

Ecclesiastes 9
Despite the Hevel, It's Ok to Enjoy Life

The lead voice of this Book of Ecclesiastes, called himself the Preacher and he has a thesis which is:

Life is empty; life is vain; life is meaningless; life is futile; life is frustrating; life is trivial; life is without satisfaction, and it goes off script.

When that happens people try to solve the problem or fill the void with all sorts of things – work, pleasure, philosophy, pragmatism, entertainment...

Those attempts to import meaning don't work.

The wisest thing you can do is to realize that not even being wise will tell you everything you want to know. - David Gibson

The Preacher says here that the person who knows God, the person who is trusting God, the person who is able to rest and believe in and trust in God's sovereign providence over his life draws comfort from that sovereignty. Derek Thomas

And despite the “hevel” and the reality of life, he is able to enjoy life as a gift from the providing God. Having that perspective, in other words, changes his view of life from meaningless to meaningful, from futile and vain, to happy and satisfying. Trusting in a sovereign God makes all the difference. Even Linus knows that...



We'll take chap 9 in small sections:

v. 1-6 Two Facts of Life we all must Face (don't have to be a Christian to accept these)

- we don't know how things will go for us

- We do, or should, know that we'll all die

1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether *it will be* love or hatred; anything awaits him.

2 It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead. 4 For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. 6 Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

- WE DON'T know how things will go for us

We don't know what kind of treatment we'll get. The Bible doesn't promise a bed of roses for all who follow Jesus. The prophets were killed; John the Baptist was beheaded for doing what God called him to do. Jesus was crucified, and the apostles were martyred. God has us in His hands, and we don't know what we don't know, and we don't readily accept what we do know. The Preacher has seen sorrow and difficulty for himself and others.

v. 2 – 3 all die

We live in a crazy world where people abuse family, friends, and spouses, create war, the strong oppress the weak, the weak are not sinless themselves etc.

IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD MAD WORLD

"Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails or Johnny Cash- a deep dive into the melancholy funk of Ecclesiastes – if you feel like going there.

v.3

This is a Fallen world where God is working to redeem, but we wait for fullness of redemption

- We do, or should, know that we'll all die

V 4 – It is good to be alive. Believers and non-believers can agree with this.

Those who are living have potential to grow and flourish, yet we know that death is coming – Dead people don't know anything.

v.5 **Make the life you live one of value for the kingdom. Don't just pursue comfort but pursue significance.**

EX: Scrooge – the wretch is changed when he is shown his death. This story echoes the deep desire of the human heart. "the things that might be or must be?" i.e. can I change
"He kept Christmas well."

A blessing to be alive and know you will die, but now you can see change. You don't have to be rich like Scrooge to make a difference. It's not just with money, but with time, words, use of talents and just being there.

V 6 – death is coming – "cemeteries are full of indispensable men"- the great and the lowly, the wise and the foolish come and go.

Death is coming and it is a bitter pill to swallow, especially when it comes to the young, the wise, the righteous. The GOOD NEWS is that God entered our world and stares death in the face, and death blinks. Jesus makes promises that are bigger than death – John 11.

Dying well means that we recognize that everything this side of hell is grace. Even in the hevel, we receive the good gifts of God. They won't last forever because we don't last forever in this life. To die well means to consider how to live well – David Gibson

One thing we know is that we're all closer to death than when we walked in here this morning.

Death is the evidence that things are not the way they should be. Death is a curse for the moral rebellion of fallen humanity; it is an evil. The bible is up front with that reality. It doesn't try to hide the pain of sin through "the Circle of Life" songs.

It doesn't try to philosophize it away:

. Kahlil Gibran says, "What is it to die, but to stand in the sun and melt into the wind, and when the earth has claimed our limbs, then we shall truly dance." WHAAAATT???

No, live dogs may dance, but not dead people or lions.

Apart from the gospel, death is an ugly reality. That is why Jesus Christ came to taste it for us and remove its sting for all who trust Him.

The gospel gives us hope in the face of death, but it doesn't remove the moral dimension of death.

v. 7-10 How to respond to those Facts

7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. 8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. 9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

v. 7 until DEATH comes, enjoy life- it's OK to enjoy life in the midst of a crazy world. Don't be paralyzed by fear and the unknown. God ALREADY APPROVES – justification by faith!!
Joie de vivre – it's ok to enjoy life. Some Christians look like they were weaned on lemon juice. It's ok to have a good meal, linger with food, even wine, friends and just enjoy the moment. It's a foretaste of heaven.

Eating fast food in the car or hot pockets is not classical food, but if it is what you like best or the best you can afford, then go for it. Don't envy others, but Let it be a good rehearsal for the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Sounds like "be young, be foolish, but be happy" or Carpe Diem or "you only go around once in life..."

Those slogans do have an aspect of truth, but don't have a view of eternity or of the opportunity to live for the glory of God. Secular songs often express this desire to find and enjoy meaning in life.

Bon Jovi – It's my life

This ain't a song for the broken-hearted

No silent prayer for the faith-departed

I ain't gonna be just a face in the crowd

You're gonna hear my voice
When I shout it out loud
It's my life
It's now or never
I ain't gonna live forever
I just want to live while I'm alive
(It's my life)

Lose Yourself – Eminem

Look, if you had one shot, one opportunity
To seize everything you ever wanted
One moment
Would you capture it or just let it slip? Yo

Brett Dennen – Ain't No Reason

There ain't no reasons things are this way
It's how they've always been and they intend to stay
I can't explain why we live this way
We do it everyday

I got a basket full of lemons and they all taste the same
A window and a pigeon with a broken wing
You can spend your whole life working for something
Just to have it taken away

chorus

But love will come set me free Love will come set me free
I do believe
Love will come set me free I know it will
Love will come set me free Yes

Even secular voices look for hope and love that will come one day.

You don't find meaning through the love of good spouse or anyone. Meaning comes from knowing the love of God and enjoying his gifts by faith.

V 8 – a party- enjoy life. One author Sidney Gredanaus points out that white clothes and oil are worn to show joy and happiness.

Eating, drinking, dressing, etc are not the exhaustive list, but they are representatives of all the ways we can love life and live it to the fullest.

Enjoy life with FRIENDS and laugh at the devil when temptation comes. (Luther).

Fight melancholy by being cheered by friends. "Solitude and inwardness are poisonous and deadly to all people....No one realizes how much harm it does a young person to avoid pleasure and cultivate solitude and sadness" We need others to get us out of our own heads where things can get gloomy.

<http://www.ransom-road.com/2010/10/>

<http://www.rpmministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Martin-Luther-Master-Pastor-Quotes-of-Note-PDF.pdf>

The voice of wisdom tells us to enjoy the simple gifts of God. You don't have to figure out all the answers to life, just receive the simple things as gifts from God.

EX: Tender Mercies – Robert Duvall – it gives both the hebel and the simple pleasures of life in one movie.

When we recognize that the things we are to enjoy will not last, then it keeps them from becoming idols in our hearts. If we give our heart to them, we won't end up enjoying them because they will let us down. When you worship the gifts and not the giver it leaves our hearts empty.

CS Lewis – “natural loves that are allowed to become gods do not remain loves.”

v.9 – enjoy your spouse- a reward and your toil

“all the life of thy hebel, which He has given under the sun”. God is aware of the hebel of life under the sun.

If you are married, it will be a reward, if you toil at it. That is why we take vows- to remind ourselves of what we were going for before it got toilsome.

You can't know marriage as a reward if you are cheating on your spouse emotionally, physically, or spiritually. It may be in thought, word or deed. It may be through idolatry of what you thought your spouse should be, but isn't. It may be an actual affair or a mental affair with a phantom spouse. Matt Chandler puts it this way...”the grass is not greener on the other side, and if it is, it's because you haven't hopped over the fence and jacked up the grass yet. Was your husband or your wife at one-time lush green grass? What happened to him or her? YOU DID. Own your part and seek God's grace to toil so that you will know that relationship as a reward.”

That leads to verse 10...

v. 10 – do it with all your might – Col 3 . God is creative and plans and brings it to its end, and he enables man to create. Make something of your life. Use the talents you have to bless those around you. Invest your time, talent, and treasure in blessing others.

Bobby Layne – Texas QB “ make sure you run out of money and air at the same time”

v. 11-18 The Difference Between Wisdom and Folly

11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. 12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me. 14 There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it. 15 But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded. 17 The words of the wise heard in quietness are *better* than the shouting of a ruler among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

v. 11 – typically the swift win the race and the strong the battle, but NOT ALWAYS. Human ability and skill doesn't guarantee success. Often those who merely trust in their own ways are caught by their own devices.

EX: sports – that's why they play the games. Crazy things happen. The ball takes a funny bounce; that one punch connects, etc

“luck is the residue of design” , i.e. Good coaches teach their players to be ready for the unexpected.

The Mighty Casey may strike out; the kid around whom all say, “easy out” may just connect. The politician ahead in the polls doesn’t always win – “Dewey defeats Truman”



James K Polk came from 2 time loser for Gov in TN to being the party nominee in 1844 and 11th President. .

Put an * on it. There is no lock on what will happen- death will occur and we don’t know when
v. 12

Even though hevel happens and things can get out of kilter, that is no reason to abandon wisdom. It is still better to be wise.

Here is the opposite extreme. We tend to live as if the one thing that is certain will never come while the many things that are uncertain are certain. Gibson, David. Living Life Backward:

We can be going along just fine and then life is turned upside down by a disaster we never saw coming, or thought would only happen to someone else.

Luke 12?? Rich fool made his plans and then got the word that his soul was required of him – that night.

The “biggest loser” workout guru- bob is doing commercials for heart medication. What???

Ecclesiastes is a book about faith because it is the walk of faith to trust/fear God in the midst of the hebel. Circumstances shout “vanity, meaningless”, but listen to the quiet voice of wisdom.

The voice of wisdom tells us to enjoy life but put our real hope in something that isn’t linked to life under the sun. Oct 29, 1929 A lot of people jumped out of windows because their hopes crashed with Wall St. James 4:13-15

v. 13ff – the wise man should be praised, but life was not fair.

V 16ff – better to be wise than strong. The old poor wise man did not get a fair shake.

A lot of people get discouraged because of a lack of recognition.

Don’t put your hopes in the recognition of others, but rather work as unto the Lord, not men. Col 3

v.18 – one mistake can cause much harm

- parenting class the “protective parent”- trying to keep the kid from the life altering mistake.

** the “ONE” MISTAKE is usually preceded by a series of small mistakes and a heart that is off center.

EX: Chappaquidick Movie- a series of small bad steps before the one life altering bad event.

Conflict can result in restoration, but it only takes one person to say, “I won’t forgive”, or one person to say, “Forget the wisdom of God, I’ll follow what is right in my own eyes.”

In the end, in C. S. Lewis's words, "we will enter not a spiritual world but "a deeper country." In The Last Battle the children and the animals move from the old Narnia to the new Narnia, where they discover that "every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more."

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right fore-hoof on the ground and neighed, and then cried: "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. . . . Come further up, come further in!" 5

Those without Christ often abandon themselves to eating and drinking because sometimes it looks as if that's all there is to do before we die. But those who love Christ cherish eating and drinking because it looks a little like what we will do after we die. The gifts are from the real country. They smell and taste and feel like home. Gibson, David. Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End

Jesus has gone before us and He is our anchor beyond the veil. Through Him we can enjoy the good things as gracious gifts of what is to come.

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