

“The Bad, Good and the Best News”

Ecclesiastes 9

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon has acknowledged that life can seem unfair at times and that the good don't always have the best lives and that those who don't know God seem to have better lives than they should. However, these are all our observations made from our 'under-the-sun' only perspective. We are limited even in what wisdom we can have (wisdom means knowing God and following God). He ended Ch. 8 telling us we cannot fully comprehend all that God does under the sun.

With this in mind, Solomon makes some conclusions and offers us some instructions in light of it. He gives us some bad news, followed by good news and then even the best news to keep life under the sun in God's perspective. So let's start with

The Bad News **(9:1-3)**

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 man knows whether hate or love awaits him.*

The “all this” that he reflected on goes back to ch. 8 where he saw how things don't always go well for God's people and how we can never fully comprehend why God does what He does. So he begins v.1 and reminds us that

Our life is not our own (v.1)

He mentions that the God-fearers' lives are in God's hands but, no one's life is totally their own. No one had anything to do with their births, and no one controls whether God's favour [love] or unpleasant things [hate] will happen to them. None of us knows what “*awaits*” us today, tomorrow or next week.

The phrase ‘love and hate’ is what is called a merism. Sometimes the Bible will use an expression like ‘love and hate’ or ‘high and low’ or ‘deep and wide’ as a way of expressing everything that falls within that broad area. ‘Love and hate’ are not used as God's emotions but describing God's sovereign favour. Like in Malachi 1 where God says, “*Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated.*” God is not describing His emotions but His sovereign will. In His sovereignty God chose to favour or bless Jacob over Esau. Solomon is saying here in Ecc. 9:1 that we can't comprehend God's ways and we never know when God in His sovereignty sends us favour/blessing or the exact opposite. We don't know when good things or bad things may come our way. So no one's life is completely their own to control.

² *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.*

“*We all share a common destiny*”

Life ends for all (vv.2-4)

The ultimate bad that we all share in common with all people is death. Solomon gives a whole list of merisms – opposites – that encompass everything in between. The wicked and the good, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not, good man and the sinner, those who take oaths and those who are afraid to take them [probably referring to swearing an oath on God's name].

He calls this same destiny that happens to all of us as evil. It's evil, because it's sin. "The wages of sin is death" according to Rom. 6:23. We sin, we pay for it by death. Some might conclude that since we're all going to die, then what's the point of living? Or if we're all going to die then I'll just do what I want. This is what Solomon points out in verse 3. Some choose to fill their hearts with evil and madness and do whatever they want before they die.

So that's the bad news – always good to get the bad news out of the way first. Everyone will die because we all sin, we all do wrong according to God's standards, but that doesn't mean life is hopeless. Actually, just the opposite – and this is what he goes on with now.

The Good News **(9:4-6)**

Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better than a dead lion!"

Dogs were not household pets back then in Israel. They were wild animals who attacked and bit you. Lions were respected; regal, king of the beasts. But the lion is dead and the dog is alive. The point Solomon is making is even the worst sinner, as long as he is alive, still has hope. How?

Every living person still has hope (vv.4-5)

"The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing".

Keep in mind Solomon is talking the advantages of being alive as opposed to being dead. Once we die, we no longer have the opportunity to prepare for what happens to us after death – whether we'll be in heaven or hell.

Isaiah calls us to *"Seek the Lord while He may be found, call on Him while He is near"* (Is. 55:6). Our only time to find Him is when we're alive. The living have hope because they still have time to repent of their sins, ask for forgiveness and accept God's gift of salvation that He offers freely to us through Jesus Christ. *"For all who call on the Name of the Lord will be saved"* (Rom. 10:13). But once we die, time is up. We have no more opportunities.

Also, life brings hope because . . .

We still have opportunities to impact others (v.6)

The dead have no more 'share' or no opportunities for reward –to do God's good and be rewarded in eternity. But God's people still do. There are many places in the Bible, where we are told that believers are rewarded for their faithful ministry to God, but once we die we have no more chances to be part of God's plan on earth to save lives and to change lives.

V.6 says that we *"will never again have a part in anything that happens under the sun."*

If we are believers and we haven't really done much for God or have gotten away from Him, there's still time to repent and change and live for Him and improve our name. A good question to ask ourselves is how will people remember us? What will people say about how we lived?

So, the bad news we will all die. But don't get discouraged as long as you're alive there's good news. You still have time to accept Christ if you haven't yet. There's still time to know God so when you die, you will be with Him. Or, you still have time to live more seriously for God and make changes for God's glory.

Now Solomon does not just end at this point. Some people don't think living for God is very exciting that doing this God thing means a life without fun. But we've seen throughout Ecclesiastes that those who know God are those who should be enjoying life the most. So, Solomon has . . .

The Best News **(9:7-15)**

If you're alive this morning and you are a wise God-fearer, then you should know more than those who don't know God that

God intends for us to enjoy life (vv.7-10)

*“Go eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a joyful heart for it is **NOW** that God favours what you do.”*

Food is what you need every day. Wine is to enjoy, to celebrate something. God promises to meet our needs. God says enjoy life's highlights when they occur. Favour is another way of saying blessing or gift. He provides for our needs. And He doesn't stop there; He often blesses us with more.

“Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.”

White garments were reserved for special occasions, for parties and weddings. Oil was an aromatic oil, a perfume that you cleansed your body with so that you didn't always smell like the barn! In other words, enjoy life's extras. Don't keep that nice dress or suit in the closet all the time. Get out your good dishes more than twice a year! Enjoy those nice things you have! God favours you with them.

“Enjoy life with your wife whom you love.”

God blesses and has put his stamp of approval on the enjoyment of marriage. God made men and women uniquely special so that in the confines of marriage we enjoy His gift. We also have unique personalities and characteristics and similar likes and dislikes. Enjoy all these in your marriage.

And again, Solomon commends us to enjoy our work, because we spend a good portion of our lives working or in our spare time often creating something we enjoy doing..

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working or planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”

Those who enjoy life the most have put their trust in God. Remember back in 2:25-6? *“For without Him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man/woman who pleases Him, God gives*

wisdom, knowledge and happiness but to the sinner He gives the task of gathering up and storing wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God.”

One day we won't have some of these things. One day our kids will grow up and move out, we'll give away some of our nice stuff, our health will deteriorate and we'll have to stop doing the things we enjoy. One day our spouse will die before us and we'll have no more opportunities to enjoy life with them. Solomon emphasizes the temporalness of life under the sun. It is fleeting – meaningless can mean vapour like, here today and gone tomorrow. When we know God, we understand He gives us His gifts to enjoy and use them for His glory. This is our lot/portion in life.

Here is some more very good news, which we may not see at first in v.11

¹¹ Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. ¹² Moreover, no man knows when his time will come: as fish are caught in a cruel net or birds taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly on them.

While the world measures success by how fast, how strong, how rich or how smart we are

God doesn't measure our life based on our skills (vv.11-12)

God 's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. We have a tendency to trust in our abilities: youth, strength, intelligence and wealth but God says just because we have all or some of these qualities does not guarantee success or what we may call a blessed life. God may remove those things we trust in, in order to get our attention on Him. God enjoys using the foolish and the insufficient and the weak from the under-the-sun perspective, to bring Him glory on earth. *Some trust in chariots and some in horses – symbols of strength in David's day – but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Ps. 20:7).*

We may have a lot going for us – health, comforts and earthly possessions, but none of these are guarantees that time and chance (i.e. the sovereign plan of God) won't take these away any moment.

“Moreover, no man knows when his time will come: as fish are caught in a cruel net or birds taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly on them.”

As long as we're living under the sun, we live with evil, the effects of our sin nature and everyone else's. Time is marred by sin. Th creation is marred by sin. As God's wise children we need to anticipate trials, not be surprised by them.

“consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds.” (James 1:2)

They will happen. Regardless of how healthy, fast, intelligent or wealthy we are. If we know they'll eventually happen, then we'll be more prepared to trust God when they do and trust Him to see us through them.

Then Solomon tells a story in 9:13-18 about a rich powerful king who surrounded a small city that had very few people in it. A Goliath/David type story. Yet the small city had a poor but wise man who saved the city by his wisdom. The point?

the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge

God has a better way of accessing and rewarding His people, God-fearers who live wisely. When you live, work and impact only a few people in relative obscurity, remember

God sees all we do when no one else does (vv.13-18)

Even though people may not remember the poor wise man, God does, because He sees what we do and knows what we think. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. We get tired of hearing those who always have to share their opinions, but we'll listen to wise people who speak gently with confidence and strength. We all know people who we have great respect for because they speak quietly and have wisdom to share with others.

One person can make a big impact. Don't ever think 'well who am I. No one will care if I don't come or be involved or keep quiet or don't vote. God says, you matter. We make a difference when we speak with wisdom and love - His words – God can take those life-giving words and godly actions and change someone's life for their good and His glory. Maybe He could even save our whole community through us.

I was skimming over my message titles from Ecclesiastes and other than seeing I'm not very original, I did notice something interesting. If I had told you beforehand that I was going to be preaching on a book of the Bible and my message titles would be,

Don't settle for a good life, pursue the best life
The best way to enjoy life
Pursue God's good in life
How can we enjoy life?

Would you think I would be preaching from Ecclesiastes? Probably not. Most of us probably had the im-pression before this series that Ecclesiastes was a dower, pessimistic book that says life has little meaning. And he does say those things only, if you don't have God in your life.

Maybe you're thinking, 'Well, I'm a believer and I'm not feeling it; my joy meter is fairly low. Joy is not defined as happy circumstances; joy is the peace and contentment we have knowing that God is sovereign over our life and we are totally in His hand and care. That everything He's doing is for our ultimate good - to be conformed into Jesus. Perhaps our problem is found in v.10

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might ..."

Perhaps our effort level as believers could be higher. That we're not enjoying our spouses and children the way we should? Perhaps our attitude at school, work, sports or attitude in general is endure not do anything with all our might?

Perhaps our lack of joy in God is directly a result of our lack of effort in loving, serving and knowing God. We read our devotionals and Scripture reading for the day, pray the same things for the same people each day, go to work/do our tasks without really involving God in them and say love you and thank you the same way to our families. We aren't looking at all these blessings from God's perspective because we are not loving God with all our heart and doing what our hand finds to do energy and desire.

Every day many Jews wake up reciting this famous passage,

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Theology and relationship (The Lord our God is the only God; love Him with all your being) changes the way we live (teach His words to your family and impress others with them in word and action wherever you go). If we lose the awe/fear of God in who He is (v.4) we won't live it out in vv.5-9.

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- If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net