

Admonitions for Meaningful Living

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

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Text: Ecclesiastes 9:11-18

Date: Sunday, August 8, 2010, 7pm

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 9**. This afternoon I want to give you some “Admonitions for Meaningful Living”.

We’ve all heard of rags to riches Cinderella stories, but have you heard of riches to rags?

I read an article recently of Charles Prestwood of Conroe, Texas. Prestwood retired in October 2000 after 33 years at Enron—most of them as a pipeline operator. He applied himself, used his intelligence and hard work to his job and life and in the end, —he had \$1.3 million in Enron stock in his 401(k).

But after the company collapsed several years ago, he lost every penny. So many people put their hopes in this life, and end up bitterly disappointed.

We know that true joy is not found in attaining the American dream, but in attaining salvation in Christ as a reality. Solomon knows that we need to be warned regularly not to put our trust in this world, but to keep our eyes and our gaze fixed on Jesus. Are your eyes fixed on Jesus for happiness and contentment? How can we avoid the heart break that occurs from trusting in man and in riches. How can we live a wise, Christ-centered, fulfilling and meaningful life?

I. **Don’t put your trust in your natural abilities** (vs. 11).

Most people when they get into trouble, they feel like they can “figure it out”. They are smart enough to get out of trouble.

A. Natural abilities can attain only temporary success.

Verse 11, “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but **time** and **chance** happen to them all.”.

- Fast runners do not always win the races
- The bravest men do not always win the battles
- The wisest do not always earn a living—sometimes they live in poverty.
- Intelligent people do not always get rich.
- And the capable people do not always rise to high positions

Don’t get sucked into this life of busyness. The rat race is out there, and you can utilize all your natural abilities to “win the race, to win the battle, to be very successful, and even to attain high position”. But what are you really living for?

Solomon is warning against leaning on our natural abilities. Now, what I've learned is that there are men and women who excel at business from the day they were born. They didn't have to go to business college, they just excel at it. There are guys who excel at being an athlete. They didn't do anything, they were just born, but they were given the right combination of speed and size.

Think about Shaquille O'Neil, an NBA basketball player. He's 7'3", weighing over 300lbs. But he didn't do anything to get that. He didn't knock on the womb and go, "Alright, I need height and size." God gave it to him." It was a natural gifting.

And the word of warning here is no matter how successful you are in business, athletics, education, whatever field you're in, natural gifting will never bring about contentment or true meaning and success, because no one is given the natural ability of contentment.

B. If your goal is to get you what your natural abilities can get you, you are going to get robbed of your contentment and meaning. If your identity is to succeed in the rat race, what happens when sickness or tragedy take your natural ability away?

Don't put your identity in the rat race!! Don't base your happiness on the rat race!

- **Matthew 6:33**, "...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."
- Paul tells us in **1 Timothy 6:6**, "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment".

Contentment is not attained through your natural abilities. Everything you can attain with your natural abilities can be broken, stolen, tarnished, and eaten by moths and rust.

No one has the gift of natural contentment. We must seek it in Christ.

Illustration: (babies)—You know how I know this? I've had two babies. Anybody had the kid who was born with the *gift of natural contentment*? When Evan came home from the hospital two years ago, he was just laying in bed the first couple of nights saying to Jill: "You need to worry about you, Mommy. I mean, you just had this horrible time, 12 hours of labor. I'm fine. My diaper's a little wet, but I'll be okay 'til the morning. I'm hungry, but I'll just suck my thumb. You take care of you." No way. That didn't happen!

There's no baby born with contentment. If anything, we're all born with the highest state of discontentment possible. We come out of the womb saying: "I'm wet, I'm cold, I'm hungry, I hate everything." It's just this tough couple of months

for everyone. Contentment is learned in life by walking with God and resting in the Holy Spirit. It's not our natural abilities that bring about success, glory, money, power, or fame. We can't trust in that, and we can't aim for that. We need to aim at pleasing God, and realize that nothing on this earth will bring contentment.

II. **Don't put your trust in your plans if you want to live a wise, meaningful Christ-centered life.** (vs. 12).

All your well laid plans can be destroyed with one event. **Verses 12**, "For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them."

You don't get a meaningful life by planning. You can plan for the college education, the family, the house, the car, the kids, the whatever, and it can all be destroyed. You must trust in the Lord. God might test you with severe illness. You may be a just man like Job, but your wife threatens to leave you in your darkest hour. Is your life not meaningful if tragedy occurs? Of course it is, because a meaningful life is not about the swift or the strong or the knowledge and riches you have. All that could be taken away in a second. That's what Solomon says here.

Things happen that you never can see coming. So, it's better to put your faith in something beyond the sun rather than under it, where in an instant, you can get snared up in it like a bird or get hung up in a fish in a net.

We need to realize what **Proverbs 3:5-6** say, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

III. **Don't put your trust in people if you want to live a wise, meaningful Christ-centered life.**

A. The majority of people are not going to **appreciate** godly wisdom.

Look at **verse 13**, "I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me." So Solomon's saying, "I saw this thing happen one time, and I think there's a lot of wisdom in it, so pay attention to the story." This story is going to illustrate that true, godly wisdom is often despised on this earth.

Verses 14-18, "There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. 15 But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet **no one remembered that poor man.** 16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard."

If you live godly in Christ Jesus, you will be persecuted. If you live a wise, godly life, you are not going to be appreciated. There will be difficulties that godliness causes. Are you ok with that? You may not be appreciated in your family or in your marriage for living for God. Are you ok with that? Your work place may think ill of you for being a Christian. Are you ok with that? Wisdom is often not appreciated.

B. Yet some will appreciate quiet godly counsel. Verse 17, “The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.”

Most people will follow the popularly accepted wisdom that is shouted by the leaders of this world. Churches today are fickle fad-driven. Today they want the “Purpose Driven church”, tomorrow they want to be emergent. Whatever is being shouted and promoted by the popular leader ends up influencing many people’s lives, and it is often not superficial and robs a person of meaning and depth in life.

But some people will want hear “the words of the wise heard in quiet” (vs. 17). Godly people don’t live by the popular fads, but by the quiet, dependable, unassuming, non-sensational wisdom of the Word of God.

Application: Do you find yourself fad driven? If you are prone to try to get the answers from the latest guru or popular Christian author. I’m not against reading, and I do read many books by men. But do you find the quiet instruction of the Word of God in the peace of your private meeting place as a vital part of your life? Are you in the Word, reading it over and over and over again. Can you tell me about wisdom from the books of Moses or the prophets or the New Testament? Can you tell me what each book of the Bible is about because you read it so much? That’s where you are going to find a meaningful life.

IV. In the end, godly, Christ-centered wisdom is what really makes the difference.

Verse 18, “Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”

- A. A godly life is more profitable than anything to keep the peace. It has power to do great good. “Wisdom is better than weapons of war” (vs. 18).
- Think about the Philistines. They had weapons. They had their champion. But David had wisdom, a sling, and a rock. If you have the fear of the Lord it doesn’t matter how small you are!
 - Think about the apostles. They were unlearned men, and they turned the most powerful, cruel, war mongering nation in the history of the world upside down through wisdom.

B. Remember that the person that despises wisdom does great damage. But also, realize if you choose not to live a Christ-focused life, you are going to do some damage. Solomon says in **verse 18b**, "one sinner destroys much good."

- All it takes is one woman to go, "I will not forgive. I will not forgive him."
- All it takes is for person to say concerning missions, "I don't care what it says. My money is mine. I'll do what I want with my money." And that attitude can spread.
- It takes one spouse to say "the marriage is over", and destroy their lives, the children's lives, and many others as well.
- All it takes is one to say, "Forget the wisdom of God. I'll follow my own wisdom."

The warning to all of us is: "Don't be wreckless!" Don't play with sin—it will destroy you!! If you play with snakes you might get bit. I know of many children who played with matches, and are disfigured today. Sin will do much worse to us. We cannot play with sin.

Now, the danger in that is the Scriptures say in **Proverbs 14:12**, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death", or destruction. It goes bad. There's this way that seem right to us, but it goes wrong in the end.

Galatians 6:7-9, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

Conclusion: So don't lean on your natural ability. Trust in something bigger than you. And in the end, find what God has asked and be obedient to it. Shine the light of Jesus to others. Be selfless. Trust in God even when you are not appreciated. Trust God when it is not popular.

Live a predictable, dependable life of prayer and reading the Scriptures and quietly living them out every day in the smallest areas of life. The meaningful life is described here over 3000 years ago, and it is still the wisest life you can live.

- Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (**Philippians 1:21**).
- The Lord said, "Seek first the kingdom of God" (**Matthew 6:33**).
- Solomon said, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (**Ecclesiastes 12:13**).

It's not always popular or very sensational. It doesn't always go along with our plans. It's certainly not attained by natural ability. But it is the most meaningful life a human being can live!