As we get going here, let's go ahead, this needs a little fixing, do a shout out. Today, the shout out is going to go to L3 Men's Ministry Bible Study, a group of 15 men. They just started meeting, like this is their first week. They're meeting on Fridays in the mornings, same time as we do, at the Frontline Community and Youth Center in Elmira, New York. By the way, Randy Jackson, the pastor, is the leader of the group. I've been there a number of times because that's where you fly into if you want to go to Watkins Glen Raceway. Randy writes, "Our guiding vision is to live, love, and lead, L3. Our guiding vision to live, love, and lead brings something bold to the forefront of men's ministry," I agree, "by living passionately for Jesus, loving others unconditionally, and leading boldly." I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm and rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to L3. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, guys. Glad to have you as part of the Bible study.

Just for a moment, imagine an empty picture frame. You can put anything you want, anything you desire, any ambition that you have, any dream that you have, you can put into that picture frame. What would it be? Would it be like the wallpaper on your computer, the azure water white sand beach or is it the Bentley convertible that we were talking about or whatever it is? Think about what is it that would be in your picture frame. What we're going to be looking at a man for the next 12 weeks, who, no matter what you put inside your frame, he had it. He had it all. We're going to be looking at this ... Is it fixed yet? Working on it. Okay. The title of the series, Solomon's 12 Secrets, already said that. Today's message, Strong Coffee For Men Intoxicated by the World.

SOLOMON'S TASK

We're going to first speak about Solomon's task. Join me at verse one which says, "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem." Over at verse 12, it says, "I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem." Down in verse 16, last part, "I have more wisdom than anyone who ruled over Jerusalem before me." The author of this book has not explicitly identified himself as Solomon. Over the years,

people have gone back and forth. What I would like to point out, and this is a little bit of, well, it's a little bit of theology, if you will, which we touch on from time to time even though we're mostly application-oriented. There was a period in Biblical history of the patriarchs followed by the period of the judges, and then there was a united kingdom. Then, after that, there was a divided kingdom. 400 years of silence, and now we live in the church age.

Well, during the period of the united kingdom after the judges, there were basically three kings. There was Saul, there was David, and there was Solomon. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. He was anointed as the king at a very young age. He was the one to whom God appeared in a vision, in a dream, and said, "Tell me what you want. Anything you want I'll give to you." Solomon asked for wisdom to govern the people. Then God said, "Well, because you've asked for wisdom and not for wealth and fame and fortune and all those things, I'm going to give you wisdom beyond the wisdom of anybody before you. In addition to that, I'm going to give you so much fame and so much wealth and power that you'll be without equal." Then Solomon had a son, Rehoboam. That's when the kingdom divided. There were really three kings of the united kingdom.

Now, we know by reading the passage in verse 12 it says, "I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem." From Rehoboam on, they would have had to say, "I was the king over Israel in the capital city of Israel." If you would have said, "I was the king in Jerusalem," you would have to say, "I was the king over Judah in Jerusalem." Back to the text, it says, "The words of the Teacher, son of David." We know it wasn't David because it was the son of David. We know it wasn't David's father or the other king. That's so interesting. Jesse was his father, but Saul was the king before David. It had to be a son of David, and there's only one son of David who ruled over Israel, the whole of Israel in Jerusalem. That was Solomon. Let's just use some common sense. It's probably Solomon.

I mean, you can not say that this is not pseudepigraphy, that some other person other than Solomon wrote it using Solomon's persona. Okay, that's possible, but Occam's razor, the most obvious explanation is usually correct. This is Solomon. If you don't think it's Solomon and, by the way, there's scholars who argue, I've argued with this ... Well, I didn't argue. I listened to him argue with me, a scholar once about this. I respect that you can not prove that Solomon wrote this, but I'm pretty sure. I think you could say with a high probability that Solomon wrote it. We have here a man, who we know from other scriptures, became intoxicated by the world. 1 Kings 11 verses one through four tell us that in his older age ... Well, first of all, King Solomon loved many women and, in his older age, those wives, those women, turned his heart after other gods. Solomon has probably wandered very far from God before he figured out the message that we get in Ecclesiastes.

He has written Ecclesiastes out of such incredible experience. Any possible earthly avenue that you could ever choose to find, meaning, purpose, so forth, Solomon has already tried it for you. It will become clear to you, as I think it is clear in the text, that Solomon, the purpose of him writing this book, is to spare you many sorrows, to spare you the sorrows that he himself has already gone through. As a speaker and a writer myself, I know that one of the most important things to do is to try to arrest the attention of your reader or your listener right from the get-go, just grab your listener right by the throat and just arrest their attention. Solomon has the most powerful way of arresting our attention right here. In his first words, he says, "'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.'" Who doesn't want to see what he now has to say?

The words that follow are written by a man whose head is throbbing from the hangover of having been in intoxicated by the world for many decades. Let's see what he had to say. Verse three, "What does

man gain from all his toil at which he toils under the sun?" Then he now gives four examples of monotonous repetition. "Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever." Out of curiosity, how many of you remember Buell Duncan, Blair Culpepper, and Pete Cross? Anybody? Anybody remember them? Three people remember those names. Four people remember those names. A half generation ago, these were the three most powerful bankers in our entire community. Now, who even remembers their names? How many of you know the first name of your great-grandfather? Right in your own families, the memories just fade. Generations come and go.

There you go. You got the generations and then the sun. "The sun rises and the sun sets, and it hurries back to where it rises." Number three, "The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course." Then, water, verse seven, "All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again." God has taken his hands and he's scooped out the depths of the sea. He's poured water into his hand. He breathes on it, vaporizes it, and his breath carries it around and around the globe over and over again. Then, he goes on in verse eight, "All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Now, this is not talking about human invention. This is talking about the creation, humanity. I mean, nobody was more inventive than Solomon. We'll get into all this in later chapters. He was doing all kinds of new, creative, inventive things, but he saw at the end that all things are wearisome, more than one can say. "The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow." There's no remembrance of men of old. How many of you remember the name Austin Jones? Anybody remember the name Austin Jones? One guy, two guys remember Austin Jones.

In our community a generation ago was a man whose name was Austin Jones. He was a superstar. He worked his way through the chairs and became the president of the local board of realtors. When the multiple listing services first came into existence, he is the one who introduced that into our community. Then, he rose through the chairs and became the president of the Florida board of realtors. One day, Austin Jones was getting ready to leave his house to drive to Lakeland to give a talk. He said to his wife, "I don't feel very good. I'm going to go upstairs and lay down." Austin Jones died that day of a massive coronary. Austin Jones was 53 years of age, and nobody remembers who he was. That's what's going to happen to all of us. This is not meant as a source of despair. This is a pointer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself.

We see here a world that looks endlessly busy and hopelessly inconclusive. The words I have written over the years in the margin of my Bible, perpetual motion, repetitious, pointless, monotonous, ceaseless, busy, inconclusive, wearisome, fatiguing, brevity of life. All of these are the themes that are suggested by Solomon's experience, having tested every possible form of finding meaning in any earthly pursuit. His mission we see in verse 12, "I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and explore by wisdom," remember the wisdom that the Lord gave him. That's a lot of wisdom. "To study and explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven." To study, this brings up this man was a scientist. Study and exploration. Study suggests, doesn't necessarily mean, but suggests rational thought. We're going to study. To explore suggests empirical observations. Through rational

thought and empirical observations, scientific, he's going to explore by wisdom everything that is done under heaven. You'll see that more than once. That's his mission.

What is his observation? "What a heavy burden the devil has laid on men." You see it? "What a heavy burden the devil has laid on men." You see it? What does it say? It says, "What a heavy burden God has laid on men." What an odd thing. What an odd thing that God is the one who's done this. Most people think there are two forces at work in the world, good and evil, but there are actually three forces. Well, there are probably more than that, but for our purposes, there are three forces at work in the world. There is that which is good, that which is evil, and that which is futile, that which is meaningless, that which is vanity. In other words, it's not necessarily evil, but what's the point? These endless repetitions, they're not evil, but after a while, you say, "What's the point? Why bother? Where's this going?" It's like without God in our lives, it ends up feeling like motion without purpose.

Verse 14, "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun." I guess if the observation is that God has laid a heavy burden on men, his conclusion is the same words he started his book with to arrest our attention, "All of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. What is twisted can not be straightened. What is lacking can not be counted," or it is what it is or you can not change the order of things. Verse 16, "I thought to myself, 'Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me. I've experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.' Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom and also of badness and folly," we'll talk more about that next week, "but I learned that this too is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief."

What Solomon is showing us here, the man who has pursued every earthly avenue of finding meaning and purpose, that apart from God, life has no meaning. That's our Big Idea for the day. **Apart from God, life has no meaning.** God has so ordered the creation that this third force dominates, this endless repetition, this at least in a sense of meaningless, dominates what happens under the sun or under the heaven. We need to get above the sun. We need to get above the heaven.

WHAT IS THE HIGHER SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE AT WORK HERE?

Second, I want us to just answer and really quite briefly: What is the higher spiritual principle at work here? It's this. God wants to destroy all confidence that the world can satisfy the deepest longings of your heart. God wants to destroy all possibility of us being able to find confidence in the world. Why does he want to do that? This is the higher spiritual principle. Because God knows this. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this. God knows that if you could find even a shred or a trace of meaning in any worldly pursuit apart from him, you would take it.

This is how men in our fallen state are. If we can figure out how to find meaning and purpose without God, that's what we're going to do. God knows this. Because he is good, because God is good, he has made what happens under the heaven futile or vain or meaningless. He has frustrated the plans that we have. That's Romans 8:21. I talk about Romans 8:21 all the time, so I won't talk about it again today. If you and I could find any meaning, just even a drop of meaning apart from God, then we're going to give a shot. We'll see that that's exactly what Solomon did. He's trying to spare us the sorrows that he himself went through because of that. The big idea here, apart from God, life has no meaning. Solomon is trying to help us begin to understand that apart from God, life has no meaning.

SO WHAT?

Finally, so what? Well, you might find yourself in one of three positions this morning. You're sober, you're intoxicated, or you have a hangover. If you are sober this morning, let's praise God that there are men who have been through enough cycles that they're now sober. By the way, if you are sober and you want to take a drink, what do you do? If you're an alcoholic and you want to take a drink, what do you do? You call your sponsor. For all of us at our tables here and online as well, if we are tempted to going, once again, get intoxicated by something worldly like me, I'll confess to you, this week, I'm thinking, "Am I becoming an Amazon addict? I need help." My name is Pat. Who can I call? Can't call my wife because she's doing it too. We got two Amazon-aholics in our family. If you're sober, give God the glory. Then, look around for guys around you that have been intoxicated by the world.

That's the second so what. Maybe you find that you are intoxicated. Worldliness is the barrier that keeps us from God. It is. It's the barrier that keeps us from God. This is why God has made worldliness so meaningless, but it takes a number of years, in most cases, to figure out that the thing that I thought would satisfy me, it did get me high, it did get me intoxicated pursuing some kind of worldly thing, it did get me intoxicated but then that wore off. Then, like Solomon, then I went on to the next thing. That wore off. Then, I went on to the next thing. That wore off. Then, I went on to the next thing. That wore off. All the time, God's saying, "Hey, look over here. Look over here. I'm here." We don't look at him. We don't listen. We don't pay attention. He makes that worldly pursuit futile. He strips it of its meaning. Then we go on to the next one. Then, he makes that futile. He strips it of its meaning. Then, we go on to the next thing. He makes that futile.

He keeps doing this until one day we look around and say, "There's nothing left. It's pointless. It's endless repetition. God, where are you?" He's right there the whole time, sovereignly orchestrating all this because apart from God, life has no meaning. Then, let's just say that you have a hangover. You're there. You know it. Maybe that's why you're here. Come to Jesus or come back to Jesus. Jesus, he's all of God in a human body. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the exact representation of God's being. God said something very similar to what Solomon said here. Jesus said something very similar to what Solomon said. "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?" Mark 8:36, Jesus said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" Be thankful that you have a hangover and turn to Jesus or turn back to Jesus. Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, our dearest Father, thank you that you love your creatures so much that you have frustrated creation so that we will realize that apart from you, there is no lasting meaning in this life and that we might turn to you. Lord, for those of us who are sober, we give you thanks. We pray that you would give us the good sense to check in with the other brothers if we feel like we want to take a drink. Then, Lord, if we are intoxicated, we also want you to know that intellectually, at least, we know this and we thank you for working in our lives to bring us to the point where we will be so overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of life like Solomon that we will turn to you or back to you. Then, Lord, for those of us who do have a hangover, Lord Jesus, please forgive us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Take control of our lives. Be the Lord of our lives. Forgive us of these sins that we've committed. We now surrender our lives in a fresh way to your lordship over our lives. Everybody said together amen.