

This morning I want to talk to you about ants...

Ants are amazing creatures. Maybe you have heard some of the crazy statistics about ants: that ants can carry 50 times their own body weight, how hundreds of thousands of ants can work seamlessly side by side toward a common goal. Maybe you've heard that ants move an estimated 50 tons of soil per year in each square mile of our planet, pretty much no matter where you live on this planet, whether in a rainforest, a desert, a swamp, or forest there are ants to be found hard at work. Ants are, hands down, one of the most prolific and productive animals on the planet – for 19 hours a day, they go, go, go.

The life of an ant is one of almost constant and amazingly productive work. Productive that is, until someone like my Gideon comes along.

You all know how it works, and most of you probably participated in the same shenanigans as a kid; the little boy with the magnifying glass frying one ant after another with the power of the sun, the little boy holding a stick with the words “ant destroyer” carved in the side hits the little ant hill and watches them panic, watches them scurry and then takes the life of hundreds of ants with one stomp of his foot.

And just like that, the lives of those amazingly productive ants are done. No one mourns for their death. No one cares how hard those ants worked, no one cares how much they accomplished, and after a few seconds that little boy is on to something else and will never think of those ants again. The amazingly productive life of those ants can be described with one word: meaningless.

I want to talk to you about ants because ants and people have this in common: We live in a world of ant-like people filling their lives with things, with work, with busyness, and the tyranny of the urgent (all of those things that fill our schedules and feel so important in the moment) – things that in the eternal grand scheme of things are meaningless.

Want some proof? Want some proof that even the most monumental accomplishments of humanity are ultimately meaningless?

You've heard of the seven wonders of the ancient world... can any of you name all of them? I'm guessing most of you can't. I have to imagine the people who built them were pretty proud of what they accomplished, pretty sure that this would make their legacy endure, give some kind of lasting meaning to the work of their lives, and yet here we are thousands of years later and all that work was meaningless, because most people on this planet don't even remember what they built, let alone who built it and why they built them. Sure we may still be learning about them in history classes, but how much do they actually matter to you? How much do you care?

How many of them are left? Only one, the pyramids (because they are basically giant rocks), and even they are nothing compared to what they used to be.

If even the greatest monuments built to men over the history of the world are nothing but meaningless facts to you, do you really think that anything people fill their lives with today has meaning? Do you think that people 1000, 100 years from now are going to care at all about all those things that seem so important to you right now? How many people are even going to remember that you ever existed in 100 years.

Solomon's 3000 year-old words from Ecclesiastes could describe so many people in 21st century America (us included). Solomon describes a man “**laboring... toiling... anxiously striving... all his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest.**”

We live in a world full of the same kind of people, people working all day for a bigger pay check, a nicer car, a fancier house, people filling their lives with work, people going out of their way to die healthy, and rich, and successful. And why?

Because if they slowed down for even a second they might begin to realize just how meaningless it all is. Because no matter how healthy you keep your heart, one day it will stop beating. No matter how many facts you cram into your brain, one day those synapses will stop firing. No matter how many zeroes are at the end of your bank balance, one day you won't be able to spend it. No matter how much effort you put into building a legacy, one day you will be forgotten. And all that effort, all that toil, all that striving, all those sleepless nights and anxious days will be proven to be... meaningless... People and ants, busy with a whole lot of things that are ultimately meaningless.

We live in a world full of people desperate for meaning. Finding meaning in this life is the theme of books, and movies, and seminars. The realization that we all are living in a world desperate for meaning has fattened the wallets of people like Oprah, Dr. Oz and Dr. Phil for thousands of years.

And let's not forget that this is all part of God's plan. God knows how meaningless this world is and he reveals that to us over and over and over again so we don't forget it. Paul reminds us in Romans, “**The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it.**”

God has created a God-shaped hole in every person's heart. It's that nagging feeling of frustration over the meaninglessness of everything we do. God gave us a broken heart so that we would look for a remedy.

The trouble is that the people of this world are trying to find meaning in all the wrong places. They are trying to fill that God shaped hole with money,

and accomplishments, and fame, and family, but none of it fits quite right. Like a square peg in a round hole, there are still empty spaces, the meaninglessness remains.

And when I look at the meaninglessness of this world and everything in it, when I read the words of Solomon (the smartest man who ever lived) who was able to accomplish more and greater things in his life than any of us here today, I'm forced to ask myself, "where am I getting my meaning from?" Do I always remember that everything in this world that I do is ultimately meaningless apart from God? What things keep me toiling and laboring and striving? What keeps me up at night and anxious all day?

When I read the words of Solomon, of Jesus and James, I am reminded that every penny I earn, is going to mean nothing when I am six feet under, so why am I so worried about my bank balance?

I am reminded that every new computer, or tv, or car, or piece of clothing I buy, all of the "things" I have acquired over my life aren't going to mean a thing when I'm pushing up daisies, so why is so much of my life and time and effort and money spent on getting more?

I'm reminded that no matter how hard I work, no matter how many hours I spend toiling, no matter how many nights I lose sleep over building a legacy, at the end of the day all my efforts could be undone by a whole list of things out of my control and the memory of me will be gone in a generation or two at the most, so why do I spend so much time worrying about what people think about me?

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" Says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless... A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?"

Brothers and sisters, this is what it is all about! **Remember where to find meaning in a meaningless world!**

Find your meaning in God, the God who has a plan for you, a plan to have your life mean something. A plan that is much greater than any plan we could think up. A plan that spans eternity.

Find your meaning in God, the God who valued the valueless. The God who looked at this meaningless world and us valueless people and says to us, "You matter to me, because I say so". The God who loved us enough to give us something to look forward to, something to hope for, something to strive for. The God who valued us enough that he gave his own Son to suffer in this meaningless world to redeem us from this meaningless world.

Find your meaning in God the God who fills that God-shaped hole in all of our hearts.

Find your meaning in God, the God who subjected this creation to frustration and meaninglessness, **"in the hope," Paul says, "that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."**

Brothers and sisters, find your meaning in God, and realize what that means for everything you do for the rest of your life. Finding your meaning in learning more about God and doing his work sets you truly free in a world that is a slave to death, decay, and meaninglessness.

We have been set free from the laboring and toiling and striving of this world. The things we do to fill our days. The work we accomplish, the conversations we have, the thoughts of our mind are no longer ruled by a desire to do or obtain something that will just be taken away from us when we die, they are ruled by the love of our God. They are turned from moments toiled to minutes treasured in which we can display a life full of meaning, lacking nothing, because our meaning, our reason for life and all we do, is found in God.

You know, a lot of people think that Ecclesiastes is a depressing book. I will admit, it is hard to swallow at times as Solomon points out just how meaningless everything in this world really is. But it also is an incredibly liberating book, because it destroys the false gods that so many of us cling to, and points you to the only place where true meaning can be found.

Solomon, a man who possessed wealth like none of us will ever see, a man who gifted with wisdom straight from God, a man whose legacy was recorded for all the world in the Bible realized how meaningless everything he accomplished was apart from God.

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Remember where to find meaning in a meaningless world. Find meaning in your God, he is the only one who can fill that hole in your heart, he is the only one who can give you peace, give you joy, give you a real reason to live and satisfy your desire for purpose. He is the only one who has promised you that for all eternity your life matters to him.

Amen.