

Does life have meaning?
3. The problem of work (Ecclesiastes 2v12-26)

John Percival

Introduction

- Right expectations?

Death renders wisdom meaningless (v12-17)

- Some benefit

- Ultimate futility

Death renders work meaningless (v18-23)

- The experience of work
 - Work is hard
 - Work is frustrating

- Work as a gift (v24-26)

Christ transforms both wisdom and work

- A new wisdom

- A new work

Conclusion

Bible references: Eccl. 10:10, 2 Tim. 1:10, 1 Cor. 1:24, James 1:5, 1 Cor. 15:58

Ecclesiastes 2v12-26 (NIV)

¹² Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? ¹³ I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. ¹⁴ The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. ¹⁵ Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." ¹⁶ For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die! ¹⁷ So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For 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. ²² What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³ All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

²⁴ A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶ To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.