

The Meaning of Everything

Ecclesiastes Week 2: The Myth of More

Good morning Connection Family! It is wonderful to be back in the great state of Delaware after an amazing time at our Annual GMC conference in Pennsylvania this past week. It was so refreshing and great to be surrounded by like minded and like hearted people as we all seek God and are asking Him to lead us in our local churches! If you want to hear more, find someone who was there this past week, CCC was well represented!

Today, we are continuing our series The Meaning of Everything as we dive into the book of Ecclesiastes. I know this book can sometimes be challenging to read and understand, but we are going to do our best in this month of June to drill down into it and see what God wants to reveal to us.

Last week, David gave a great introduction to the series as he talked about finding meaning in the monotony and how everything really is meaningless without Jesus. I loved how he said it last week- that **the bad news, the futility of life outside of God actually lays the groundwork for the Good News of Jesus. Life without Jesus is meaningless. But life with Jesus is so much more-it's everything.**

And that's exactly what we're going to be talking about today as we talk about the Myth of More. Let's pray.

We are getting ready in just a few weeks to celebrate the 4th of July, and it will be the 250th birthday of our nation-the United States of America. I looked up some great nicknames or terms people have for our country this week, many I had heard of, and some we don't tend to use a lot today, but this list included nicknames like- The Land of the Free, The U.S.A., the Land of Opportunity, The Home of the Brave, Liberty's Cradle or the Melting Pot.

But what about this one-The Land of Excess. Have you heard us called this before?

It's easy to see why America would be labeled with this name-Land of Excess, because we can see this excess everywhere.

For example, in our food portions. Did you know that fast food portions in the U.S. are generally anywhere from 20-100% larger than in other countries? Take for instance, a large fountain beverage from your favorite fast food chain. In the UK, a large cup holds 17 fluid oz., yet in America, our large soda is 32 fluid oz. Overall, our food items generally contain more calories and sugar too.

Or how about when we look at the sizes of our vehicles? Overall, personal vehicles in America are significantly larger, with a cultural love for oversized trucks and massive SUVs. Cars here are on average are 8-10 inches wider, 1.5-2.5 feet longer, and weigh about 20% heavier than their European equivalents. Experts say this is due to our wider roads, cheaper fuel, and consumer preferences.

If we want to feel really embarrassed, let's look at what we buy. What does America look like when it comes to our hyper-consumerism and waste? Did you know that American stores are typically TWICE the size of their European counterparts? Along with that, the average US grocery store stocks around 40,000 unique items, while stores in Europe, contain less than 18,000 items in stock.

Furthermore, Wal-Mart, we can see that its annual global revenue is \$713 billion. For comparison, it is larger than the revenue of other entire countries such as Argentina, Sweden, and Saudi Arabia, meaning that if Wal-Mart was its own country, it would have the 25th largest economy in the world.

This may contribute to the 292 million TONS of waste American's generate EACH YEAR, which, you guessed it, makes us the largest producer of trash, contributing over 12% of the planet's total waste, despite the fact that we only have 4% of the population.

America- the Land of Excess.

See, **somewhere along the way, we bought into this idea, this lie that MORE=BETTER.**

And while you could argue that for somethings, more could be good, we know that more is not better when it comes to everything in life. Even too much of a good thing, or even a great thing, can sometimes just be too much or even a detriment to our lives.

And really, if we just paid more attention to the book of Ecclesiastes, we would know this already!

Ecclesiastes 5:11 says-

As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?

There has been some research done on what is known as the “happiness plateau” which is all about what really makes people happy when it comes to money. Although it does depend on your baseline level of happiness, this concept basically says that emotional well-being stops increasing once your income reaches a certain level and that extra money really has little impact and can even be a deficit to your daily mood.

When we dig into Ecclesiastes, we see this. We see that the striving for worldly things really gives us nothing and leaves us feeling empty.

We talked last week about the word “meaningless” or “hevel”, like a vapor, which appears over 40 times in this book. And when you just sit down and start to flip through the book of Ecclesiastes, we can really see just how many things this author says are meaningless.

To name a few, like Ecclesiastes 2:11 says-

“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.”

Or a few verses later- 2:14-15-

“The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I said to myself, “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said to myself, “This too is meaningless.”

Ecclesiastes 5:7-

“Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, fear God.”

And later verse 10-

“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.”

So, putting all of those together, we get:

Our work and achievements- meaningless.

Our wisdom- meaningless.

Our wants and desires- meaningless.

Our money and possessions- meaningless.

Wow. Anyone need to pause and take a deep breath?

So the many things that we find we want more of- more time, money, energy, space, achievements, are all meaningless. So, if all of that is meaningless, what are we striving for? What are we doing with our lives? And WHY?

I think if we are honest, for too long, we've gotten stuck in the rat race and the lie that not only do we need all of these things, we need MORE of these things. Our society pushes and influences us that we need that one thing. And then one becomes 2 and then 2 becomes 3 and then 3 still isn't enough.

I don't just need enough money for my family to survive, I need enough to buy whatever I want and go on elaborate vacations each year, and splurge on whatever I think I deserve.

I don't just need a job that provides, I need to be the best, the smartest, I need to outperform everyone. I need the notoriety and the popularity. I need to be needed and if it can't succeed without me then I'm doing something right.

I don't just need clothing or shoes on my body, I need the best, and the most expensive. I need multiple colors, prints, options. I need people to see what I wear and think good

things about me because I am a good person and my clothing and appearance should reflect that.

I WANT MORE. I NEED MORE. I DESERVE MORE. I CAN SO I WILL DO, GET, BE, STRIVE FOR MORE.

This is the Myth of More.

I think that Ecclesiastes 4:4 wraps all of this up nicely when the writer puts it this way:

“And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

I am not here to point fingers or judge you for what you are wearing or what you are doing in your life, that’s between you and God. It’s not what’s on the outside that matters. What I care about is what’s on the inside. What I care about it is the WHY.

Why are we doing this to ourselves? Why are we striving so hard for these things that don’t actually matter? Why are we “chasing after the wind” when it’s all really just meaningless?

Why do we think that more is the answer when Jesus said that He is ENOUGH?

In the book of John, chapter 4, we read the remarkable story of Jesus and His encounter with a Samaritan Woman. We don’t have time to read the whole story, so I’ll paraphrase and read part of it.

Basically, Jesus is traveling through Samaria and He stops about midday at a well for a drink. He is alone when a Samaritan woman approaches and He asks her to give Him a drink. This was a big no-no back in those days because as a man and a Jew, He should not have been there with her, let alone speak to her. She is of course taken aback and is like, “What? How can you ask ME for a drink?” Jesus says that if she knew who He was, she would be asking Him for a drink of living water. She is confused and questions Him in this and this is His reply,

We’ll pick it up in verse 13, this is John 4:13-15-

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

In this story, Jesus is offering the woman a chance to have living water, to quench her thirst forever and to have eternal life.

What we don't often remember or recognize is that we all have that same thirst within ourselves. And we don't realize that unless we turn to Jesus for that drink of living water, we will always be thirsty again.

We can strive for more of anything that this world has to offer. And we may be content for some time, but eventually, we are going to be left wanting for more. We are going to continue to be thirsty, until we receive that living water.

We all have that God-shaped hole in our hearts that can only be filled by our creator, the one who made us and the one whom we were made for.

Colossians 2:10 reminds us that-

"...in Christ you have been brought to fullness."

So the question we must ask ourselves is: do we want MORE of what the world has for us or MORE of what God has for us?

If you search your heart and truly want MORE of God and MORE of what He has for you, the next question is, are you ready? Are you ready for what God is going to do in you? Through you? Because the MORE that He has for you is likely going to blow you away.

Part of my story, is saying yes to THAT kind of more. It's easy from where I stand now to look back and see what God was doing and where He was leading because, you know, hindsight. But when I felt God stirring in my heart just a year and a half ago, I had no idea where I would go and what I would be doing.

I had felt God call me to more in the past, and if I'm honest with you, my first initial response was, "WHAT? I AM doing the more here God!" But I have found that each time I say yes to His more, each time I just let go and lean into it, He does more than I could ever comprehend or imagine. I never could have imagined that I would be here, in a different town, in a different state, pursuing my call on my way to ordination as a pastor in the Global Methodist Church. But here I am, and here you are being asked that same question-are you ready for the MORE God has for you?

God works in big ways and small ways all the time. Sometimes He closes doors but opens windows. Sometimes He leads in the exact opposite direction of how we expected Him to lead. But He knows what He's doing, we just have to yield to Him.

If you haven't heard me say it yet, my favorite bible verse of all time came to me during the beginning of my college years when I had no idea what I was doing, but I found peace in the fact that He did.

Jeremiah 29:11 says,

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

I love this verse because I don't need to know the plans. I don't have to know where to go or what to do. He is the one driving the car, and I am the one that get's to just jump in and enjoy the ride.

The things that you and I hold on to, the things that we think are so important to have and to strive for are really just meaningless. Especially when we compare it to what God wants to do in our lives. If life without Jesus is meaningless, than I want all of the Jesus I can get. Let everything else fade away but give me more Jesus!

What we have to lose is nothing, but what we have to gain is everything.