

Chasing the Wind

By Pastor Greg
December 21, 2008

Ecclesiastes 2:9-11

Bunkertown COB

At the age of 44, Greg James had made 10 million dollars over the past decade. He owned a ski chalet in the state of Washington, a beautiful four-bedroom home, a 46-foot yacht, a Ferrari, a Mercedes, and three other automobiles. He had built a successful business for himself, and just started buying “stuff” for his wife and three young children. But one weekend, while relaxing in the ski chalet, James realized that something was missing. And so, in order to find peace with what was nagging at his soul, he decided to devote time to environmental causes and make some changes in his lifestyle. He sold two cars and the yacht, and invested in 3,000 acres of land in Washington for a nature preserve. At the office, he began rewarding employees for improving the fuel efficiency of their own cars and for carpooling. And last year his company contributed close to \$400,000 to environmental nonprofits. James also reports that he spends more time with his children than before.

What this man has realized is that the next thrill, the next gadget had to be bigger and greater than the previous one because he eventually became desensitized to what had given him a thrill just yesterday.

Many people fall into this trap; this desire to stimulate our souls. It begins when we are a child. Parents, you know that the gift your child just couldn't live without soon is piled in the box with what they just had to have last Christmas. And we never outgrow this. I saw an add last week for a diamond pendant. According to Tiffany's, this gift will really let her know how much you care; only \$363,000. Someone will buy this gift, take it home, and find that eventually it no longer gives them satisfaction. Over a quarter of a million dollars spent on something that in the end is vanities of vanities.

Listen to what King Solomon says about joy. ⁹I was the most famous person who had ever lived in Jerusalem, and I was very wise. ¹⁰I got whatever I wanted and did whatever made me happy. But most of all, I enjoyed my work. ¹¹Then I thought about everything I had done, including the hard work, and it was simply chasing the

wind. **There was no profit under the sun.**¹ (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11). Solomon points out that happiness cannot be found in our possessions, and neither in the labors of our hands. And even giving and doing for the good of others is still like chasing the wind. “Vanity of vanities” he says. I know we are tempted to think that Greg James finally got his priorities in order and is doing the right kind of things; that joy can be found in doing things that make a difference and by giving of oneself to a worthy cause. But still this is a joy and happiness which are the result of activities designed to make him feel good. I know he is doing things that are really important, but are they not designed to make him feel better about himself in the end?

Our lives are swamped with activities designed to fill an emptiness within ourselves. We buy things as rewards, trying to convince ourselves that we are a valuable person. We do things to stimulate and add excitement to our otherwise dreary and mundane lives. Even some people give of their time and wealth, not for the good of others, but to appease that nagging feeling, that emptiness they feel within their heart. The bottom line is that the pursuit of happiness and joy is really a pursuit to find meaning and purpose in life. And although many people will look outward to find that joy, the Bible tells us that there is a different way.

(Cantata)

The kind of joy the angels announced to the shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem had nothing to do with the promise that Jesus will provide the things that make US feel good. It had nothing to do with Jesus giving us direction to pursue the things that give US meaning, nor directing us to serve and give to others just so WE feel better about our lives. The whole purpose behind the birth of Jesus was so that we no longer need to look outward for the things that give us joy. God sent Jesus so that we can become His children. That’s the story the Bible is trying to tell. We must stop looking for joy in things and activities and instead turn to God through the Son. Looking for joy anywhere else is just chasing after the wind.

¹*The Contemporary English Version : With Apocrypha*. 1997, c1995 (electronic ed.) (Ec 2:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.