

A Chasing After The Wind!

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Date: 29 January 2012

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[0 : 00] Well let's look back to the Old Testament reading that we had in the book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 4. Ecclesiastes chapter 4 and at verse number 4.

And I saw that all labour and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbour. This too is meaningless at chasing after the wind. They say that every dog has his day, meaning that there are times when most of us who live just on a flat level as it were all the time, we may rise above the surface once in a while and come to prominence because maybe of some crisis that we had to deal with that we overcame or something like that. And if I may use that seeing about books of the Bible, it is true that at certain times in the history of the church, a particular book of the Bible rises to particular prominence. It seems to resonate with people because of the crisis or the particular age in which they find themselves. For example, there were really bad times in the history of our Scottish church about 300 years ago, the killing times during the Covenanting period, when the book of Psalms came to prominence among the people. They found them particularly apposite to the needs that they had at the time. For example, Psalm 124 which said, if the Lord had not been on our side, they would have been completely overwhelmed. And some 150 years or more before that in the Reformation period, the book of Paul's letter to the Romans became the bedrock on which the Protestant church came to be built at that time. When we turn to the book of Ecclesiastes, we might wonder what particular time that book might have special reference for. Some people have even questioned whether it should be in the Bible at all. And yet here we find it among the wisdom books of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, in Paul's second letter to Timothy, we read that all scripture, the Old Testament with all its books, as well as the New Old Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable, profitable for every aspect of our living. And I believe that the book of Ecclesiastes has a real significance for the day in which we are living now. It's particularly suited to our day. Why do I say that? Because we are living in a thoroughly materialistic world, in a secular world. And by a secular world, I mean that people are living as if God does not exist. Or if he does exist, he has no relevance to this life. We live as if this world is all there is, here and now.

The writer of Ecclesiastes has a special phrase that he uses throughout the book, and it describes that type of life. It is life, he says, that is lived under the sun. There's no reference to eternity. There's no reference to God. It is simply on this plane only. And when we end this life, six feet under, finished. And he has another way of describing this life, which I've chosen for our text this morning. When you live that way, life under the sun, at the end it turns out to be a chasing after the wind, a great and sad delusion. It's right that we should always be taking stock of where we're at in life, and what plans we have for the future, taking time to consider whether or not God is important to us and the way that we live.

[6 : 54] Do we take him into account in the things that we're thinking, the things we're doing, and about the future? I want us to look at one or two things at this time which may cause us to consider just how we're living. Because in the first place he tells us in this chapter that our work may be meaningless. It may be a chasing after the wind. Not that the Bible knocks work in itself.

Indeed having work to do is a blessing. Being made redundant can be devastating. From its opening chapters the Bible speaks about work as a noble thing. After all God affirmed work when he created Adam and placed him in Eden to work the garden. But in the first chapter of this book of Ecclesiastes, in chapter 1 and verse 3, the writer says this, what does man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun? What does he gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun?

And that last bit of the verse is really the key. It is, as I was saying at the beginning, a writer's way of saying that this work, simply done under the sun, is work that has no reference to God. It ignores

God completely. And it is that which makes our toil meaningless. Because it is purely for self, purely for me and God is nowhere in my world. And at the end it has no goal.

I remember some years ago when we were because of sickness dealing with a surgeon. And when he was speaking to us about the procedures that he had to do and about the expenses that were normally involved in the different things he was going to do, he actually said that there would be no expense involved for us. Because he said we work for the same boss with a capital B. And the fact that he was a Christian coloured all that he did every day. An excellent man at his work. And he took

God into his work. In Psalm 127 we read that unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. The Lord builds but he uses our hands. But if we leave him out of account, we're going to end up with a meaningless shell. That's the motto of our city, Psalm 127 verse 1. And I think sometimes that the city fathers tend to forget what the motto is and where it belongs to. Our Lord Jesus said do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of man will give you. In other words what we are doing now must have reference to God if we are really going to have meaning and satisfaction in this life and in what we do. Whatever the job is that we are given to do. Idleness is condemned. Paul the Apostle had to write once or twice to the

[12:28] Thessalonian Christians who thought themselves so spiritual, so heavenly minded that they became no earthly goodness we say because they were just waiting for God to supply everything and Jesus to come back again and so on. And Paul was quite emphatic in his denunciation of that. Jesus often referred to work in his parables and Paul was a hard working man not only as a preacher but he worked with his hands making sails and tents and whatever in order to keep himself and through it all he saw that he sought to honour God. At the time of the Reformation the great reformers Martin Luzer and John Calvin took a very what we can call a high view of work as something God given and through which we can and should honour the Lord so that it is not merely done under the sun but as a thank offering to the Lord who gives us the ability to work. Otherwise it will be meaningless, empty, a chasing after the wind. So how do we view our work? Is God in it? And again here our writer tells us that our wealth can be meaningless. Look at verses 7 and 8 he says again

I saw something meaningless under the sun there was a man all alone he had neither son or brother there was no end to his toil yet his eyes were not content with his wealth for whom am I toiling he said and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment this too is meaningless a miserable business.

His eyes were not content with his wealth isn't that a commentary on so many in our society today but just as I said the Bible does not knock work neither does the Bible knock wealth as such it's our attitude to it that counts in Psalm number 49 in verses 7 verses 6 rather and again there's a reflection on this in verse 10 it speaks there about those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches but then as it says in verse 10 when they come to die they leave it all to others Proverbs in 29 and verse 4 says do not wear yourself out to get riches for a cast but a glance and they disappear of course we all need money and we are so grateful for people who are able to give what they give to support the work of the gospel to work to support the work of the congregation here the wider church in our country in lands abroad and a whole multitude of other good causes that money can go to and can be used so positively but like so much in life we need to have a right attitude towards it or else it can become an idol that we worship instead of worshipping God and if that's the case ultimately it will turn out to be meaningless at chasing after the wind and the New Testament warns us about that in so many places for example in 1st Timothy in chapter 6 verse 17 Paul says to Timothy command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain but to put their hope in God who richly provides for us everything for our enjoyment you see where the emphasis lies God must be uppermost it is Paul the love of money that is the root of all evil it can so easily become an idol for as Jesus said in Luke 16 and verse 11 if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth who will trust you with true riches we can become obsessed with the wrong things and that is why Jesus said about the rich how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God if we put our wealth our things our possessions this life before Christ so it is

that Jesus could speak of the deceitfulness of wealth how it can choke the precious seed of his word from taking real root in our lives and after all as he puts it so clearly what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul or what can a man give an exchange for his

soul so let's keep a check on our attitude to our wealth in whatever form we have it don't let it dominate us but let us thank God for it and use it wisely for him concentrating on what the apostle calls the unsearchable riches of Christ otherwise it will all end up being meaningless a chasing after the wind and there's one other thing here that I might mention and that is success our success can also turn out to be meaningless and a chasing after the wind if you look at the closing verses from verse 13 to the end of this chapter these verses are a bit enigmatic and perhaps difficult to interpret but you get the drift when you read them a few times telling us that popularity and success are very fragile they can easily disappear we have a culture of celebrities many are famous just for being famous we don't know of anything practical or substantial that people have done they're just as it were paper idols and may soon be blown offstage by the next group of celebrities who come along of course we all like to be liked and to be popular can be a very affirming thing but popularity can be very fickle you just need to ask a politician about that but there is a success that is positive and is blessed by God a way back in the Bible in the book of Joshua at the very beginning of that book God spoke to that leader of his people and he said concerning his own word do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it then you will be prosperous and successful that is the secret of a life that is meaningful a

life that is wise and a life that has a glorious future you see we may ignore God all our days but be assured God does not ignore us if you look at the very end of this book of ecclesiastis God the very last verse of the book says this for God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil how sad it will be if when God comes to review your life and to review my life and he looks at what we have achieved we may perhaps have been hard working all our days we may have attained to a good standard of living we may have had a considerable measure of success in what we had been doing and we bring that before God and God looks at it all and as it were my shake his head and say yes you worked hard you got on in the world you were comfortably off you were successful but it was all meaningless but why

[25 : 15] Lord because I was not in it and friends that would be a terrible condemnation because when God would speak such a way to us that would not be the end we would be cast out of heaven because there's nothing meaningless in heaven that is why in the last chapter of the book when he's summing all up about life under the Sun the writer says listen remember your creator and that's what I want you to do today remember God and have him uppermost in your life there is a very very telling passage the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 and at verse 19 for our Savior says do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be also

Paul the Apostle says to us in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 no eye has seen no ear has heard no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him that friends is the meaningful life I was reading in my daily Bible reading notes the other day a comment made by an African man living in a country where civil war was raging and he had lost everything his home his family he lost it all and he said I never realized Christ was all until all I need until Christ was all I had if at the end of life you come before God and Christ is all you have heaven is yours and God will welcome you home otherwise you've been chasing after the wind shall we pray our Heavenly

Father speak to us we pray and help us to decide for Christ to put our faith our hope our all in him for he is the one who gave his all for us Grand Lord that at the end of our days we may not be found to have been chasing after the wind but rather may we know a welcome into glory through Christ our Lord Amen