

Ecclesiastes: Life Under the Sun
Part 4
“Meaning in Work and Wealth”
Ecclesiastes 5:10-17, Ecclesiastes 6:1-2, Ecclesiastes 6:7
Pastor Charles Price

Now if you have got your Bible, I am going to ask you to turn to the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament and Chapter 5.

Ecclesiastes 5, and before I read to you the verses I am going to read, I want to just set the scene by reminding you that Ecclesiastes was written by an older man.

I am making the assumption it is Solomon – his name is never mentioned but he was the son of David, he was the king of Israel and many of the autobiographical statements there he makes about himself fit exactly into the story of Solomon.

And as an older man, he has turned away from God. It tells us that it was his wives who turned his heart away from God.

Now he had far too many wives anyway. Many of those were diplomatic political arrangements in order to – he married daughters of kings and governors. It was a good way of creating a wholesome foreign policy by having your father-in-law and they having their son-in-law or brother-in-law as the leader of Israel.

But over the years he has turned away from God and he is looking at life from the perspective of under the sun. Now I have mentioned this every week that 32 times that phrase reoccurs - life at the end of your nose, what you can see and touch and smell and taste and hear. And what is tangible is what is real; what is intangible is not real. This is life under the sun. And the conclusion he comes to 35 times is that it is meaningless.

“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless,” he says. (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

He describes it as being like chasing after the wind – 9 times he uses that expression - trying to catch the wind and somehow retain it, and you can’t do that.

And the theme of this book is about searching for meaning and searching for purpose, and it becomes elusive to him.

And today I want to look with you at what he says about a very important area of life that all of us here are engaged in or will be engaged in, in which he says it’s hard to find meaning.

And it’s the area of work and wealth. So, I have called it, “Finding Meaning in Work and Wealth.”

There is a Peanuts cartoon where Lucy offers her observations about life to Charlie Brown (as she often does), and life, she muses is like a deck chair on a ship. Some place it so they can see where they are going, some place their deck chair so they can see where they have been, some place their deck chair so they can see where they are at the present.

And poor old Charlie Brown says, “I can’t even get mine unfolded.”

And in this area of work and wealth, the writer of Ecclesiastes looks back, he looks on, he looks out, but he can’t get his deck chair unfolded. And I want to read to you about some of this.

Let me read to you from Ecclesiastes 5:10-17

“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.

“As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?

“The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

“I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him.

“Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.

“This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?

“All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.”

Go down to Ecclesiastes 6:1:

“I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men;

“God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.”

And Ecclesiastes 6:7:

“All man’s efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.”

None of us escape the challenge to find meaning in work and in money, the wealth that we accumulate as a result of our work.

What we usually call work is activity that is a means to an end. It is designed to accomplish something that is needed.

Activity that is an end in itself we normally call play. It may take a lot of energy but it’s play.

And the absence of activity is what we usually call rest.

Now these three are important ingredients in our lives – work, rest and play.

Some of you may remember that some years ago for several decades Mars Bar had a slogan – it was printed on the side of the bar itself, and it was one of the most successful slogans in advertising history: “A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play.”

Now I grew up in England and it was around for many years in England. And actually, Mars is a British company and somebody challenged the accuracy of that statement in the law courts and they won.

And they went through this trial where they decided the Mars was made up of all the wrong kinds of fats. It raised your LDL, which is your bad cholesterol (Low Density Lipoprotein). And it clogged your arteries as a result and so it didn’t help you work, rest and play at all; it helped you get fat, it helped you get old, it helped you die. So, there was unhealthy publicity given to Mars during that process.

But Mars was right that we need the balance of work, rest and play. And the Bible encourages all these. Work is commanded – “Six days shall you labor” – that’s one of the Ten Commandments.

Now we have opted for five as being preferable to six but the command is six (Six days shall you labor). Then as for rest, that was the seventh day – God gave us the Sabbath.

As for play, there are not many direct statements about this but as Solomon, I am assuming to be the writer of Ecclesiastes, was a man who was extremely busy – he knew how to work, he governed Israel as king when it occupied the greatest area that it ever did in its history. And yet he found time to play, he found time to sit down and write 3000 proverbs (we’re told this in 1 Kings 4) and 1005 songs.

He could describe plant life, he taught about animals, birds, reptiles and fish. These were all his hobbies.

He was a songwriter, he was a proverbialist (if that is not a word I have just invented), he was a botanist, a zoologist, an ornithologist, a herpetologist, and an ichthyologist (an ichthyologist is a fisherman who knows all about fish) and it says he knew all about that. And where he got the time to do all that I don't know, but he did.

And we usually find renewal in the things that energize us that we do, because we don't have to but because we enjoy them.

Carl Zimmer, who was a science writer in Forbes Magazine a while ago, said this:

"A human child and probably a human adult who has no time to play or lives in an environment that doesn't allow for play is seriously handicapped."

Notice he doesn't just say children – he says adults too – we need to play. However, most of our energy is spent on work that is a means to an end. Usually, the end includes and sometimes is solely financial reward because we need money on which to live.

Now some of the hardest working people in the world are stay-at-home mothers who don't have set hours and who don't take weekends off. And you may have read in the newspaper recently a report from the United States that estimates that stay-at-home mothers are doing the work of ten different jobs (and stay-at-home fathers would be in the same category): housekeeper, cook, daycare center teacher, laundry machine operator, van driver, facilities manager, janitor, computer operator, chief executive officer and psychologist.

They work apparently a 92-hour week. That's 52 hours of overtime. And if a woman or a dad who stays at home to work was paid, they would be worth, according to this report, \$138,095 a year (that's US dollars).

And women who work outside the home and come home to do the extra 52 hours of overtime with their families would be worth an extra \$85, 939 for their domestic labor, so says the report. (And I won't let my wife read that one.)

But life should be a rhythm of work and rest and play. However, as Solomon looks out on the world and sees life under the sun, from a purely human and humanistic perspective, he comes to some very discouraging conclusions about work. And I am going to give you some of these.

First of all, he sees it as a sense of futility about work. Let me read to you what he says in Ecclesiastes 1:3:

“What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?”

(Now I am using the power point this morning because there are a lot of verses, I want to give to you and you would forget them all, so you can just jot down the reference if you want.)

But he asks this big question:

“What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?”

Then he answers it in Ecclesiastes 2:10:

“My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.”

In other words, “I enjoyed my work.”

“Yet, when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was to be gained under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

“I enjoyed it but when I ask where does this lead, where does it end, this is my conclusion: it’s all meaningless, it’s chasing after a wind. Nothing is to be gained under the sun.”

Now most of us spend a lot of our time at work. We go to school, most of us, for about 12 years to prepare ourselves to work and then we might go to university for anything from 4 to 8 years. And that prepares us for 40 years of working life.

And the purpose of our working life is to earn money so we can buy a home and we can buy clothes and food and cars so that we can go to work in order to earn money so we can have homes and clothes and food and cars to go to work to earn money so we can have homes and clothes and food and cars to go to work to earn money to...it goes on.

And he says it’s meaningless, it’s chasing after the wind. And there is a futility to life.

Now if you live 75 years (and life expectancy is a little higher than that in our part of the world) – if you live for 75 years, you will have spent 25 of those years in bed, asleep. What a waste of time that seems, but that’s what you would have spent on average.

You will have spent 5 years eating - non-stop – 5 years.

You will have spent nearly two years at school (that's a relief if you are a kid here in high school – it's only two years in total – you could have spent 5 years eating all your life.) But that's, you know, if you go for about 7 hours a day, you will end up having in total about 2 years of school. Another 10 months if you do a few years at university.

We spend a few years playing. We spend about 2 years and 4 months on the toilet in the course of 75 years.

And if you retire at 65, you will have spent 10 continuous years of your life at work (that's a 40 year span – 50 weeks a year, 40 hours a week, if my math is right).

So, after sleeping the thing that you spend most of your time on – all of us – is work. And then at the end, in Ecclesiastes 2:21, he says,

“A man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill,”

(That's what you went to school for and to university for and did your apprenticeship for)

“He may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave everything he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This ...is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man gain for all the toil and anxious striving for which he labours under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 2:21-22)

There is a sense of futility, which comes through this, says Solomon. Not only that, there is a sense of fatigue.

Ecclesiastes 10:15 says,

“A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.”

(I am not sure about what he means by not knowing the way to town). He doesn't know where he is going, doesn't know why he is doing it, and it wearies him.

And Ecclesiastes 1:8-9 says,

“All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

Life seems to just be a recurring cycle of things you do all the time and it doesn't go anywhere, there is nothing new.

So, when you are kids you get up in the morning. If you are going to start school, you probably eat your Cheerios and then you go out to school. You come home, you play, you watch TV, you go to bed, you get up, you eat your Cheerios, you go to school, you come home, you play a bit, you watch TV, you go to bed.

And then you go to high school and then you get up and you eat, probably Froot Loops at this stage and you go to school, you come home, you do your homework – no play now – you watch a bit of TV, you might tweet if you are into that, and then you go to bed, you get up, you eat your Froot Loops, you go to school, you come home, you do your homework, you watch a bit of TV, you do some tweeting, you go to bed, you get up.

And then you get a job and by this time you are probably eating Muesli and you go to work and it's hard and you wish you were back at school, but you come home and you take a nap and you go to bed and you get up and you have your Muesli and you go to work, you come home.

And then one day you will get up, you will have your Muesli and you get married and then you have to work even harder. And then you come home and you get up and you eat your Special K and you go to work hard, and you come home, you watch TV, you talk to your wife, you go to bed and you get up (or your husband), you have your Special K and then you have your baby and you have to work even harder.

And then you come home, there's no time for anything. You go to bed and you get up and you have your Special K, you go to work, you come home, you get up, you have another baby, you go and get two jobs, you get up in the morning.

And then when you get old, you get up and you have your All Bran probably by now and then you retire so you go back to bed and then you get up and don't know what you do, but it seems to occupy all of your time and you go to bed, you get up and you have your All Bran, the day seems full – you don't know what you're doing but you do it anyway and you go to bed, you get up, you have your All Bran and some prunes thrown in by now and then you die, which is a waste of All Bran!

And there is a kind of sense of fatigue about this cycle. You just get through it, time goes and you work, you work, and work becomes a delicate balancing act. If you work too little, you don't have enough; if you work too much, you get health problems and family problems. You starve if you do too little; you burn out if you do too much.

And that's why in Ecclesiastes 5:12 he says,

“The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.”

Interesting. He says too much is a bigger problem than having too little. So, then you ask why do we work so hard to get so much and it creates only more problems?

You see there is an illusion with wealth and the illusion goes like this: the more I have the more content I will be.

The reality is: the more I have the more I have to look after. The more I have to look after, the more I am afraid I might lose it. The more I am afraid I might lose it, the harder I work to keep it and the harder I work to keep it, the more worried I become about losing it. And the very thing I thought would bring me contentment actually brings me anxiety.

And so, he says the laborer who has done his job, gone home, doesn't worry about his work. But the rich man gets no sleep because he is worried that what he has got, he's going to lose or he is not going to make it work, as he wants it to work.

So, there is a sense of futility, which leads to a sense of fatigue, which leads to a sense of failure - a sense of failure.

Ecclesiastes 5:15-16:

“Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.

“This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?”

In other words, he says there is nothing ahead. The way you were born is the way you will die. You were born with nothing; you will die with nothing. All his labor, all his activity – he can carry none of it in his hand.

Many of you will know the name of Aristotle Onassis who was a very famous Greek multi-millionaire – one of the richest men in the world. Owned a shipping line; he was the major shareholder of Olympic Airlines, which was the Greek national airline. He became internationally famous when he married Jackie Kennedy, the widow of President John Kennedy.

A number of years ago he died in a hospital in New York City. I was in New York at the time. I remember the day he died. I picked up a newspaper and on the front page was a picture of his wife Jackie and his daughter Christina arriving at the hospital at the same time to visit him. And Jackie and Christina had never

been seen together. Christina had not accepted the marriage. And so, it said, “Are they going to be reconciled at Aristotle’s death bed?”

Well, the cynic in me says, no, probably not. The truth is where there is a will there are relatives. And it was in their interest to be there.

But that day Aristotle Onassis died. In the morning newspaper there was an insert. It said, “How much is he worth?” They tried to estimate the worth, the value, the monetary value of Aristotle Onassis’ possessions.

That morning he died. That evening I picked up a later newspaper – same newspaper, but a later edition. Headline: “Onassis Dead”. And the same insert was there that had been there in the morning with one word changed. In the morning it said, “How much is he worth?” The same article was entitled in the evening, “How much was he worth?” Because the moment he died it was all past tense.

And I discovered that Aristotle Onassis, one of the richest men in the world, left as much as I am going to leave when I die. Do you know how much he left? Everything. And I will leave exactly the same as Aristotle Onassis. So will you.

If you want to feel good sometime, tell yourself you will leave as much as Onassis, or anybody else that you admire, on the rich list.

And he says, “There is nothing that I can take with me,

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

I am running fast but where am I going? I am like a hamster on a wheel running around the cage and the hamster is getting lots of exercise. He is probably perspiring (if hamsters perspire) but when he stops, he gets off exactly where he got on.

Do you know what’s missing here in Solomon, and I am just giving you a selection of verses – there are many more statements he makes about this whole dilemma. What is missing here is this: there is an absence of hope, because everything you might begin to hope for comes to an end.

A few years ago, I came across the writings of a man called Viktor Frankl. I didn’t know anything about Viktor Frankl until he died. And when he died, there was almost a full-page obituary to him in a newspaper I was reading.

And I was fascinated by his story, and on account of that obituary notice, I went and bought a copy of his first book. He has written many books. His first book, published in 1945, was called, “Man’s Search for Meaning.”

And Frankl was an Austrian Jew in the 1930’s, training as a medical doctor in Vienna, specializing in psychiatry (which was a new discipline at that stage). His first job was in a medical practice where he was to help depressed and, in the main, patients who were suicidal.

And as he talked with them about their woes and their reasons for wanting to commit suicide, they all blamed their past for their depression. “This happened to me, that happened to me, etc.”

And Frankl realized “I know people with a lot worse pasts who are not at all suicidal.”

And he came to the conclusion that their past was not their problem; it was their lack of future that was their problem. And so, he developed a whole therapy called logotherapy around orienting your life to the future because he said, and I quote:

“A person can live with any past if he has a sense of future.”

Now in the 1930’s –1938 - Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany and Frankl had begun to write at that stage. All Jews were under threat and he was offered a scholarship in America where he could escape the threat of the anti-Jewish movement within Nazism.

But he chose not to leave Austria and subsequently he was arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp along with his father and his mother and his brother and his newly married wife. All of those died in the gas ovens in Auschwitz. Frankl survived, although he lost every possession. He suffered hunger, cold, brutality, and as he writes, every hour expecting extermination day or night.

The first part of his book “Man’s Search for Meaning”, he tells a story of his experience in these camps in Auschwitz primarily and then in Dachau as well. Many people died in the gas ovens; many people died anyway – they were just found dead in the morning.

But he said there were many, like himself, who survived that time, and one thing they shared in common – the people who survived over against all the folks who just died naturally – was that they kept alive a sense of hope. They would sit in their groups and talk about what they would do when the war was over, when they were out of this concentration camp.

He'd say, we would invite each other to our homes for meals and say, "this is what we are going to eat" and we described beautiful food that we would eat together. Meanwhile we were living on very thin bean soup and half a piece of bread a day. But we talked about this and we kept our sense of hope alive."

He said, "There was a man that came to me one day who said to me, 'Doctor, I had a dream and in my dream somebody appeared to me and said, 'is there something you would like from me?' I don't know who it was in my dream but I said, 'Yes I would like to know when I will be released from this prison. I would like to know when the war is over, when it's over for me.' And the man in the dream said, 'the war will be over for you on the 31st of March 1945 (and Frankl writes this was February 1945)."

He said that man was a different man. He had new energy. He had a spring in his step. He had a glint in his eye and he was saying, "March 31st, I'm a free man." He had believed this dream. He filled with hope.

But he said, "As we got close to the end of the March, there was no evidence anybody was going to be released or the war would come to an end." He said, "On the 29th of March this man became sick. On the 30th of March he fell into a coma. On the 31st of March he died.

And his death certificate said he died of Typhus but Frankl says he died of no hope. Because one of the things that is vital is a sense of hope that sees beyond the immediate and that is what is lacking in a life lived under the sun.

Frankl set up practice after the war and for many years he practiced, although he travelled and gave lectures all over the world as well.

And in one of his other books, he says that when a patient came to see him who was depressed or discouraged or didn't feel like going on, he would say to them (a very disarming question actually), he would say to them, "Why don't you commit suicide?"

That's not a very nice question if your doctor asked you. But he said this, "The answer to that question gave me the key to this person's life."

They might say, "I won't commit suicide because of my spouse or because of my children or because of my grandchildren or because I still want to accomplish this or I still want to go there." And he said that was the key to that person's life – it's what gave them hope.

Now what Solomon has here is a scenario of work, getting up in the morning, going to work, coming home, going to bed, getting up, going to work, coming home, going to bed...but what is it for? What is it for? That's the big question. It's meaningless.

And so, he tries to find meaning, as we all do, as we all must. He tries to find something which supplants hope. I am going to suggest four things, different reasons he gives to work when you are living under the sun.

And the first is we can work for money. He says in Ecclesiastes 10:19,

“Money is the answer for everything.”

So, he adopts this idea, why not just recognize, just accumulate as much money as you can? Money gives you freedom; money gives you power; money is the answer for everything. And so, he works to earn and we work to earn and we invest to earn.

And this is what he discovers in Ecclesiastes 5:10:

“Whoever loves money never has money enough. Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.”

In other words, it is not enough. And partly the illusion of trying to get more is that if I get more I will be satisfied. But we're not. There's always that little bit more.

And last week – this week rather – I just read – no, last week now – I read in the newspaper an article about a man who won something like 45 million dollars in the lottery. And he was a young single man. He said, “I spent it on houses, fast cars, women, travel. And after 8 years,” he says, “I am back to nothing, looking for a job, still buying a lottery ticket every week.”

But I tell you there is an incredible amount of people who work for money that doesn't satisfy, says Solomon, so you can work just to live.

Here, Ecclesiastes 6:7:

“All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.”

In other words, it's all about looking after me, looking after my needs, just to live. Sometimes we work just to live because, you know, what you bring home in the pay pack is gone by the next pay pack. And it's just to live, to live, to live.

You can work to prove something. He says in Ecclesiastes 4:4:

“I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

So, he says you can work out of envy, you can compete; you can try to keep up with the Jones' (is that a Canadian expression?). Keeping up with the Jones', which means spending money you don't have to buy things you don't need, to impress people you don't like.

And a man's work springs from envy, he says. But he concludes this is meaningless.

You can work for your children, for your kids. It talks about in Ecclesiastes 4:8,

“There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to this toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.

“ ‘For whom am I toiling,’ he asked, ‘and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?’ This too is meaningless – a miserable business!”

In other words, he says, you know, because hadn't got a brother or a son, nobody else was going to get this, and so this is meaningless.

The implication is if you had a son then there is a meaning – you can give it to your kids.

Though he says elsewhere in another passage, “I have seen a sad thing” he says, “a man earns money and then he dies, he passes it to his child and his child hasn't earned it so it's just slush money for him – he just spends it on things that are utterly ridiculous and he destroys himself in the process.”

Winston Churchill often made some wise and witty comments. One of his wise comments was, “Parents should not leave their children money; they should leave them horses.”

What he meant when he wrote that in the 1920's: leave them the means to make money – give them some horses.

You know, you can eat a horse I suppose but, you know, if you leave them horses, they have to work and they can earn some money. That's a very wise comment as opposed to spare cash.

Now Solomon does a very good job of presenting the problem but a very poor job of providing any answers. All his answers are temporary. All his answers go back to the same thing. Okay, you work for money; money is everything, but at the end of it, it's meaningless. You work just to live but then it is just a routine you are on and at the end it is meaningless. You work to prove something – this too is meaningless he says.

You work for your kids. Well, that's okay but what if you haven't got any? And what if you do and they go and spend it and destroy themselves with what they spend it on?

So, his own answer is this: eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die.

In other words, don't ask the big questions, don't ask what is it about, why am I here, what's the meaning of it? Just shut your eyes to that and your ears to that and your mind to that and just eat, drink and be merry; tomorrow you die.

But there is an answer to Solomon's dilemma and we have to go to Jesus to find the answer because Jesus speaks right into this situation when in John 6:27, the word to Solomon from Jesus is this:

“Do not work for food that spoils,”

(Some translations say, “for food that perishes”.)

“...but for food that endures to eternal life.”

There is a food that spoils, a food that perishes; it is here today but it's gone tomorrow. And Solomon's repeated comments about work and wealth is it's only for today, it only lasts for now, it doesn't go beyond anything other than the immediate present life under the sun.

And Jesus said, “Don't work for food that spoils, don't work for food that perishes, don't work for things that are just about now.”

As I will say in a moment, that doesn't mean that now is not important and we don't have to work for now, but in the working for the now as well, work for food that endures to eternal life.

That is, that has significance beyond the temporary, significance beyond the now, significance beyond the three score years and ten, but which looks out into that which is permanent, that which lasts, that which is eternal.

Working for food that spoils means we will never be satisfied. That verse I just read, “All of man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.” That kind of work is all about now, it's all about here, it's all about me, it's all about my mouth, it's all about my own needs.

But there is a food that we work for that endures to eternal life, said Jesus. And that is where in our lives on earth, we bring in the agenda of heaven. The agenda: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now this involves a total re-orientation of our lives. It means that our life is not built around our needs, though our needs are there and our needs are necessary for us to be responsible about. But there is a bigger picture as well and that is it is built around God's purpose.

I am not talking about being a missionary here or about being a pastor; I am talking about being a bus driver or a physician or a schoolteacher or an accountant or a lawyer or a factory worker or a taxi driver or a stay-at-home mother with ten jobs, or a nurse, as well as a pastor.

When I was at Capernwray we used to talk to the students about every person in full-time Christian service irrespective of their occupation. In other words, get a vision that life, in all the necessary things that are required for this life, it's a bigger thing than that; it's about what am I doing to satisfy the purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let me give you some verses that we have in the New Testament. I will just give you three – I could give you more. Here's one:

Colossians 3:17, Paul says,

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus”

That is, do it under His authority – you are doing it in His name, under His direction,

“...giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Thanking Him for what it is that He is doing in your life and will do in your life as you make yourself available to Him.

At the end of the first service this morning a man came to speak to me and he said, “You didn't mention a factory worker this morning in your list.” (Well, I did this time because he told me that I had missed it out last time, as I missed out many things of course).

He said, “I worked for 12 years in a factory and every day I went to work for those 12 years, I said, “Lord, as I do into this factory today, help me do a good job, help me do it well, but help my eyes to be open to people that you might want to speak to through me or help in some way.”

And he said, “During those 12 years I led 11 men to Christ.”

I said, “Was that exciting?”

“Oh yeah, of course it was.”

He is not working for food that perishes. He needs his food on this table, he needs all those necessary things for this life, but he is working for food that endures to eternal life. He is saying, “Lord, what is Your purpose beyond this?”

Whatever you do – whatever you do – whether at work or play or rest – do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks – that is, confident that He is sufficient for you to work through you.

Here’s another verse:

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it for the glory of God.”

Whatever you do. Here’s what you have in mind – I am doing this for the glory of God. That will impact your integrity; that will impact your honesty; that will impact when you turn up for work.

This same man said to me that “I then went to work for two Jewish brothers. They came from Haifa in Israel and when I went to work for them, they said to me, ‘we understand you are a Christian. We will ask you to never talk about that during your time that you are working here.’”

He said, “I will honor that of course. I am here to work and if you say that, I will do that. I will only talk about Christian things if you ever ask me to or ever ask me any questions about it.”

They said, “Thank you.”

He said, “It wasn’t very long – a matter of weeks – before one of the brothers asked me into his office. He had a Hebrew New Testament on his desk and he said, ‘I have been reading this Hebrew New Testament to understand what Christians are about and I don’t really understand it. But you have something I don’t have.’”

This man said, “I said to him, ‘What I have is shalom, peace.’”

And his boss said, “I don’t have shalom.”

And this man said, “I said to him, ‘Shalom is Yeshua (that’s Jesus).’”

He said, “As far as I know he didn’t come to Christ – that man – but I knew he was hungry, I knew he was thirsty and God gave me that opportunity.”

But what I thought about that was, when you went to work knowing you can't talk about these things (and many of us cannot talk about these things in our workplace – it would be unethical for us to do so. We're not there to evangelize; we're there to work.)

But whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it to the glory of God and your boss, who wants you to never mention Christianity, says, "What have you got? What is it in your life?"

Shalom.

You see I had several conversations this morning after the first service with people who said, "You know, I would love to witness in my work but I can't or I don't think it's right."

I said, "You're right to think that. You have to live with respect to the context but your witnessing is not just your lips; your witnessing is your life, your heart, your compassion."

Now we're all frail; of course, we all fail, we know that. But people recognize when there is something about you that is inexplicable in normal terms. Because that which Jesus Christ does in us is inexplicable in normal terms, in human terms.

And so, work for food that remains, is what Jesus says. That is, in your normal working place, living place, where you deal with things which are going to perish but you have got to deal with them because this is what life is here on earth, look beyond that.

Here's another verse:

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

Some of us need to take this verse and stick it over our work life. You have a boss, yes, but you have two bosses. You have a paycheck, yes, but you have two pay checks. There is an inheritance from the Lord; you are serving the Lord.

And you see, the mission - and we talk about being missional – being missional is not the same as being evangelistic. Evangelistic usually means you have a program of evangelism.

Missional means that you are being in the workplace, in the place where you live, you are being a man, a woman, a young person in whom Jesus Christ is at work,

and through whom He is seen, because there is something about you that shows itself to be different.

You see this is the purpose for our lives, that although we need to go through the three score years and ten that God gives us on earth or whatever length of time He gives us, we have a bigger agenda, we have a higher Master, we have a higher goal.

1 Corinthians 15:58 – let me read this to you:

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

Your labor in the Lord is not one that you come to the conclusion it's meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. It's life under the sun and therefore it's like chasing after the wind.

No, your work is not in vain. And the context in which Paul writes that is the resurrection chapter (1 Corinthians 15) where there is something beyond this life.

That's why, you see, we're not just down here killing time to eventually arrive in heaven. If you are a Christian this morning, your Christian life is bringing heaven into earth, bringing heaven into the earthly, sometimes mundane but necessary processes, by bringing Jesus Christ in.

But the sad thing is we can get so caught up and so seduced by the demands of this life. Somebody also gave me after the first service this – they had taken it out of a magazine. And you can't see this, but down the side here is a little label that says, “Discover something new under the sun.”

So, he obviously was here the last couple of weeks when we talked from Ecclesiastes about life under the sun. And you open it up and it says, “This fall the sun will rise on a new mutual fund company in Canada” (I am not sure if I am supposed to say this because we are on television – it's an ad for Sun Life Financial, but they can always send the money to us.)

But I will tell you what that doesn't tell you. It doesn't tell you the sun will set on a new mutual fund company in Canada too. This is advertising life under the sun. That's as far as they can go. Life under the sun is important. We've got to live this life, but we live it with a bigger vision than that. We look beyond this life; we look beyond the now.

And as Ecclesiastes 2:3 says, the reason why Solomon writes this book, “I wanted to see what was worthwhile for man to do under the sun during the few days of

their lives. I want to see in this short life that we have under the sun, what makes life make sense.”

He concludes nothing does, because we have left heaven out of this, we have left God out of this; we have left the eternal out of this.

But when we come and recognize that and say, “Lord, my life has a purpose that’s bigger than just what I do from Monday to Friday or Saturday or Sunday – all that is important but it has a bigger dimension to this too. And I want to work for food, not that perishes, but I want to work alongside that for food that remains for eternity.”

And we only have this short life to do that. And Jesus said to His disciples in John 9:2,

“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”

Don’t waste your life by living it purely for what’s under the sun. We live it for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and we live it in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ and we live it for the purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when life is tough and it’s falling apart and things go wrong, as they do, you don’t lie on your bed, “it’s meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless.”

You lie on your bed and say, “Thank You Father, this is not what it’s all about. Life is bigger than this.”

An old spiritual many of you will know, sung by slaves down in the cotton fields, when they seemed to have very little to give meaning and purpose to life, other than being driven and made to work hard with little reward, and this was one of the songs they used to sing, and you probably know it.

“This world is not my home. I’m just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”

And there some rest of it, which I don’t have. They were saying, “In our difficult environment, where sometimes it might feel better to be dead than to be alive in this situation, we can rejoice because this world is not home, we’re just passing. We have treasures. Nobody else can get at those; they are not here. As they put it poetically, they are somewhere beyond the blue, meaning they belong in heaven.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,” said Jesus in Matthew 6 “for moth and rust and thieves will rid you of it, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” There are no moths, no rust, no thieves.

You lay up treasure in heaven by living on earth with heaven in mind – that is, with Jesus Christ as your Lord and the One to whom you submit everything so that whatever you do, you do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

And there will be some here this morning – that’s a totally alien idea to you. But what’s not alien to you is this: that life under the sun is meaningless, ultimately. We are here today; we are gone tomorrow. You know that. You have allowed yourself moments to perhaps lie on your bed and think about the meaning of your life. What is it? There isn’t unless we hook this life, which perishes, to eternity, which does not. And we work for food that endures, not just for that which perishes.

And maybe some of you need to come to Christ this morning because your life is going nowhere. No matter how successful you may appear to be and no matter how poor you are, if Jesus Christ is your Lord, your life *is* going somewhere.

You can be a slave in the cotton fields of Alabama and sing, “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up, and I have them, somewhere beyond the blue.”

It gives life meaning, it lets you put your head on the pillow at night and say, “God, thank You, my life is significant.” Otherwise, it is meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless.

That’s not the way you need to live, is it? Let’s pray together. And there may be some here this morning – you need to come and talk to somebody. We would love to help you and pray with you, especially if you don’t know Christ and God has spoken to you and given you a glimpse there is a life that is bigger and better and longer and higher and deeper than the life you have been living, and you want to surrender your life to Christ.

Lord Jesus, thank You that we are created not just to fill time, but that our lives may have meaning and purpose that last beyond the years of this life. We want to be those who live with an eternal perspective, we want to be those who bring God into every part of our lives, who humbly walk with You and allow our lives to be a testimony to Jesus no matter where You place us, that You, through us, might bring benefit to other people. Write this into our hearts we pray, make it live in our hearts. We ask it in Jesus’ Name, Amen.