

**CHASING THE WIND**  
“Gaining What???” Ecclesiastes 2:12-26  
March 19, 2023

**INTRO.:** We are so thankful for the MOPS ministry we host at this church. MOPS stands for Mothers Of PreSchoolers and is led by Jessica Wallish, one of the ladies from this fellowship and has a steering committee to help lead it. This is a wonderful ministry to mothers of toddlers and younger from various churches as well as those who maybe don't have a home church. This place is hopping the second and fourth Wednesday mornings of the month. We have people helping with the nursery for the younger children and others helping with the toddlers. As I reflect to when our sons were toddlers there are two words that seemed to be a common occurrence when they spoke. Can anybody guess those two words? The first is “no” and it didn't take them long to learn that word. The second is “why” which would be repeated over and over as they watched me doing something or fixing something. Sometimes that was also what my wife asked me, given my talent for fixing things. My sons would ask, “Why?,” and when I would answer that question they would ask, “Why?, again. They could do this on and on and on and on.... Eventually, I would have to say, “Because.”

Solomon, as he sorts out the meaning and purpose of life is asking, “Why?” Many just stop asking questions when the answers don't come quickly enough, but not Solomon. He is going on a long and difficult journey to find meaning in life and this is what the book of Ecclesiastes is all about. As he begins this journey he does so without God in the picture. He looks to human wisdom to find the answers (1:12-15) but there were too many things that just didn't add up. It was meaningless, a chasing after the wind as he searched under the sun, without God.

Then he looked to pleasure and drinking (2:1-3) as the answer to no avail. He looked to possessions and wealth (2:4-10) as he built houses, planted vineyards and fruit trees, made gardens and reservoirs. He owned slaves, more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem, amassed silver and gold, acquired singers and a harem. He became greater than anyone in Jerusalem before him, but his conclusion was the same as previous searches. It was meaningless, a chasing after the wind as he searched under the sun. There was a missing piece: God!

This morning we will look at how he continues his journey in this search of meaning and purpose in life and yet he continues it without God until the very end of the passage. As we read Ecclesiastes 2:12-26 together see if you can find what he searches out and what causes his search to turn.

**Ecclesiastes 2:12-26** Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I thought in my heart, “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said in my heart, “This too is meaningless.” For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die! So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless. A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

As he continues this search, one of the questions we want to ask is, “Gaining what?” Once again Solomon begins without God.

**WITHOUT GOD:**

Why Wisdom?

**Ecclesiastes 2:12** Then I *turned* my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done?

“*turned*.” “to turn one's attention” or “take up a new line of thought”

It appears that Solomon is going back to looking at wisdom as a possible answer to life's questions. He is examining the contrast between wisdom and madness and folly. This contrast is also made in Proverbs.

**Proverbs 10:1** The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.

**Proverbs 10:8** The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

Now, remember that what Solomon is presently describing in Ecclesiastes is human wisdom, not wisdom from God. What are some of his conclusions?

**Ecclesiastes 2:13** I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.

Wisdom > Folly  
Light > Darkness

What can wisdom do?

**Ecclesiastes 7:12** Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

**Ecclesiastes 7:19** Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city.

**Ecclesiastes 8:1** Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance.

**Ecclesiastes 9:16** So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

Just like light is better than darkness, so wisdom is better than folly. When you get up late at night and you think you know where you are going but you trip and fall. Your mind says you can navigate through the darkness, but your body says something entirely different.

**Ecclesiastes 2:14** The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.

"*eyes in his head*:" doesn't everyone have eyes in their head? This refers to being able to look ahead and see what would be the best direction and decision.

Solomon's conclusion (and I would have to agree) is that wisdom is better than folly or madness. Yet, he brings up a huge objection:

**Ecclesiastes 2:14** The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.

What is the *fate* that Solomon is talking about?

**Ecclesiastes 2:15** Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless."

What gain is there by being wise? The same fate overtakes the wise as does the fool. What fate?

**Ecclesiastes 2:16** For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

Everyone, barring the return of the Lord before, will die! Death is the great equalizer.

Jean-Paul Sartre would have agreed, for the famous existentialist has been quoted as saying, "Life has no meaning the moment you lose the illusion of being eternal."

Voltaire, "I hate life, and yet I am afraid to die."

It even gets worse than that for Solomon.

**Ecclesiastes 2:16** For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

Not only will every person die, wise or foolish, they won't be remembered for very long. I never met any of my great-grandparents. In a few short generations people can be forgotten. Solomon's conclusion about chasing human wisdom as the answer to life's meaning is, "this too is meaningless." Like life itself, it is a vapor, a puff of smoke, breath on a cold day. It is all only momentary when one takes God out of the picture.

**Francois Mauriac**, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952: "You can't imagine the torment of having had nothing out of life, and of having to look forward to nothing but death, of feeling that there is no other world beyond this one, that the puzzle will never be explained."

WITHOUT GOD:

Why Work?

**Ecclesiastes 2:17** So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Without God work becomes meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Why is work meaningless without God?

This passage reminds me of the song, *Working 9-5*.

Why is work meaningless?

**Ecclesiastes 2:18** I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.

First reason: \*You can't take what you earn with you when you die!

No U-hauls behind hearses; Jewish proverb: "There are no pockets in shrouds."

Jesus tells a parable warning that life does not consist in how much stuff you have. A rich man had an incredible harvest and decided he would tear down his barns and build bigger ones. I'll have enough grain that I won't have to work and I can eat, drink, and be merry. But God said, "(Luke 12:20-21) 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

**Ecclesiastes 2:19** And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.

Second reason: \*Who knows what the person will be like and he will decide what happens to all that I have worked for

Think about what Solomon left to his son Rehoboam who ultimately split the kingdom and lost much of its wealth.

**1 Kings 14:25-26** In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. **26** He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made.

Poof, it was gone! Statistics say that in 60 percent of cases, inherited wealth is gone by the end of the second generation. Solomon's wealth was greatly diminished in the first generation!

**Ecclesiastes 2:20** So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.

This is work that he poured his effort into, giving all his energy to it.

**Ecclesiastes 2:21** For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.

Third Reason: \*You leave all you've worked for to someone who hasn't worked for it. Often that person doesn't place the same value on it as you did.

**Ecclesiastes 2:22-23** What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

Fourth reason: \*Work brings pain and grief, both mentally and physically

Because of all these reasons Solomon concludes it is meaningless, truly a vapor or mist that passes far too quickly. People give their heart and soul to their work and what does it produce?

Wall Street Journal: "Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider of everything except happiness."

Once again, if we stopped here it would be incredibly discouraging. The passage takes a dramatic turn because God is included. Without God why chase wisdom or work but how about:

## WITH GOD

Why Not?

**Ecclesiastes 2:24-25** A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

Solomon says that eating and drinking and finding satisfaction from our work is from God. Up to this point God is hardly mentioned in his search. There is a passing reference to God in 1:13, but here the foundation is laid.

Just like anything else in life, if you want to find meaning and purpose in work, it starts with God.

What does Jesus say about why He came?

**John 10:10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Attempting to do life apart from God brings emptiness and lack of fulfillment.

Daniel Akin, "God is gracious to Solomon and us in exposing the failure of everything else to satisfy. God allows us to feel the meaninglessness of our efforts in order to drive us to Him!"

How does God provide meaning and satisfaction in our work?

\*I realize my job/work comes from Him: He is the great provider

\*My work is done through God's strength and power

\*Work provides an opportunity for me to reflect Jesus to a world that desperately needs Him

\*He provides motivation for me to work since I know He is my boss and He will reward

**Colossians 3:23-24** Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, **24** since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

With God what is Solomon's conclusion?

**Ecclesiastes 2:26** To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

"sinner:" missing the mark

The person who has their goal, "pleasing God," will receive blessings from the Lord. We can't do this without God being at work in our lives. There are also consequences for not recognizing God for who He is and the right He has to rule and give direction to your life. What I do will be much less meaningful to me when God is left out of the picture.

True meaninglessness and an empty chasing of the wind is the fruit of those who do life without God. In contrast, my work has eternal value when God is the Lord of my life.

## SO WHAT???

Chuck Colson, "Life isn't like a book. Life isn't logical, or sensible, or orderly. Life is a mess most of the time. And theology must be lived in the midst of that mess."

We need to:

\*Recognize God as the author of all wisdom and seek that wisdom through His Word, prayer, and fellow believers.

\*Thank God for our work: caring for children, volunteering, student, job,

\*Remember that God is the one I live for, work for, play for, serve for

\*Pursuing wisdom and work apart from God produces meaninglessness