

Meaningless! Meaningless! That's how the book of Ecclesiastes begins. King Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes around 950 BC, and it's a book that wrestles with life in this world and the meaning of this earthly existence. That word gets repeated again and again throughout this book. Meaningless. **"Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."** Life is meaningless. Kind of uplifting, isn't it? But when you read through the book, you begin to realize something. Solomon is describing life without God. Life without the presence of God. Life without knowing the goodness of God. We'd have to say, he's exactly right. Life in this world without God ends up meaningless.

In our lesson today from 1 Peter 1, the Apostle Peter uses the exact same word to describe life in this world. In verse 18, **"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers"** (1 Peter 1:18). That word "empty" in 1 Peter 1 is the Greek word that gets translated for the Hebrew word that Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes. Empty. Void. Meaningless.

What's an empty way of life? Peter answers that by saying this: **"Your faith and hope are in God."** (1 Peter 1:21). An empty life is life without faith or hope in God. Or as Solomon would put, "Life under the sun without God is a meaningless life."

So the question we're confronted with today is this: "Do you have a meaningless life?" Or let me put it a different way: "Where have you placed your faith/trust and your hope?" Take a second and insert the answer in the blank: "My faith/my trust is in \_\_\_\_\_." Now you're watching the Livestream and you're thinking about church and the Bible, and so the easy answer to give is: "My faith and my hope are in God." I trust in Jesus. I trust in the Lord. That's true, and I don't want you to doubt that.

But is that evident to those around you? Does your family see it? Do your neighbors see it? Or do you find yourself showing signs of it only when you're around other Christians, or only when you're at church or only when it's safe? I think to my childhood, and I thank God for the Christian parents he gave me, and we certainly talked about our faith and talked about God's Word, but as a child, I remember spending more time playing sports. And then I think to my own kids' lives, and we talk about our faith at home and God's Word, and yet, I also know there are plenty of times where I set a bad example – where my faith in Christ isn't always on display or isn't so clearly seen.

That word "meaningless" used by Solomon in Ecclesiastes is a word that also is often used to describe idols. **"What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols (literally "empty things") and became worthless themselves. (Jeremiah 2:5)** I don't think that's a mistake. When I ask the question, "What is your trust in?" I'm really asking this, "What idols do you have?" Our idols are obviously more hidden than many of the Israelites' idols were, and yet, I would say that the last 5 weeks have exposed many of our idols. I know it has for me. What idols have been exposed in your life?

A good test is this: How do you react when something gets taken away from you? How does it make you feel? How does it change your life? Idols often start as good gifts from God, but they can slowly start taking the place of the Lord in our hearts. Many of us have lost money in the last five weeks whether losing a job or retirement accounts getting hammered. Many of us are concerned about our own health and what would it happen if we get the coronavirus. Many of us can't watch sports for hours at a time. Many of us can't spend time at the ballpark watching our kids play sports. Maybe you haven't been affected in a deep profound way, but I want you to consider this: "What in my life, if it were taken away would shake the foundation of who I am?"

There's nothing wrong with grieving over the loss of a job. There's nothing wrong with being sad for our seniors in high school. There's nothing wrong with being bummed out that you can't watch the Bucks play for a championship (at least not yet). But if your peace, security, and contentment are severely damaged because you've missed out on those things, then perhaps an idol is being exposed.

Here's the thing about idols. All they do is enslave. All they do is leaving you wanting more. It's not a mystery that Tom Brady is still trying to win superbowl in his 40s. It's not a mystery that if you make \$500 in the stock market, you think to yourself, "I should have invested more." It's not a mystery that an hour of Netflix during the quarantine will turn into five

hours very easily. Our idols – those things we turn to and trust for peace and security tend to grab a hold of us and leave us wanting more. And that’s why Peter and Solomon, and the rest of Scripture, “Life with idols, life without Christ is empty. It’s meaningless. It’s void...something’s missing.”

So Peter reminds these Christians of a time when the Israelites were in slavery. Physical slavery in Egypt. God sent Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Do you remember what God used to set the Israelites free? The fancy word the Bible uses is “redeem.” Redeem means to set free from slavery. What did God use to redeem the Israelites? He told them that on the night of the Passover, they were to take a one year old male lamb without any defect at all and kill it. And they were to take the blood of that lamb and put it on their doorposts and doorframes. Can you imagine if God told us to do something like that today? I just imagine my neighbors looking into our yard, “Did the Ehlikes buy a lamb? Are they really slaughtering it in their garage? Now they’re painting their door with its blood...we need to move, like right now.” But that’s what God chose. He spared those with the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, and he would then set them free from slavery.

It was all part of a bigger plan. Through the blood of a greater lamb, a lamb without blemish or defect, you have been redeemed. You’ve been set from all sin and from those idols that try so hard to grab a hold of your heart. He’s freed you. Not with gold or silver but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. This was all God’s plan, all the way back in Egypt as God commanded the Israelites to celebrate that event each year pointing ahead to a greater lamb. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. **He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake (1 Peter 1:20).**

Through this Lamb, God has set you free...he has redeemed you. Consider how precious you are to him! Salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, but consider how much it cost him. Consider now your worth and your value are fixed at the cross. The Savior who would leave heaven and travel into this world to set you free loves you more than anyone or anything else in this world loves you. That’s what turns an empty life into a life of purpose. That’s what turns a meaningless life into a life full of meaning. That’s what turns a heart that trusts in idols into a heart that trusts and hopes in the Lord. The Lamb of God who shed his blood and rose again. It leads us to do this...

**Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear (1 Peter 1:17).** In the Father’s eyes, we can’t hold up our looks, our skills, our money and say, “Here’s why you should love me.” All we can do is point to Jesus and his blood and say, “Here’s why I know you love me.” Or as the hymn says, “Nothing in my hand I bring, only to thy cross I cling.”

No longer a slave to sin, we call on our heavenly Father. What comes to my mind when I think of that is when I drive home at night, and if my kids are playing outside, I hear the shouts as they notice my car driving up, “Dad’s home!” They come racing to my car. I’m sure that’ll end in the next few years, but through the blood of Jesus, we call on our Father. Not as a buddy. Not as a pal. But with reverent fear/trust. With joy. He’s the Father who acts exactly the way a father should act. This Father is perfect. This Father is faithful. This Father will always be there for us. This Father holds us in his hands. This Father will one day bring us home.

And so what does Peter say we should do? “Live your lives as strangers here...” Just like the Israelites would have looked strange to paint blood of a lamb on their doorposts, as redeemed children of God covered with the blood of the Lamb, don’t our lives look different? In how we treat our families? In how we treat our neighbors and even our enemies? In how we spend our time? In how we handle different situations and problems? In how we handle a stock market crash or a pandemic? Of course, some of us handle these things better than others, and if you’re having an especially hard time right now, reach out and talk. It’s ok and good to do that. We’re here for you. And then also remember that Christ has freed you from sin and from this sin-cursed world, and he’s freed for something better – a relationship with your God and the assurance that this is only your temporary home...and that your life in this world is not meaningless. **For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.**

## At-Home Bible Study Questions

- 1) Why is life without God meaningless?
  
- 2) What idols do you think our culture especially struggles with? What idols do you especially struggle with?
  
- 3) How do idols (like money, food, whatever it might be) end up enslaving us?
  
- 4) What did God use to redeem us from slavery? Why did Jesus' blood need to be "holy and precious" (Read Psalm 49:7)?
  
- 5) What does the word "redeem" mean in the Bible?
  
- 6) Our heavenly Father is not a buddy but a loving father. How is a loving father different than a buddy/pal?
  
- 7) Peter tells us to live as strangers in this world. In what ways do you find yourself to be a stranger in this world?
  
- 8) Read Philippians 3:18-21. Where is our citizenship? How does that impact the way you live in this world?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I give you thanks that you have redeemed me (set me free) from my sin and from this sinful world. You have made me an heir of a much greater home through the blood of Christ. Lead me to live in that reality now as I strive to honor you with my words and my actions and as I live for those around me. Keep my eyes fixed on my heavenly home where you will wipe every tear from my eyes. In Jesus' name, Amen.