

Whose Will It Be after I'm Gone? #1

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23; Luke 14:26

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When we are so attached to someone or something in this life, that we worry and fret over what will become of that someone or something after we die, we will likely not find true joy in that someone or that something while we yet live. For how can you presently enjoy what you fear losing? Or how can you enjoy what you fear leaving when you die?

For example, if a man works hard all of his life and builds a sizable estate, but he lies awake at night worrying about what will happen to his estate once he dies, his worry and fear will rob him of the joy he might have in his estate while he yet lives. Or if a woman has become a mother and loves her children dearly, but she worries day and night what will become of her children when she dies, her worry and fear will likewise rob her of the joy she might have in her children while she yet lives.

The problem is not that it is wicked to enjoy an estate in this world or to enjoy the children we dearly love. However, we can be assured that joy in anything in this life will continually elude our grasp if we worry, fret, and fear losing it when we die. This was a question that plagued King Solomon as he considered his great wealth, large family, and vast possessions. Whose will they be when I die?

From our text in Ecclesiastes 2:18-23, we will consider three areas related to Solomon's death, which he considers to be vanity: (1) It Is Vain to Leave All That for Which I Have Worked to a Fool Who Will Waste It (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19); (2) It Is Vain to Leave All That for Which I Have Worked to One Who Has Not Earned It (Ecclesiastes 2:20-21); (3) It Is Vain to Worry about All That for Which I Have Worked and Will Surely Leave behind (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). This Lord's Day we will only have time to cover the first main point.

**I. It Is Vain to Leave All That for Which I Have Worked to a Fool Who Will Waste It (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19).**

A. In the previous sermon from Ecclesiastes 2:12-17, you will recall that Solomon introduces an event that comes upon the wise man, just as it comes upon the foolish man: DEATH. Solomon concludes that this certain event of death, which comes upon both the wise and the foolish alike, makes all of the time and resources he invested in knowledge and wisdom to be vanity and emptiness. In fact, Solomon in his backslidden state declares that he grew to "hate" the life he was living, because there was no advantage to the wise man over the foolish man, as it relates to their common end on this earth: DEATH. Frustration seemed to envelope Solomon when he saw that all of his worldly knowledge and wisdom did not help him grasp that everlasting joy any better than the foolish man, who gave himself up to the mere pleasures of life. Solomon in great turmoil of soul cries out, "all is vanity and vexation of soul" (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

B. Now as if that realization about death was not enough, Solomon moves to another sobering thought about death in Ecclesiastes 2:18-19. Solomon in effect says, "It's bad enough that I have no advantage over the fool in enjoying life. For death will snatch away from me (just as from the fool) whatever I have worked so hard to obtain. But add to that this depressing thought: After all I have worked so hard to accomplish in my life, I may leave it all to one who will be a fool and waste it all." The thought of this possibility drives Solomon to worry about what will become of all that he has accomplished. And that worry and fear rob him of any enduring satisfaction in the work of his hands. After all, how can you enjoy what you

have, if you fear losing it all, or if you fear it will fall into the hands of a fool who will destroy it all? Dear ones, when that happens, our work becomes a curse rather than a blessing to us. For every thought we might have about our work or our accomplishments only reminds us of what we will sooner or later leave behind to one who may waste it or squander it. Such is the end of all those who look and seek for a lasting joy and contentment in the creature rather than in the Creator, or in the gift rather than in the Giver of all good gifts. Their fears rob them of true enjoyment in those earthly possessions.

1. Note carefully how this truth hit Solomon, one of the richest men that ever lived and the wisest man who ever lived (except for Jesus Christ), "Yea, I HATED all my labor which I had taken under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:18). Here is strong language, but honest language nevertheless. Solomon grew to despise all his work and all that he had accomplished (as magnificent and beautiful as it was). Why? Read Ecclesiastes 2:18b-19. Solomon hated his work, and he SINFULLY hated it (I would submit), because he feared what would become of it after he died. But I would ask you a question, which perhaps you never really considered. Is there a biblical sense in which it is right to hate our work? Actually, there is a proper and biblical sense in which we should HATE our work, as well as a biblical sense in which we should LOVE our work.

a. First, how should we HATE our work in a way that pleases God? We should HATE our work whenever it becomes the first love of our life, or when we make unethical decisions at work in order to keep our job or in order to move up the ladder. In this sense, Jesus says we are even to hate many other important things in this life: Read Luke 14:26. When it comes to being a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, we should so cherish Christ and His promises, Christ and His righteousness, Christ and His love, Christ and His commandments, that anything else in life that may compete in our heart for that supreme love and obedience which Christ alone deserves, we turn away from it as if we hated it. Not that we actually hate mother or father, husband or wife, children, brother or sister, our work or our own life, but that we have such a love for Christ, that we desire Him and His will more than we desire anything else in this life (Matthew 10:37-38). Dear ones, we must be so jealous of that supreme love we have for Christ above everything else in life, that any competing lover is hated in vying for our supreme affection. Let me illustrate it this way.

(1) Those of you who are married, let me ask you: Should you enjoy the flirting of men and women in this world that would seek to turn you from that special love you should have for your wife or husband? Or should you not rather be righteously angry that someone even attempted to turn your eyes or your affections from your husband and wife?

(2) And if we should have that unique love for our husband or wife, how much more so for Christ, our first and supreme love. What is there in your life presently that you desire and would sacrifice even obedience to Christ in order to have and to hold? Is it a friend? Is it a family member? Is it a job? Is it financial prosperity? Is it a home in that special location? Is it your health? Is it popularity? Is it your freedom? Whatever it is that you would forsake your Savior and His commandments in order to enjoy, it has become a harlot to you that you are cherishing in your heart and life (according to James 4:4). So in this sense, Christ commands us to hate our work.

b. However, I do not want to leave you with only a right and biblical sense in which you are to hate your work, but I want to leave you also with a proper and biblical sense in which you are to LOVE and to enjoy your work and the fruit of all your labors in this life (Ecclesiastes 2:24). Dear ones, God commanded Adam to work and to till the Garden of Eden, even before the fall of man into sin, not as a punishment to bring misery, but as a means of enjoying God and enjoying all that with which God had blessed him. Hard work is good for us, and God does want us to love and to enjoy our work; for God gives us richly all things in this life to enjoy (including our jobs) according to 1 Timothy 6:17.

(1) Now what if you are not presently doing the kind of work that you would like to do? You can still find joy and contentment in serving the Lord in whatever you are presently doing. You don't have to be miserable. If you are miserable in your present work, it is because you have chosen to be miserable (and likely to make others around you miserable as well). For you can (by God's grace)

look to Christ and find your joy and contentment in Him, who has you right where He wants you in order to grow you and in order to use you for His glory.

(2) We always seem to think that we would be happier if we were only doing what we really wanted to do in life. Such an attitude only reveals our ignorance and immaturity in not recognizing the sin of discontentment that is active in each of our own hearts. For the grass is always greener anywhere except for where we presently are. Dear ones, do not deceive yourself into thinking that true joy is found in a particular job. It isn't. True contentment and joy is found in a particular Person (Jesus Christ), who is able to give us a song in our hearts whatever job we are doing.

(3) Paul and Silas had been beaten for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their backs were bleeding and raw from the beating they had just received. They were isolated in a dark, damp, prison. Their feet were in stocks, so that they could not find a comfortable position for their body. But there was a song of praise to Christ in their hearts, which then flowed out to their tongues (as we see in Acts 16:23-25). And here we are enjoying all of the necessities and many of the comforts of life by means of the job that we have, and we have no song in our hearts, but only bitterness, which rises like venom from our hearts to our tongues. Even if we cannot enjoy the specific kind of work that we are doing or the people with whom we work, we can still learn to enjoy Christ in our work. We can still learn to be thankful to Christ for even the crumbs that fall from the table or that same manna that falls from heaven day by day for forty long years. We can choose to complain about the crumbs and the manna, or we can choose to see Christ in the crumbs and in the manna.

c. Now when Solomon says that he had come to hate all his work, clearly it was not in a biblical sense that he hated it. He did not hate his work as Jesus said we should hate anything that competes for that place that Christ alone should hold in our lives as our first love. It was rather in a sinful and unbiblical sense that he had come to hate all his work. Why did Solomon confess that he hated all his work? He says it was because he might leave all that for which he had worked so hard to fools. Solomon had set up in his mind sinful expectations concerning his work, namely that his work would bring him a lasting joy in and of itself. And when it did not do so, he hated it.

(1) This is precisely what happens in so many marriages today. A husband has the false expectation that his wife can make him truly happy, and a wife has the unrealistic expectation that her husband can meet all of her needs. And because of these sinful and unrealistic expectations, they soon become utterly frustrated with one another. And then they begin to despise one another and pick one another apart. Hopelessness with regard to the marriage then settles over their minds, and a bitter divorce finally ensues. How did such a beautiful beginning end in such a horrible and unbiblical divorce? If you are expecting your husband or wife to meet all your needs or to make you happy, you are placing more on his/her shoulders than any one mere human being can possibly bear. For only the one true living God has the power to make us truly happy. Only He who is perfectly at peace in heaven, who is completely filled with joy, who needs no one outside of Himself to make Him happy, who is dependent upon no one or anything for his life, breath, or existence, only He (the living God) can make us truly happy.

(2) The example of Solomon shouts at us, that whenever we look to someone or something in this life to bring that fulfillment and satisfaction to our lives which only Christ can bring, we will likely end up despising and resenting it, just as Solomon did his work. Remember that Solomon in his backslidden condition had said earlier in Ecclesiastes 2:10: "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; FOR MY HEART REJOICED IN ALL MY LABOR; and this was my portion of all my labor." Solomon did find a measure of joy at the outset in his work and in his many accomplishments. But because he sinfully expected he would find a lasting joy and satisfaction in the creature, he deceived himself with a lie and was bitterly disappointed when his new god did not deliver an enduring contentment as he believed it would.

(3) And the way to a deep enduring joy that can face the various

storms in life is the way of trust in Christ and loving obedience to Christ. We cannot be truly happy, if we are not united by faith to Him who is the source of real joy. And we cannot be truly happy, if we are not desiring and endeavoring to see the holiness of Christ more and more manifested in our lives (by His grace). The world has lied to us in saying that obedience to Christ and holiness unto the Lord is the surest way to squelch all of our joy in this life. And we have believed that lie to varying degrees. However, dear ones, the road to happiness is called "HOLINESS." Why (I might ask) will we be completely happy IN HEAVEN? Why will all tears be wiped from our eyes IN HEAVEN? Why will all sorrow be blotted out IN HEAVEN? Because God will make us completely holy so that we think no evil, speak no evil, see no evil, hear no evil, and do no evil. Disobedience to Christ and His commandments brings misery. Loving obedience to Christ and His commandments brings contentment and joy. Dear ones, the Lord says that His commandments are not grievous to those who love Him (1 John 5:2). There may be that struggle in our hearts with our own wicked desires to obey the Lord, but God's commandments are not a heavy burden to those who love the Lord. Loving and obeying the Lord may cost us relationships with people. Loving and obeying the Lord may cost us certain pleasures in this life. But loving and obeying the Lord will bring a joy and happiness that no relationship or pleasure on earth can match.

2. Solomon says that all of his worries about who would inherit what he had accomplished in this life did not cause him to enjoy his work, but rather only caused him to see the vanity of his work. All that he had worked so hard to accomplish might in fact be wasted upon the desires and pleasures of a fool.

a. Do you see, dear ones, the underlying problem that Solomon had here and which led to the overwhelming sense of vanity and emptiness? Solomon believed he could control what he possessed. He thought he could command what he possessed to make him happy. He had come to believe that what he possessed was his gift to himself, rather than God's gift to him.

b. Dear ones, the thought of leaving your loved ones in death or leaving all of your possessions in death may simply reveal who you really believe owns all that you have. Do you believe and act as if you are the source of all that you possess? If so, you will always fear losing it, and will cling even more tightly to it for fear of losing it. Or do you believe and act as if God is the source of all that you possess? Do you see yourselves as masters of all that you have, or as stewards of all that you have? Do you view yourselves as managing the measure of wealth, gifts, graces, family, and friends that your heavenly Lord has allotted to you? If so, you will not fear giving it all back to the Lord, who gave it all to you in the first place, when you die. You will then not worry about the child, who may become a fool in wasting all that you have accomplished. For you know that God sovereignly disposes all these earthly blessings upon whom He wishes. Your duty is simply to be faithful in your use of what the Lord has given you to enjoy and to be faithful in leaving what the Lord has given you to enjoy to those who are walking faithfully in covenant with the Lord. What your heirs may do with their inheritance after you are dead, you need not worry about. Do you worry as though all that you possess belongs to you? Or do you rest as though all that you possess actually belongs to the Lord?

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