

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:18-26 *“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²²What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ²³All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless. ²⁴A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

“A billion dollars doesn’t go as far as it used to.” I once heard this phrase spoken by a man who is a multi-billionaire. He gave this answer in reply to a question about how secure he felt with that kind of money supporting him. We might find that answer incredulous. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind seeing how far a billion dollars could go. I can’t remember the name of the man whom I heard this from. The man who is given credit for originally coining this phrase is J. Paul Getty. He was the richest man in America in 1957. He had accumulated \$2 billion by his death in 1975. That’s quite outstanding, especially given the value of money at that time. Yet, we can’t help but look back now and ask, “What good is that \$2 billion doing for him now? The phrase was later used by a man named, Bunker Hunt. You might not recognize his name either. He was an oilman in Texas who got deep into the silver market throughout the 70’s. For a while, life was great. He bought much of his silver when it was only \$5/ounce. It jumped to \$50/ounce and life was really great. It was so great that he got into the futures market taking risks on the future increase of silver. But when the market took a sudden drop, he ended up going bankrupt. He couldn’t meet the demands of his contracts and lost everything. And what did all of his work and wealth get him? Nothing.

This is the main point God makes to us through the words of Solomon. People all around us are engaged in the mad dash to find satisfaction in the things of this world. We can be tempted and caught up in the drive to build large bank accounts, extend credit limits, take luxurious vacations, have bigger cars and newer homes. And if the Lord blesses you with any of these things, great. But Solomon reminds us today that wealth is only a fleeting mist. We have seen too many times in recent years the lack of security that jobs and reputations and wealth can bring and how quickly it can vanish like a vapor. Seeking our fulfillment and meaning in life in the things of this world will never bring us true satisfaction. No matter what we have, we will never have enough. Someone will always have something more and it can all easily be taken away from us. How much better to invest our resources and time and energy and focus into something that will last, not only here on this earth but will last for all eternity. Investing in what is nothing but a mist and can’t be taken with us is foolish, meaningless and a chasing after the wind. Investing in what will last forever is a wise investment. So God encourages us this morning: **Invest in Eternity.**

What is it that makes everything we work and toil for meaningless? Solomon answers that with the phrase, “*under the sun.*” That phrase, “*under the sun*” refers to everything here on earth in the realm of our human existence. It refers to going after everything human or worldly without God in the picture. It means going after the things of this world with a worldly focus, using the wealth of this world for security, searching after fame, recognition, validity, and purpose from the things you do, what you can achieve and the things that you have. It refers to focusing your heart on chasing after the things this world considers to be important. It means investing what you have in the things of this earth.

What makes them meaningless? We see that when we step back and take an eternal view of things. When we start to view things from eternity, the picture becomes crystal clear. To be blunt about it, what makes them meaningless is death. Ultimately, whether you are a wise person or a fool, whether you are rich and able to accumulate a large amount of wealth or you are poor and scraping to make it through life, we are all in the same boat. We are all going to die. Death is that one obstacle that none of us can escape or overcome. Death deprives us of everything earthly that we might gain for ourselves. We can’t take any of our wealth or our possessions with us when we leave this earth. Death takes away any advantage we might have gotten from our earthly possessions. Far worse than this, death means that we will stand before almighty God to give an accounting for our lives—how we lived them, how we used the resources God gave us, where we were focused as we lived out our lives. And for those who do not meet the standard God has set, the consequences are eternal: banished from God’s sight for an eternity in hell. This reminds us of the need we have to be focused on what will last forever: faith in Jesus as our Savior from sin.

A good local example might be George Steinbrenner. He’s been gone for almost 10 years now. It’s impressive to think that he paid only \$125,000 for the Yankees when he bought them. When he died, his estate was worth more than \$1.15 billion. Yet what good is all of that money for him now? I saw over the weekend that former NFL running back Cedric Benson and a rider died as a result of a motorcycle accident. All that fame and all the money that he earned are worthless to him. In a flash, in the blink of an eye, they were gone and everything they had here was gone. You probably know examples of people who were taken suddenly, without warning and are all too well aware of how quickly that could happen to us. Even if you do get to live out a long life here and die at 100, all of the wealth and possessions you accumulate will be of no value at the end. Nothing that we have except faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior will do anything for us before God. You’ve heard the saying, “He who dies with the most toys, wins.” The reality is that he who dies with the most toys, still dies! There’s another famous saying you might be familiar with that applies here also: I’ve never seen a hearse being followed by a U-haul. Solomon will later say in Chapter 5, “*Everyone comes naked from their mother’s womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that*

they can carry in their hands." (Ecclesiastes 5:15). Why spend so much time and energy investing yourself in something that is nothing and meaningless?

So perhaps you are thinking, "That's easy for you to say, Pastor. You don't have any of this anyway." I understand that thinking. But consider the source of these words in our text. They come from Solomon and he did have everything. Anything Solomon could have wanted in the world of his day, he had. A read through the beginning of Chapter 2 records these things: *I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. ⁵I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁶I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. ⁷I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. ⁸I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart. ⁹I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. ¹⁰I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. ¹¹Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had labored to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.*" (Eccl. 2:4-11). Building projects, commercial ventures, money, women, denied himself nothing that he desired. This was Solomon. He had it all. You couldn't have more than what he had. Yet he didn't find fulfillment and satisfaction. What he found, even though he had it all, was emptiness and a void. All of this was a chasing after the wind. It was like a dog chasing its tail but never catching it. He invested in what was here and found himself empty.

Contrast this with the Apostle Paul in Philippians. Paul had nothing. He had times of plenty and times of nothing...but now he had nothing. He wrote this letter from a prison in Rome being unjustly imprisoned. Yet the whole theme of his letter was, "Rejoice." The same Paul who seemingly had nothing would write, *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* (Philippians 4:12-13). Paul and Solomon recognized the same thing. What brings true fulfillment and satisfaction is not the wealth or material things for this world, but the love God has shown for us in Jesus our Savior. Our true treasure is found in Christ alone. We find our worth and value and meaning in life in knowing that we are God's children and participating in the work of Gospel ministry which brings eternity to the people of our world.

The contrast that stands before us today is the brief, fleeting mist of earthly things verses the eternal, immovable refuge and fortress that is ours in Christ. Not wealth, not reputation, not success, not recognition or honor can overcome the obstacle of death. Only Christ has done that. Only Christ can do that for others. Only Christ faced death and the punishment of hell and overcame it all. The treasure which he has given to us is nothing less than his own perfect life and life with him eternally in heaven. He has brought us into his family and promised to watch over every need we have. He promised that not even the gates of hell could overcome us as his people. He promised to never leave us or forsake us. He promised that he would use all things for our eternal good. He promised that the inheritance he has given to us will never perish, spoil or fade. And he has given us the wonderful privilege of being able to participate in the Gospel ministry that helps bring these great promises of eternity to more and more people. This is why we can be content and full of joy regardless of our situation in life. In Christ, we have everything we need. Our deepest need of forgiveness and overcoming death has been met. In him, we have fulfillment. In him we are eternally satisfied. In him, we have all that we need for all of eternity.

That means we have been rescued from a meaningless life. Life is no longer about hard work and toil where we accumulate what we can here and then die and leave it to someone else. That's meaningless. Now we live to serve our God who has given us an everlasting treasure and we take a completely different perspective on our work. Now we see our work as a blessing from God that we accept and enjoy with love and gratitude for God who has given us this opportunity to serve him and use our talents and time. It's not wrong to have things. God blesses his people with things. Sometimes he blesses them with many things. Just look at how wealthy the patriarchs were in the OT. But God blesses us with things so that we can use them to bring eternal returns. God blesses us with things so that we can use them to serve him and carry out the mission he has given us to Go out into all the world and make disciples for him. He not only wants us to keep our focus on the eternity that awaits us in Jesus, but also to use what he has given us to preach the Gospel to our world. To be able to use the blessings which God has given us to make an eternal difference in someone else's life—that's meaning and purpose! That's not chasing after the wind, it's using what God has given to us to invest in eternity. Maybe you've never considered this as you thought about the offerings that you bring to worship God. We just think about the money we bring. We don't always consider the great things that are happening because we have an active ministry here sharing God's Word with people. The offerings we bring to God help to insure that we have a church and school so that we can meet people and help them know of God's love in Jesus. The offerings you bring are an investment in someone else's eternity! Through your offerings you participate in this eternity changing work both here in Tampa as we carry out our mission through our church and school and throughout the world as we carry out our mission through WELS. God wants you to take an eternal perspective on the resources and wealth which He puts at your disposal. He doesn't want you mindlessly chasing after the things of the here and now which are fleeting. He wants you to keep your eyes focused on eternity and use the blessings he has given you to sacrificially and aggressively be about the work of bringing his word to our world.

A billion dollars may not go as far as it once did. But it will never go as far or last as long as the treasure God has given you in Christ our Savior. That will last for eternity. True and lasting happiness comes not from chasing after the pleasures and things of this world. Those are selfish and will only lead to ruin and destruction. True joy, fulfillment and happiness comes only from Jesus and pursuing the great Gospel ministry work he has given us to do. When we spend our time and life chasing after him and investing in eternity (ours and that of others), death will not deprive us of anything. It will be the door through which we enter God's eternal glory won and prepared for us in Jesus. With your eyes focused on him, **Invest in Eternity.** Amen.