

**+ Ecclesiastes 2:18-26 (HCSB) + The Source of True Treasure +
+ 11th Sunday after Pentecost + 9 August 2015 +**

Where would you go to find treasure? A beach? A cave? A tropical island or a dense jungle? The mountains or an old field? I'm sure you can imagine all kinds of adventures you could have searching for hidden treasure, but how about someplace closer to home? Now I don't have a good lead on a location for hidden treasure here or elsewhere, but where would you go to find treasure here in Central New York? Well, I suppose you could purchase a lottery ticket or try some game on the midway at the State Fair. You could search in your own backyard or somewhere on the playground at school. What about the workplace? Would you go there to find treasure?

Now unless your job is or was actually treasure hunting, you're probably wondering why I suggested the workplace. Think about this. Don't we and those around us treat work like a lifelong search for treasure that always seems to be just out of reach? Why are we so quick to make the focus and priority of our lives all about treasure that rusts or fades or breaks or easily disappears? Why are we so quick to make our work or lack thereof the source of meaning and purpose and yes, even treasure in our lives and therefore a reason to sacrifice so much?

Centuries before Jesus was born, old King Solomon had similar concerns. The Lord in his grace had given Solomon tremendous earthly wisdom when he was still a young man. That knowledge enabled Solomon to rule the kingdom of Israel peacefully and wisely for many years. Unfortunately, that God-given wisdom didn't prevent Solomon from being seduced by the false gods of his many wives. At some point late in life, however, Solomon looked back and saw the foolishness of his ways. The Lord called him back to the true wisdom that comes only from God himself. In so doing, the Lord led Solomon to write Ecclesiastes—a look at life and how without the true God, without the Savior, life has no meaning and passes away like the wind.

People in King Solomon's day weren't all that different from you and me and those around us today. They too treated work as if it were a lifelong search for treasure that was always just out of reach. They toiled and labored. They got anxious and nervous and worried—even to the point of losing sleep—over the treasure they hoped to gain for themselves through work.

Yet what came of all that toil and anxiety and worry? What came of all that time and effort spent pursuing treasure? All that treasure that they had stored up would be given away as soon as they took their last breath. All that treasure fell into the hands of people who had not worked for it. All that treasure often fell into the hands of fools.

So what does Solomon say to all that toil and grief? He calls it ***“futile and a pursuit of the wind.”*** Solomon looked back on his own life and hated what he saw because much of his adult life had been spent in that futile chase after the wind. He hated it because Solomon realized that even if you devote your life to gaining treasure for yourself, in the end, you don't get to keep it. ***“I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. And who know whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile.”***

Soon Solomon was despairing over all his accomplishments and treasure he had stored up for himself. Soon he would have to give it away. ***“So I began to give myself over to despair concerning all my work that I had labored at under the sun.”*** He thought it a ***“great wrong”*** that after all his work he would have to give it up to someone who had not worked for it. Finally, the utter futility of life spent devoted to work and the search for temporary treasure caused Solomon to ask, ***“For what does a man get with all his work and all his efforts that he labors at under the sun? For all his days are filled with grief, and his occupation is sorrowful; even at night, his mind does not rest. This too is futile.”***

Things haven't really changed, have they? Why is it that we treat our lives as if they were a futile search for treasure? You spend your life working. Your work is ***“done with wisdom, knowledge, and skill...”***, yet you always need more money—to pay for your lifestyle or to have the retirement that you want. You have difficulty finding contentment and satisfaction in your work and find yourself always looking for more. You lose sleep at night about the family finances. Your mind refuses to rest.

So you sacrifice the one thing that you do have—your time. In search of passing treasure, you sacrifice time with your spouse and with your children. You sacrifice time with your Lord in his Word and at his Table. After all, you need a break. You need rest and time in God's Word doesn't do that for you. So you sacrifice your faith for a futile search for treasure. In the words of King Solomon, ***“this too is...a pursuit of the wind.”***

In the end, does it really matter how hard you worked or how much earthly treasure you gained for yourself? On a deathbed no one wishes that they worked more. You can't take any of it with you anyway! No hearse drives to the cemetery with a U-Haul trailer full of stuff hitched behind. All of that stuff, all of that wealth, all of that treasure goes to others who have not worked for it or even into the hands of fools who won't be like you. Even in this life, you can devote everything to passing treasure, but just as suddenly lose it all.

So what do we do? Do we just go and quit our jobs or stop working so hard? No, we can't do that. There are mouths to feed, bills and taxes to pay, and families to support. What's more important is how we look at work and the treasures of this life! King Solomon discovered that work can actually be a blessing from God. ***"There is nothing better for man than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God's hand, because who can eat and who can enjoy life apart from Him?"***

So often we look at work as drudgery, as less than ideal, as a necessary evil. There may be people or reasons that make work difficult for you to enjoy. Yet Solomon turns that view of work upside down. Yes, our lives aren't supposed to be all about work, but the Lord uses work to bless you. Think about this. Before the fall into sin, even Adam had a job that God gave him in order to bless him. In our case, the Lord uses work to provide food and drink on your dinner table, a comfortable home, clothes on your back, provisions for your family, and even the opportunity to actually enjoy work—whether that's in what you do or the benefits the Lord provides.

Yet no matter how much blessing you receive through work, work itself still isn't the source of true treasure. Solomon tells us, ***"For to the man who is pleasing in [God's] sight, He gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy..."*** True treasure is found in the One who gives ***"wisdom, knowledge, and joy"*** because that One makes you ***"pleasing in [God's] sight."***

Now how does God do that? He accomplishes it through his own work on your behalf that you might have lasting treasure. Thank God that he never viewed his work of saving us as drudgery or less than ideal or a necessary evil or that he was doing it all for his own glory! Consider how God guided human history so the time, place, setting, and people were exactly what he wanted for Jesus our Savior to come into this world.

Consider how Jesus willingly went through each stage of life from infancy to adulthood not shirking his saving work at all in spite of poverty, ridicule, faithlessness, betrayal, opposition, and even death. Consider how Jesus not only lived a perfect life and died an innocent death, but how he also fended off Satan's every temptation and attack, washed us clean of the guilt of our sins, and conquered death with his own empty tomb. Now he rules all things for our eternal good—all that to make us ***"pleasing in His sight!"***

Then God blesses us with ***"wisdom, knowledge, and joy"*** unlike any you'll find in this life. Through his Word, God gives you wisdom from above—the wisdom of salvation, the wisdom to know where you're heading and why. On your own, you'll just be stuck in the rat race seeking the passing treasures of this life. Through Jesus, you now seek eternal treasures—treasures like forgiveness and strength, hope and meaning and contentment and eternal life in him. You see how Jesus impacts every aspect of your life and you can look for ways to use your time to serve him in your God-given callings in the home, in the church, and in society. You look for ways to spend time with Jesus! You look for ways to use your God-given wealth—no matter how small or great—to support His work so others will enjoy the eternal treasures that you have through Christ. You can even plan that your wealth be used as a physical blessing for others and to be used so others can receive the eternal blessing of the Gospel.

Now through the Word of God, you have knowledge of the God who gives you everything in this life whether much or little, who gives and who takes away, but who in every case blesses you with his undeserved mercy and love. In particular, you have knowledge of the God who saves you—your Savior Jesus Christ and that leads to the final blessing—joy.

You have real joy—not the kind of passing joy you feel when you get some money in a birthday card or a bonus in your paycheck, but lasting joy that praises your Savior even when times are tough or finances aren't so good. You see, joy in Christ comes from confident trust in Christ. That means you can go to sleep at night trusting that Jesus will handle your problems. That means that your life need not be filled with grief and anxiety and worry, but instead contentment and peace and hope because you have a Savior-God who gives you everything from income he uses to provide for you and your family to the eternity he has waiting for you. All those gifts come from God's gracious hand!

So what treasure will you seek when you leave here today? What treasure will you seek when you go home or when you go to work on Monday? Don't chase after the wind of this world's treasures which will be here today

and gone tomorrow. Instead go to Jesus and enjoy the blessings from his hand. Go to the Source and find in him true treasure that will last forever. Amen.