

Ecclesiastes 2:4-8

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 November 2015

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] We've been studying now for a bit of time the book of Ecclesiastes and looking at the words of the preacher. I'm going to say this to you every week just because I think it matters.

Most scholars believe that the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, and I tend to agree. I think it's most likely that that's who this writer is, but we don't know that for a fact because he just doesn't say in the book, to be sure.

There's not enough detail to sort that all out. And so he calls himself the preacher, and therefore, that's what I'm going to call him. We have, as we've looked in Ecclesiastes and the first part of it, we have seen that he starts a sermon and he begins it, Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? And then in the rest of it, he gives us kind of the body of his sermon as his personal experience, his biography and his search to find gain.

As a man, presumably Solomon, had all of the resources at his fingertips that he possibly needed to do this. And he starts out his story in chapter 2 with a number of self-indulgent pleasures.

[1:22] And he chases them out to their very end. And I think that's important for us to recognize that none of us really have the capacity, the resources to chase out every possible thing that we could potentially find joy in under the sun to its very end.

But the preacher does. At least he sure seems to. And after all of this chasing, all of these experiments in gain, as he's looking for this ultimate value, he finds nothing of note.

Remember the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 12, verse 13. The end of the matter. All has been heard. I've searched it all out and recorded it for you.

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. And so in the past weeks, we've looked at chapter 2, verses 1 through 11.

We're going to continue to do so today and select out these particular potential gains and his search in them.

[2:29] So follow with me, if you will, as I read to you verses 1 through 11 of chapter 2. I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure.

Enjoy yourself. But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad, and of pleasure, what use is it? I searched my heart to know how to cheer my body with wine, my heart still guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

[3:46] So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them.

I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done, and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

This is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

And this morning, I want to draw your attention in to verses 4 through the first half of 8 and talk about the vanity of wealth.

And this is not a thing that's talked about very often in churches these days. And we could muse at the reasons why. We could survey all of the pastors in America and ask that question, why do we not talk more about money in our churches?

[5:06] We could guess that we are afraid to offend those who give well. We could guess that many of us see it as a necessary evil, that we don't really like talking about it because we know it's a thing that can be so deceptive.

But I would venture to say to you that the reason that it's not talked about more is because it's a great idol in our churches. And I'm not excluding ours from that.

And you don't mess with people's idols because they'll get angry at you. And this morning, I just want you to know that I don't care because I love you. If you want to get really mad at me, I will simply say, you are offended by God's Word.

And I'll step out of the way. I love you. And I want what's best for you. I echo with Paul. It's not you that I seek. It's not what you have that I seek.

Excuse me. It's not what's yours, but you. I want what's best for you. And I know our audience, it's mixed, but it's primarily young people.

[6:11] And some of you may have already checked out because you said, I don't have money. But you do. As college students, you're among some of the wealthiest in the world.

You have more than you really understand. And someday, and I hope someday soon, you're going to finish college. And you're going to go on to a career of some sort.

And you'll begin to receive a paycheck. And you need to understand how it is that we're meant to handle the wealth that we have.

A note beginning in verse 4. And we're going to talk in future weeks a bit about toil and work. But I just want to say these beginning things that he mentioned starting in verse 4. The great works, the houses, the vineyards, the gardens, the parks, the pools to water the trees.

All of those things are a work that he did, but they took money. Those of us with yards know how expensive it is to keep up a yard. I just, it's beyond me. Why does mulch cost so much?

[7:16] He buys slaves, right? He has slaves in his home to do work for him. This was a matter of status, but it also took money. He had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before him.

He gathered silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces, which means he had massive, massive wealth. Verse 10 says, Whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them.

And the preacher tells us in Ecclesiastes that wealth has no real value in this life. That it is not ultimate gain. That it is vanity.

Chasing after the wind. Meaningless. Why do so many of us who profess faith in Christ, who say we have the greatest treasure, still spend so much of our time chasing wind.

Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, the preacher tells us that money cannot satisfy our hearts. Chapter 5, verse 10. He says, He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.

[8:35] This also is vanity or meaningless. We need to pay very careful attention to the message of the preacher this morning.

Because our culture is telling us that the very opposite is true. It whispers from all sides. In social media and in advertisements.

In the posturing of our peers. On television and in movies and on the radio. If you only have this, you'll be happy. Look at the way she dresses.

She is so put together. That would make you complete. People would think you're successful if you drove that car.

Your house is who you are. Your capacity for leisure. How many vacations you get to go on this summer and post on Facebook. Facebook defines you.

[9:37] The sound of this constant whispering rises. From something really subtle. Into a cacophony of lies. And beloved, we buy them.

We eat them up. And when we do, they steal our satisfaction. And our joy. We need to stop listening to the culture. And we need to start listening to the word of God.

God loves us. And He wants what's best for us. And therefore, He instructs us in the ways we should walk. We've had some difficult discipline in our house over the last couple of days.

Those heart-wrenching moments for me where I really would just rather not get involved. It would be really nice just to ignore altogether and pass over the disobedience that's happening in our house.

But because I love my children. I bring them discipline. I bring them instruction. Because I want them to walk in the ways that are best for them.

[10:40] And our Heavenly Father does the same for us. We need to listen to the words of the preacher this morning. Vanity of vanities. Vanity of vanities.

All is vanity. The amassing of stuff is of no gain under the sun. Beloved, our life is but a vapor.

We are merely passing through and we ought not invest in the now. I'm not speaking against investment. I'm speaking about investing in joy and satisfaction in the now.

But we should rather invest in eternity. You can't take anything with you. Can you? I mentioned to Wes what the sermon was about today. The preacher says in chapter 5, verse 15 of Ecclesiastes, As he came from his mother's womb, he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.

None of it will have any eternal value. Those things that you invest in here, those earthly things that you invest in here, have zero eternal value.

[11:54] So how do we handle our money? Money is intrinsically woven into our lives. Almost everything we do requires it. Few things that don't have some component of money involved.

It takes gas money to go see family members. There's money tied up into almost everything that we do. I'm not going to suggest to you today that we should all cease to deal with it.

That we should all become monastic or move to some kind of philanthropic bartering system.

Money is necessary. But as Christian people, we need to learn how to handle it appropriately.

Whether we have little or whether we have much. I suppose that money is woven into everything. And because there's such a danger in it is why Jesus spoke about it so much. 15%. I didn't do the math on that.

[12:56] So check me if you'd like. 15% of Jesus' recorded teaching was on this matter. I know for sure that it is the one topic he talked about more than anything else.

Jesus talked about money more than heaven and hell. Interesting. Why? Because it's dangerous. And because we need to handle it rightly.

So turn with me. Step away with me, if you will, from Ecclesiastes. To the Gospel of Matthew 6.

Remember that the preacher has said, the end of the matter.

All has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments. For this is the whole duty of man. And there's a temptation on my part to run you all over the Old Testament. Run you all over the commandments of God to see how you can rightly handle your money.

And I think that there's a place and there's a time for that. But this morning, I really want to talk to your heart. So Matthew 6, verse 19-21. Jesus says, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

[14:16] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus gives to us in this text one exhortation with negative and positive statements. So He says it in two different ways.

Firstly, we are commanded, and don't miss that, the imperative of the language, we are commanded not to invest in this life. Our loving Father says to His children, Do not lay up for

yourselves treasure on earth.

Why? Because stuff is temporal. It is not lasting. It goes on to say, verse 19, Where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

The things that we can have and we can hold here are fleeting. They're passing by. It's pointless to invest in them. We are in the positive commanded to invest in eternity.

[15:28] A loving Father graciously says to His children, But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. It's not optional.

This is a command being given to the children of God. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. I love you. I want what's good for you. I want what's best for you. Invest in this way.

Why? Because eternal treasure is eternal. It will last forever. We get to enjoy the treasure stored in heaven forever.

Verse 20, Where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. It makes sense to invest eternally.

Those of us who have been enlightened by God, who have been made aware of the created order, who He is and what comes after. It makes sense that we would invest in that.

[16:28] Now, I'm with you in not being able to fathom what forever looks like. But on and on and on. This morning's book's attempt was to say day after day after day after day after day.

It makes sense to invest in that way. It has great benefit to us in eternity. Don't be like the man in the parable Jesus tells in Luke chapter 12.

You'll appreciate going there. Luke 12 verse 13. Luke 12 verse 14.

Someone in the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. This man wanted his now.

But he said to him, Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you? And he said to them, Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, wanting for yourself.

[17:36] For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. So there's the negative statement. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.

So then he tells him a parable to make the point. Verse 16. He told him a parable saying, The land of a rich man produced plentifully.

And he thought to himself, What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones.

And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, be merry. But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you.

[18:34] And the things you have prepared, Whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself in the now and is not rich toward God.

The fool is the one who spends his money on himself rather than spending his money in a Godward direction. Spending his money on the kingdom and God's advance of it.

A very famous quote from a very famous man, the late missionary Jim Elliott. He said, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

And to state that differently, the person who hangs on to what he cannot keep, who white knuckles the stuff of this world in lieu of eternal reward, is a fool.

We are too often foolish. Investing in eternity makes sense in eternity.

[19:40] But it also is of great benefit for today. Look at verse 21, Matthew chapter 6. I'm sorry I got you away from there to rip you back into it.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. I've had many, many, many people argue against what I believe the Scripture is clearly teaching on the way we should handle our money.

It's okay that I can have my things just as long as I don't worship my things. It's okay that I have all of this for myself just as long as I don't worship those things.

But I want you to catch what Jesus is saying here in verse 21. Jesus is saying, put your money where you want your heart to be.

He is suggesting that the one will follow the other. Put your money out there. Invest in the kingdom because that's where we want our hearts to be.

[20:47] We know that that's what's best for us. Don't wait until you feel like investing into the eternal things. Invest in the eternal things and your heart will go to that place.

1 Timothy 6, verse 17. Oh, I hate Scripture taken out of context. And this one is so destroyed in this way.

1 Timothy 6, verse 17. As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty. Nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. Have you heard that phrase before from somebody? As long as I don't worship these things, I don't set my hope in riches. They stop. They stop at the end of verse 17.

How dare they? Verse 18. What are they to do? Instead of setting their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but rather setting it on God, then there's some evidencing of that hope.

[21:48] They are to do good. Paul's brilliant play with words. They're to be rich in good works. They're to be generous and ready to share.

Which has the implication of both sharing and being ready to share. You catch that? So it's not just being ready to share. It's sharing and being ready to share. Verse 19.

Thus, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future. So there's the one implication, the eternal investment of this.

So that they may take hold of that which is truly life. So that they might enjoy the very reason that God gave them the riches.

And that is that they may gain more of Him. They may take hold of that which is truly life. Living as a child of God in the kingdom of God. That they may gain Him.

[22:48] And it's tragic to me that so many of us have so much. And we hold on to these little paltry things that mean nothing when we could have more of Christ. Would you freely give it away to have Him?

Beloved, we have been saved by grace. We have God's riches at Christ's expense. Christ bore the curse in our stead. And He secured for us an eternal reward.

Which is far grander than anything this world can afford us. If you have not experienced the goodness of God to you in Christ. Then none of this is going to make any sense to you.

Eat, drink and be merry. Repent and believe that you may gain Christ. If you have experienced the goodness of God to you in Christ. Maybe you just need to be reminded of that goodness.

Maybe it's grown cold in your heart. Maybe you have forgotten how precious a treasure Christ truly is. Psalm 34, 8-10 says, Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.

[24:04] Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints. For those who fear Him have no lack.

The young lions suffer want and hunger. But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Get the imagery here.

The young lions are the ones that have to take their turn to eat. It's the older lions that dominate the pack. And they get to eat their fill when there's a kill. The young lions have to wait on the periphery. And they get the leftovers and the scraps. The young lions are never fully satisfied. But those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

One of my very favorite psalms, which I want to invite you to turn to with me. And I promise not to put you back into Matthew. Psalm 73. This is a psalm of Asaph, who was one of David's singers.

[25:08] Pinned quite a few of the psalms. And this is a sort of confession for him. And I relate to this so often.

Even in my day to day. As I look out and I observe the world. And I just want you to read through. We're going to read the entire psalm together. And I want to stop and make some comments to you. About his testimony concerning the goodness of God.

He says, Truly, God is good to Israel. To those who are pure in heart. He starts with that very emphatic statement.

An echo of Psalm 34.10. Those who think the Lord lack no good thing. Truly, God is good. Verse 2. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled.

My steps had nearly slipped. He stopped believing that great truth. That God is good to His. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[26:15] For they have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. In this day, to be fat meant you had time for leisure. You had time for laying around and eating rather than working hard.

Right? So replace for that tan and fit. In that place. Verse 5. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore, pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness.

Their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore, His people turn back to them and find no fault in them. And they say, How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked.

[27:15] Always at ease, they increase in riches. So catch what he's doing. He's observing the way that these people live. But he's saying, But wait a minute. They clearly oppose God.

And yet, they're so wealthy here. They seem to have so little trouble. And so much joy. Right? So much so that the people of God find no fault in what they're doing.

The people of God are being deceived by them. Right? How can God know? The people of God have ceased to listen to the Word of God and rather are listening to the culture around them.

He goes on to say, verse 13, All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long, I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.

If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. Right? So here's this emotion going on in him. He's actually beginning to think, maybe I shouldn't follow the ways of God.

[28:13] Maybe it'd be better for me if I would follow the ways of the world. But then he says in verse 15, if I were to say that out loud, right? This thing that I'm feeling, if I were to actually vocalize that, I would have betrayed your children.

Verse 16, But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task until, catch this, I kind of hear in verse 16, the preacher in Ecclesiastes, the labor, the toil of trying to figure out what is good under the sun until, verse 17, I went into the sanctuary of God.

Then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors.

Like a dream in one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. So he sees that the end of things, right? They've got what they want now, but the end of things, at the end of their life, they will be destroyed.

Verse 21, When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast toward you.

[29:32] How dare I think in this way? Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel. And afterward, you will receive me to glory. Praise God. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. My full satisfaction forever.

For behold, those who are far from you shall perish. You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you, but for me it is good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of all your works.

So this great satisfaction that he finds in the Lord is turned out to the telling of his great satisfaction in the Lord and all that he has done for Him.

[30:37] Beloved, this should be the testimony of our lives as well. Recognizing the goodness of God. We should be like the man that Jesus talks about in Matthew 13, 44 who goes and finds a treasure hidden in a field.

Jesus says this is what the kingdom of heaven is like. A treasure hidden in a field which a man found and he covered up. So he's cutting across a field which was customary in this day and he trips over a treasure.

He finds something of massive value and so he hides it. And then he goes in joy. It says then in this joy he goes and sells all that he has and he buys that field for this greater thing that he finds in this field.

He's willing to give up everything else in his joy for the treasure that's in that field that he may possess it as his own. Beloved, this is Christ.

The one who brings the kingdom of heaven to earth. The one who will one day return and fully bring it to pass. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[31:52] Give to the work of God. Give abundantly. Give sacrificially. Give in a way that loosens your grip on the things of this world.

Give in a way that has you gripped tightly to Christ. in a way that leaves no room for anything else in that grasp. And we'll speak more of giving next Lord's Day.

Give to the work of God here and beyond. Listen to the words of the preacher. Vanity of vanities.

Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God. And keep his commandments.

Let's pray together.