

Under the Sun: Joy, not Gain

Kole Farney

In an attempt to regain some of what has long been lost in my very average brain, I've been slowly reading a book about American history. I have learned this: It is much more interesting *now* than when I was in high school!



Something that I noticed in the introductory pages was the common motivation each of the nations had as they vied to colonize the vast lands of North America — earthly gain. Yes, there were different longings in the hearts of individuals and groups who sailed over the Atlantic, some of them more pure than others, but the driving force of the national colonial interests was gain.

You can't blame them, really, so that isn't what I'm doing. I am simply calling our attention to what we see all around us and in our own hearts. What is that? Simply this: humanity is focused on what might be gained under the sun.

If you are a Bible reader, you've heard that phrase "under the sun" many times over in the book of Ecclesiastes. In it, the self-monikered Preacher literarily wanders through his vast earthly experience with pleasure, wealth, and power only to conclude in many different ways, "there [is] nothing to be gained under the sun (Ecc 2:11).

The Preacher's Strange Conclusion

He tried everything. He worked hard, he indulged himself, he lived with prudence and wisdom, he acquired wealth and experienced honor. Here was a man who knew how to hustle, and how to outdo himself, and this resulted in great wealth and wisdom.

So how then does he conclude that nothing he did brought him gain?

In one word, death. No matter his efforts, he knew death would visit him. You see, the hope of the pilgrim travelers from England and Spain was that their expeditions might result in something more, something greater than they had or experienced in their homeland. This hope is a

powerful thing, leading to industry, manufacturing, church planting, and so many other good things, but it cannot stave off death.

What we are to understand from the Preacher's conclusion is that nothing is able to bring about *lasting* gain for mortals who die. What we have instead is life and breath given to us by a benevolent God.

Joy in the Toil, Not Only at the End

So far, you may have noticed that our conclusions have been a bit depressing, possibly leaving you with a "so what" attitude about life. In another conclusion later in the book, we find an answer.

"And I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun" (Ecc 8:15).

Don't miss the point. Joy may be grasped, but it is *in* the toil, not after it. Of course, we look forward to the unfiltered joy of Jesus' presence and our resurrection, but here "under the sun" God has given us a secret to joy, and it isn't gain.

Joy is not in the results of our lives, but in our very lives which are given by God. It isn't a new car, a better job, a successful year, or a surplus. It isn't found after many years of living with great shrewdness and wisdom, and it cannot be ruined by death, even an untimely one. Joy is un-ruinable, even under the sun, because it comes from the one above the sun.

While the world wastes away striving after the wind, God beckons us into a joy-filled life of receiving, or as I read recently, "This is the main message of Ecclesiastes . . . life in God's world is gift, not gain."¹

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¹ Gibson, David. *Living Life Backward* (p. 37). Crossway. Kindle Edition.