

Many think that if you can't get the gold medal at least you can get the silver. But studies show that silver medalists are less satisfied than even bronze. When asked why, the second place finishers said they couldn't help thinking about what might have been. The third place finishers were just satisfied to have medaled. I guess accomplishing more and getting to a higher place on the podium doesn't always guarantee a feeling of success or happiness.

Are you facing anxious striving, despair, or grief? Do you struggle with misfortune, pain, or toil? These are words right from the book written by Solomon called Ecclesiastes. Which describes you? On top of all those words twenty eight times Solomon uses one word that strikes a chord with us as well. Maybe you've described your work or your life in this way. Instead of being satisfied Solomon cries out **"Meaningless, meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!"**

So as you examine your life this morning and think about how satisfied you are with your work let's think about Solomon and the hints that this well known king of Judah gives to us from the first lesson for today.

If you've heard anything about King Solomon it probably has something to do with his wisdom or his wealth. His wisdom was something legendary, greater than just about everybody. And he was not short on money. It poured in from all over his kingdom. It was said that Solomon collected twenty five tons of gold each year. Everything in his house was made of pure gold. No cheap silver for the king. So to hear this wealthy wise king of an influential country cry out **"I hated all things I had toiled for under the sun"** we might ask if we heard that right. Solomon was such a famous and powerful man, but also so full of tragedy.

One phrase is so important when you read the book of Ecclesiastes. That phrase **"under the sun"** describes not only where Solomon was working but also why he felt so limited. Solomon, like you and me, examined his life and realized that no matter how hard he worked it was always going to be for nothing because it was under the sun. All earthly effort still points to one source for success, yourself. And self is limited. Jesus taught that in the parable from the gospel. The rich man had everything and it was going great. Except he forgot one thing, he was going to die. It happened early. Working under the sun destroyed everything the rich man worked for, everything Solomon worked for, and everything you will work for.

So everything is meaningless as Solomon said. Can't we escape to something different? The Bible gives the answer. **"You have been raised with Christ...for you died."** Jesus Christ came from beyond the sun, from heaven itself, and died with all your sins of personal selfishness and greed in tow. All the sins you ever committed or ever will have been paid and the guilt too. You died with Christ. No longer are you an earthly creature bound to a limited existence with no chance at happiness. That part of you is dead. What lives today is hidden in Christ, raised with him from the dead. You're not limited to under the sun anymore. Rather your life is unlimited in heaven beyond the sun.

With your eyes focused on life beyond the sun look to make a difference beyond the sun. No matter what your work remember that it isn't for nothing. It has a purpose beyond this world. Working those late hours toiling when no one sees. Putting in the time to make sure the kids are all set for the school year. Driving the extra mile to visit a relative or loved one who is home bound. Working hard late into the practice. Whatever it is don't ask what's in this for me? Ask yourself what's in it for God and his son Jesus? Instead of following sinful desires follow what God says in the Scriptures. Instead of pleasing yourself praise God. Die to self, live for Christ.

Ever wonder how much land a man needs? The Russians had a story they told that went like this. *A Russian peasant was told he could have all the land he could walk around in the time between sunup and sundown. So, with the rising of the sun he began walking as fast as he could. By midmorning it seemed that he was moving too slowly so he increased his pace and didn't stop for lunch. As the afternoon heat beat down on him he hurried his pace even more. He felt that he simply must circle more and more land. By late afternoon he was soaked with sweat and tired. He had walked around many acres but still dreamed about more. So he began to run. Breathlessly he pushed himself into a fatigue he had never known. His heart beat wildly from anticipation and exhaustion. Sundown was now only an hour away so he ran faster. Within minutes of sundown he raced toward his point of beginning, a point that would complete his circle and make him the largest landholder in the district, and he fell to the ground dead.*

Sounds a lot like what Solomon wrote. **"A man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest."** Do you ever get the feeling you're working for someone else's benefit? Your hard earned money goes to tax dollars for entitlement programs. Your hard earned money goes to the retirement expenses of others. Your hard earned money is being used on your children, spouse, or someone else and not on you. You want control over your money. Who can you trust to handle your money as well as you? Even in the night you can't stop plotting and dreaming of ways to earn more.

All that died, remember. Died when you became a new person in Christ. Instead of working for control let God control your fortune. This isn't the line about giving more to church or giving everything to church. Instead give all your wealth, property, possessions, time, plans, priorities, and all your hopes and dreams to God your heavenly Father. In perfect wisdom and love he'll use them for his glory, a glory beyond the sun.

Think about the rich foolish man from Jesus' parable. He could've done so much good. Out of just the extra he could have fed the homeless for years, funded research for a cure to deadly diseases, or built schools and churches. Instead of mocking God he could've glorified him. God gave you resources, some more some less. It's not what you have or how much that's important but how you use it. Work with what God gives you. do good with it. Life is meaningless under the sun and so is our money. But life will not be meaningless when we live life using God's gifts for Christ and his church.

Technologies always increase; that's the nature of technology. Something newer always does more than the previous version never dreamed of. But consider what you have and who you are as a gift from beyond the sun. **"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works."** You were made by God perfectly for this moment in this place. As a child of God you will always produce exactly what he calls for in any given circumstance. You have a special task for a heavenly purpose. Everything you have from God is given from beyond the sun to be put to use under the sun. There, in Christ, you can find satisfaction in your work.

People are always saying to think outside the box. This means to find new and better ways to do what is already being done. Solomon doesn't just want us thinking outside the box. He wants us thinking beyond the sun. Glorify God with your work. Trust in God to manage the results of all your work. And work hard with the gifts and resources that God has given you. Set your mind on heavenly things and not on earthly things and you will be satisfied with your work.