

Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: "Work Life"

Sermon Title: "The Dead End Job"

Sermon Text: Ecclesiastes 2:17-23; Matthew 7:1-11

Listener's Journey: Listener's Journey: I want my listener to recognize when their job or career feels as if it is at a dead end, to take a step back and reflect upon on their vocational intuitions and have the courage to explore new job and career pathways.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

Times have changed and while some believe that corporate cubicles represent the classic dead end job, it is possible for any job to become a dead end job depending upon how we feel about it and regardless of whether we are good at it or not.

Michael Jordon, one of the most famous basketball players of all time, burned out on the game and left it for two years to play baseball, which we can safely say was not his gift!

I know dozens of people who, after years of doing a job or career path in which they continued to earn a decent living wage, felt despondent and stuck. Helpless and meaningless.

And, I know people who work in cubicles and in the same jobs and career paths as those who felt despondent and stuck, and they feel comfortable and alive in those same jobs because they were different people doing different work during different seasons of their lives.

The dead end job, like mid-life crises, is very likely something that everyone will experience at some point in our lives. It's just a reality. So, what are we to do when we feel that we have hit a dead end? How are we to think about such things as Christ followers?

You know how movies and media often warn their audiences of adult content before they begin their shows? It has long been my belief that the Bible should place a warning before the Hebrew book of Ecclesiastes that says, "If you are struggling to find meaning in your work and feel as if you occupy a dead end job, do *not* read this book of the Bible at this time. It will lead you deeper into despair and meaninglessness."

One scholar asks these questions of Ecclesiastes:¹² Is [the king] coherent or incoherent, insightful or confused? Is he a stark realist or merely faithless? Is he orthodox or heterodox? Is he an optimist or a pessimist? Is the ultimate message of the book, "Be like [the king], the wise man," or [the king] is wrong, make sure you don't fall into his trap"?

I go to the trouble of sharing all of this because what the king of Ecclesiastes gives us in our journey of work life is the fact that the larger questions of meaning will always be nipping at our heals. Regardless of whether we are pastors and philosophers, artists and social workers, politician and bankers...at the top of

¹ In this quote I swap out the Hebrew name "Qohelet" for "the king" to simply the point. Read more at: <http://thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org/resources/introductions-to-the-books-of-the-bible/ecclesiastes/> (accessed 7-16-16)

² Peter Enns. Ecclesiastes (The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (THOTC)) (Kindle Locations 104-106). Kindle Edition.

our game or feeling lower than low—in every case, the shortness of our life spans and the finiteness of our humanity will sooner or later corner us and in that moment we face a choice: we can give into despair over that which do not understand and which is out of our control, or we can humbly accept the gift of human consciousness as a grace filled journey of what Jesus and the New Testament authors taught as the journey of belovedness regardless of what we do or accomplish in our work life.

For those who are more restless than that about paying jobs, it is appropriate to apply Jesus' teaching of seeking, and asking and finding to our paid work life as well as our unpaid work life. Practically speaking, what does that look like? The obvious start is prayer. But, not prayer as an incantation or demand of God. Prayer, rather, as letting go and listening to God, what is going on inside ourselves, and the voices of those we trust around us. If our work life is to be a pilgrimage of identity we have to be willing and have the courage to listen and then (and this is key) see everything as an *invitation* of personal growth.

I am guessing there may be some inside voices saying "My job will never be an invitation, it's a prison cell. Have you met my boss?" I get that. But, the dead end is about you, it's about me. It's not about our bosses, or our companies, our churches, or wherever we work. It's about the creator of all things compelling us toward the fulfillment of all that we are intended to be. Jesus' invitation is to not accept current reality as the end but rather to take this moment that feels like a dead end and leverage it as a time of honest self-discovery, patience to endure a season of waiting, and then when given compelling and forward looking insight, taking courageous risks to change the path.

Three Discussion Questions:

1. Describe two of your least favorite jobs you have had to work. (Personal sharing)
2. Have you ever felt like the author of Ecclesiastes? (Exploring the text)
3. What are some of the ways you could apply Jesus' teaching in your day to day work life? (Direct application)