

***Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:18-26***

***2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." 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.***

**God has purpose for you**

- 1. Recall who you are in Christ**
- 2. Recognize who it is that you serve**
- 3. Remember what it is that you do**

What is the meaning of life? That may be a pretty weighty question to consider especially this early on a Sunday morning. And I would venture to say that most of you don't spend too much time pouring over different philosophy books nor do you spend too much time staring into the starry expanse pondering this big life question. However, even if you and I are often too busy just carrying on with our lives to consider this question often, it is a question that is worth looking at periodically. Especially, in light of recent events both locally and internationally it is a question that would be beneficial to consider. When we are reminded of how fragile and fleeting life is it is worthwhile to consider those big questions of life, such as: What is the meaning of life? Why are we here and what is our purpose? And while these might seem like questions that would take more time to adequately answer than a 20-minute sermon or an hour long church service God gives an answer to us in his Word that is rather straightforward. He gives us the wisdom of his Word to help us combat the misleading answers that this world so often offers. He also reveals that having this purpose identified for us in his Word gives us fulfillment and satisfaction like nothing else could. And so this morning we will consider the meaning of life and I pray that we will leave today knowing that God has meaning for you and me as we remember who it is that we are in Christ, who it is that we serve, and that we truly recognize what it is that we do as his dearly

loved children.

If we do take time to consider these lofty inquiries about life, it is often because things are at the time frustrating or they seem to lack meaning. We consider these questions as we struggle with the present reality and look for answers to find a better way. In those times what we need the most is not some sort of incredible new revelation as much as we are in need for simple readjustment in our thinking and in how we are conducting ourselves through this life.

Such is the tone of the words before us today. Many consider Solomon to be the speaker here, a collector and author of much wisdom, and as wealthy a man as you could ever find in the ancient world. He was a ruler of a kingdom at its very height and so one would rightfully consider that Solomon would have had every earthly blessing at his disposal. As we consider the likely author, the overall tone of this book, therefore, might be surprising. It is one of a man looking back at a life that was not as full as it might first appear. Wealth and riches, pleasures and success, all lined up in spectacular fashion for a man like Solomon, but the speaker here calls them all meaningless.

Utterly meaningless. These words deal our daily reality a slap in the face and grab our attention all the more as we learn that there are several pictures vivid behind these words. The picture of a mist, a vapor, that is here and gone, describes in breathtaking fashion just how temporary the things of life are. What is additionally eye-opening is how this word is also used to describe the value, or the absolute lack of value, of an idol. As we readjust our thinking about how a person finds meaning and satisfaction and purpose in life these are images of the most useful kind.

So often where do we go to find purpose and meaning in our life? Whether it is because of fleshly nature or it is because of the tendencies and the influence of those around us we look to the material. Case in point: if you meet someone new, what is one of the first things that you ask them? After asking their name, we might ask, "And so what do you do?" That is the culture and the custom that we have - for better or worse - been trained in. And so it is not surprising that we find ourselves putting a lot of stock in finding our own personal identity in what it is that we do and the things that this occupation gains for us. Our purpose and our meaning in life is quite often framed in our occupation, our role in life, and our success is this role. Tangible creatures that we are we also try to quantify our personal meaning with numbers and other things that we can stack and measure. How many thousands of dollars a year that we make at our jobs, the number or size of the things that we have, homes, equipment, automobiles, acres of land, all of that, so easily falls into places of importance especially as we live among peers who quantify their lives in such a way. And so we pause today and say, *"Is this it?!"* *"Is this really where I should find my purpose and meaning in life?"*

The collector of wisdom, the author of Ecclesiastes, comes in and at God's direction and he derails that train of thought, and tips over the apple cart of our priorities in shocking and memorable fashion; forcing us to pick up the pieces and consider how we must

rearrange our priorities. <sup>2</sup> ***“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”*** All that we are so often taught and shown to be of the most utter importance is called meaningless. Not that our work or our occupation or the even the earthly wealth that God gives to us is completely unimportant, but it is not nearly important than we make it out to be. And this is where that other image lying behind the Hebrew word for meaningless is exposed. When we make idols and false gods out of these things they become utterly meaningless. With these words Solomon forces us to consider what is often an uncomfortable and sinful reality. Too often, far too often, we make the things around us into idols. We look to our stuff, our money, our material possessions, our occupations, our status and roles in life, we look to these things first and we have thus made one or the other, or all of them put together, into an idol that neither holds nor wields any true power or meaning.

Solomon’s case is made here in these verses as he carefully traces out a logical progression as he places these things we give so much value into a context that brilliantly exposes them for the meaningless idols that they are. ***“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”*** <sup>18</sup> ***I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.*** <sup>19</sup> ***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.*** If you stopped to think about it your occupation and thus your impact in this life, it is nothing but a tiny, tiny blip in the grand scheme of things. We live and work for a little while on this big earth, on this huge timeline of history, and then we leave it all behind for the next guy, who may or may not mess it all up. If these positions that we hold for a time, the roles that we play for a little while, the money and materials that are here and then gone, the treasures that rust and fade or suddenly go up in smoke, if this is all that we live for and find satisfaction in, if this is it, no wonder Solomon describes the lack of satisfaction that we see so often in this world. <sup>20</sup> ***So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.*** <sup>21</sup> ***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.*** <sup>22</sup> ***What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?*** <sup>23</sup> ***All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.***

So now what?! Are we to walk away from church today merely crushed and dispirited by the overall insignificance of our existence and the fleeting nature of our wealth. Certainly not! However, through this collector of wisdom, God dispels and disrupts all these misconceived notions of the sinful world and through His holy Word the LORD refocuses our thoughts on what is truly important, what the meaning of our life really is, and how He does in fact give us purpose in this life and into eternity. <sup>24</sup> ***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,*** <sup>25</sup> ***for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?***

Rather than making futile attempts to finding satisfaction and purpose and happiness from the things of creation may we look to the Creator. Each day is an opportunity to take in the goodness of God. There is joy and divine satisfaction and happiness in recognizing that the Creator takes remarkable care of each one of his creations. In the grand scheme of history, I am but a blip, a dot, on this gargantuan timeline, and yet God provides for me personally. He kneels down in love and he knows you and me by name and he sees the need of each one of us. In his love the Creator of all, our Triune God, gives me the things that I need in this life. He listens to my voice, he receives my prayers, he addresses my every need and concern. In his caring providence and protection, he gives me the gifts and talents to not only earn a living, but provide for loved ones, serve others, and to give him glory. When I serve my LORD, and use my gifts that he has given me to serve others, there is a certain joy, there is a certain satisfaction, that can never be found in the empty pursuits of selfishly gathering up worldly wealth that will one day be lost, used up, or handed over to another. There is joy and satisfaction in knowing that the God of the universe is my Heavenly Father who sought me out and declares me to be his dear treasure, his child, and this priceless status is mine throughout this life and unto eternity in Christ Jesus alone. Through his Word the LORD tells me, little old me, that Jesus died to take away my sins so that I may serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, blessedness, which includes the temporal tasks of each and every day here on earth. God is pleased when we use to gifts he has given to provide for ourselves, to serve others, and to serve him. This is the meaningful truth that is yours as well. Your life has purpose and meaning for through baptism and the power of the Word the very Spirit of God dwells within you. You are God's holy temple. And in his wisdom he now takes the work of your hands and he provides for your children, for your neighbors, for your friends and relatives, and many more precious souls that you may not even be aware of, but he knows and cares for. Look upon he fields of corn that line our local horizon and how God provides for so many unnamed faces through just one farmer. Think of how God provides and cares for others through your occupation, through your calling, through your life. And consider how through his gift of faith, he unites each one of us to the body of Christ, the Church, and he uses our individual gifts and our talents, our abilities and offerings, even our paper money and our metal coins to extend his spiritual kingdom that extends through time and eternity. For his, is a kingdom, that will never rust or fade or lose its value now and forever.

Life can lack a clear meaning at times, especially when our focus is drawn so much to the material rather than the spiritual. But God in his goodness leads us consider the meaning of life that is found in him. Yes, dear Christian, whatever your calling or station in life God has meaning for you and me as we remember who it is that we serve and when we truly recognize what it is that we do. To God be the glory and we recall how he has set us free through Jesus to serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.  
AMEN