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The Story: The King Who Had It All 1 Kings; Ecclesiastes

Last time I played a music clip... it was recently, so I thought I'd throw a golden oldie in there. That was the Rolling Stones with *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. And I think Mick Jagger and the boys hit at the heart of one our deepest problems in life: we just aren't satisfied. No matter how hard we try, no matter how many things we buy, how many things we achieve, we just seem to want more.

This morning we jump back into *The Story* after a 6-week hiatus. For those of you who haven't been with us—and for those of you who, like me, have forgotten—let me recap some things about *The Story*. *The Story* is an abridged, chronological Bible. This is the real words of Scripture from the New International Version, arranged in chronological order and then abridged so that in 31 novel-length chapters we can read and understand the entire story of the Bible.

This year we are preaching through it from September-June with a short break for Christmas and Easter (or Advent and Lent for the Church calendar buffs). In the fall, we got through the first 12 chapters, where we saw God create the world, humanity turn away from God, and God launch his rescue plan to bring humanity back into relationship with himself. His plan was to use a family—Abraham's family—who later became the nation of Israel, to be his representatives in the world, to show the world that the Lord is the one true God and to invite the world into relationship with him. God brought Israel out of slavery, gave them a land and set them up with a king to rule over them.

We left the people with King David ruling over them, and we pick up the story with his son Solomon who takes his place on the throne. And this week we will discover just quite how incredible Solomon's kingship was. David might have inaugurated what many see as the golden age of the people of Israel, but it was Solomon who cemented it. The chapter title this week is: *The King Who Had It All*. We will see that he did indeed have just that, but yet—just like for Mick Jagger 3000 years later—it wasn't enough.

Solomon had it all. Early in his life, God appeared to him and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." (1 Kings 3:5 NIV) I don't know about you, but if God said I could have whatever I wanted, I'm not sure I would have responded as Solomon did. He asked for "a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong." (1 Kings 3:9 NIV) And God gave him that.

Solomon was given wisdom like no one else—so much wisdom that he was known all over the world for it. He spoke 3,000 proverbs, many of which we find in the book of Proverbs in the Bible, and he wrote over 1,000 songs, some of which we find in the Psalms and in the book entitled the Song of Solomon.

And because of his father's military success as king, Solomon could focus on building his nation. He made Israel a central part of Middle East trade. And in this time of peace he set about doing something his father had not been allowed to do—construct the Temple. [Drawing of Temple] This was the ultimate way to serve God—building a house for Him. And yet he got more beyond that. He was given by God riches and honor that surpassed anyone in Israel before or after Him. In his time silver became as common as stone, so much so that nothing in his palace was made of it, everything was gold! "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth." (1 Kings 10:23 NIV) Solomon had it all and he didn't let anything get in his way. In a time when polygamy was considered normal—although it wasn't sanctioned by God—Solomon took for himself 700 wives and 300 concubines. Sadly, women were Solomon's eventual downfall.

Solomon wrote about his life in a book called Ecclesiastes. Here's how he describes it:

"Oh, I did great things: built houses, planted vineyards, designed gardens and parks and planted a variety of fruit trees in them, made pools of water to irrigate the groves of trees. I bought slaves, male and female, who had children, giving me even more slaves; then I acquired large herds and flocks, larger than any before me in Jerusalem. I piled up silver and gold, loot from kings and kingdoms. I gathered a chorus of singers to entertain me with song, and—most exquisite of all pleasures—voluptuous maidens for my bed. Oh, how I prospered! I left all my predecessors in Jerusalem far behind, left them behind in the dust. What's more, I kept a clear head through it all. Everything I wanted I took—I never said no to myself. I gave in to every impulse, held back nothing. I sucked the marrow of pleasure out of every task—my reward to myself for a hard day's work!" (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10, The Message)

And it would be easy to sit here today and think: that's him, but I don't live a life like that. However, a few weeks back, I was reading a book when I read a line that made me stop in my tracks. It said something like: "If you live in the west today, you are richer than almost all of the kings and queens throughout history." The reality is that the wealth that Solomon had is little different from the wealth we have here in beautiful Gig Harbor today. The possessions he had, the life he lived was not that different to you and me.

And remember that Solomon didn't have cable TV and a cell phone and the internet "700 wives and 300 concubines" but we do have internet pornography and sadly, almost 2 out of 3 Christian men view pornography once/month or more. The reality is, if you live in Gig Harbor, you are pretty much in the same wealth category as

Solomon. So when you read about Solomon's wealth, think: that's me, I have that wealth.

Yet, Solomon wanted more. He kept chasing after more and more and more because deep down he believed it would satisfy. That's how he ended up with 1,000 women. That's how he ended up with a tax system that supplied him with everything he could possibly want. Because he truly believed that more would make him happier... more success, more money, more women... more, more, more.

We believe the same thing too, and this belief drives us to live the way we live. We work longer and longer hours trying to be more successful or to earn more money because we believe it will satisfy us. We buy and build bigger and bigger homes with more and more rooms because we think it will make us and our families happier. We seek to give our kids and grandkids the best gifts for Christmas because we believe that their happiness depends upon them having the best toy. We chase after more and more and more because we believe it will satisfy us. And some of you may say, "Ellis, that may be true for other people, but I know more doesn't satisfy." And I believe that you believe that, but does it really affect your life?

Here's what makes me believe that we Christians believe that more makes us happier: short-term mission trips. I remember my first short term mission trip. I went to Kenya in Africa. And what struck me the most? The people I met were happy; I couldn't understand it. They were living lives of such poverty, they were ridden with disease and sickness, and they lived in mud huts. They didn't have proper sanitation, they ate the same food every day, and yet I saw that they were happy. And I'm not the only one who has come back from a mission trip saying the same thing. Almost every person I've spoken to has come back from their first mission trip and said something like, "They didn't have lots of stuff but they just seemed so happy." You see, deep down, we all believe that if we have more it will make us satisfied.

But Solomon already tried this. And in the words of Mick Jagger, "he couldn't get no satisfaction." Right after those words, I read from Ecclesiastes; Solomon writes this: "Then I took a good look at everything I'd done, looked at all the sweat and hard work. But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any of it. Nothing" (Ecclesiastes 2:11 The Message)

Solomon chased after more and more and more, and yet, at the end of it, what he found was that it was worthless, meaningless, empty. It was nothing. Nothing but smoke. And today, we believe the same lie that Solomon believed. We believe if I just had more, I would be satisfied. If I had more success, more money, more square footage, more sexual experiences, more pleasures, I would be satisfied. But it doesn't work. In fact, some sociologists have given this condition a label. They call it affluenza. It's defined as 'a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more.

And at some level, in some way, we all struggle with this. And nothing brings that to the surface like Christmas. How many walked out of Christmas feeling satisfied? But how many experienced—or are experiencing—overload, debt, or anxiety as a result of Christmas?

Honestly, I think my biggest struggle with this comes in my pursuit of more success. I am a A-grade over-achiever. That is where I believe I find my satisfaction. And when I am not achieving, I feel overloaded, debt-ridden, and anxious. Just last month, I began to become very anxious. I suffered a migraine for the first time and felt completely overwhelmed. When I finally sat down to try and get my head wrapped around what it was, I realized that I didn't feel like I was achieving enough. I didn't feel like I was achieving what I wanted to achieve here at the church. I didn't feel like I was achieving what I wanted to achieve in my studies. And I didn't feel like I was achieving what I wanted to achieve at home. And in my pursuit of more and more achievements I was left anxious, overwhelmed and under pressure.

So what's to be done? How do we rid ourselves of this disease? Thankfully, Solomon didn't end Ecclesiastes where I finished reading. In the final two chapters, Solomon reaches a point where he resolves his argument and provides a solution to the problem. And thankfully, the translators of the English Standard Version decided to translate three imperative verbs in three consecutive verses with three English words beginning with the same letter. So let me give you Solomon's solution to the disease of affluenza... rejoice, remove and remember. 'Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.' (Ecclesiastes 11:9, ESV)

Rejoice. All throughout Ecclesiastes there is a repeated theme: enjoy life. Solomon says it again and again... over 8 times in 12 chapters. Life is a gift to each one of us. God did not have to create this world. He didn't have to create you. But He did. You have been given life and that, in and of itself, is a gift to rejoice in.

Last month, when I was feeling totally overwhelmed, Pastor Larry led Pastor Mark, Pastor Bill and me through a little exercise based on a devotional Pastor Megan was reading. He asked us to write down 10 ways God had provided for us in the last week. As I sat there and was forced to list these things out, my heart was turned from anxiety to thankfulness. I began to rejoice in life, rejoice in the goodness of those around me, and the greatness of our God. Rejoice. Second, Solomon writes, "Remove vexation from your heart, and put away evil from your body." (Ecclesiastes 11:10 ESV)

Remove. If you want to be freed from this pursuit of more, Solomon says to remove anxiety and evil from your life. If something is causing you anxiety, don't focus on it; don't allow it to occupy your heart and mind. And if you are in sin, kill that sin. Get rid of it before it kills you. Remove anxiety. Remove sin.

Last month I went to Pastor Mark and asked him for some advice on dealing with anxiety. I mean he always says it's his spiritual gift. And he directed me to something the great British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones had written. Lloyd-Jones talked about taking ourselves in hand. He writes, "We must talk to ourselves instead of allowing 'ourselves' to talk to us!" So often we are anxious because we are listening to ourselves rather than talking to ourselves. We are listening to our fears and worries and anxieties. Instead we need to talk to ourselves. Declare what is true. Recite scripture to ourselves. We need to be active in removing anxiety from our lives. Remove. And lastly, Solomon writes, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth." (Ecclesiastes 12:1 ESV)

Remember. In the midst of our desire for more, we must remember, that is, call to mind, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Savior... Jesus. In our desire for more we have lost sight of the one who has already fulfilled all our desires, the one who alone satisfies, the one who is our all in all: Jesus.

Last month, as I was feeling overwhelmed I recognized that since we had finished reading *The Story*, I had lost the habit of daily Scripture reading. Without the discipline of a reading program, I had neglected to pick up my Bible and read. I was starting my day with other thoughts, other things on my mind. I was not beginning by remembering Jesus. So I started got out my Bible app on my phone, picked a new reading plan, told my wife I was going to do it and then started reading each day. Each morning as I read, I am calling to mind who God is and what he has done. Remember.

Solomon says the solution to our wretched pursuit of more is to: Rejoice. Remove. Remember. Rejoice in the gift of life. Remove sin and anxiety. Remember Jesus. My encouragement to you this morning is to do all three in this new year. And one way to start is by picking up *The Story* this week and reading chapter 13.

Today we are going to do all three together as we renew our baptismal vows. We are going to remember our baptism. Remember the God who called us before we even knew him. We are going to remember that baptism is a sign of washing, cleansing, of removing our sin. The visual image of descending into the waters is of dying to our old life, dying to our anxieties, to our fears to our sins. And then we are going to rejoice in the gift of life that Jesus has given each one of us: life eternal, life abundant, life everlasting.

Rejoice. Remove. Remember.