



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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August 4, 2013

Pentecost 11

Sermon Text: [Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 34](#)

Second Lesson: [James 5:1-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 11:1-13](#)

The Believer Follows Christ: Followers of Christ Know That Earthly Wealth Is Meaningless

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear Christian friends:

According to the Williams Group, a group run by a guy named Williams, 70% of inter-generational wealth transfer fails. Okay, what is inter-generational wealth transfer? Who talks like that? Inheritances, right? Inter-generational wealth transfers fail. The Williams Group studied this for 20 years and they found that people that get the wealth are often foolish and blow it. Or people that don't get the wealth get mad at those who get the wealth and the families bicker and have strife and problems. Twenty years they studied this. You could have told us that without studying it, right? People at times are idiots and they act idiotic. That's the way it is. And when it comes to money, we can get especially idiotic at times, can't we?

Their 20-year study kind of comes to the same conclusion that I read to you from about 3,000 years earlier with Solomon. "Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless. I toil and labor under the sun. I built this empire. I built this kingdom. I have to leave it to my son, and who knows if he is going to be wise or a fool, if it's going to be going the way I wanted it or not, or if it's going to be squandered. That's what life is like under the sun," Solomon says.

One of the key phrases in the Book of Ecclesiastes is "under the sun." The whole point of the book is life under the sun is meaningless, and at the end of the book he comes to the conclusion of that matter. "Remember the Lord in the days of your youth, before you die. Fear the Lord and revere him." That's the only thing that really has meaning. So in this whole Book of Ecclesiastes, what is compared and contrasted is life under the sun and how it's meaningless, and life knowing God and believing God, which has purpose and which has meaning. I suppose you could say Solomon was probably uniquely qualified to write this book.

God tells us he is the smartest guy that ever has lived or ever will live. So surprise, surprise, that means he's smarter than you think you are. Yet he also went through a time of living life under the sun. Having wisdom does not include automatically serving God faithfully. As God blessed him with a growing kingdom and growing political alliances and growing wealth coming in from the tribute in all the kingdom, Solomon solidified some of those political alliances by marrying the daughters of some of these other people that worshiped other Gods. We're told it seems like about half-way

through his life, or sometime during his life, he fell away and started worshiping false gods. Then it appears towards the end of his life he came back to understand the only thing that really matters is believing in God and serving God and loving God before you die. So he is uniquely qualified to teach us about the matter of such thing.

When you want to talk about wealth? Solomon can tell us all about wealth. We are told that in the days of Solomon, the gold that came in was measured in tons, and the silver that came in as tribute, they didn't bother to measure because that was like the gravel. Any of you weigh the gravel in your driveway? I don't think so. That's how Solomon viewed silver in his day. So when he talks about wealth, he's not talking about something that he knows nothing about.

When he talks about the guy coming after him and blowing it, that's exactly what happened. His son was a fool. He didn't listen to his father's advisors. He didn't listen to his own young know-it-all friends. He didn't learn wisdom from his dad, who is the smartest guy that ever lived. The kingdom that Solomon ruled over, all Twelve Tribes, became two Southern Tribes that his son ruled over. The Northern Ten Tribes became godless and worshiped false gods and it all became really meaningless because they forgot remembering the Lord and knowing the Lord.

So when Solomon talks about earthly wealth being meaningless, we probably should perk our ears up and listen. Honestly, when you got here this morning and you looked at the theme of worship this week, the theme of the sermon, how many of you talked to Scotty in the engineering room and put up shields immediately so you wouldn't have to listen to the pastor talk about wealth? Isn't that how you get? You don't want to hear it. That's how we are. We're sinners.

But the point we have to learn is that if our only purpose in life is to keep track of how much we are making and how much this empire is that we are amassing and how we are building, if in life our only thing is the scorecard of our checking account or our retirement balance, we're missing the point. We, as God's people, who love our Savior, who know what he did for us, should know better, but we often don't.

The last few weeks I've driven a lot...to South Dakota and back, New Ulm and back for the synod convention, and things like that. When you drive a lot, you have to stop a lot and get gas, right? You stop a lot to get gas. You walk up there. What's on the big neon sign at almost every gas station across America? A bunch of little numbers in red. Last week one of them was 290. One of them was 20. I don't look at the other ones. I don't pay attention to them. Do you know what I'm talking about? Anyone know what I'm talking about? Is anyone listening yet?

290 million...that was Powerball this last week. I looked this morning. No one won it. 400 million next week. Mega Millions was 20 million. But this is what I do to stay awake while I'm driving. I don't talk to my children, because they are sleeping. What I do to stay awake while I'm driving is think, "Okay, if I won that, what would I do?" That keeps you awake for the next half hour. You think about it and you go through all these

things. It helps keep me awake as I'm driving. That's what I do. You've probably done something like that. Not maybe exactly the same. But how many times in your life have you ever had the thought, "If only I had x number of dollars, life would be better. If only we had this much more or that much more, then life would be great." Have you ever thought that in your life?

How many times in your life have you thought, "If only I was closer to God, my life would be better. If only I walked more hand in hand with my Savior and knew him better and loved him more and thought about him more, my life would be better. I would be more content. I would be more satisfied. I would be a better husband. I'd be a better father. I'd be a better boss. I'd be a better employee." Have any of you ever thought that to yourselves? Probably only for an instant after the last time I said that in a sermon, right? That's not how we are.

I know better. I know that the closer I am to my God, the more content I'll be. I know that the closer I walk with my God and focus on this incredible love that he has for me, the more he makes me what Solomon described at the end of what I read to you. Did you catch the phrases he used at the end, that last paragraph? "To the one who pleases God, God gives this. And to the sinner, God gives this." He breaks down the world into two people. By the grace of God, I pray that you and I are the people that please God, not because of who we are and what we do, but because we know what he has done for us.

We know that he sent Christ to live and die in our place, to take away every last time that we look to wealth as the answer and the purpose of our life, every time we sin against God in ways that we don't think are that bad, by thinking, "If only I had more money, things would be better." In essence then, what I'm saying is "money could bless me more than God could bless me." We know that's not true, but honestly we live that way at times, right?

So what our God is saying to us is don't make excuses for it. Just say, "Lord, I've failed you. Lord, I don't live with you as the biggest priority in my life. I get caught up in what everyone else in the world does, chasing after scorecards of accounts and power and money and all the things money can bring. Lord, I've failed you. Forgive me." Those things don't bring purpose to life. In reality, like Solomon said, you can amass all of that, but if you don't know God, it just goes to someone else, and who knows what they are going to do with it.

But now let's assume, as one who pleases God, as you who know that Jesus lived and died and took away your sins, and you know that everything you do you want to do to the glory of God, and "everything" would include wealth, right? As you start looking at wealth as this thing that is not the be all and end all to your life, that you view whatever God gives you as a blessing that comes from his hand and you learn to be content with it, or you look at amassing it as a way that you honor God, not as something you do just to keep score, and you use it the way he wants you to, to take care of your family and things like that, you find purpose in life.

Just like we talked about in our Bible Study last week about serving God and about how so many people miss this about serving God. When you serve God, you do it because you love him because he loved you first. You don't do it to keep track of "I served him. I was there for this, this and this, and you weren't. So I'm better than you and God loves me more than he loves you." You don't serve to keep track of stuff like that. You don't amass money for money's sake. It's another way that you glorify God, that you thank him for his gift of salvation, that you honor him and say, "Lord, you're more important to me than all this stuff, but here's another way I get to say I love you and thank you for heaven and how I view it, not the be all and end all to everything, and how I use it...to your glory, Lord."

That's hard for us to do. I don't kid myself into thinking I'm all that good at it. I don't kid myself into thinking that you're probably all that good at it. But I do know that I can get better the more I focus on Christ as my Savior. And I do know that you can also. I do know that we can start looking at money and each other differently the closer we walk to God.

But that means we have to walk close to God. That means we have to see what truly is meaningful in life. What is meaningful in life is knowing our Savior, being close to him, and serving him in whatever way he puts in front of us at that moment and at that time. You and I have all kinds of opportunities to do this.

We also have all kinds of opportunities to do what one of our Readings said. One of our Readings told us to stop grumbling and complaining about each other. When we keep God as the most important thing in our life, we aren't going to grumble and complain against each other as much either because we know that it doesn't glorify him. If we are serving him faithfully, it doesn't matter as much what you're doing and I'm not going to grumble at you. Instead I am going to try to teach and admonish you in love and kindness.

Meaningless! Meaningless! If you go through life and that's the only conclusion you come to, that everything is meaningless, that's miserable. Life without God is exactly that...meaningless and miserable, whether the person knows it or not. But you and I know life with God. We know how he has loved us and forgiven us. And we know how we can serve him in every area of our life just for the sake of serving him. The question becomes, am I going to serve God, or am I going to serve me? With my eyes focused on God, I hope tomorrow I'm better on serving him than I am today. I hope you are too. Amen.