

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Two)

Work

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In the last message that I gave, we covered the importance of the phrases “vanity of vanities,” “under the sun,” and “what profit is there” to help us understand the guidance Ecclesiastes has for a Christian in his daily life. Ecclesiastes is a book of overviews, whereas life is like a labyrinth with many choices, and what Ecclesiastes does is counsel us as to which way to go—“this way” or “that way”—in life of our overall calling so that we do not get blocked so often. It is like Solomon is looking down and he can see the pathway through, and so he gives us this guidance through the book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes does not delve into mighty acts of God, like the parting of the Red Sea, nor does it delve into our redemption through Jesus Christ’s blood, or prophesy of specific historical events. Instead, it helps us to want to understand what general approaches to life are profitable for preparation for the Kingdom of God.

It can be said that it mostly points out activities and goals for life that really are nothing but “vanity of vanities.” These activities might be interesting, they might be exciting and fun, and they may even pay well and bring one a measure of fame, but they have no lasting value for the Kingdom of God. In other words, there are certain approaches to life or occupations that simply burn up a lot of time and produce nothing of value toward eternal life.

Many people involve themselves in these without ever thinking that what truly matters is the Kingdom of God and one’s relationship with God. These activities and attitudes may produce a great deal of discouragement and frustration.

“Vanity of vanities” indicates something worthless. However, these vanities may be far more destructive than just being profitless, because they are very time-consuming. A person may spend his entire life doing something that is vain. That is a lot of time. They may even be destructive to character and death-dealing in an eternal sense because they may not be glorifying of God at all. In other words, there is not any redeeming value to them whatever, so one must be careful because *everything* matters, at least to some small degree.

“Under the sun” indicates that Solomon is looking at his lessons’ conclusions from an unconverted secular or humanist point of view. In other words, God is not in the picture

at all, but God must be in the picture for us always, and “profit” refers to the value of an endeavor, activity, or attitude, or understanding’s worth regarding the Kingdom of God.

Some activities, thoughts, and plans have no value whatever to this life for the Kingdom of God, and these things are generally out-and-out sins. Clear examples of single acts that are absolutely worthless would be adultery and murder. They have no profit whatever under any circumstance, regardless of what a person may think in his attempt to justify his actions. I point these out only to provide a contrast. There are many time-consuming activities or practices we may choose in which to involve ourselves in which the matter is not so clear as adultery or murder, and it is these activities on which the Preacher tends to give his instruction.

The Preacher—Solomon—lays the groundwork for his instruction by showing that life is lived in a constant never-ending stream of cyclical activity. You find this in chapter one. Life seems lived somewhat like a hamster in a wheel, expending an awful lot of energy, but going nowhere.

One might call life a rat-race, or that one is just spinning his wheels. We all have lived that way to some extent, so it is nothing unusual. This illustrates why making right choices is so significant. How we have lived is reality for us, and we must make efforts to make our life more positively moving in a direction toward the Kingdom of God. The choices, brethren, will not miraculously happen. We must choose. That part is essential for everyone. They must be made to happen, one step at a time, and then following that, disciplining ourselves, aided by the knowledge of God, and the fact that because of His merciful calling we have a relationship with Him that must be lived by faith. In this regard, Ecclesiastes can be a major help toward making right progress.

Let us turn in the Bible to a chapter—the very chapter we concluded with in the first sermon when I resumed this series.

Romans 8:18-22 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

This brief inset, combined with Ecclesiastes, gives us a clear picture of why things are as they are. It is telling us why it seems as though life is lived like a hamster inside of a wheel, and why everything just seems to be heading nowhere. It tells us why life seems as though we are just spinning our wheels and using up a lot of energy, and we are getting very tired. But at the end of our life, what has been accomplished? Now here is a major reason: God Himself subjected nature and life to vanity.

Recall, that following Adam's and Eve's sin, God cursed the ground, and life instantly became a great deal more difficult to deal with.

Genesis 3:17-19 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

All of life is cursed to some degree as a result of God's reaction to Adam's and Eve's sin, and so Paul, in Romans 8, is showing that life—even the life of nature itself—is confined to sort of arrested development so that it is unable to fully achieve its desire. What Paul has done there of course is personified nature as though it is a thinking, communicating being. So nature itself, in Paul's personification, is crying out for relief from the curse it is under. Now we are within it, and we wonder why life is the way it is. That is part of it, and in this there is a very sobering lesson. God is showing us what the result of sin is.

Adam and Eve were only two people, but they were critically important to all of mankind. The one sin they committed where they ate of the fruit of the Tree in defiance of what God said—that seems in a way so minor to what we are aware of in this world that we live in—and yet that one sin has impacted on billions and billions and billions of people. There are people who go around and say, "What could be so bad about this sin? Nobody else is being affected." Do not believe that.

When one part of your body hurts because it has been injured, it affects the whole body. I am not saying that just because we commit a sin we affect everybody in the universe. I am saying that a sin cannot be committed without it affecting somebody else, and usually it is those who are closest to us. Be aware of that. God goes to great lengths to teach us this, and He holds us responsible. So we are caught in the curse, even as

nature, and this is one of the major reasons, brethren, why *everything matters*.

Our life is not lived in a vacuum. We are part of a whole, and Paul really brings it home in I Corinthians 12. He tells us that we are part of this body. We might only be one little tiny cell, a little bit of protoplasm floating around inside of a body, but we are part of that body, and so it is important that we strive to keep the body as pure as we possibly can, because it is the body of Jesus Christ.

Here is what is important to us. God the Creator has willed that things must be as they are for the very best outworking of His purposes. He is creating us in His image, and there is an awful lot going on. But God has made that judgment, and He has acted that the world and what it is has to be the way it is. He has willed that we must live and operate in the midst of what sin, vanity, or futility creates. So the point is pretty clear; therefore we have to deal with it. There is no escaping it. It is there.

Adam and Eve rejected God and His counsel from their life, and all have done the same since, and so our major choice is clear. Either God and His purpose is accepted as a part of one's life, or life will be vanity of vanities—getting back to the book of Ecclesiastes again. God has called us. We have accepted that call, and we need to turn our attention to what He is preparing us for. We have to turn our attention to yielding to Him and follow the advice He has given to us in His Word.

Ecclesiastes exhorts us to know that people gain nothing from all of their work, all of their labor, all of their worry, all of their doubt, all of their fear, apart from God. This is the key to the success of our life and calling, and that is, to take advantage of what God has done in His mercy.

Incidentally, the Greek word underlying “futility” or “vanity” in Romans 8 is *mataiotes* (transliterated *mat'ah-yof-ace*). It is a Greek synonym for the Hebrew *hebel*. *Mataiotes* too stresses emptiness, briefness, unsubstantial, and impermanent, and as we might say today, life is just like spinning your wheels.

You might remember I used the word “preface” in my last sermon, and it is a hangover from that sermon. The preface, as I am able to discern in the book of Ecclesiastes, is actually in a way a small one and a short one. The small one is Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. The rest of the preface, much larger, extends from Ecclesiastes 1 all the way through to at least Ecclesiastes 2:26, and maybe, I think further study is beginning to show that it actually goes to Ecclesiastes 3:14. So I am still expounding on the preface here, laying groundwork even as Solomon did in order to make his case so that we could understand it.

Thus the preface informs us of what Solomon is striving to accomplish, and that is, that life under the sun without God being a part of it is vanity of vanities and without profit, and that is the effect of sin. It is an effect that as things are, those lives are going nowhere who are living just “under the sun.”

We look at this and we begin to get knowledge of God and some understanding of what is going on, and we would like change. People in the world who know something of Christianity will say something like this: “If people would just keep the commandments, everything would work out.” People in the church will do this too. It is because they have not really gotten the bigger picture here. I am standing before you today to tell you, no, it will not work out. Something else is needed.

Ecclesiastes teaches us that God must be involved in our lives, and we must be seeking to be like Him. Remember my former sermon? God calls. He injects Himself into our life, but in response to His calling we have to seek Him, and thus we have a cooperative effort between us and God the Creator. We are giving our efforts to seek after Him in order to be like Him; not to find Him, but to be like Him. He revealed Himself, and now we seek Him to be like Him.

It is that combination that will work things out on earth. Just men keeping the commandments is not going to do it. I guarantee you, if they *did* keep the commandments, things definitely would be better, but do not ever eliminate from your mind the truth. God *must* be involved. Things are not going to change until *He* is involved. If you want proof of that, we are going to take a look at this right in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 7:11-13 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it. Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?

Do you see that? All of mankind cannot make straight what God has made crooked. The only one who can make straight what God has made crooked is God Himself.

Let us break this down just a little bit further. Even godly wisdom within the hearts and mind of God’s children cannot straighten out this world. The word “defense” that appears there in verse 12 means protection. Wisdom is a protection, and that is certainly true. Now the word “excellence” in verse 12 means “advantage.” Wisdom gives

people an advantage. Wisdom is a protection.

What we are seeing here is why the teacher states in Ecclesiastes 1:15 that what is crooked (meaning life) and hope for real lasting gain in this world cannot be corrected. So much is lacking, so much is wrong, it cannot be humanly corrected. In fact, there are so many problems, he says they cannot be numbered. Now because things on earth are not fixable as they are, it leads directly to the next subject he deals with, and that is "wisdom."

Things will not get straightened out until God sends Jesus Christ, and God Himself is personally involved in Jesus Christ and with more of the sons of God who, at that time, will be eternal beings even as Jesus Christ is. Then things are going to get straightened out. There is your answer. The problems on earth cannot be humanly corrected even if the overwhelming majority of people begin keeping the commandments.

So mark it well. Things would go much better, but it is not going to straighten out until God Himself is here directing things through Jesus Christ. Then it will get straightened out.

In Ecclesiastes 1, he starts talking about wisdom. We saw the word "wisdom" there in chapter 7:12-13, and that word wisdom means a defense. It also means a protection. Here in Ecclesiastes 1 he does not spend a major amount of words or time on it, and so at this point in the writing we are not going to be spending a great deal of time on it. We will get to it a little bit later at a better time, but there is a point of understanding that he wants us to grasp, and that is that wisdom helps us to deal with our circumstances. That is why he says it is a defense and it is a protection.

Wisdom helps us deal with our circumstances living as converted sons of God in this vanity-driven world, and it is a major means by which we are enabled to grow and overcome. But even the wisdom of Christ and the apostles, when they were on earth, did not change the world, did it? That is the first thing we can look to. And if He really was going to change the world, God would have left Christ here, but He did not, and things have grown substantially worse than they were since the time that Christ and the apostles were walking the earth.

Every four years we elect a new president, a new administration, and so there is hope that circumstances within the nation will change. That was a big deal when President Obama was elected. He had been elected to change things. "You're really going to see changes come!" We are seeing the changes, and we are losing our liberties. We are losing our economy even further. We are losing the capitalistic system that we have

which is way better than socialism, but we are changing to socialism about as fast as they can push it. That is their agenda, because for leadership, socialism is the way to increase their power, and that is in the heart of the government: to always increase its power over those subject to them.

The historical reality is that nothing really changes. Now you have the answer. It will not change until it is God's will to do so.

We are being counseled here in the book of Ecclesiastes to use the wisdom that God gives us because it is a defense, it is a protection, but do not expect that because you and maybe a growing number of people are being given this kind of godly wisdom, it is going to change things. I think, brethren, you and I will learn that as we increase in the wisdom, the knowledge, and understanding of God, the Tribulation is going to keep coming closer and closer and things are going to get worse, and you know that is true.

We are going to need this wisdom because it is a defense, because it is a protection, because it connects us with God. It is His wisdom that He gives to us to help us understand what to do, and of course He Himself is on the job too, overseeing our lives and providing protection as well. Therefore, in dealing with this vanity-filled world with wisdom, it is our best personal hope for the time being until God moves to really straighten things out.

But Solomon is letting us know that even dealing with godly wisdom, it is going to leave very much unanswered and undone. That fact must be accepted or we will always be on the edge of anger, hopelessness, emptiness, and dissatisfaction and perhaps fear as well, and it is going to eat away the joy of life. Our lives might really have a hole in it that cannot be filled.

Do you remember the song I gave early on when I started Ecclesiastes before—the song being: “Is That All There Is?” Keep your faith in God. It is *not* all there is. Things have to be worked out in our life, in the world, and they will be worked out at the pace God moves in for them to be worked out, and we have to deal with it. But God expects us to use the wisdom He has given us, and He expects us to use it for our defense and for our protection, but at the same time He is still overseeing our lives. Again, without directly saying it, Solomon is telling us that God's calling enables us to look ahead with hope.

That new section I mentioned before begins in Ecclesiastes 1:16 and it carried through, I feel sure, all the way to Ecclesiastes 3:14. But as he goes on here from Ecclesiastes 1:16, he begins to go into another subject that I am sure was near and dear to him,

because he lived it personally. That of course is the great works that he did in chapter 2 that he mentioned, and also along with that was the entertainment that he sought to keep him amused.

We are not going to go into this in a great bit of detail, but I am going to give you his conclusions. His conclusion there is that both of them were not only unprofitable, vanity, and a grasping for wind, but the mirth—the entertainment—he said was madness and folly. I think the way we would normally look at this is, “Solomon, you should’ve drunk more wine,” because he said there he was drinking wine while he was doing this, but he did not drink so much that he lost his ability to make wise decisions. But when the search was over, he concluded it had not produced the lasting quality of life that he dreamed of when he began.

I get the impression that Solomon was a person who was restless to accomplish things, and there is not anything that I can see that is inherently wrong with that, but the sense of loss or the sense of not really gaining some mental and physical efforts he put into his accomplishments was not as satisfying as he anticipated. It fell short. After all, he built the Temple for which his father David had collected all the material. In addition to that he built his own palace. In addition to that he built all kinds of gardens around the city of Jerusalem, and he irrigated them, which means he had to build irrigation systems. There are all kinds of things in which he involved himself.

You can just see this mind of his that God had given to him was just bursting with ideas about this, that, or the other thing, and he had all the intelligence and zeal to do these things, and he accomplished them. Besides that, every night when he came home from the office, there were also singing girls and guys and musicians, and the wine and the good food to help him to relax, and he said that when it was over, was it really worth it?

I do not want to mislead you, because at first that is what he said. Then he rethought it and he began to see that even for himself there were things that were good that happened to him, because he had to admit that he had really enjoyed the work. He did not say that he enjoyed the entertainment. He did say that he enjoyed the pleasure of building, of accomplishing, and he goes on then to establish something that is very good, and he concludes that the work that God gives to us to do must be considered as a gift. It is a gift—a *positive* gift from God—not to just amuse us, but to give us pleasure in the accomplishments that can be made from the gifts He has given to us.

This is important because it ties into something that he said earlier; in fact as early as the third verse in the book of Ecclesiastes in which he mentions the word toil—labor. And so this really does play a very large part in what is going on in our lives, even apart

from our godly calling. Eventually we are going to go into “work” in some amount of detail, because in regard to our relationship with God, work is a big deal. I kid you not. It is not to be shoved off as nothing. I am going to show you something that I know as soon as I say it you are going to say, “I knew that.” But we will see.

Eventually I want to compare Solomon’s teaching regarding work with what Jesus taught during His ministry, and I think we will see that both have something to offer. I think that we can learn something about judging, and at the same time arrive at balanced understanding regarding pursuing things of this world because I have personally come to the conclusion that this was the one downer that took place in Solomon’s mind regarding all that he did. It did not really produce what he thought it would. He came to the conclusion that it was good, that it was a gift from God.

Do you know what I think Solomon did? I think that he worked so hard and so involved himself in what he was doing in building the Temple, in building his palace, in building all the gardens and everything that he scattered all around the city of Jerusalem, he forgot about other things that were important to life. He lost himself in his work, and brethren, many, many, many, especially men, do this through their work. They really forget about things that are equally important, like their wife, like their kids, and on and on it goes. If a man loses himself in his work he destroys things that in God’s purpose are more important—the relationship with other people.

It was J. Paul Getty who said that he would give his entire fortune for one good marriage. A priceless quote! He had five marriages. I hope he was sincere in saying that. You can be sure that he did not have good marriages because he spent all his time making money.

What I am getting at here is that there has to be a balance. A poet by the name of Charles Kingsley said, “Men must work and women must weep.” There is a lot of wisdom there because men have a single-minded brain. Women have a brain that allows them to multi-task. Men have a brain that is going down one narrow alley, and never the two shall meet! That is the way it is sometimes. It is not good. I think that is what happened to Solomon and why he first said that it was all vanity, because he looked around, he saw, and he began to understand what he lost. But then he rethought it, and said there was some good that came out of it. But a person’s life needs to be *directed*. A man’s mind especially has to be disciplined so that he pays attention to other aspects of life that he has a tendency to ignore.

I think it is so sad, ladies, that you live in a time in which feminism is such a powerful influence. I do not know, but I think it is one of the most destructive things that ever

happened to the United States of America, to its culture and social life—women trying to be men and thinking that all men are ignorant louses. But they want to be just like us! That is what is so weird.

I believe that our reaching this point in Ecclesiastes is interesting because of the intersection of this particular subject material in Ecclesiastes to the Days of Unleavened Bread. Those days of course are just ahead of us. Properly observing the Days of Unleavened Bread is done by understanding that they represent coming out of sin, and at the same time Israel's trek through the wilderness. They walked, as it were, for forty years after leaving Egypt, and Egypt is a type of sin. Walking literally was a major part of their work.

Walking is used in the Bible as a metaphor for a Christian living his life, making progress toward a definite destination—the Kingdom of God—within a relationship with God. At the same time, the term “work” is a metaphor used in the Bible to represent the mental, physical, and spiritual efforts required to accomplish growth in Christian character, that we might be in the image of God and glorify Him at one and the same time. Thus, as a Christian, we must both do our Christian walk and work with our hands at one and the same time in order to be prepared, changed into the image of Jesus Christ following our calling. At the same time we can make some limited use of one major work's involvements of Solomon's life. That is Ecclesiastes chapter two.

We will spend a major portion of our remaining time on the term “work.” First, let us define the term. Remember, we are attaching this to the Bible, and work in the Bible is big, I kid you not. It is a major, major subject. This definition I will limit to its uses to a simple overall bottom-line usage. According to the *Free Online Dictionary*, work is defined as “the physical or mental activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something.” It has numerous other applications depending upon the context one might use it in.

Richard spoke a great deal about work in his previous sermon, and I am approaching it now from a different angle. Let us begin with God's example, because there is none better to show us the need for work. I am going to go to a scripture you all are quite familiar with, but we have to touch on it, because God is working.

John 5:17 But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”

Here is as good an example I can think of that we can find in Scripture. The verse is

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written in the sense as Jesus stated it, that both the Father and Son work continuously. Notice again: "My Father has been working until now." He does not even give it a starting point. The starting point is something that we have to supply, because He is the Creator. In other words, it goes back, and back, and back for eternity God has been working. Now why is this important? God is our model. He works. He creates. He does it continuously.

Let us look at another one in Hebrews 1:3.

Hebrews 1:3 Who [Jesus Christ] being the brightness of His [the Father's] glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

It is the term "upholding." In modern English it is better rendered "sustaining." "Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and sustaining all things."

It also pictures, just like John 5:17, that God is working, and that it has the sense of continuous activity. In this case it does not indicate carrying, as Atlas does in Greek mythology trudging along with a great burden on his shoulder, but rather the Greek word indicates purposeful energetic movement toward a goal. It is not like He *has* to do it. It is something that He willingly does because He is accomplishing something in doing it. He does not waste time. He is always going forward.

God's work is a dynamic concept of accomplishment toward goals that He Himself establishes. That is what we do. We do that, following God's example. We work toward goals that we establish. "Well, I want to build a house." "I want to plant a garden." I want to do this. I want to do that." There is the goal. We work. We leave one job, we think of another, and we go on to another. God is the one who establishes that way of doing things, but unlike Him, we have to establish time that we spend sleeping, eating, relating to our family, and so forth that has to be part of our goal-setting operation, and we have to discipline ourselves to do it and not let our occupation get the better of us.

The world has largely dedicated work within the context of salvation as being without value. It is true that salvation is mercifully given by God. It cannot be earned by means of one's works. However, the warning that people give us actually becomes a threat at accusing one doing Christian works as attempting to *earn* salvation because of their diligence. They must be ignored, brethren. They just do not know any better.

Let us go to the book of Ephesians, chapter 2 where it tells us this.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

There is an important principle here. We are talking about salvation. Notice first that God has prepared these works beforehand. In other words, God's calling of us included within His mind things that He wants us to accomplish. He is the one who has set the goals. We have to learn what those goals are, and we have to join Him in working to accomplishment. These can be assignments. These can be requirements. Another way of looking at it is things that He established even before we were called—things that God wants us to accomplish through doing Christian works.

Let us make it real obvious. Keeping the commandments is an assigned work that everybody is required to perform. Then there are works—the works of overcoming problems, weaknesses, proclivities that God does not want in us or in His Kingdom. In His mind these are an assignment to us that we are to overcome them, and it is going to take work to do that. It is going to take sacrifice to do that. It is going to take reading. It is going to take studying. It is going to take disciplining ourselves in order to do these things. Our God is a goal-setter not just for Himself, but for us. But everyone is not necessarily required to meet the same things, and God gives gifts to everyone of us in order to enable us to accomplish those goals.

Is that not what an employer does? An employer hires you, and then you bring to him certain skills or whatever, but you are also given by him things in order to accomplish the job. I worked in a steel mill. I was a welder. I brought to those people a skill that, incidentally, they taught me to do, but you see, that was something my employer gave me. Once I had it, it was now mine, but they gave me the equipment I needed to do the job—the welding machine or whatever. God does this with us as well.

Let us turn to the book of Matthew. I am just going to read one verse and then skip to another just so you see the context. I will read verse 14 just so you get the sense of it.

Matthew 25:14 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

Matthew 25:26-27 “But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where

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I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

God calls us. God employs us in doing things to prepare us for the Kingdom of God. God gives us what we need in order to accomplish the goals He wants us to achieve. That is what this parable is teaching us, and so God gives us what we need to go on.

Let us see how this began right in the beginning. We are going to go all the way back to the book of Genesis.

Genesis 2:15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

Let us pick up the sequence right from the beginning. My understanding of this is that even before God created Adam and Eve He had already created the Garden, but then from the sixth day He created Adam and Eve, and then He put them into the Garden already formed, and the first command we see given there is, "Okay Adam and Eve, work." Do you see that? The first responsibility given to man is to work. Again we see the sequence. God does the creating. God gives the gifts. God gives the person things to do, and says, "Produce." That takes work. That is the sequence.

Anybody who wants to do away with works in regard to salvation is nuts. We must understand God requires this, but the works do not save us because we do not do the works as well as He could do them, let us say. We sin, and therefore we keep putting ourselves back in the hole, you might say, and so we cannot possibly do enough perfectly to be saved by our works. But it is a reality. We *have* to work.

There are a couple of things here that we can establish. Number one is this. It is a big point, especially here in the United States of America. *There is no concept with God entitling anyone to receive something for nothing.* That is made very clear in Matthew 25. God says, "I at least want back what I gave you. Why didn't you work and produce something?" That is a big point. It tends to show how important work is.

The second is directly related to the first. *The command to tend precedes Adam and Eve's sin, and having to work is not a penalty for sin* as some believe. There is no doubt that the curse showing up again in Genesis 3:17-19 did make work more difficult, but the command to work preceded the sin. Therefore, from the very beginning the man and

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the woman were required to work. Not just the male, but also the female right from the beginning.

If we are going to be like God, we are going to work. We will not do the job as well as He would, but we are learning. From these complications and so forth that come up in doing the work, we learn very many valuable principles along the way.

There are a couple more verses we will stick in here. I have probably got about 15 just on the subject of work. We will go into them the next time, but I want to establish here that this idea we now have in the United States that we are entitled to things—no, we are not. The United States government believes in entitlement, but God does not. He gives us the gifts to produce work, and then says, “Work.” Raise your children that way.

To show you how important work is, let us go to Revelation 20:12. You all know what is in this context. Verse 11 talks about the Great White Throne.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

That is how important work is! In the beginning God assigns work. At the end we are judged according to what we have done with what we have been given. Beginning and End—and works are part of the entire process.

Just in case you might say, “Well, that has to do with those people in the world.” It does. We are going to take a look at something Jesus said that is very definitely aimed at those who are His brothers.

Matthew 16:26-27 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

To make sure that you understand that He is talking about people in the church here, verse 28 says:

Matthew 26:28 “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who

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shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

He is saying this to those who are converted. We too are judged according to our works even as the world is. Our God is a working God. His job is creating. We are learning to become like Him, and work is involved in the entire learning process. It does not save us, but it is necessary to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, into His character, become like Him, and this involves work—mental work, physical work, disciplining ourselves, overcoming, growing, sacrificing, you name it. All of those are part of the works required of us.