

Ecclesiastes 9

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[0:00] God's word, Ecclesiastes chapter 9. But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God.

Whether it is love or hate, man does not know. Both are before him. It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.

As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all.

Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward. For the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

[1:18] Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments always be white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life, and your toil at which you toil under the sun.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going. 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. For man does not know his time, like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare.

So the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them. I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun. And it seemed great to me.

[2:31] There was a little city with a few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man, and by his wisdom he delivered the city.

Yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. The words of the wise, heard in quiet, are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

Welcome to Christ Church Chicago as we work our way through this enigma of a book. Christ Ecclesiastes.

I want to title today's sermon, Wisdom's Reward. You know, last week we looked at who is the wise person.

[3:40] But today the text shifts our attention to the rewards for those who would be wise. And if you want to know the answer, the wisdom's reward, well, the righteous have learned to wait for it.

Early on in this series, I took the writer of Ecclesiastes to be a pessimist. As the book continued on, I thought he was a realist.

Today, with chapter 9, I'm convinced he's a comedic genius. Let me explain. There's a kind of stand-up comedy that specializes in dark humor.

We have comedians such as Anthony Jaselenik. These comedians who tackle incredibly serious subjects, but in ways that, quite frankly, just make you laugh.

Laughing in the face of the darkness that they're presenting. They take on, for instance, human pride and show the absurdity of it.

[5:06] Or human accomplishments and show the vanity of it. And they do so by saying, you know, there's really nothing new under the sun.

And they always do it, these comedians of the dark humor, with wit and a deadpan delivery. Twice this week, while studying this chapter, I laughed out loud in a room just by myself.

Let me show you the first time. It was there in verse 4. But, and you can hear the deadpan delivery, a living dog is better than a dead lion.

I think that's now my favorite verse in all the Bible. Dogs, not these homegrown dogs that some of you have in your condos and walk around our street.

No, dogs in the ancient world were just scavengers. They were the lowest out there, fending for themselves. And the distinction is between being a living dog as opposed to a dead lion.

[6:24] And so the one who works well thinks. What's ironic about this opening is what comes after.

It's stunning. To some of them and good places themselves in the hand of a soul in the for them world.

through verse 1. Whether it's to love, man does not know he's going to get both, righteous or wise or good.

It's the same for all. And then with incredible, straightforward delivery, six, six, yourself in the hand of God.

He says it's the same for all. It's the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who does not, the one who is good and the sinner, the one who swears as the one who shuns an oath.

[7:57] This is the evil of all that is done under the sun for the second time now, the same event happens to all. Then, as comedic genius does and also, by the way, the hearts of the children of men are full of evil.

The madness is in their hearts so long as they live. That's a dark picture. Which I guess makes what he says next extraordinary.

Prepivotent. But, notice the long adversative, the moment in the text where he's only set you up for something.

But, I can still say that he who is joined with all the living has hope for a living dog is better than a dead lion. It's a good thing to be alive, he says.

this is your hour being the land of the living. Although those know advantage down here necessarily that doing the right thing or the wise thing or the good thing is going to give you anything, it's still good to be living.

[9:20] It's still good to be vertical. It's still good to walk up out of a hospital bed and back into the assembly. It's still good to give birth to a child even in a world like this.

It's still good that he raised you, that he saved you, that he's given you breath. He says, you know, it's just better to be a living dog than a dead lion.

And he tells you the reason why. There's the little word again, verse 5, 4, these grounding, these because kinds of words. For, you know, the living know that they're going to die, but the dead, well, they've already done so and the memories forgotten, their love and their hate, their envy have perished and forever they have no more share of all that is done under the sun.

That first sketch from the comedic genius is landing with this potent truth that it's still good to be alive.

What's interesting in the text is these two sketches on wisdom are separated by this little vignette in the middle. I hope you got your eyes on it. much easier to see it than simply to follow my word.

[10:47] But verse 7 and 10 stick out like a sore thumb. In fact, so foreign are they that I thought about using these verses last because it would bring everything to balance or a sense of positivity which I want

you to walk out with.

But I've been convinced that they're in the middle for a reason and we'll study them between the sketches. But here it is even though it's of no advantage to be righteous or wise or good in this world necessarily.

In other words, if there is a reward you'll have to wait. Nevertheless, there's something in the present he wants you to know. Take a look at the imperatives, the commands, the where does he push you for.

Look at verse 7. Go! Enlighten the fact that you're alive and not a dead lion. Go! Eat your bread with joy. Drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already approved what you do.

This isn't the sense that God's just going to approve anything you do. This is the one who is wise and righteous and good and acknowledges God and puts themselves in his hand.

[12:03] Well, then you work from his approval not for it. One commentator put these middle verses this way. Verse 7, he just called contentment.

Be content today because you're alive. He called the verse 8, but what did he call it?

Comfort. Let your garments be white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Get up. Get dressed. Be clean. Stay righteous.

And put a little oil on there in a dry climate. Do a little skin care. Make yourself look good while you're still in the land of the living before the mortician got to make you look kind of good when you're already a dead lion.

So he says, be content. Continue your godliness and live with a sense of comfort. comfort. And then verse 9, don't think that life isn't better without companionship.

[13:13] Now he uses marriage here, which the Bible, of course, puts forward as an important, the most important foundational institution for societal life.

But single people who don't get married nevertheless need the family of God, do we not? To walk through life with. He says, enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life.

And by vain, he means fleeting, tough to get a hold of, here today, gone tomorrow, like life that he's giving you under the sun because this is your portion in life.

This is great. This is the expectation then, the present benefits, the present rewards for being wise, righteous, and good even though there's no advantage in the world.

Nevertheless, this is your lot. You've got an opportunity you and I do today to be content, take comfort, to walk through life with companionship.

[14:17] And then look at verse 10. Boy, this is a verse I used to love when I was younger. I still love it when I'm old. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.

Oh, did you notice the choice of language? Whatever your hand wants to do. Remember, the chapter opened with there's a group of people who have placed themselves in the hand of God.

They trust him in the midst of a world that will not make sense to them. yet, whatever is in your hand to do, do it.

Be active. Get up. Get after it. I think of that for our church family all the time. What has he asked us to do?

do it with all our might. We're going to build up a multi-ethnic cross-cultural church.

[15:25] We're going to, I guess I'm coaching now. We're going to, we're going to proclaim the name of Christ anywhere we can go. We're going to put it on display for the world to see.

Having put ourselves in the hand of God, he's put a work in our hands as well. What work has he given you? Worth asking today, what does he want you to do in the land of the living?

I know the apostle Paul will say that it's better to be present with the Lord, you know, in his presence than to be here.

I understand that theologically, but even at my age, I want to keep getting something done.

Sometimes, you know, you know, David has a prayer where he says something to the effect of, you know, Lord, what good am I going to be to you when I'm dead?

I mean, if history keeps going, I want to be dead a long time, so keep me around to get something done. That's kind of the way I've always felt. Therefore, I'm hoping to live to be 117.

[16:38] You should have laughed. These are wonderful things here in the middle of the text.

In fact, they begin to breathe purpose. This is what righteous, good, wise people do. They find contentment, comfort, companionship, and calling from entrusting their souls into the hand of God. Knowing all the while that the fullness of their reward, you must yet wait I've been thinking about how the Bible moves on from this.

It's going to put another preacher on the scene, Jesus. He becomes a supreme example in my mind of this kind of person.

when he's on the cross, the very last thing he says picks up the notion of being in the hand of God as Psalm 31, verse 5 would say.

[17:57] And as he's stretched out after giving his life to wisdom and righteousness and goodness, he says, into, if you know it, come with me, into thy hands I commit my spirit.

Jesus entrusted himself to one who would judge righteously and looked for an ultimate reward beyond the treatment he had received during his life under the sun.

Psalm 31, 5 from which Jesus quotes talks about a person who's just being undermined even though they continue to try to do good all along the way.

And it's a plea. It's a cry. It's a prayer. Lord, may there be reward for my wisdom, your blessing on righteousness, your hand of mercy on all that I have done for good.

And Jesus' prayer was answered. Not under the sun. They led him right to his death. But he was resurrected from the dead.

[19:27] His wisdom, righteousness, and goodness was unparalleled. It was perfect. So all that could be done to him under the sun couldn't hold him.

And so he is really the first fruits of what awaits anyone who would live their life in gratitude under the shadow of his wise, righteous, good work.

that's what it simply means to become a Christian. To become a Christian is to say, wow, this world makes no sense.

It's a mess and I'm a mess. I don't know where to go. I can try to be wise. I can try to be righteous. I can try to be good, but I'm never going to be it. Well, wouldn't you say he did it and God rewarded him? If I grab hold of him, maybe I'm coming with him.

[20:26] That's his promise. And that also then fuels anyone here this morning who's already put themselves in the hand of God.

1 Peter 4.19 in a sense says, the righteous people entrust their souls to a God who will judge righteously.

So you're going to have to wait for your reward, but that shouldn't inhibit you for being wise and righteous and good now.

Now, wouldn't it be great if the text ended right there at verse 10? I mean, it's a perfect ending, right? You're like, yeah, he's done preaching. That's a good sermon. Well, at least I hope you think so.

He come out with that comedic genius thing. I thought I might pay attention. He told me what's so funny about being a living dog than a dead lion given that the same thing called death is going to happen to everybody.

[21:35] And then he gave me that purpose of hope. He gave me that Monday to Friday thing. I'm going to go. I'm going to eat. I'm going to drink. I'm going to get clean. I'm going to get something done. Can we go home now?

But look what he does, just like these comedians of dark humor. Look at verse 11. Now, again, oh no, here comes the deadpan voice.

He just couldn't let it fly. He'd come to great resolution. And he looks at you out there and he says, now, let me start sketch number two. You know how they do that with a pause.

They get something done. The laughter's there. The tension's relieved. He says, now, another thing I saw. He doesn't give you a run of six things.

This time he gives you a run of four things. Just so you all know, the race isn't going to go to the swift here, the battle to the strong, the bread to the wise, the riches to the intelligent, nor favor with

those knowledge.

[22:38] You know, time and chance is going to happen to us all. He just brings you right back into the world in which we live.

Here's the point of that second sketch, though. Verse 10. I'm sorry, 15. But, for the one who was wise, yet no one remembered, that's his illustration, this poor man who saved the city, even though no one remembered him, it was still better to be wise here.

Wisdom is better than might. If it's better to be alive than dead, it's better to be wise than to be a fool, even though the one who's wise isn't lifted up in a world of fools.

It's all right there. So know this, you're not going to get there because you're fast or strong or intelligent or knowledgeable.

Time and chance are going to catch up to us all. Like fish, sleep, who get caught in a net or like birds who can't escape the snare.

[24:04] It's all coming down, but it's better to be wise anyway. Yeah, he says as he gets ready to lead the stage.

Yeah, but you know, one sinner can undo all the things you've got done in life anyway. Into the darkness comes his humor.

So what does it mean for us? With Jesus, and his reward for righteousness and the answer to his prayer of putting himself into the hands of God, it means that one day God will get the last laugh on a world that will provide no advantage for your good work.

So until then, we need strength that will come from sitting at his table. You don't have to worry.

You don't have to be afraid. I'm telling you, joy comes in the morning. Your troubles, they won't last always.

[25:35] You got a friend in Jesus. He's going to wipe away your tears. And if your heart is broken, then even today, just lift your hands and say, Ecclesiastes 9, I know that I can make it.

I know that I can stand. No matter what comes my way, my life is in his hands.

Our Heavenly Father, we come now to your table with strength and dignity and joy and celebration. For whatever this world throws at our wisdom or righteousness or good works, we joyfully wait for you to complete in us and for us what you have already done in the death of Christ whose meal we celebrate together.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.