

The Certainties of an Uncertain World

(Ecclesiastes 9)

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Introduction

Christmas presents are a great reminder that nothing in life is sure.

Because there will be kids who open presents and cut open boxes to reveal the toys that don't work.

Instead of finally being able to play with that one thing that you have wanted for months, some kids will have to take that toy back to store for one that works..

I will never forget getting a skateboard one Christmas to find out that one of the wheels was stuck.

I mean how hard is it to check the wheels before you send it out of the factory in a box?

But that didn't happen and I ended with a skateboard on Christmas that I could only imagine riding down the sidewalk in front of my house..

It had to be returned to a store in Greenville that would have to return it to the manufacturer, and I ended up with a Christmas present that I really didn't get to enjoy until late January..

But this is life in a fallen world.

Even Christmas presents come broken.

Well, Solomon, the 3rd king over Israel from 971 - 931 BC, is well aware that the world is broken.

In fact, Solomon says that world is filled with brokenness everywhere he looks..

Governments are broken, kings are broken, people are broken.

And for Solomon, all of this brokenness is frustrating to him.

One of his favorite words is the futility of life.

It is frustrating and difficult and it happens fast.

So what is man to do?

Well, Solomon is working his way to a solution, and we have seen glimpses of what he is concluding.

One thing he concludes is that we are to live with a fearful respect of God.

Though we may feel the frustrations of a world under the curse of sin, we cannot let that frustrations pull away from the Lord.

Instead, Solomon says that the person who fears the Lord is going to be blessed by God even in a cursed world..

Another thing he concludes is that God is fully in control, and that man cannot understand all that God does..

Look, we would all love to take the steering wheel of the universe, but we can't.

The entire creation is under the direction of God.

And though that creation has warts and cuts and scrapes, it is still under the sovereignty of God..

A third conclusion of Solomon is also this..

Enjoy the fallen world.

In other words, just because the world is broken by sin, God still sheds his grace in many ways..

And when those graces of food or drink or pleasure come your way, see them as a blessing of God and simply enjoy them..

Now, as we get to chapter 9, the first 12 verses of this chapter are really a summary of those principles..

In fact, if you had never been here prior to Ecclesiastes 9, you could take this chapter and really understand what Solomon is trying to say throughout the book..

So we wont see anything new necessarily, but we will be reminded about some things that we may have forgotten already..

Let's begin in verse 1 with a simple truth we have seen numerous times in this book already..

We will call this..

I. Life is Uncertain (1)

***1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain
[a]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
[b]awaits him.***

The simple way to expelling verse 1 is this..

Every day when you wake up, you have no idea
whether it will be be filled with love or hatred.

In fact, every day when you wake up, you have no
idea what awaits you.

Many of the most pivotal days in our life happen
without warning..

A car swerves in front of us.

A storm blows over your house.

A illness hits out of nowhere.

This is life in the world.

And the real hard part for Solomon to grasp is that
life is uncertain even for the best of people..

Even the lives of righteous and wise men are marked with uncertainty..

Look, in our minds, we don't care if ungodly people are taken by surprise..

But we certainly expect that God should reward good living with a predictability..

Yet, neither the wicked nor the righteous man has any guarantees about their life..

Today, somewhere in the world both the Christian and the atheist was diagnosed with cancer.

Today, somewhere in the world a believer and an unbeliever were involved in an accident..

This is life in the world.

It is uncertain for us all..

Now, let me make a note here that may be helpful to someone..

There are two ways to approach this truth that life is uncertain..

The first approach is to try and make life predictable..

And the outcome of that approach is a life of anxiety and disappointment..

Because as much as you try to control, the more you realize that you have no control over the events of life..

And the result of that is more frustration and more anxiety and the end result of that is never good.

A second approach to this truth that life is uncertain is to simply embrace it.

Now this doesn't mean we live with reckless abandon.

It also doesn't mean that we won't be hurt by a broken world.

But the benefit of this approach is we simply live in the world trusting God rather than trying to run the world for him...

And the outcome of that is always good..

Look, we don't need Solomon to tell us that life is uncertain...

We have 100s of examples of that in our own life, but it is good to be reminded of that in order to keep our anxiety down and our trust in God strong...

A second truth of chapter 9 that we are familiar with is found in verses 2 and 3..

II. Death is Certain (2-3)

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 [c]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.

Not only is Solomon bothered by the fact that good men also experience the uncertainty of life, Solomon is also bothered that good men die just like evil men..

Today in the world, the Christian and the atheist both died.

Today in the world, the believer and the unbeliever passed away..

And though this may seem unfair, this is how the world has operated ever since sin entered..

Everyone who died today died due to the effects of sin.

Heart disease is not the silent killer, sin is.

I am dying before you eyes tonight..

I am a dying man preaching to dying people because sin is having its way with all of us.

Yes, we are forgiven in Christ but sin is still destroying our physical bodies...

Though Solomon understands this because he was a sinner himself, he still struggles with the apparent unfairness of it..

Like we said last week, why do the good die young..

Yet the reality is that no one is good.

If God ended my life right now, I couldn't complain.

He is justified to do that because of a single sin, much less because of the 1000s of sins I have committed..

But we feel Solomon's struggle..

If it were our world, bad people would die quickly
and good people would live long lives..

Yet that is not how things work in a fallen world..

So what are we to do in a world where life is uncertain
but death is certain?

Well, let's turn to verses 4 to 6 where we find...

III. Hope is Present (4-6)

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.

Look, I don't need to tell y'all, but a live dog is better than a dead lion...

We all know what that means, right?

Well, no we don't know what that means, but let me tell you..

Dogs are no the favorite animal of the Bible..

We may love our domesticated dogs now, but dogs in the Scripture were seen as scavengers..

They were like buzzards who feed on decaying animals..

For that reason, the Jews had a very unfavorable view of dogs.

This is why Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs.

But even a living dog was better than a dead lion in the sense that he was moving and breathing and existing.

In the same way, life is preferable to death in the sense that the living can still make good choices in this world..

In other words, the living know that life is uncertain, and the living know that certain.

Therefore, they are able to make wise choices before they die..

We spoke of this back in Ecclesiastes 7, where we were told that going to a house of mourning is good for us because it reminds us that death is approaching.

You see, you sit here tonight with the certainty of death and the uncertainty of life before and you are reminded of the need to live with that in mind.

Now, this is not license to sin.

This is not license to live wildly.

This is not an endorsement of a bucket list mentality.

This is encouragement to get busy laying up treasure in heaven.

This is encouragement to get busy sharing the gospel with your friends and family.

This is encouragement to put off sin and live for God's glory.

This is encouragement to love your spouse and raise your children to know and fear the Lord.

This is encouragement to serve the church, spend time with believers and grow in your knowledge of God.

Tonight, you have life and you should value that because it will be gone in an instant and what will you have to show God what you did with the life that HE gave you.

Solomon's point is to remind the living that they have time to change.

Yes, life is uncertain.

Yes, death is approaching.

But today is the day to do something about it while there is time..

Solomon then moves to a second way to live in light of an uncertain world but a certain death..

We find this second piece of help in verses 7-10..

We will call this..

IV. Enjoyment is Approved (7-10)

Let's read this beginning in verse 7...

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 [d]fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun[e]; 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.

I want to free you from some guilt tonight by saying this..

God is okay with you enjoying the life he has provided.

Though that shouldn't be a surprise to you, I think the church and pastors have not always done the best of jobs in teaching this..

I want to give you two opposing views of life that always wage war in your heart, in the church, and in the world..

One view is what is called asceticism...

That is a word that we don't hear often but you all know what it means...

Asceticism says that God is only pleased with our denial of self..

Monks and monasteries are the consequence of asceticism..

These are places where people withdraw from the world and the pleasures of the world in order to please God..

Now the opposite view of asceticism is what we can call libertinism.

This would be someone who would take enjoyment of earthly pleasures to the extreme..

They would indulge in all sorts of activities and never restrain themselves...

In terms of church life, these two views are always competing.

Asceticism would try to remove all sorts of pleasures for believers while libertinism would encourage pleasures with any restraint..

Now both sides are a little off balance..

Look, self-control and self-denial of asceticism is good.

The Bible endorses those disciplines in our life.

On the other hand, we have freedom because of Christ's finished work of salvation.

In other words, you won't improve your standing with God by heading to a monastery and withdrawing from the world.

Think of it this way.

Gluttony is a sin so the libertines are wrong but starving yourself trying to please God is equally wrong..

With that said, Solomon is not telling us in verses 7-10 to go make a glutton out of yourself by eating too much bread..

And he is not saying to go and make drunkard out of yourself in drinking too much wine..

But he is saying that enjoying life is fine in the world..

In fact, your enjoyment is approved by God.

That is the end of verse 7..

The idea of white clothes and oil on your hair is the picture of joy and happiness..

Sad people dress in sack clothes and put ashes on their head as a sign of mourning..

But the life of someone who sees the uncertainty of life and the certainty of death should be a life that enjoys the blessings of the Lord..

Dress in white unless it is after Labor Day..

Cover you head in oil, which means that shampoo is optional..

Then Solomon tells us to enjoy our spouse..

It is not good t one alone and life is enriched by company and relationship.

The NT calls marriage the grace of life.

And then verse 10 is a reminder to enjoy doing things with your hands...

In sum, death is certain.

Life is unpredictable.

So enjoy food and drink.

Enjoy the blessings of clothes and perfume..

Enjoy your marriage and relationships in the world.

And find enjoyment is being active in this world
through work or hobbies..

For Solomon, life is too short.

Life is too unfair.

Life is too unpredictable.

And death is coming to fast for those who love the
Lord to miss the blessings of this world..

So get busy living and enjoying God's goodness
while there is time..

Now none of this is said in a way to cause us to
hold on to this world..

None of this is written to cause our hearts to not
long for heaven.

None of this is written without eternity in mind..

Solomon know that there is an afterlife.

He knows that being with the Lord is better than being away from the Lord.

But Solomon is also aware that God is good even in the midst of a broken world.

And we shouldn't miss his goodness to us when it is present in our lives..

So with that said, Solomon returns to his initial thoughts in verses 11 and 12...

V. God is Sovereign (11-12)

Verse 11..

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.

Again, Solomon say that life isn't certain..

Sometimes the swift don't win the race.

Sometimes the greatest soldiers don't win the battle.

Sometimes the wise don't have enough to eat.

Sometimes the man of God is poor.

Sometimes the most talented simply falls short..

This is the truth of verse 11..

Now don't be thrown off by the end of that verse..

Solomon is not saying the life is matter of pure chance..

In fact, Solomon knows that God is fully in control..

There are no coincidences and chance meetings..

He is simply that from a human perspective, it seems that things are so random at times..

So be prepared for the surprise in life..

On top of that, verse 12 is a reminder that the end of our lives can also be a surprise..

Man does not know his time..

And there are plenty of people who never saw death approaching..

However, we know better.

God has told us that through Solomon.

Conclusion

What can we say and apply from this to our lives tonight?

Thought the Holy Spirit is our best help in applying this, let me give you a few thoughts..

#1 - Better late than never.

This passage is not intended to fill your heart with regret.

This passage is intended to fill your heart with hope.

You may not have done all you intended to do, but if you are alive, there is time to do it now.

Don't be on your death bed wishing that you had done more for Christ.

Do it now.

Better late than never.

Moses didn't do his best work for the Lord until he was 80.

The disciples were called until they were most likely in their 30s or even early 40s.

A live dog is better than a dead lion, so do the most with the life you have left.

#2 - *Better some than none.*

It is fine to be happy in this world.

No, happiness is not a guarantee for the believer.

In fact, many believers were saved and then persecuted until they died..

But that is not the case for us here tonight.

Our salvation does not mean persecution....yet.

So, don't feel guilty when God blesses you with things to enjoy in the world.

Whether that is your spouse or good food or good fun or a good hobby.

Enjoy those things and thank God for them.

If God gives you some enjoyment during your time on earth, it is better than folks who find no enjoyment in anything.

I would put our enjoyment this way..

Life is short and death is coming, so enjoy the good things of God but never make an idol out of any of them.

#3 - Better prepared than unprepared.

If I go out on the street and tell people “life is uncertain”, nearly everyone will agree with me...

If I go out on the street and tell people, “death is certain,” nearly everyone will agree with me.

But if I go out on the street and tell people, “you better prepare for the uncertainties of life and the certainty of death by trusting in Christ,” most will disagree with me..

This is the world in which we live.

In life with no guarantees except death, very few want to accept the only guarantee of eternal life, which is faith in Christ.

Look, Solomon is right.

Life is absolutely unpredictable..

Verse 1 is absolutely accurate.

Anything awaits you you in life, and you have no idea what is around the corner..

This is the world under the care of God.

Yet God is not unconcerned about that reality.

In fact, the gospel is God's answer to an uncertain world.

You may not know if you will be here tomorrow, but if you have repented and trusted Christ, you know who holds your tomorrow

My dad's attic was not much of an attic..

He put plywood down and we stored some stuff up there, but the plywood was old and the possibility of falling through the ceiling was real..

So when I went up in the attic, what did I do?

Well, I would put one hand on the roof trusses above me while i took steps on that plywood.

You life in this world is walking on plywood..

If you hit a rotten part and begin to fall through, you better have your hand on something above you to keep you from falling..

The gospel is just that.

This world can slip out from under you at any moment.

Make sure you are connected to God through repentance and faith in Christ.

Let us pray.