

## Enjoy Life

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12, Romans 5:3, Romans 3:23, John 11:25-26

### **Slide 1**

In our focal passage today, Ecclesiastes 9:1-12, the first 6 verses deal with the certainty of death. The last section, verses 9-12, deal with the unpredictability of life.

The section that's sandwiched in the middle, verses 7-10, speaks about the solution to all this, which is: We're to enjoy life.

In today's passage, Solomon's revisiting a topic that he seems to find beneficial, the topic of death. His rationale was that a person should be able to take it to heart because death is the destiny of everyone.

Solomon understood that there are lessons to be learned in grief that can't be learned in pleasure. This is why he's examining the unfairness of death.

### **Slide 2**

Ecclesiastes 9:1, *"So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them."*

The idea presented here is that God controls everything, yet Solomon implies that we don't know if we're dealing with a good God or a bad God.

In other words, we don't know if we're dealing with Someone Who's going to embrace us when we get to heaven or Someone Who's going to hammer us.

Eugene Peterson, who wrote *The Message*, paraphrases Ecclesiastes 9:1 like this: *"Well, I took all this in and thought it through, inside and out."*

*Here's what I understood: The good, the wise, and all that they do are in God's hands – but, day by day, whether it's love or hate they're dealing with, they don't know."*

Solomon seems to believe that we don't know whether we're dealing with a God of love or a God of hate because He doesn't seem to follow our rules of life.

An example that comes to mind is the idea that some Christians believe that, if all of a sudden they have a windfall of money, then God's blessing them.

But what about when a drug dealer receives a windfall of money? Is that a blessing from God?

A while back the Coastguard intercepted a submarine from Mexico going to California with a cache of cocaine valued at \$1.8 million.

Now, if that shipment had not been intercepted, I guarantee there would've some people profiting greatly from the sale. Would that be God's blessing? Probably not.

On the other side of the coin, when you're going through a painful time, that doesn't necessarily mean that you're being punished by God, although it may look that way from our point of view.

But again, all we have to do is look at the story of Job to know that's not a good way to view life.

Job was a righteous, an upright man, a blessed man. He had ten kids, a bunch of livestock, and all sorts of wealth.

Satan visited God one day and asked permission to mess with Job. Satan told God, if he took away all Job's stuff, Job would probably curse Him. So, God said go for it.

Even Job's so-called friends suggested that the reason he was experiencing such hardship was because God was angry at him, only to learn that at the end of the book He wasn't.

Sometimes we just don't know the reason why things happen. God didn't give Job a reason, just like He doesn't always give us a reason.

### **Slide 3**

Then Solomon spends the next five verses revisiting the mystery of death, its certainty along with its unpredictability.

*Ecclesiastes 9:2a, "All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not."*

What this passage says is that no one gets out of this earth alive. Not the good, bad, wise or unwise, we're all subject to this thing called death. Death is the great equalizer.

If I were God, I'd probably change the rules a little. I'd think that somebody who lived a good moral life, went to church, gave their offerings, and served in the church should be able to live longer, but I'm not God.

But we know that's not the way life works. We know there are evil, wicked people who live long lives while, at the same time, innocent young people leave this life too early.

There was an article in the news a while back about an elderly man, probably in his 90s who was an accountant at a Nazi concentration camp.

Regardless that his job was just to take all the gold and money from the prisoners, count it and keep track of it, he was still involved in the killing of several thousand Jews.

At 90+ years of age, he was finally arrested and tried for his crimes. He was convicted and given four years. What's sad is that he got to live a good, long life before he was punished.

If I were God, I would've taken him out a little earlier, but that's not the way it works. Yet we see many young people that tend to die young for no reason. They didn't do anything. Innocent lives suddenly taken away.

Another incident happened in 2015. It concerned a 9-year-old boy who was a bat boy for a Kansas City minor league baseball team.

He was doing exactly the thing he loved to do when he walked in front of a batter who was practicing his swing. The bat hit him on the back of the head and a few hours later he was dead.

You say what's up with that God? You allow a Nazi to have a good long life but then You take this little boy's life away. Does that irritate anybody? Do you think about things like this?

It's frustrating and that's why we can appreciate Solomon because he expresses that frustration.

*Ecclesiastes 9:2b, "As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all."*

Solomon isn't waving his fist up at God saying You're evil, he's just frustrated. From man's point of view, it looks like something's not right. The system's messed up.

Solomon believes that there must be something behind all this evil, and he's correct. There's a resident evil that exists not only in this world, but it's in the hearts of men and women as well.

Ecclesiastes 9:3, *“The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.”*

This verse is interesting, yet troubling. We could even say he’s talking about just a few people.

People like Charles Manson, or James Holmes, the man responsible for the 2012 Aurora, Colorado shooting in which he killed 12 people and injured 70 others, or Salvador Ramos, the gunman who killed 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde.

But Solomon’s not talking just about psychopaths or sociopaths, he’s saying that all people have this resident evil within them.

Everyone has the capability to sin. Whether we like it or not, we inherited this, and because of that, we have death.

Paul affirms this in Romans 5:12, *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”*

We can join that with Romans 3:23, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

If you’re in church today, you’re here because you identify to some degree with Christianity, you identify with what’s called the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Good News that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that none of us would perish but have eternal life.

But what does this mean? Well, to believe in the Good News, you have to believe in the cross.

You have to believe that Christ died on the cross for your sins, which also means you have to believe that you're a sinner at heart.

That's not comfortable to believe, but it is true. Because of sin, the result is death. Not just physical death but spiritual death, except for those who trust in Christ.

#### **Slide 4**

Then Solomon said, given all this, it's still better to be alive than dead.

*Ecclesiastes 9:4, "Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!"*

Now, when Solomon's talking about a live dog, he's not talking about a household pet. This was 3,000 years ago. They weren't pets, they were scavengers. They would roam in the desert picking up whatever they could find.

When he's talking about a lion, he's talking about an animal of honor so much so that lions were worshiped.

As a side note, I think some of you might remember the news about Cecil the lion that was killed outside of a national park in Zimbabwe in 2015 at the hands of an American dentist on a hunting trip.

I'm not here to cast judgment either way, but had it not been a lion, maybe a crocodile, a snake, a hyena, or a desert dog, would we have been as upset about that?

Do you think society would've been like, oh man, you killed a snake? No. It's because it was a lion. A symbol of power. A symbol of honor.

People were offended. So much so that somebody wrote on the poor dentist's garage door, "*Lion Killer.*"

Now, as an aside, if it was an accountant or a car salesman, we probably wouldn't have heard of it either, but it was a dentist! That's why we heard about it.

What's really sad is that we gave all this attention to a lion, yet we hardly hear anything about Planned Parenthood. That's a sign of resident evil. That's proof that there's an evil within our culture.

Anyway, Solomon goes on and when he's talking about how it's better to be a live dog than a dead lion, he's saying it's better to be poor and alive rather than full of honor and dead. Then he suggests the reason.

*Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun."*

That's the most realistic, but depressing, description of death I think there is.

We're all going to go to die and then what's going to happen is there will be no benefit coming to us from this earth anymore, in fact you won't even be remembered.

Everybody gets forgotten. Some people, who have lost loved ones, only remember them for a few years.

Then he says, along with the fact that you're buried, all your passions, your ability to love, hate, and to express emotion are gone, too.

Since you're dead you will have no part in anything that goes on in this world. He's blunt, but he's speaking truth; he's talking about death.

## Slide 5

Then, in verses 11 and 12, Solomon changes the subject, but he's still talking about the unfairness of life.

Ecclesiastes 9:11a, *"I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong."*

From man's angle of view this looks like there's a big crapshoot going on upstairs. We'd expect that the race would go to the swift. The fastest person should win, but life happens. People trip up.

Anybody remember the name Lolo Jones? She was an Olympian hurdler in the Beijing 2008 Olympics. She was considered the fastest woman alive.

As she was finishing her race, she was in the lead, but she tripped on the last hurdle causing her to come in seventh place. The race doesn't always go to the swiftest.

What about Ben Johnson from the 1988 Olympics in Korea. He was considered the fastest man alive and even was awarded an Olympic Gold Medal, but he was later stripped of the title because he was accused of injecting himself with illegal steroids.

So again, the race is not always to the swift, the battle isn't always to the strong. Even in the Bible we can see example of this. The easiest example is David and Goliath.

Goliath was a huge man believed to be about 9 feet tall. He was a major asset of the Philistines as they fought against the Israelites.

You should know the story. Goliath harassed the Israelites, telling them to send your best men out and I'll take care of them.



The Israelites sent a shepherd boy, David, with a slingshot and a few stones. He slings that stone, planting it in Goliath's forehead, and Goliath falls dead. The battle's not always to the strong.

Then Solomon goes on in the second part of verse 11, "*nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned.*"

This tells us that smart people don't always come out on top. We'd think they would. If you spent tens of thousands of dollars on education or had years of experience on the job, you'd think you'd come out on top but sometimes people starve.

There are people who have multiple degrees, but they can barely carve out a living. I imagine most of you know of Superman. Superman was created in 1938 by a man named Jerry Seigel.

You don't hear much about him because he sold the rights of Superman for \$130. Jerry didn't know that his creation would end up being one of the most successful characters in comic book history.

The series has probably made billions of dollars, yet he sold it for \$130. After he sold the rights to Superman, he and his wife could barely carve out a living.

So much so that the wife showed up at the office of the president of DC Comics, to whom he had sold the rights.

She confronted the president, and said, "*Do you really want to read in the newspaper that the creator of Superman starved to death?*"

They didn't want the bad publicity, so they gave him a job as a writer or something making \$500 a week. The point being the race is not to the swift; people trip. The battle's not to the strong, nor does food only come to the smart.

You begin to ask why there are all these exceptions. That's a good question and Solomon answers it, because time and chance happen to everyone.

This is hard for Christians to swallow. Looking at it from man's point of view, like Solomon did, it did life looks like a game of chance.

So, after examining the first section that dealt with the certainty of death and the last section that dealt with the unpredictability of life, let's look at the four passages that are sandwiched in the middle.

### **Slide 6**

*Ecclesiastes 9:7, "Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do."*

This is a good passage because it's recognizing what people of faith have believed all along. God isn't a vengeful God. God desires to show favor on us. God desires to help us to enjoy the things of His creation.

Obviously, Solomon's talking about food and wine, the main commodities of the day. We could add music. I think God likes it when we enjoy life. When we go to good music concert, an art museum, a good movie, or engage in a sport activity.

Contrary to what some Christians say, these are gifts from God. We know that Jesus wasn't afraid to enjoy life.

He was facing the cross, but if you read through the Gospels, you'll see that Jesus enjoyed life.

His first miracle was at a wedding in Canaan where he multiplied the wine. He would be seen at parties with sinners engaging them in the Good News of the Gospel.

I think if He were here today, He'd be enjoying life. He'd be a Rangers' fan. He might play a round of golf or Frisbee in the park. I suspect that Jesus would agree with Solomon's words.

Solomon expresses this enjoyment of life by using a metaphor in verse 8 for this enjoyment. He says, *"Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil."*

White clothes in the Middle East were designed to reflect the heat of the sun. The oil was designed to keep the skin from being dry. This metaphor was a picture of joy.

In the Old Testament, people who were in a period of grief would put on sack cloth and put ashes on their face to demonstrate the sadness of their life. He's saying don't do that. Be joyful as you enjoy these gifts. Enjoy life.

Then he extends that act of enjoyment over to relationships. Particularly the relationship between the husband and wife.

Ecclesiastes 9:9a, *"Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days."*

You read this passage and think, *"Solomon had 700 wives. What does he know about pleasing one wife?"*

I think, later in life, he realized the blessing of having one husband and one wife who're fully committed to each other. His words seem to come from a sense of frustration.

Since we have this certainty of death, since we have this unpredictability of life, then all these meaningless days we should be enjoying it with our spouse.

There's nothing else to do, so you might as well have fun with your spouse. That's basically what it sounds like, but he doesn't have the full picture.

As Christians, we don't enjoy our spouse because we know we're going to die and think this life is meaningless. No.

We enjoy our spouse because, when working correctly, a marriage relationship is a picture of Christ's love for the church.

Ephesians 5:25, *"Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."*

This speaks of the sacrificial nature of the relationship between Christ and the church, between husband and wife.

Solomon then winds up his musings up by drawing on the importance of enjoying your work and having a good work ethic.

Ecclesiastes 9:10, *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."*

He's not advocating being a workaholic. He's advocating for us to do our best while we work.

Paul alludes to this in Colossians 3:23-24, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."*

We don't work because we know life's short, we work, and enjoy our work, because it becomes an act of worship to God, of service to God. That's why we work.

We're to work in an enjoyable way. Whether we drive a garbage truck, flip hamburgers at McDonald's, work at a Starbucks, or are a nuclear physicist, Solomon says just do your best because you're not working for men, you're working for the Lord.

## **Slide 7**

### Conclusion

These words of Solomon have a real sense of wisdom to them. We can't deny the truth that there is no favoritism. Life is unpredictable. We never know who's going to win the race or battle, but we can agree with the solution.

But, in verse 7, when Solomon said, "*Eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do,*" Solomon's not 100% correct.

He's suggesting that, because life is short, we should enjoy our time here on earth. Like the pagan philosophy of the epicureans: Eat, drink, and be merry because tomorrow you will die.

Understand that Solomon's suggestion that we enjoy life is born out of frustration rather than faith.

We know that it's faith that allows Christians to really enjoy life the way God intended from the beginning. Because of the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He opened the doorway to new life.

We don't enjoy life because we know life's going to end and we want to cram as much into it as possible. No, we enjoy life because, regardless if we might be dying or not, we know we're going to live for eternity.

Think about that. How should living for eternity affect your thought life? How might it affect how you engage in different activities?

I think, if we really believed it, it would cause us to be different knowing that we have eternal life.

We don't simply enjoy life because we know the certainty of death and we know the unpredictability of life but because we know we are going to live for eternity.

So, we can truly enjoy this life in a pure and wholesome way. In a way that when we do it, we begin to get a taste of the life that God intended for us from day one.

Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*