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Ecclesiastes 5:10-20
21 Oct 2018

“The Good Life”

Grace and peace...

The text for today is Ecclesiastes 5. It's about finding meaning in life and realizing that money itself doesn't provide it. The preacher in Ecclesiastes (Solomon most likely) doesn't buy into the glitz of possessions or the glamour of beauty. He's just too wise to fall for that because I get the sense he's been around the block, been there, got the T-shirt. He's had it all. And in the end, he comes back to one word: vanity. What's the point of pursuing possessions? What's the point of making money only to see it go bye-bye or having money when you can't take it with you? He's searching for meaning, just as many people do—after they have exhausted materialism, commercialism, hedonism...what's left? What's the point of life?

Ecclesiastes doesn't have any patience for flattery, for empty promises. There are times when we want to be told something we know isn't likely true, just for the sake of hearing it. Ecclesiastes doesn't go there. It's far too sober. There are no rose-colored glasses. It's one of those books that just tells it like it is. It is straight-up, blunt, honest to a fault. It tells it to us straight. If Ecclesiastes were your friend, you could only have one of these kinds of friends. Otherwise, I think it might get to be too much. In the same manner, I don't often preach from Ecclesiastes, but it's there and because we love the whole Word of God, we take it in.

Sometimes I have to go searching for sermon illustrations and sometimes I feel like I never find the right one. Other times, the illustration just comes easily. Sometimes the perfect illustration comes Monday and that really ticks me off. But not so, this week. I already know the perfect illustration is going to come Tuesday because if you haven't noticed, the lottery has

set an all-time record. The Mega Millions jackpot is at \$1.6 billion. And if that's too much money for you to handle, if you're feeling modest, you can always dial things down and play Powerball for a mere \$470 million. The Mega Millions drawing is Tuesday and people are in hot pursuit of Easy Street, the good life! I'm sure whoever wins will tithe to their local church. People are really going nuts over this. It's disrupting their lives because of the hope they are putting into winning. Even I would have had a sermon outline for you, but the line for Mega Millions was just so long...Just joking. I can already tell you who will win—the government! They will take their cut of that \$1.6 billion in taxes. This is probably a good reminder to say gambling is wrong because it makes the heart covet and not be content. It's a 10th commandment issue. God wants us to be content. But just for the sake of it, let's say you won. You won the jackpot of \$1.6 billion dollars. The preacher in Ecclesiastes would shrug and say, "Vanity." "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity" (v.10).

The more you have, the more you spend. Funny how that works. "When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?" This verse sums up how those of you with teenagers in the house feel after going to the grocery store. I bought the food, I saw the food, but it's gone. No advantage to the owner. This Ecclesiastes stuff is true to life. This is not high-flying theology. This is very down to earth.

So we go to work, to make money, to buy things. Repeat as needed. When we work hard, we usually sleep well. When we sleep well, that means we can work hard. So the cycle goes from day to day. The work may bring order and priority to the calendar, but does it bring meaning? Does it bring identity? Does the work we do define who we are? To some extent,

yes it does. There's nothing wrong with taking pride in what we do. But ultimately, our utmost identity to live out is as children of God. There's a lot that could be said about being God's children. Protection, provision, power, peace. But perhaps the best part of being a child of God is that He never wrongs us. He always does what is right and for our benefit.

The preacher in Ecclesiastes knows that's not always the case. He has a particular situation in mind. "There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,¹⁴ and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand." Not only did this guy cheat out a worker of his rightful wages by hoarding the money, but he has nothing to give his son. He gambled with it on some kind of venture and now he has nothing for his son, not even for himself. This is something like Enron, if you remember that particular scandal. If people work hard and they have nothing to show for it, that's wrong. That can't be! Work is too hard for it to not pay off. We can't toil for the wind (v. 14). So the Scripture says, "A worker is worth his wages." And as far as the standard of our work, we are to work as if we were serving the Lord himself! Work is a gift of God. One of the very first things that God gave Adam was a job. Then a wife, hence the need for a job...but you get the point. This is before the Fall. Work is good. Work is holy.

And ultimately, even the sober-minded preacher in Ecclesiastes has to yield on this point. ¹⁸Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. ¹⁹Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the

gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.”

So where’s Jesus in all of this? He has done the work of salvation for us. That’s a gift. Jesus makes it possible for us to live as children of God. But He’s also inviting us to live in service to our neighbor. As Luther observed, God doesn’t need our works, but our neighbor does. Jesus puts us in relationship with the Father so that we can recognize all that we have as a gift from our good heavenly Father—and how it’s meant to be shared, given—not hoarded. It’s not just “eat, drink and be merry.” But it’s eat, drink, and be grateful. Be grateful for the work you’re given to do. It’s that whole, “Do what you love, love what you do” thing. Ecclesiastes could go with that, even down to the most mundane, day to day things. Work like a child of God. How? By serving our neighbor with love and by being honest and good worker. Even eat like a child of God—how? By recognizing how it all comes from God. Sleep like a child of God. How—because I know He watches over me and He will give me strength for each day as it comes. Live like a child of God. Don’t worry about money; save your heart for what really matters—the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This is how the good life is meant to be lived as God’s children. For this is who we are!

In Jesus’ name, Amen.