



The Vanity of Toil – Ecclesiastes 2:18-23

Solomon continues to spiral as he moves into v. 18. Considering all that Solomon had done as king, to look back and consider the vanity of his toil reveals his great frustrations with his current lot in life. His father, David, had desired to build the Lord a great and magnificent temple, but that privilege and responsibility fell instead to Solomon. Is this toil also to be relegated to vanity?

18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, 19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

The latter portion of v. 19 may hold somewhat of a key to understanding the state of mind that Solomon found himself in at this late stage of his life. Stating, “Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.” Solomon struggles with the reality that we do not in fact have control over our own labor. Take the temple as an example. This was a project very much guided by the mind and faithful passion of the king, yet, upon completion, it was no more his than it had ever been. His labors and toil on the temple provided a great and magnificent more permanent home for the worship of God than the Tabernacle, but ultimately this was God’s home and the people’s temple. We might talk today about Solomon’s temple as a method of distinguishing it from Herod’s temple, but neither could be the possession of their benefactors.

In v. 23, Solomon juxtaposes the struggles of the day with the restlessness of the night. “For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even at night, his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.” When the day’s hardships are left unresolved they can unsettle our nighttime rest. Dreams are often invaded by the unfinished business of the day. When we are convinced that we need to control more of our own labor than can possibly be done, we run the risk of that lack of control spilling over into nights of frustratingly troubled sleep.

The good news is that our labor as a vocation in Christ is not under our control, but rather in the hands of our Lord. We can take good comfort in the realization that God’s will is not thwarted, even when we are unable to see what our toil has amounted to just yet.

Thoughts for Reflection

What can you do to keep in mind that all our labor in Christ is for Him and not ourselves?