

## Whose Will It Be after I'm Gone? #2

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23; Job 1:21

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In most professions, it is the policy of a company to make sure a person is qualified before hiring him for a certain position. How that is done may vary from company to company. This process will no doubt involve interviews, in which questions about one's past experience will be asked, a list of referrals of people who can also vouch for the candidate's competency, perhaps an oral or written examination of some type, and possibly some on-the-job training. Why all of the concern on the part of those who are responsible to hire people for positions in their company? Companies want to ensure as much as possible that the one they are hiring is competent and responsible to perform the tasks he will be called to do. For if a company makes it a practice to hire unqualified people who have not earned the right to hold a particular job or position, that company will eventually lose and waste all of its valuable resources. Such an unsound practice on the part of a company would eventually destroy it.

Now if you understand that concept, then perhaps you will better understand the dilemma in which Solomon found himself. Solomon complains not about leaving all of his wealth and resources to an incompetent heir while he yet lived, but leaving it all to an incompetent heir after he has died. Solomon realized that he could not control his wealth after he died. He was learning the lesson we all must learn: what we possess is not ultimately owned by us, but by the Lord. He is the Owner, and we are the stewards.

Dear ones, we are called to be faithful and diligent managers of the gifts and resources God has entrusted into our care. If He adds to our prosperity, we must be thankful. But if He subtracts from our prosperity, we must even then learn to be thankful. Why? Because it is His to do with AS PLEASES HIM; and because He is all-wise, all-knowing, and full of love for us, His children. He knows (better than we could ever know) what is best for us. The only way that we can possibly find a lasting contentment when the Lord takes away from us loved ones in death, jobs, homes, wealth, security, freedom, etc. is to ever keep before our eyes this truth: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). If we find no comfort in these words, I would suggest it is because we view our possessions as our own, rather than as the Lord's, and we are clinging too tightly to them.

Let us continue to hear the words of the penitent Preacher, Solomon, as he leads us by means of the Holy Spirit from despair to hope. The main points from our text are the following: (1) It Is Vain to Leave All That for Which I Have Worked to a Fool Who Will Waste It (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19). This first main point we considered last Lord's Day. The next two main points will occupy our thoughts for this Lord's Day: (2) It Is Vain to Leave All That for Which I Have Worked to One Who Has Not Earned It (Ecclesiastes 2:20-21); and (3) It Is Vain to Worry about All That for Which I Have Worked and Will Surely Leave behind (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23).

### **II. It Is Vain to Leave All That for Which I Have Worked to One Who Has Not Earned It (Ecclesiastes 2:20-21).**

A. In the first main point, we saw last Lord's Day that Solomon bemoaned the fact that he hated all of his work (Ecclesiastes 2:18), for he was not able to find that lasting joy for which he searched in his work. And if that wasn't enough to depress Solomon (in his unrepentant state), he then began to think about what would happen to all of his wealth after he died. This truth really set before his eyes the vanity and emptiness

of seeking joy in the creature rather than in the Creator. For all that he had worked so hard to accumulate might fall into the hands of a fool after he died. But dear ones, consider with me that Christ and all of His heavenly blessings will never perish after we die. Christ and all of His heavenly blessings cannot be wasted away by a fool. Christ and all of His heavenly blessings only begin to be enjoyed to their fullest at death. When our joy and contentment is found in Christ in this life, we lose nothing at death, but gain everything.

B. The thought of all that he had worked so hard to accomplish being wasted on a fool led a backsliding Solomon to take AN ABOUT FACE from joy in his work to despair of joy in his work in Ecclesiastes 2:20 (“Therefore I went about”, or literally, “Therefore I turned in a circle”).

C. The Hebrew word used in Ecclesiastes 2:20 for “despair” (*yaash*) is translated in other places in the Old Testament as “desperation” or “no hope.” Despair is a hopelessness that a person or situation will never change. Solomon in the verse before us had come to see that his search for a lasting joy in his work, in his pleasures, in his family, in his power, or in his riches was hopeless. He despaired of finding an enduring happiness in the things of this life. He had sought for it with all of his heart, and he had the resources to find it if it was to be found there, but he only found emptiness and hopelessness. Dear ones, despair comes in at least a couple different packages. There is A DESPAIR THAT LEADS TO DEATH, and A DESPAIR THAT LEADS TO LIFE.

1. What is A DESPAIR THAT LEADS TO DEATH? It is a despair that leads our hearts to continue in our unbelief and in our transgressions. It is a despair that says, “No one or nothing in heaven or on earth can possibly change the situation in which I find myself.” It is a despair that eliminates the Almighty God and His power and grace from that seemingly hopeless situation. It is a practical atheism, wherein one acts and thinks as if Jesus Christ was not raised powerfully from the dead, and acts and thinks as if Satan actually won and defeated the Lord of glory by keeping Him in the grave. The following are examples of this type of despair.

a. “I have tried to overcome that besetting sin in my life, but it cannot be overcome. So I will stop struggling against it anymore, and simply throw myself into the arms of that sin, and commit it to the fullest.”

b. “I have tried to have a godly marriage, but my spouse will never change. So I will stop trying to have a godly marriage, and even stop praying for a godly marriage.”

c. “I have tried to live at peace with that person in the church, but he/she only continues to criticize or condemn me. So I will stop trying and stop praying for that person, and will rather give myself up to despising that person or at least showing no care or concern for that person.”

d. “I have prayed for years that God would bring my child to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, but nothing has changed. I have only grown weary and worn out in my praying. I have only seen him fall further and further away from the Lord. So I will stop praying for him any longer and forget about his spiritual well-being.”

e. “I have despaired of life and no longer see life as worth living. I cannot change my life or those around me. I cannot find any joy, happiness, or contentment in the things of this life. So I am going to end my life.”

f. Dear ones, this despair that leads to death is filled with unbelief. It leads a person not to Christ, but away from Christ. This is a despair that has given up altogether. It is a despair that has become so weary from the struggle and the fighting to change one’s self or to change that person or to change that particular situation in which one finds himself/herself that the only thing the person wants to do is to bring the struggle and conflict to an end. And bringing the struggle to an end in this case, either means no longer trying or no longer living.

g. Have you been there before? Are you there today? Perhaps we have all known

that kind of despair to one degree or another. The greatest encouragement I can possibly offer you (if that is where you are today) is that there is everlasting hope in Jesus Christ. For death could not keep our Savior in the grave; and no problem that we ever face can keep us in our grave, as we trust in an Almighty Christ. Nothing is impossible to our God. The Lord is able to move mountains, to open a Red Sea so that His people can cross it on dry ground, to preserve us from the fiery furnace so that not a hair on our head is even singed, to close the mouths of hungry lions, to multiply a few fishes and loaves of bread to feed literally thousands of people, to heal the deaf and the dumb, the blind and the lame, the paralyzed and the demon-possessed, or to raise even the dead from the grave. There is hope, my friend, but there is hope only in Jesus Christ; whereas there is only hopelessness and despair without Jesus Christ. And the Lord in His wisdom may not change that person or may not change that situation, but even if He does not, He will give us the grace to endure it, to be thankful in it, and to grow in faith through it, so that it WILL work out for our good. Dear child of God, don't listen to Satan (who is a liar from the beginning) when he says that Christ cannot overcome that besetting sin in your life, or that Christ cannot heal your broken marriage, or that Christ cannot give you love for that brother/sister in Christ that has criticized you, or that Christ cannot bring your child to repentance, or that Christ cannot make your life worth living and give you meaning and purpose in life. The tomb of Christ is empty! He is risen! Even death itself is now our servant to be used for our good, and is no longer our master, because the Lord Jesus Christ lives.

2. Which brings me to the second type of despair: A DESPAIR THAT LEADS TO LIFE. This despair leads one to see the utter futility of finding true and enduring joy, peace, satisfaction, life, and love, in our loved ones, in our work, in our accomplishments, in our pleasures, in our education, or in our wealth. This despair bring us to the place where we acknowledge that nothing will essentially change in our lives if we don't embrace Christ by faith alone and find our joy in trusting Him and in obeying Him. This despair leads us TO Christ in faith and repentance to find forgiveness, joy, and life.

a. This is the despair that we saw a couple weeks ago (in Mark 5:25-34) in the life of the woman who had the issue of blood and who touched the hem of Christ's garment. She had despaired of finding any help in her doctors. They had done all they could do for her. She had spent all she had in this life in order to be healed, but had not been helped. She only drew closer and closer to death—that is, until she heard of Jesus Christ and His power to heal. Then she turned from her despair in what man could not accomplish and looked in faith to Christ and what He alone could accomplish (by merely touching the hem of His garment), and she was healed (both physically and spiritually). Her despair led her to life.

b. Likewise, I would submit that Solomon's despair here in Ecclesiastes 2:20 was eventually used by the Lord to lead him to life, whereby he was renewed in his faith in Christ, renewed in his enjoyment of Christ's forgiveness, mercy, and love, renewed in his love for the holiness and righteousness of God, and renewed in his commitment to endeavor to walk in new obedience to God's good commandments.

c. Dear ones, despair is a pain in your soul. And just as pain in the body tells you that something is wrong, so despair tells you that something is wrong with your soul. Thank God for the sense of pain in your body that drives you to seek medical help. But even more so, thank God for the sense of despair in your soul that drives you to seek help from the Lord Jesus Christ, your heavenly Physician. How are you using the despair in your soul? Are you ignoring it and pretending as if it does not exist? Have you given up and concluded there is no hope in heaven or on earth for your problem? Or are you viewing that despair as God's means to your joy and happiness? The words of Jesus are appropriate to the non-Christian and Christian alike—to the unconverted and to the converted alike: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matthew 9:12). Today do you see any despair and hopelessness in your life? Let that despair not be turned inward, but let it be turned upward. Look to the God of hope, who takes what is impossible to man and uses it to glorify Himself and to bring life to all who cast their despair upon Christ, who conquered death and every enemy that oppress you.

D. Solomon now gives a further reason why his heart was cast into despair. Solomon not only came to realize that he would lose in death all that he had worked so hard to accomplish in life. Solomon not only came to realize that all he had worked so hard to gain in this life might be left in the hands of a foolish heir who would waste it. But now he reflects with a slightly different nuance on the possibility that even if the heir were not a fool, all of his life's successes might be left in the hands of one who was incompetent and incapable of handling such a vast empire of power and wealth, knowledge and wisdom as he had amassed. Read Ecclesiastes 2:21. The net effect is the same with the foolish heir as with the incompetent heir: the inheritance is wasted and lost.

1. This was actually a self-fulfilling prophecy for Solomon. For when Solomon died, his kingdom was left in the hands of his son, Rehoboam. Now Rehoboam no doubt acted foolishly, but he also acted incompetently as well. For when the leaders of Israel came together to inquire about the type of leader he would be, you will recall Rehoboam gave the most harsh answer to the leaders, declaring to them that he would make their lives more difficult and burdensome than even his father, Solomon, had done. He did not heed the counsel of the older more competent counselors, who advised him to lighten the heavy burden of taxes upon the people, but rather followed the counsel of the younger incompetent counselors, who advised him to let the people know who was boss in no uncertain terms (2 Chronicles 10). Rehoboam's incompetence led to 10 tribes breaking away from the 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin. From that point forward and until both nations were led into captivity, they remained 2 separate kingdoms with different kings, and different religions. Rehoboam, the incompetent son of Solomon, wasted the kingdom left to him by his father.

2. Dear ones, how careful we must be in the selection of leaders that would rule over us, and especially in the church. We must be ever so careful to ordain and commission church officers who have proven themselves to be competent before setting them up in places of authority, lest they like Rehoboam waste the kingdom entrusted to them. The same result will likely occur within the kingdom of Christ as occurred within the kingdom of Israel: division and schism. We should want to see over a longer period of time evidence of competence in doctrine, worship, government, and sound judgment. How has a candidate for leadership handled various responsibilities in his home and in the church? Is he able to humbly repent of his own sin? Does he hold to the truth, even in the most stressful situations, regardless of the consequences that might come to him, or does he compromise the truth for the sake of family, friends, job, popularity, or convenience? A competent leader must be gentle, but he must be unshakeable in the truth of Christ. A competent leader is one whom people can trust, because he is honest and has shown himself to be trustworthy. A competent leader is one who speaks the truth in love.

E. Solomon's concern about leaving his wealth to one who is incompetent is a legitimate concern that we all should have, whether it is in the church or in the home. However, a legitimate concern was turned into an idol for Solomon, because his life, his joy, his love, and his contentment were all wrapped up in his possessions. Rather than fulfilling his duty and leaving the consequences in God's hands, Solomon could find little or no peace or rest, because he could not even enjoy what God had given to him, for fear that it all might fall into the hands of an incompetent heir.

### **III. It Is Vain to Worry about All That for Which I Have Worked and Will Surely Leave behind (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23).**

A. Solomon summarizes in these verses the conclusion he had reached in his backslidden state: All the travail or labor pains in seeking to give birth to a lasting joy and happiness (by means of one's work in this life) are absolutely futile and empty. All one gets for all of his/her hard work in seeking an enduring satisfaction in the things of this life (apart from faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ) is sorrow and grief.

B. In fact, one not only has sorrow and grief during the day, but even at night, so that a true rest flees from one. Dear ones, there is a balance between legitimate care and concern for those people or possessions for which you are responsible, and utter worry and fear over those same people and possessions. I submit that you will be far more likely to worry and fear, when you believe and act as though it is all yours to lose. However, when you are able (by God's grace) to give over to God your wife or husband or your children because they are ultimately His and not yours; when you are able to give over to God your work and your vocation because they are ultimately His and not yours; when you are able to give over to God your degrees and accomplishments because they are ultimately His and not yours; and when you are able to give over to God your dreams and your ambitions because they are ultimately His and not yours, you will then find out how enjoyable life can truly be. For then you are trusting in a sovereign God, and casting all of your cares and anxieties upon Him who loves you with an unfailing love that is firmly grounded in the love that He has for His perfect, Only Begotten Son—Jesus Christ. Listen one and all to the invitation of your Savior today: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Dear ones, cease from worry, fear, and despair. Cast it all upon Christ. He will carry all such burdens of sin for you, and will give you in return His perfect righteousness, peace, hope, and joy. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3-4).

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