

How to Live East of Eden, Part 2: The Quest and the Problem

The Preacher seems to have experienced a mid-life crisis. He realises that he is nearer to his death than he is to his youth; that anything he achieves will soon be bettered by others or squandered by his offspring. How can we live well and significantly when work is toilsome, life is short, evil lurks and yet we find this world beguiling and beautiful and long to leave our mark on it? What does a Christian view of work and mortality look like? How do we enjoy the 'now' in the light of the 'not yet'?

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1. Holding the tensions

A. The Lordship of Christ and the priorities of a gospel age

B. The frustration of fallenness and the joy of living as a dependent creature

C. Work

Ch 2: ¹⁷ So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And 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. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For 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. ²² What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ²³ All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless. ²⁴ A 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, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

D. In a pre fallen and post fallen world and the world to come. In God's service lies perfect freedom. (Ch 3 ; 12-13 and 22; Ch5:19 and Ch 8:15)

E. Yet work seems toilsome and futile (Ch1:3; Ch2:17-18,20 &22-23)- If we are looking for a net gain.

3. The frustrations of living in a fallen world

A. Toil
(1:3; Ch 3 :9 etc & Genesis 3:17-19)

NB. Genesis 1-11 is a possible framework for Ecclesiastes
Hebel = Abel- Capturing life's transience, tragedy and sorrow.

'Life is one long process of getting tired' (Samuel Butler)

The Bible is realistic about work- Work is both created and cursed

B. Death
'By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you will return.'

"Your 30s are about how great life can really be, before you hit 40 and realise your job sucks, your marriage is a nightmare, your kids are dysfunctional and you're going to die"
Tina Gaudoin- the London Times

C. Evil and Injustice (3:16)

D. Toil and death and Evil **and yet** with eternity set in our hearts (3:11-13)

Yet God has made everything beautiful in its time
And he has made humans after his image – He has made us curious and hungry to
explore and to understand the right time for the right course of action.
This is why toil and death are frustrating.

More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul, less than All cannot satisfy Man.
(William Blake)

‘What should it profit you if you gain the whole world- And you lose your
life/soul?
(Jesus of Nazareth)

E. Continue holding the tensions

-Understanding the now and the not yet

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8)

“Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?” (Robert Browning)

-Understanding the goodness of a fallen creation

³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. (1 Tim 4)

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