

Cloudy Days, Week 3: Meaningless Work, Power, and Wealth

Ecclesiastes: 2:18-26, 4:13-16, 5:8-20

Introduction:

- Did you earn any awards, trophies, or medals when you were younger? If so , where did you display them? Do you still have them on display today? Why or why not?
- Growing up, many of us were involved in some form of competition, whether it was individual or team sports, spelling bees, debate, or any number of activities. Many of us walked away with trophies, ribbons, medals, or some other kind of award.
- But over time, those awards lost their shine (luster) and/or were replaced. As rewarding as it was to earn the awards, it didn't take long for us to realize that they didn't satisfy us. In today's message, we'll see that **(Big Idea) Whether it's our profession, power, or wealth, nothing satisfies us apart from God.**

Review the series

- We learned last week that the Teacher is finding life under the sun as meaningless. We all end up in the same place without God.

This week we'll see that our **Big Idea** today is: True contentment isn't found in our work, power, or wealth. Finding meaning in God's unfailing presence and provision.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-26 The Meaninglessness of Work

The Teacher says all his days are filled with grief, and his work (job) makes him sad. Even at night, his mind does not rest. Work provides us with the resources we need to take care of our families and the opportunity to serve others with our God-given gifts. Work is not evil. Making our future career, school, or accomplishments our ultimate source of meaning will only lead us to stress and emptiness. (idol) It can be hard to let go of our work, not knowing what will happen to it when we are gone.

God gives those who live to please Him satisfaction in their work because it is accompanied by wisdom, knowledge, and joy. When work has an eternal purpose, it gives lasting satisfaction. **Only what is done for and through God provides meaning. There is no meaning in our work apart from God.**

This is why we must view our work and schoolwork through the lens of the Gospel. When we view our work through the lens of the Gospel, we see that if we are in Christ,

our work has eternal value. Jesus brings eternal value to our work as believers because our work glorifies the Lord and contributes to God's Kingdom. Even if what we do is passed on to another person after we die, what we have done for the Lord will continue to live on. Therefore, we can joyfully take up our work, knowing that our work is for God's Glory and matters to God's Kingdom.

Whatever our work is, we can approach it from the Teacher's perspective. Our projects may or may not amount to anything. Our work may or may not be remembered. But if ours is good work, done well, for the right reasons, **we give glory to the One who gave us that work to do.**

Illustration: Building our sense of self-worth on our work is like trying to grasp the steam from that cup of coffee – it's temporary at best. But enjoying our work is like drinking that cup of coffee slowly, savoring the aroma, the flavor, the moment – honoring the giver by enjoying the gift – even though we know it will be gone soon.

Application/Discussion: What value and joy is there to be found in our work if our efforts are temporary? What helps you to live well in the simultaneous joy and pain of your work?

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 The Meaninglessness of Power

The Teacher observes that it is better to be poor, young, and wise than to be old, foolish and rich, because the poor young man can grow to become a wealthy king. Yet even a wealthy popular king at some point will have followers that do not respect, applaud, or remember him. Regardless of what we acquire or *our popularity*, they are short-lived. Popularity fades and eventually the poor young man becomes an old rich man.

As King Solomon in the Bible gained more power, he stopped listening to others. Solomon relied on making his own decisions. Our lives are deprived of meaning when we try to make it without community or friendships. Even a king is considered a fool for neglecting community. No matter our age or circumstances, community is essential to pursuing God.

Illustration: *Think about the presidency in the United States. A president gets to be in power for a term of 4-8 years. The president works endless hours during their limited time in office to implement policies they're passionate about that would bring reform to the country. When the president's term ends, a new administration comes in and could change things around if the new administration thinks differently than the previous*

president. This would completely erase the efforts of the previous administration. This should point us back to our ultimate hope in Jesus Christ. The only progress that lasts is how we progress in our knowledge of Him. All other progress is really just an illusion that can break as quickly as it was built.

Application: We should glorify God with the opportunities He has given us. One of the loneliest places is in leadership, you climb to the top and you realize there is no one else there with you. Leadership is a commitment to being misunderstood that you open yourself up to a lot of criticism.

Discussion: Have you been given more responsibilities in your job and how did you handle it? How do you feel about “just handing things over” to the next person when you’re gone?

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 The Meaninglessness of Wealth

Many believe they will be satisfied once they have accumulated enough wealth, only to find they are still unfulfilled. Having wealth carries no guarantees since riches can slip away at any time. All humanity enters this world empty-handed, and every person will leave in the same way. Solomon recognized God as the one true source of happiness and satisfaction. He realized that contentment in life is a gift from God, enabling a person to enjoy his work and possessions.

We live in a society that worships wealth. People exhaust themselves to have it all, only to want more. Living for money can cause frustration, illness, and even death. No matter how secure someone believes his wealth to be, financial ruin can happen to anyone at any time. God never intended for us to depend on something so unreliable.

Solomon reiterates that the proper way to enjoy wealth is as a gift from God and as a means to glorify Him. Those who enjoy and demonstrate gratitude for whatever blessing God grants them will spend their days content and full of joy. We should focus efforts, not on pursuing riches, but on pursuing holiness in conduct, attitude, and thought. It is impossible to be content when our hearts are set on gaining more. We will not remain godly for long if we are not content with what God has already given us. Both greed and contentment are states of the heart. When we choose to be content with the riches of Christ rather than blindly pursue material riches, our lives will be more in line with God’s desire for us.

As the Teacher says, the pursuit of wealth is meaningless. Instead, we must anchor our joy, satisfaction, and “gladness of heart” in the one who provides us with wealth: God himself. Pursuing satisfaction in Him brings life and enjoying His gifts is a great reward and a great joy.

Interpretation Questions:

1. What stood out to you in these passages?
2. What parts of this passage can you most relate to, and why?
3. What do peoples’ lives reveal about what they think will make them happy?
4. How have these passages of Scripture and discussion most comforted and/or convicted you personally?

Discussion Questions:

1. Take some time to reflect on the tasks you get to do in your job. Why do you think the Lord wants these tasks to be a part of your life? How can you honor the Lord even in these small, seemingly trivial tasks?
2. Have you been given more responsibilities in your job and how did you handle it? How do you feel about “just handing things over” to the next person when you’re gone?
3. What has God given you that you can choose to enjoy right now instead of seeking after something more?
4. Are you accumulating possessions for greedy purposes, or are you allowing God to lead you in your spending money?
5. What are some practical ways you can apply the teachings of these passages to your daily life?