Series: Various Topical

Title: Profit for my Pain

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Description: *What gain has the worker from his toil*

# Introduction

Please turn to Ecc 3:9 and read this question with me: ***What gain has the worker from his toil***? -

* a rhetorical question... implication is none! We call that FUTILITY
* It's an experience enough to make anyone either angry or depressed.
* The epitome of this would probably be unexpected death - ILLUS: rock-climbing accident, falling to death; devastation.
* yet it's a regular experience, '*micro-deaths*' of the energy we work and investments we make. **ILLUS**: tantrums after Spain's infection surge and holiday makers stranded or prevented from going
* today: we read v9 with higher emotion : the worker who cannot toil as he'd like, as he used to, or even toil at all
* nevertheless it's not a novel feeling - we know it well.
* THIS VERSE is the pivot of 3:1-15 - very well known passage, often read at funerals (cf v1-2a)...But it's actually talking about every-day life

# A Philosophy about Gain

* Ecclesiastes #1 is a book of philosophy
  + *Philosophy*: the reasoning of Life - what it is, why it is and how it works. Written by King Solomon, of "Wisdom" literature. Summary of his life-lessons, written near the end of his life, after many grave mistakes - so he gives it as a benefit so that we don't follow suit
* Ecclesiastes #2 has a reputation of negativity
  + - but it's one of my favourite books because it's extremely honest about life - you almost never hear people speak like this - but it's SO TRUE.
  + There is a philosophy which you'll know: *“****No pain, .... No gain****”*
* But Solomon asks, honestly:

“What gain has the worker from his toil [pain]?!!” (9)

* You might say, well it depends on your occupation!

**Is there profit for our pain**? Hinging on this question, the King takes his people on a journey to consider only 2 different occupations: 1 Man's Occupation (in v1-10), 2. God's Occupation (in v10-11), and concludes it in (12-15) showing 2 fundamental truths that govern gain in this life.

# Pray

# Man’s Occupation (9-10)

***Seen*** in others and ***Experienced*** in his own life this way:

* '*what gain has the worker from his* ... “**toil**”: hard, painful labour
* *'I have seen the* “**business**”... occupation, distraction - which consumes attention
* *which God has given the children of man to be* "**busy with**" : bowed down by

Why so heavy? Because everything he does is ***a zero-sum effort***.

* Effort with Zero profit (2-8)
  + v2-8, 7 pairs of everything. Merisms: contrasting pairs to show the whole; like 2a 'time to be born and a time to die'
    - pairs of pairs, e.g. 2a + 2b
    - '7 pairs of everything' in life
    - makes it poetic, and BEAUTIFUL to quote
  + but it's not beautiful to experience
    - He's not saying that these are ***all good*** - just that ***they are***.
    - That for every one kind of exercise, there is an opposite that produces a zero-sum effect.
    - Compare these 7 pairs:
      * born/plant; heal/build; laugh/skip; collect/embrace; seek/keep; mend/speak; love/peace - How does that feel?
      * die/uproot; kill/break; weep/wail; throw/separate; destroy/discard; rip/shut-up; hate/war - How does *that* feel?
  + For all that man invests, aims, plans, toils...what does he get? **7 pairs of everything**. If he has invested in **laughter**, he will still weep. If he has searched **to find**, he will still lose. In trying to **break down**, there will still be building up. There will be a never-ending cycle of works contradicted by other works - and *not going anywhere*.
  + We call that "**FRUSTRATION**"
* Frustration, “*meaningless” - 7 pairs:*
  + - beginning vs ending
    - destroying vs developing
    - grieving vs rejoicing
    - gathering vs dispersing
    - accumulating vs shedding
    - separating vs bonding
  + so that life **fluctuates** between **peace and war**
  + That's why the scroll opens with *"Vanity or Vanities" says the preacher, Vanity of Vanities; All is Vanity! What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?*
  + the last thing to be said about man's occupation - (10)...

"I have seen the business that God has given"

* + If God be God, it is His doing

APP

* Worth reflecting in your own life the frustrations, anger, depression at the waves of futility that come? And the questioning of God... it's not illegitimate to see God's role in it.
* ILLUS JOKE: 2 Irishmen Paddy and Sam took up a cycling challenge for one of the most arduous offroad trails up a steep mountain path. They hired a tandem and Sam sat in front, Paddy behind; The race began and Never before had they pedaled so hard. The other cyclists slowly moved before them and disappeared while they strained against the incline. A few times they'd nearly come to a dead stop and fallen but with the hope of conquering up they finally arrived at the top, broken and sweaty, only to be told, they'd missed the deadline. "Well," Sam said, that must be the steepest incline I've ever faced. "Indeed," Paddy agreed, "I had to use the brakes just to keep us from going backwards!"
* Well that's the end of the Paddy's cycling career, but it's not the end of Solomon's philosophy. The irony is, often at funerals, this is where the reading stops. But Solomon sees more than man's occupation: He also sees God's occupation!
* (It's really good to know that God is occupied, not idle; In times of futility we may feel like God is still, we're calling Him to move

# God’s Occupation (11)

v11

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (Ecc 3:11 ESV)

* He is not idle, but He is **making** and **giving**
* Solomon has seen God's occupation; Just as he's seen man's. We've put so much on our desks to bring about what we desire... What has God put on His... only 2 items worth mentioning now:
* ***FIRSTLY:*** Making Beauty

Look carefully now

* + what? "*everything*" : cf v1. Of man’s toil: The 7 pairs of everything - what is not beautiful, he has made beautiful
  + and when? "*in its time*" : not talking about what comes after life, but in the middle of man’s toil
  + We call that “**Redemption**”
* ***SECONDLY:*** Giving us thoughts about *Eternity*

Also, he has put eternity into man's heart

* + "heart" = mind, conscience... Every honest person recognises there is more to life than what science measures, more than nature - the supernature, the spiritual, time itself: how can it be?
  + Solomon says that's a gift from God. That our significance goes beyond 7 pairs of everything. [‘conscience of our true significance and that of our accomplishments’]
  + He has given this to us, as a mystery to be searched out; That what determines my encounters is not just my works.
  + We call that "**Revelation**"

**God’s Occupation : Redemption**

I can't ignore what Paul explained in Acts 17 - How God supersedes our plans and labours to work Redemption and Revelation - to Solomon it was vague; but Jesus Christ has made it plain to us!

God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place [read=experiences,circumstances], so that [in their conscience] they would seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Act 17:26-27

[And this is the end of all work done on the earth::] God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and he has given assurance of this to [everyone] by raising that Man from the dead." (Act 17:31)

* Not sure what's on your desk... But your life is on His - This is His occupation. While we may be pre-occupied with 7 pairs of everything, He is giving thoughts of eternity into our hearts, so that we can seek Him, trust Him, and find the beauty we're desperately fighting for.
* What Profit has THIS MAN for His Pain - our Gain. Next time you hear 'No Pain, No Gain', think : ***His Pain alone is My Gain***

# True Gain (12-15)

* v12-15 is his resulting Philosophy of Gain
* 2 fundamental truths that govern gain in this life.
* (12) "*I perceived that*"; (15) "*I perceived that*"

I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil--this is God's gift to man [="REWARD"! Whatever your toil, God has a reward"]

## Truth #1: “There is Nothing Better” than *Life in God*

* + because “He makes pain Beautiful” (12-13)
  + *What gain has the worker from his toil?!* **In God, His gain will be:**
  + *Joy,   
    Goodness, -   
    Contentment -   
    Meaningful toil*

APP:

## It’s futile to try any other way

* + The frustration of earthly life really IS His doing.
  + *READ 14-15. Only what God does endures forever* - His **Reward** is Pleasure... AND His **Strategy** is *frustration*!
  + So be glad for your frustration and use it well. Unless we come to the end of ourselves, we never seek Him...

God has done it, so that people fear before Him

* + If we refuse, and stubbornly try to make our own way, we'll only discover futility. We will die in our sins and get our just reward.
  + But if we relent in frustration, and turn to Christ, we'll rest in the knowledge that ***He is God****, and we are His.*