

## Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Four)

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Today we are going to get back to Ecclesiastes. I was once again interrupted about three quarters through my last sermon, so we are going to go back to that sermon. The subject of that sermon was drawn from Ecclesiastes 2, because in that chapter, Solomon said a great deal about work. So my real subject here is work. It is not just about working for a living, it is also about Christian works as well.

We are going to turn to a scripture that is often overlooked in regard to the importance of work. And just to serve as a reminder, I want you to turn to II John. This is not the letter that we would normally think of associated with work, but he put an interesting point in here that I think is important to always think about.

**II John 5-11** And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide [or continue] in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

That is pretty strong speaking that he is making there. He is admonishing those of us who are converted that we be careful regarding the doctrine that these people are teaching that has something to do with Christian works.

Now, work has a tarnished reputation in relation to Christianity. In fact, Christian life is falsely portrayed as if it does not include plain, hard work. By that I mean that what we do in response to our calling is looked upon as not being of much value.

This thing about works not being of any value is greatly over-emphasized, that is, that

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we cannot earn salvation. Now note, whatever this is, it is a teaching of deceivers.

John speaks sternly of them, in warning to us. This statement that these people made is indeed technically true—that is that one cannot earn salvation by works—but much overlooked is that God is indeed judging the quality of what we do as well as the quantity of what is produced by our carrying out of our Christian responsibilities.

In sharp contrast, Jesus clearly looked upon what He was doing as God's servant as work. He said, "We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day, for the night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4)

In like manner, our calling has become our vocation. A vocation is an occupation; it is a work. And we are to look upon our discipleship under Jesus Christ as work.

Work is what we do because of our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. The Bible plainly says that we are a slave to Christ. Why do people buy slaves? To work. We are a purchased possession and we have been bought and paid for by the life of Jesus Christ, at least partly for the responsibility of working.

We are to live by faith exercising love for God and man. Love, in reality, is often more work than emotion. And faith absolutely requires the labor of thought and the exercise of our will, that is, works. We are exercising our will towards the accomplishment of an objective and that objective includes glorifying God; becoming in the image of Jesus Christ; being in the Kingdom of God. Every aspect of that involves labor. If you think work is not important to our calling, you need to think again.

Our calling is a serious responsibility. That is what John is talking about here. Ordered for us to prepare for continuing on for all eternity as servants of God as He continues His plans for the future. So often we do not have a proper awareness of truth concerning rewards for our labors.

What did John say here? The goal in this little section in the book of II John is that we what?—earn a full reward. That requires work.

In the sermon that I gave just before the day of Pentecost, I gave you five points and hopefully, before this sermon is over today, I am going to add two more to that. I will go over the five points again that I gave you.

1. God is our model regarding work. The Bible shows He fully intended that we work from the very beginning of His purpose. Work is not a penalty for

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sin, but rather a positive means to helping to produce a product, fruit: character like His.

2. We are admonished by Christ that in our working, whether it is our job in the world or in His works, our highest regard must be for seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. That has to be before us. It is a major part of our motivation.

3. It is important to understand that as God sees things, we work for Christ as His slaves. It says that straight out of the Bible.

4. Profit in life. In the book of Ecclesiastes, profit is very important. Profit for life is produced by work and this includes profit from Christian life.

5. We are clearly counseled by Christ to grasp that work has a cost. It requires sacrifices. The way He puts it, we must deny ourselves. In His statement, the denying of ourselves in order to do the work God requires is the cost. A lot of that is the sacrifice of time and energy.

At this point we are finished with the review and we are going to continue on to clarify an important fact regarding Christian works. We must do this because of this vague generality that people give that works are of no value.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Notice how clear this is. Christians are created for the very purpose of doing good works. Are we going to do good works by doing nothing? Not at all, we have to do good works.

Verse 10 states that God has prepared—ordained; assigned beforehand—that we must do these works. Works are a requirement and they must be accomplished to the degree that God judges as right and good.

I am going to read verse 10 from two modern translations. First from the Philips translation. Notice how clear this is. It says:

**Ephesians 2:10 (Phillips)** The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do those good deeds which God has planned for us to do.

That encompasses the whole plot there. I do not know how it can be made any clearer. Now I am going to read it from the Revised English Bible.

**Ephesians 2:10 (REB)** There is nothing for anyone to boast of; we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus for the life of good deeds which God designed for us.

Both of these translations are exceedingly clear and they honestly cannot be denied. Even though the works do not earn salvation for us, God's calling and our regeneration is given in order that we are being prepared to live life adhering to these same works for all eternity. That is, we are going to be doing the same things in terms of work, for the entirety of eternity.

He wants us to be well-practiced and He wants us to be proved before He gives us that opportunity in His Kingdom. So make sure that you understand these truths regarding works. I am going to give you three of them here. They are a summary.

1. Christian works were never intended by God to save us. Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. God knew beforehand we would need a Savior for salvation. Jesus' works as our savior and High Priest is what saves us. Not our works, His works.
2. Doing the works provides practice in God's way of life thus helping to ingrain His way as part of our character.
3. Doing the works is a witness before the world and by them, God is glorified.

Those are works' three purposes. Now let us take a very serious and very important look at works from a different—I would call urgent—angle.

We are going to go to Matthew 24. This is the Olivet prophecy and in it is a description, an outline, of the things that are going to be going on just prior to His return.

This is important to you and me because, even as I was saying in the announcement, we are witnessing the formation of the Beast. We are in the end time. It may not happen tomorrow, but these are things that are going to be happening. Some of what he describes here are things that are happening now and we have to do our works in the midst of this crazy generation in which He has called us.

**Matthew 24:37-44** But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. [What is going on? They are working, doing their daily routines of work.] Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. [There is a sense of urgency there: watch; be aware; be ready.] But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Matthew's account of the Olivet prophecy sets these commands and some parables immediately following end-time descriptions that Jesus gave, and to add to the seriousness of the times, it appears that we are living in and at the very beginning edges of the very time that He warned us of here in Matthew 24.

In verse 44, "Be ready" means "be prepared with everything in order." It takes work to prepare. It takes work to put things in order, does it not? We are talking about lives that are to be put in order here in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. He is talking about works to do those things.

Immediately following this command, a series of three parables follows: the Parable of the Two Servants; the Parable of the Ten Virgins; and the Parable of the Talents. All of these parables have something in common and we will go through them with a little bit of detail.

**Matthew 24:45** "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?"

The first parable is an exhortation that directly concerns making strong efforts to be faithful and wise. Faithfulness to God is wisdom, and it is a major key because if one is not faithful, one will not carry through at following the instructions contained within the three parables.

**Matthew 24:48** But if that evil servant [remember this is the Parable of the Two Servants] says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards.

Here is a major key: the key to being wise and faithful, in this parable from Jesus, is to really believe that Christ is going to return. If it is just a vague wish, what do you think your works are going to be like? If we really have it in our minds that Christ is coming and we better be ready because we have faith in His return and feel that it may be very soon, we are going to be working. We are going to drive ourselves to do it.

We are getting to the heart of this particular parable. This is the key to motivating yourself: truly believing that Christ is going to return. This is going to affect the way we act. One of the special bits of advice that Christ tell us is this: It is going to affect the way we treat our fellow members in the body of Christ.

Notice what it says again here: "But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,'" he is not really on fire regarding Christ's coming. Then what does he do? He begins to beat and mistreat his fellow servants—the fellow members of the body of Jesus Christ—and to eat and drink with the drunkards. Who are the drunkards? It is the people in the world.

So the person who really does not believe that Christ is going to return quickly is going to mistreat the fellow members of the body of Jesus Christ and an awful lot of his time is going to be spent with the world. That is going to get that person's attention.

**Matthew 25:1** "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, at the beginning of this chapter, is also clear regarding faithfulness. It compliments the Parable of the Two Servants that preceded it, but it shows a somewhat different responsibility regarding being faithful than the two servants parable.

First of all I want you to notice the word “then” that begins chapter 25. When Matthew wrote this, there was no break and when Jesus spoke it there was no break between those two chapters. The translators decided to put a break there and it was probably done to keep the chapter from getting any longer and they thought that was a convenient place to break it, so they stuck this word “then” in there.

The word “then” is being used by them to show that there really is not any break between what He said in chapter 24 and 25. Jesus went right on. In other words what He said here in verse 1 immediately followed what He said in verse 51. There was no break whatsoever; they are tied together.

So this is advice regarding how we should be living, as these descriptions from Jesus Christ are being given. Now let us read the rest, verses 2-5:

**Matthew 25:2-5** Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

One of the keys to understanding the instruction that is in this parable is that they all went to sleep. Now what does sleep have to do with the understanding of the parable?

Actually I did a fair amount of research on the word “sleep” in regard to this parable and nobody can come to any real conclusion because it does not seem to fit anything except to give the indication to us of the passage of time between the work that was done and the time that these people laid down to rest.

Here is what happened: You know very well that the wise virgins worked before they went to sleep, so they were prepared when the bridegroom came. On the other hand, the others were not faithful in carrying out the charge that was given to them, so they went to sleep too, along with the wise ones. Then the cry for the bridegroom went out and they were not ready.

So the wise virgins were faithful in carrying out their responsibilities. The foolish virgins were not faithful in carrying out their responsibilities in the time given to them. They lollygagged about before they went to sleep and now we have to come to a decision as to what was the difference between the two groups of virgins.

The foolish ones discovered that they did not have any oil. They went to the wise ones

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and the wise rejected their request out of hand. That is as logical as you can get because what the parable is showing here is that what they grew in—developed in; were faithful in producing—was something that could not be given to another person.

So what was it that they developed in that period of time before they went to sleep? Faith cannot be transferred from one person to another. Character cannot be transferred from one person to another. It just cannot be given; it is something that *must* be developed.

That begins to show us then what the wise virgins did with their time. It had to be something that was developed within them as part of their manner of living. It was not a work that was outside, it was an internal work. It was a work of growth so that they could go on.

Now what happened that the foolish virgins were good at? They were good at putting other things—other than the Kingdom of God—as higher responsibilities than the responsibilities that had been given to them by their Master.

So they did not follow through in seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and it was now too late because what the wise virgins had could not be given to them. In other words, they were not faithful in carrying out personal responsibilities to grow and overcome.

Remember, do not forget the context. This applies to us more directly more than any other part of the Bible regarding works, because we are in the period of time that Jesus is talking about here.

**Matthew 25:14-16** “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. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.

I just wanted to give you a picture here. This parable is a complement to the ten virgins parable, but there is a difference here as well. Both of these parables have to do with personal growth. However, no activity is shown in the ten virgins parable, and thus the understanding of it, and the focus of growth is internal godliness. That is, it is a growth in things like knowledge, understanding, wisdom, perspective, attitude, traits of character,

the way one thinks, and growth in the fruit of the Spirit. These are all things that cannot be transferred to another person.

So they carried out faithfully in growing in those areas, things that all of us are capable of accomplishing regardless of our age, education, or whatever. Every single one of us can do the things that the five wise virgins grew in.

The ten virgins parable shows the virgins waiting for Christ and thus there is somewhat a sense of passiveness. They all went to sleep—that is pretty passive. Now, do we see the same thing in the parable that we are in right now? No, the Parable of the Talents implies a great deal of activity that one is given.

The servants are clearly shown as working for their lord in an external way, as we might say, out in the field doing what the boss has commanded. Thus, its focus is external in terms of the application of the gifts (verse 15) given by God in a more public setting, whether in the world or within services to the Body of Jesus Christ.

So, we find in the ten virgins parable, growth is a passive kind of growth. I do not mean that there is no requirement of activity, but it is internal, whereas in the Parable of the Talents, it is not internal. It is something that is out in the world in which activity is taking place.

As Paul shows in I Corinthians 12, everybody in the Body of Jesus Christ is not gifted equally and everybody is not called by God and placed within the body to function in exactly the same capacity. God makes sure, though, that we are not short-changed regarding gifts. He gave one servant five talents, another two, and another one, showing that we are not all equally gifted, we are not all given exactly the same responsibility.

So God makes sure that we are not short changed regarding gifts. Tie this to Ephesians 2:10, where God has ordained that we carry out certain responsibilities. We have been given sufficient gifts to perform what he has assigned us to perform.

**Matthew 25:23** His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

What he is doing with this verse is to make sure that we understand that He is carefully judging how well we do with what we have been given and always remember that He abundantly shows us in other places that He is considerate, merciful, kind in His

judgments. He is not a harsh taskmaster.

**Matthew 25:27-30** So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

That is a sobering reminder to you and me that, though He is unseen, He is judging. So what is He saying here? "My son, get with it and do what you can." We are being judged even though God is not visible to you and me.

We have already gone through three parables, and here is a fourth one, but a little bit of explanation is in order here.

**Matthew 25:31-34** When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

The first hurdle to accept what is here in this particular parable is that, even though the parable is applied directly after Christ's return, the instruction given here applies in principle to the three parables that precede it.

In other words, Matthew took this parable that Jesus may have given at a different time altogether and he tied it into Matthew 24 because it indeed fits. It was not part of the Olivet discourse whenever He gave at that particular time but it fits there as well.

So even though it gives sort of a time element at the beginning of His parable, do not think that it does not apply because what is here fits into this time element pretty well. So we must not ignore the instruction.

This parable focused strongly on Christ making judgments. Remember, the end of the

Parable of the Talents ended with the judgments of God and this is complementary to the judgments that are given in the previous parable. That judgment is based on people's works.

What sets this end time instruction apart is that it specifically applies to works within relationships within the Body of Christ, and services to the brethren. So it is a complement to the talents parable.

**Matthew 25:40-45** "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'"

So what we have here is a summary of this process of judgment. Christ is showing us that whatever we sow within the body, we reap. This is specifically aimed at relationships within the Body of Jesus Christ—those relationships and those works taking place in that period of time immediately before His return, when the pressure and heat is really on us to treat one another in love, kindness, and mercy. That is one sobering parable and admonition to you and me.

I am going to take the four parables here and apply them directly to this time, at least in terms of summarizing.

1. This is the first of the four parables. It is urging us to be faithful and keeping ourselves mentally alert, not letting down, and dealing with each other with thoughtful kindness. Put these four parables together and that is what he is saying, you better be treating one another with thoughtful kindness. It is going to be tough enough to live during this time.

2. This primarily applies to the ten virgins parable. This one applies to our overcoming and growing in our relationships with and looking for Christ's return.

3. The third parable is focusing on activity that is more public in its application.

4. Focusing on its certainty of judgment and strongly suggesting that we reap what we sow using our relationships within the church as being of major importance during this period of time.

Now this in turn leads me to a brief discussion or instruction in regard to two major principles that have to do with sin. These are generalities that help us to understand sin. We know sin in specific ways by way of the Ten Commandments, but I am looking at sin as a generality so that we understand this generality as to how it applies.

First is this: sin describes failure. It is that simple. To get a little bit more specific, it is the failure to live up to or meet a standard; a failure to hit a mark; a failure to stay on the path and thus one wanders from it. So, sin pictures failure.

The second principle is this: Sins are acts of either *commission* and *omission*. Besides being a failure, sin is a direct act of evil against someone or a failure to do something good, something that God would expect one of His children to do.

What does this add up to within the subject of work? The failure to work is sin. It is that simple. These aspects of sin are especially clearly shown in these four parables.

How important are works even though they technically do not save us? Well, let me put it this way: the failure to work is critical to our salvation. Mr. Armstrong put it this way: it is succinct, it is right to the point and he says, "Works do not save us, but everyone who is saved, works."

I am going to show you the proof of this right out of God's Word. We are going to go to Revelation 20. Here is proof of the importance of works, even though they do not save us.

**Revelation 20:12-13** 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, brethren, is sobering. Somebody is recording what we do.] The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Do you see the truth in what Mr. Armstrong said? The Bible is very clear. Works do not save us, but everybody who is saved has already worked. Those who are not saved and go into the Lake of Fire, their works were also recorded but they were bad. It is pretty important that we work.

So the judgment of each and every person who comes up in the two resurrections that are shown here in Revelation 20 are based on the quality and the quantity of their works according to the judgment of God.

In the larger picture, sin involves the failure to understand and approach Christian works at the correct place of attack and I believe it is relevant to point this out at this time. Now we are getting around to your works and my works as converted sons of God.

What I am going to give you is succinctly stated by Jesus in the book of Matthew. So please turn back to Matthew and I am going to use a verse that I used in the previous sermon regarding works. You will see in a moment why I chose these verses.

**Matthew 16:24-27** Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. [even to walk after Him is going to take work] For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 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.

Who is He talking about there? He is talking about His disciples. Our works are being judged even as those in Revelation 20:12-13. Even though those people are not coming up in the first resurrection, the people who are spoken of here in Matthew 16 are people who are coming up when Jesus Christ returns and their works were judged too. So that is you and me, and it nails us to the wall. And even though the works cannot save us, He is judging the quality and the quantity of what we do against the gifts that He gave us to carry out responsibilities here on this earth.

In this section, verses 24-27, Jesus is pointing here to the relative values of two goals that a person is free to pursue. One of the major differences is in regard to the timing of the loss. Remember he says that person has to make these sacrifices for Him and

when the timing or the loss will occur.

Now in a Christian's life there are two possibilities here. I do not know how many of you have lost a job because you decided to follow Christ and you lost the job because you were keeping the commandments, because you were keeping the Sabbath.

So the timing is: a person can begin to make sacrifices to follow Christ. Remember the principle here, working involves sacrifice; it involves a cost. Sometimes the cost takes place right at the very beginning and then throughout our life as a Christian we are sacrificing to continue the following of Jesus Christ, up until the time of our death so that we can be in the first resurrection and by our works, glorify Him.

Then again the time of the cost might not come until the end, like it did for the foolish virgins when they went out to meet the bridegroom and they found out they lost what they had been given. So they wasted all their time.

What Christ is doing here is He is pointing out to you and me that we have a choice. He does not even tell us here directly what the choice should be. He lets you and me to make the decision regarding this. We can put our time and energy in service into following Christ, or we can put it into pursuing wealth, which is what the rich young ruler wanted to do. But either one requires the sacrifice of one's will, his affection, his body, and his life. It is up to us to make the choice.

Now turn please to Luke 12 as we make refinements in this subject.

**Luke 12:16-20** Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'"

This instruction is between two approaches to life and earning a living and makes these two choices exceedingly clear. His concern is the attitude one motivates himself to work in. As it appears here in the book of Luke, becoming wealthy is really not an issue in this teaching. If it was, scriptures that clearly encourage one to work to be successful would be a contradiction. God *wants* us to be successful. The issue here is that in man's

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approach to be successful, there is no thought whatsoever regarding one's responsibility to God. Do you see in this parable, Jesus never even mentioned God.

Now this is important to you and me because we are instructed to seek first the Kingdom of God and all that is needed for life will be added. This is an incredibly important point. Everything else regarding work is secondary.

There are two ways that we can go, but now that we have decided to sign on with Jesus Christ and to follow Him, He expects us to put the Kingdom of God and the righteousness of God first in regard to what we are working at. That is very important. No person can serve two masters. This is what we being judged against.

Now let us go to Matthew 6. Jesus makes this very clear. This is addressed to those who are following Christ.

**Matthew 6:19-21** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

That is a very high standard. It is also a very clear standard regarding life. So we are then commanded by God actually, when we have a clear choice between making a sacrifice of a job that could pay us a great deal of money, but we sacrifice it in order to make sure that we seek God's righteousness and the Kingdom first, then we know what His response is going to be. He is going to be very pleased.

**Matthew 6:22-24** “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! [You cannot serve God and riches.] “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

We cannot work with a divided heart. That will not please God at all. In John 6, Jesus puts the same general principle in a slightly different way.

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**John 6:27** Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

So I think we can see the choices easily, they are between two approaches to earning a living. The one represents a person totally working self-centeredly for himself. The other recognizes working as essential to living but the wages are not an end in themselves. There is the principal.

There is a contrast between Jesus' teaching and Solomon's. I have to back up a little here and remind you partly what I said as I began the previous sermon on working. That is, I was going to make a comparison between what Jesus says about working and what Solomon says about working.

The last sermon was primarily on what Solomon says about working and there was a great deal of good advice in what was in that. But now we are coming to a place where we are going to summarize the difference between the two teachings.

There is very definitely a contrast between Jesus' teaching and Solomon's, but are they contradictory? Absolutely not, rather they are complementary. Solomon's illustrations and his conclusions do not directly consider conversion. It is just the subject of work.

That man knew how to work, there is no doubt about that. If you put what he says within the overall context of the book of Ecclesiastes, then you will understand what he says about work in Ecclesiastes is almost totally an “under the sun” approach to work.

Just remember what “under the sun” implies, then you will know that Solomon's advice is good but it is an “under the sun” counsel that is coming from him. So in his teaching, God is not an ever-present factor in what he is saying. Solomon's illustration regarding himself is something that he did within the work of God at the time under the Old Covenant.

In fact, what he accomplished were great works. He was really an accomplished man. But do you know what happened? Solomon lost himself in his work and it became almost as if *it* was his god. We find out later in the book of Chronicles that the Israelites wanted to run him out of town because he practically enslaved them in order to fulfill the responsibilities that he felt that he had from God and it became his work. It was a great work, there is no doubt that.

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As you follow his teaching there in Ecclesiastes 2, throwing oneself into it the way he did to the virtual exclusion of everything else (he pretty much abandoned his family), was not good. So when he got to meditating on things, you can see this at the end of chapter 2, it left him with the empty reality that he accomplished nothing truly worthwhile. He called it vanity.

So his concern was about work itself and he says right in that section there at the end of chapter 2 that it gave him great delight while he was doing it. Do you understand the difference there? He really loved what he was doing and he threw himself into it. He did a great work, but when it was over, he was rubbing his head. "What in the world did I do?" He called it vanity. Actually, it was worse. He called it "vexation of spirit."

He was worked up within that somehow despite all this there was a sense of failure. Just like J. Paul Getty, said he would give all his wealth to make one good marriage. He had all that money, but there was a sense of failure there despite the wealth that he had earned.

So it is one of those accomplishments in which the journey was a pleasure but the destination brought pain, and thus the conclusion of Solomon's work is that the "under the sun" approach does not produce good fruit. God cannot be left out of a man or woman's labor and expect that it is going to produce anything except joy *while* you are doing it.

Solomon teaches us that we cannot let our ambitions run wild. In order for them to be rightly controlled, there has to be a relationship, an honest relationship with God that we sacrifice ourselves to.

Now let us put a capstone on this subject. We are going to go to I Corinthians 15:58. We all know that this is the resurrection chapter, so Paul says in verse 58:

**I Corinthians 15:58** Therefore my beloved brethren be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

What a contrast Jesus Christ's teaching is with what Solomon witnessed in his life. I believe that this verse states the central issue for the Christian to keep in mind regarding work. It does this at the conclusion at this very important context for the Christian.

Working is part of Paul's conclusion to truth regarding the goal of life: being part of the first resurrection. Is that not what we want to achieve? Works fit into that preface before that resurrection.

The key for you and me is the phrase “works of the Lord”. It is the key to what is important to God and therefore must be important to us if we are going to please Him, because they glorify Him and they help create His image in our character.

On the basic and needful level that everyone can participate in and do well according to the gifts that God gives us is Bible study and prayer. They are basic, they are foundational and it does not matter who you are, it does not matter when a person is called—whether it is late in life or early in life.

The most basic things to do in terms of work in relation to God are those things that the wise virgins did. They took care of themselves internally in their relationship, so that when they went to sleep and the master came, they were prepared, at the very least internally.

I give this as a broad application because not everybody, because of their age, time of life that God calls, and the gifts that He gives, is exactly the same. It is clearly shown in Luke 12 that not everybody is judged the same.

Everybody is judged individually according to what they have been given. So some people are called when they are quite young, because what God wants to accomplish in them is going to take a long time to be developed, and what He wants them to do is also going to be a work that is also going to require a lot of time for it to be done.

Remember—and this will actually be part of my next sermon out of Ecclesiastes—God is in control of time. God determines the time for everybody, all of His children. We will see this very clearly stated in God's Word.

He gives everybody enough time to do the work that He wants them to do and He gives them the gifts to be able to do them. So we have to understand and accept in our relationships with one another and our judgment of one another that God is running this whole show. Everybody is required somewhat differently.

Bible study and prayer is something that everybody can do to keep in touch with our Creator and keep building up reservoirs of His Word in our minds so that we can be directed in what we are doing in life. So everybody can participate in that.

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Then there are the more active things like giving service, being kind, encouraging, helpful in many situations, and a good example to all. That is far more active and refers us back to the Parable of the Talents that are given.

So what Paul is doing here when he says “the works of the Lord,” he is pointing to the works of Christian conduct following being called. Things that we would not be doing unless God called us. They are the works of the Lord for you. So, our attitudes, actions, reactions, our imitations of Jesus Christ are similar to what He would do.

Along with Bible study and prayer, if you want to know what the works of the Lord are, they are the most basic elements that shape us into the image of the Lord. And again remember, everybody is going to be a little bit different because of what God is requiring of them.

So we are to work, as Jesus taught us in those many sections that we were in order to take the profits (remember the parable) from the labor through the resurrection and into the Kingdom of God.

He leaves it to us to search out in our lives the labors that are most critical to whether we will glorify God. These are the labors that our reward is based upon, the labors that are services to God Himself, to Jesus Christ, and to God's Family. They are the key elements in our life.

I Corinthians 15:58 is a reminder, an exhortation, and promise to the church through Paul, that if we want to be in the first resurrection and experience His glory, we had better pay attention to this above all things in our life—the works of the Lord.

We must discipline our knowledge and energy because this is what Christian life is all about. So we are going to add two points here that appeared in this sermon.

1. At the end of a Christian life, his reward is based on his works.
2. Works are so important that in relation to the resurrection, we are reminded to be abounding in the Lord's works because in Him they are not in vain, which means that He will not forget them because His children are bringing honor to Him by what they do and He will be glorified.