**Ecclesiastes 2:12-26 || *Wisdom & Work* || 4-26-20 @ RCBC**

Believing earthly things will satisfy us is a that never produces true

lasting joy, because we keep searching for satisfaction in created things instead of the .

In 2:12-26 Solomon adds to his growing list of things he’s trying to be filled up with. Entertainment & self-indulgence didn’t work so he swings the pendulum to the other extreme and now considers *wisdom*.

It’s true that living wisely benefits a person more than living foolishly.

* Solomon equates this to the difference between walking in light and walking in darkness. He has just identified a bunch of things in life that are folly at their core. Pursuing those things is like walking in darkness – it only ends in pain and heartache.

Is wisdom better than foolishness? ---- yes

Is wisdom the end-all of what life is about? ---- no, because wise men and fools both die

* Making self-indulgent pleasure your life’s goal doesn’t work. --- it doesn’t fill you up
* But making the pursuit of wisdom your life’s goal doesn’t work either.

This truth shatters the deception that fulfillment comes by spending your life trying to make a name for yourself.

* + The wise man and foolish man both still have a certain number of days on the earth.
  + It’s been said that “Death is the great equalizer.”

Solomon’s response in v.17 is probably the same as what ours would be too: “So I hated life…for all is vanity and striving after wind.” I have a very strong suspicion that every one of us have felt this way at one point in our lives.

Solomon was driven by the pursuit of these things, and when he realized they wouldn’t really satisfy him, these same things drove him to despair for life.

Maybe there’s another place to find meaning? Surely we can find something that will bring meaning and fill us up?

Maybe working hard and accumulating wealth to pass to our children will bring satisfaction and meaning?

This is what Solomon considers in v.18-26. But he has a pretty quick answer: NOPE.

He toiled hard to lay up treasures for himself and his children and grandchildren, but came to realize in v.19 that he can’t know whether his kids and grandkids will be wise or if they will be fools.

* + Will they use their inheritance wisely, or wastefully?
  + Work in itself is also vanity/meaningless because by the time you’re old enough to enjoy the fruits of your labor you don’t have the physical capacity to do the things you never got to do while you were working!
* v.22-23 paint an all-to-familiar picture of a person who is a workaholic.

***Have you ever laid awake at night because something with your job was keeping you up?***

We all want jobs where you can walk out of building at 5pm and not think about work even a little bit until you walk into the doors the next morning. But few if any of us respond to our work that way, and because of this I would venture to guess the problem isn’t then with our jobs.

* *The problem is with you and me*. We don’t know how to properly balance work and the rest of life.

(I’m in no way condemning working hard and being dedicated to what you do. Before sin ever entered the picture God gave Adam work to do and it was GOOD. Ephesians 6 reminded us that hard work is an evidence of a saved person, whereas a lazy work ethic does not display the fruit of salvation).

Work isn’t the problem any more than *laughter* or *music* or *gardening* or *money* or *sex* or *wisdom* is the problem.

All those things are given by God as good gifts for His children to enjoy.

The brokenness of sin has not only marred God’s image on us as humans, but it’s also twisted how we

and God’s gifts.

When we spend all our effort & energy pursuing the gifts rather than the Giver, we are ripe for the kind of frustration Solomon is describing and that we all have felt (or maybe still feeling).

At its core, pursuing the things of this life is .

Isaiah 44:15-17:

*“Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”*

We may not be whittling little statues from trees, but we are inclined to do the same kind of thing!

* Work is a gift of God. ---- Work is a good thing.
* God instructs believers to work hard & honor those in authority over them.
* A believer’s work in this way reveals the Spirit of God in their life.

Sin warps and twists God’s good gift until we replace God with the gift itself. We choose to make our work the most important thing instead of God. We burn half the tree for fire and then worship the other half, expecting it to make our lives better. We dedicate our very lives to the pursuit of accumulating wealth and making a name for ourselves and then expect God to bless us. What a delusion?! Why would God bless our pursuit of idols?

Every time we think the things of this earth will satisfy our hearts we fall for the lie.

* Work isn’t the problem; the is the problem.

There is a solution to this heart problem, and part of it is found in v.24-25. The answer isn’t to refuse enjoyment in eating and drinking and finding joy in work. The answer is to recognize that these are – in fact – gifts from the hand of God. And because they are from God, we *can* find enjoyment in them.

Two things are 100% true: the human heart is sinful & God and His gifts are good

So is it possible to enjoy gardening and music and intimacy with your spouse and is it possible to enjoy what you do for a living without making them an idol? ---- yes!

It’s not about denying earthly pleasure; it’s about keeping the gifts of God in their .

*“As we ate, drank, enjoyed our spouse, and enjoyed our work, it would cause us to thank God for His goodness. But human sin distorted that, so now we look to the created things for the satisfaction only God can give. Not only is this rebellion against God, but also it renders our true enjoyment of these gifts [almost] impossible. We want more, more, more, and we are never happy…More will not satisfy us; only God can.”* - Danny Akin

Any fulfillment we get from earthly things is intended to point us back to the Giver.

The only way to rightly things on this earth is to first be in the Creator.

For the Christian who finds their contentment and purpose in God, He will give them wisdom and knowledge and joy. But for the person who goes about pleasing themselves instead of God, they will find that they have worked their entire lives for nothing because it all is vanity & striving after wind. [v.26]

In reality, every one of us displeases God. But the good news of the Gospel is that if you recognize that you’re a sinner, repent of your sin, and believe in Jesus, you are united with Him by faith and God no longer sees you in your sin – He sees you *in Christ*.

Because of Christ God gives to you along with the to enjoy them!

The Prodigal Son

We tend to think that the prodigal son’s problem was snatching his inheritance early and spending it on elaborate parties. But the story doesn’t just *begin* with him partying and losing it all – it *ends* with him partying too!

His pursuit of fulfillment in this life left him broken and destitute. But when he came to his senses and returned home – when the lost son was found – the story ends with an elaborate party! His dad sees him down the road from far off, doesn’t even let him finish his apology, and because of his *undeterred love* for his son rushes to bless him.

As Danny Akin puts it, *“The difference is the son cannot enjoy the party rightly until he is satisfied in the father’s love.”*

If you spend your life pursuing pleasure, entertainment, wisdom, or work, you will never have a cup that is full. You’ll come to the point (if you haven’t already) where you look at your life and wonder what it was all for.

* You might regret some of the decisions that you’ve made.
* You might even feel like Solomon and hate life.

Your life doesn’t have to remain in the place it is now.

You do not have to live in discontentment and give in to despair.

***There is hope in a relationship with Jesus Christ.***

Turn away from the pursuit of earthly things to fill you up – Solomon tried it all and it didn’t work. It won’t work for you either. But a right relationship with Jesus causes you to be filled up with Him *first*, which then allows you to properly enjoy the things of this life because you recognize where they come from – the hand of God. [v.24b]