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Ecclesiastes 2: 24-25

Living from God's Fatherly blessings

Text: Ecclesiastes 2: 24, 25.

Reading: Ecclesiastes 2: 15- 3:14.

Singing:

Hymn 4: 1, 2, 3, 4.

Psalm 40: 3.

Psalm 67: 1, 2, 3.

Hymn 6.

Hymn 57: 1, 2, 3, 4.

Theme and points:

The LORD teaches us to live from his fatherly blessings all our days under the sun. We will see

- 1) the value of the blessings appraised*
- 2) the conditions for the blessings applied*
- 3) the Giver of the blessings appreciated*

Ecclesiastes 2: 24-25

Living from God's Fatherly blessings

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

Every year we ask God's blessing over the work of our hands. We pray for his seasonal blessing. Spring has arrived, and the face of the earth is being renewed, as the Bible says in Psalm 104. In this prayer, as in our whole life, we need to be guided by what the LORD tells us in Ecclesiastes about his blessings.

This text gives us a thought that is echoed throughout the entire book. What we find here in 2: 24-25, we find also elsewhere, in 3: 12-13; 5: 17-19; 7: 14; 9: 7-10; and 11: 7-10. We will not look up those passages to compare them with the text before us, although in itself that would be an interesting and beneficial exercise. We simply note the continuity of thought.

A deepening element

We would notice then, for example, that the Bible does not merely repeat itself, but that there is always a new and deeper element. Our text speaks about eating and drinking, and work. Each time, an element is added that enhances the previous thought. In chapter 3 the Preacher speaks of *enjoying* one's work. That may go a little farther than merely finding satisfaction.

In chapter 5, the Preacher speaks of receiving many possessions. In chapter 9, various new elements are added, notably that of enjoying life with your wife. And in chapter 11, the matter of *youth* is added.

So we may uncover a deepening line: find satisfaction in your work, that is enjoy it, be abundantly blessed, appreciate marriage and family life, and develop your gifts when you are young. All this stands in a remarkable juxtaposition with the central idea that all is meaningless. The meaninglessness is still a main factor, but the good things in life do somewhat balance this out.

No one-sided impression

I mention this because we should not receive a one-sided impression, as if it is all bad news. The Preacher wants to teach us to distinguish properly, not to give up altogether on life.

We might get that impression from 2: 17: “so I *hated* life”. But that is not a general, unqualified statement. It stands in a very specific context. The Preacher hates life because of certain unpalatable aspects, but life as such is still to be appreciated and lived to the best of our ability. I summarize it as follows:

The LORD teaches us to live from his fatherly blessings all our days under the sun. We will see:

- 1) *the value of the blessings appraised;*
- 2) *the condition for the blessings applied;*
- 3) *the Giver of the blessings appreciated.*

The text says then first, “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work.” Here the value of the blessings is appraised. It may sound as if the Preacher is saying, “Well, given the circumstances, make the best of it”. In other words, life is terrible, but give it what you’ve got. He is not saying that, however. The word “better” in the wisdom literature indicates the better of two or three options.

Worry about work

Speaking about work, the Preacher has said in the verses immediately preceding our text that work is endless, anxious, restless, and grievous. There is no end to work and we are always filled with many concerns with respect to our work. Will it be successful? Will the conditions be right for profit? And so we can worry. The Preacher states that there is no respite from work: even at night our mind does not rest. We toss and turn, and we wonder if we will be blessed. Imagine if we did all that work for nothing?

Do you ever lose sleep over your work? You come home from a hard day’s work, but you are anxious. There is still so much to do. I must phone so-and-so, and make sure this has been done and that has been lined up. Some come home and hang on the telephone all evening. When they finally go to bed, the work is still on their mind. In the morning, when they awaken, they are already tired.

In the ministry it is often so: you work during the day on your sermons, perhaps do some visits, and then in the evening you go to classes or meetings and come home late, usually with your head spinning. And you

can wonder sometimes, “What’s the use?” Mostly there is little change, and it often changes for the worse. This is true also for all other kinds of work. Sometimes it is better for a wife not to ask the question, “How was your day?” or vice-versa. “Don’t even ask”.

The right focus

But the Preacher gives us the right focus. There are blessings, and their value should be fully appreciated. “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink.” What does that mean? It means that you are extremely fortunate to come home and find a good meal ready. “To eat and drink” means here to eat and drink *well*. We are not talking about a scrumptious three-course dinner, but a good, solid meal, after which you can say. “That hit the spot!” It means to have enough in content and quality, in variety and tastiness.

The Lord does not anywhere promise us riches, but we may ask for our daily bread, for what we really need. We may not demand this, but humbly ask for it. And then we should appreciate it all the more when God give us *more* than our basic needs. For He has given us many things and He continues to give many things. We have been richly blessed as a congregation, and also as individuals or families, in so many ways.

When this happens, we must be grateful. Then we are doing well, *better* than many others in this world. Then we do not so easily say, “Others have it better than I, but *I have it better than others*”. This is especially true since we live in one of the most highly-rated countries in the world.

What more do you want?

What more do you want? I know that we always want more. The Preacher adds something of great importance: “and find satisfaction in his work.” He does not yet speak here yet of enjoyment, but *satisfaction*. However, see also the next verse where the word “enjoyment” is already used. The two are not identical, though they are related. Satisfaction does not necessarily mean that you enjoy your job, but it does mean that you see the blessing upon your labor, and at least you are satisfied: this work is meaningful because it does yield blessings. This may not change the character of the job, and you may still like it or not, but at least it is being blessed so that you can support yourself and those entrusted to your care.

Find satisfaction in your work. We can pray for the Lord’s blessings, also for every new season. but we must apply the condition that God states in order for these blessings to come. We are going to have to work hard, and give it our best effort. Nothing comes to us, except through hard work and faithful labor every day again.

Warning against laziness

The wisdom literature, and I think especially of the book of Proverbs, often warns against laziness. Remember the passage, “Go to the ant, you sluggard.” (Prov 6:6) A sluggard will do only what is extremely necessary, and sometimes not even that. He is slow to act, achieves nothing, and quits long before others. He does not see that without work there is no blessing to be expected.

The condition is always that we work hard, as long as we can, especially in our youth, before the evil days come of which we say, “I have no pleasure in them.” That is not a Calvinistic work ethic, as some like to call it, for it has nothing to do with Calvin. It is a *divine* condition. The book of Ecclesiastes uses various words for work, such as “toil” and “striving”, or “labor”. Look at 2: 22 where all these words are used in one verse.

Nothing comes easily. You do not have to be jealous of those who have more wealth than you, because it most likely means that they put in more effort and toil. They have endured more anxiety and put in more hours. I know that this is not always true, for some are simply more gifted than others, but as a rule it stands that you reap what you sow. We may and must pray for the Lord’s seasonal blessings, and that is good, but are we then also prepared to give it our best? The LORD does not *depend* on our efforts to bless us, but He certainly *requires* our efforts.

The condition for God’s blessing

And so the condition for God’s blessing is work, toil, and labor. When the blessings do come, and we find satisfaction in our work, we must say, “This, too, I see is from the hand of the LORD.” The hand of God means his providential care and power.

Note that the text says, “this *too*.” There are many things of which we might readily say, “This is from the hand of the LORD.” Time and health, for example, are truly blessings from God. We all will basically agree on that, for we cannot guarantee our own health or determine our times. We all know that. But this *too* is from the hand of the Lord.

Let us never think –as Moses warned Israel in Deuteronomy 8:17– “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” Moses adds, “But remember the LORD, your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant...” The blessings are God-given, by way of his covenant of love.

Never exclude one blessing from the Giver of all blessings. “This, too, I see, is from the hand of God.” “I see”, it says, because it is something that

is visible by faith. “I see” means here something like, “I understand.” Like when we say, “Oh, I see!” It is also something that is to be *observed*: one person has more blessings than the other, but he may not have worked any harder, for it all comes from the hand of the LORD.

The Giver of all blessings

We must appreciate the Giver of all blessings. We promise this in our prayers. In 2: 25 we find a deep confession, “For without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?” There are those who think that they can enjoy life only apart from God. He must be factored out, and then they feel fine.

A young man, an avowed unbeliever, once said to me, “Why do church people think that unbelievers are not happy or cannot enjoy life? I feel great, I am enjoying life quite well without God. I don’t need God with all his promises and I don’t want him with all his demands. I am quite happy without him.” Yeah, sure. But this is the pinnacle of human foolishness and haughtiness. For apart from God, who can feast and find enjoyment? Nobody can. Then we may constantly gather and even grow rich, but in the end it means nothing.

We must appreciate the Giver of all blessings, not *after* we work but *while* we work, not at the end of our life, but during our life before the evil days come. And so the Lord Jesus Christ took bread and broke it, and said, “Thank you, Father in heaven, for this blessing.” He never once claimed credit or glory for his work, and never once showed unthankfulness for his blessings.

It is very striking that our Lord Jesus lived fully out of the hand of God. He appreciated a good meal. He put in a hard day’s work. He found satisfaction and enjoyment in his work. He did this, knowing all the while that it would lead him to the death on the cross. He did not say, “This is useless, I quit.” It was his *pleasure* –it gave him joy and enjoyment- to do the will of the Father.

Let us understand the great value of God’s blessings. In Christ, they extend beyond this life to eternal glory. We did not deserve any one of them. Even our best works are corrupt and defiled with sin. My best is not good enough. But God’s hand remains open in Christ Jesus, his Son. He so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son (John 3: 16). Let us appreciate the Giver of all good, earthly and temporal, and especially heavenly and eternal. Then we can live and function in this blessed life under the sun.

AMEN.