



Part 3: Toil

Toil in the rest of the Scriptures

It was very good:
Genesis 1:31-2:3

Work Cursed:
Genesis 3:17-19

Rest Commanded:
Exodus 20:9-11

The wisdom of hard work:
Proverbs 6:6-8, 12:11, 14:23

Choose what is better:
Luke 10:38-42

Work for Eternal Food:
John 6:26-27

Work hard, help the weak:
Acts 20:32-35

Work to Share/the Will of God:
Ephesians 4:28, 6:5-9

With all your Heart:
Colossians 3:23-24

Work with your Hands:
1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Work to Eat:
2 Thessalonians 3:10

Provision/Labourer is worthy:
1 Timothy 5:8, 17-18

Toil in Ecclesiastes

Once again, as with the areas of Wisdom and Pleasure, the Preacher now wants to give us a reality check on the area of Toil. The book of Ecclesiastes is extremely negative in this area but as with other subjects this doesn't remove the positive light the rest of the Scriptures portrays it in. God is the author of work - He set it up in the garden of Eden, and though the fall has seriously affected our experience of labouring in this world, it doesn't take away from the fact that this is God's design and is an essential part of what it means to be the people that God has called us to be.

However what the Preacher wants us to understand is that hard work, effort and achievement aren't the things that will bring us ultimate satisfaction and fulfilment in this life. The world puts great emphasis on those who can achieve the most through their physical or mental prowess and their committed dedication to their goals and ambitions. We stand in awe of great entrepreneurs who can build huge enterprises from scratch, or athletes and musicians who climb to the top of their profession through endless hours of training and practise. On the flip side, even to the world, a lazy person - one who lounges around all day without motivation - is seen as someone with very little value.

All this can so easily feed into a perspective that puts great weight on our achievements to build our status and our worth, but the reality is that no matter how high we climb up any kind of ladder it won't bring true contentment. The Preacher has seen this for himself - he's worked hard and achieved much, but all he can see is the fact that he'll have to leave what he's accomplished to someone else when he leaves this life (2:18-23). You can just tell from the Preacher's words that he hoped for much from his toil and received very little back. He now doesn't want us to make the same mistake but wants us to know that great achievements don't equal a great life.

Rather he has 2 exhortations for us to build our view of work around. Firstly he says in chapter 9 verse 10: '*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might*'. The Preacher doesn't downplay the value of hard work - experience should tell us this: a good solid days work can be satisfying, as can completing a task we've been working hard on. God created work, and calls us to keep it as an integral part of our lives. Secondly the Preacher calls us to '*find enjoyment*' in our work - to make the best of it that we can. This man who's been there and done it all is well aware that work can often be frustrating, but not putting too much emphasis on our achievements will free us to find as much joy as we can in the simple tasks that life gives us to do.