

Enjoy Your Life!

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Ecclesiastes chapter 9. I'm going to begin reading in verse 1. It's the Word of God. But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of the Lord and 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.

[1 : 4 9] 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. So 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 be always white. Let not oil be lacking from your head.

Enjoy life with the one 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 in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. For there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going. Verse 11.

[2 : 5 4] 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 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.

May God bless the hearing and the preaching of his word. Several years ago, I read a story about Bessie.

Bessie is a Burmese python. One day, Bessie was a pet. Bessie was accidentally let loose in her owner's Idaho apartment, and was nowhere to be found.

A gang of plumbers were hired to find the eight-foot-long snake in the walls and pipes of their 57,000-square-foot apartment complex.

[4 : 09] After two weeks of searching, they found Bessie hanging out in the ceiling above her owner's apartments. But for two weeks, everyone in that apartment complex had to go to bed each night knowing Bessie was on the loose.

For two weeks, they anxiously checked under beds, inside sheets, behind closet doors, before going to sleep each night, hoping that Bessie wouldn't emerge while they were resting.

For two weeks, they lived with the uncomfortable fear of stumbling upon Bessie. Bessie, after she was found, one resident said, will definitely sleep better now.

I can only imagine. Well, if we're honest, studying the book of Ecclesiastes can leave us with a similar uncomfortable fear about life.

Ecclesiastes is a hard word. You want something that makes you feel good? This is not the book to turn to. Ecclesiastes tells you, tells me, life is broken. Diligence isn't rewarded always.

[5 : 24] Wisdom isn't blessed. Righteousness doesn't always protect. And so we can become unsettled and anxious about when life's brokenness will break in on us again.

Uncomfortable waiting for the next disappointment to arrive. The next sudden tragedy to strike. The next shoe to drop. Perhaps even more seriously, we can begin to settle into a simmering bitterness over life.

Frustration over what life has taken from us. Deep unforgiveness for those who have wronged us. A pervasive pessimism about anything in the future.

We can adopt. Many people say this is what the preacher has done. A victim's mindset. Stuck in the past.

Bitter over what has happened. We can become a cynic. In her challenging book about surviving the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. Psychologist and author Edith Egger said this.

[6 : 37] She said, My own search for freedom and my years of experience as a licensed clinical psychologist have taught me that suffering is universal. But victimhood is optional.

No one can make you a victim but you. We become victims not because of what happens to us, but when we choose to hold on to our victimization.

We develop a victim's mind. A way of thinking and being that is rigid, blaming, pessimistic, stuck in the past, unforgiving, and punitive.

Now, as a victim of Auschwitz, Dr. Egger is not saying there's no such thing as being victimized. No such thing as experiencing innocent, painful suffering.

But contrary to our mainstream culture, no one, not even that, can make you a victim but yourself. This morning, after trudging through the muck and mire of our broken world the past couple chapters, Solomon begins to bring things to a close.

[7 : 50] Solomon begins to make a conclusion. Solomon wants us to reject a victim reactionary mindset to the brokenness of this world. Solomon doesn't want us to live in the brokenness of what has happened.

Solomon doesn't want us to live in fear of what is ahead. Solomon wants us to enjoy the few days we have of life. So in a word, where we're going, the choice is yours.

Stay bitter or start enjoying life's good gifts. The choice is yours. Stay bitter or start enjoying life's good gifts.

Now, I was reading one book on this chapter this week and he had a great outline. So I'm basically stealing his outline. David Gibson's outline. Thank you very much.

First point is one thing in life is certain. One thing in life is certain. We're all going to die. Solomon has been obsessed with death since the beginning of this book, as we know.

[8 : 50] But these verses are what one author describes, an anguished reflection on the finality of death as the destiny.

As the destiny. This is your destiny of every person. So Solomon begins in 9.1. He says, Now, we know from the past several chapters, Solomon has been talking about the righteous and the wise and the wicked quite a bit.

He's been talking about the righteous. They can't be so righteous that they escape the brokenness of the world. The wise can't be so wise that they understand all the brokenness of the world.

And often the wicked, the one who are pursuing wickedness with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, just go on like nothing happened. Just go on scotch free. But now he says, The righteous and the wise are where?

In the hand of God. Now, the hand of God in Scripture is a way of saying God is absolutely in control of the details of your life.

[10 : 01] You remember John 10, that famous passage, I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one can snatch them from my hand.

But being in the hand of God might not be as comfortable as we think. Look in the way he continues in verse 1.

Whether it is love or hate, man does not know. Both are before him. Though in the hand of God, For the righteous and wise, Both love and hate are before them.

What in the world does that mean? Being in the hand does not guarantee a comfortable life. And we think, how could this be? Proverbs 3.33 says, The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous.

Now, before we rush and accuse and convict God of doing evil, we must remember what Solomon is telling us. He's telling us what he sees in the world.

[11 : 12] He's not saying God is doing evil. What he's saying is something very provoking. That as far as he can tell, as far as he can tell, scanning the whole earth, being in the hand of God makes no difference in whether one experiences good or evil.

That's a third word. He continues further. Look in verse 2. It's 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, to him who does not sacrifice, as the good one is, so is the sinner.

He who swears is as he who shuns an oath. The same event. Now, he said this back in chapter 2. He said the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked. It's death.

Provokingly, here, he uses, he's so specific. Nowhere in the book of Ecclesiastes is he more specific about the fact and finality of death. He uses six contrasts to make this very clear.

It doesn't matter if you're righteous or wicked. You're going to die. It doesn't matter if you're good or evil. It doesn't matter if you're clean or unclean. He tells us he knows about the Levitical law, the clean or unclean, to him who sacrifices, and him who doesn't, or swears an oath, or shuns an oath.

[12 : 31] You remember two chapters ago, he said, woe to you if you don't keep your oaths. But here he says, it doesn't matter. The same happens. Everyone, Derek Kidner, captures the drama and the perplexing nature of these verses.

He says, the things that are supposed to matter most to God turn out to make no difference. or none that anyone can see, that's key, to the way we're disposed of in the end.

Moral or immoral, religious or profane, we're all owned down, mowed down alike. Don't waste your life, John Piper says.

Solomon says, go ahead. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how you live your life with how you're treated in the end from his eyes.

It doesn't matter. You're going to die and no one around you will be able to tell whether you lived a good life or a bad life by the way you die. No wonder he said in verse 3, this is an evil that is done in the sun to the same event.

[13 : 38] This is an evil. This is a wicked evil. The same event happens to all. And he continues. He says, also the children of man are full of evil and madness is in their hearts.

What he's saying is someone that comes to this understanding, the same event happens to all. No matter what you do, they just say, oh, well come what may, I'm going to party down. I'm going to chase every thrill and every high, throwing away anything that tries to hold me back.

But Solomon says, they go to the dead too. But if we're all going to die, then life must be better for those who are alive.

Look in verse 4, he says, but he who is joined with the living has hope for a living dog is better than a dead lion. Now that's another one of those better than statements that have been running through these chapters.

But what does it mean? You know, in the Peanuts cartoon, Theology and the Dog, Snoopy sits on top of his house, typing away. Charlie Brown arrives on the scene and is handed a copy of what Snoopy has been typing.

[14 : 45] It reads, as in the ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes, a living dog, Snoopy's a dog, in case you didn't know, is better than a dead lion.

Charlie Brown gives it back and says, what does that mean? Snoopy says, I don't know, but I agree with it. It means it's better to be alive.

Look in verse 5, for the living know that they will die, so they know something ahead of time. The dead know nothing. They have no reward. The memory of them is forgotten already.

So when you're alive, you know you're going to die, but at least you're not dead yet. You know something, but when you die, you don't know anything. You don't gain anything.

There's no reward, no memory. No one talks about them. No one celebrates the dead. No one remembers them. So it's better to be alive than dead, but not much better.

[15 : 46] You're not a lion. You're a dog. Now, unlike our culture that went from being child-centered to pet-centered, dogs were not man's best friend back then.

They didn't go to doggy daycare or on daily walks. They were unclean scavengers roaming around running trash for something to eat while they lived out their numbered days.

So it may, this is what Solomon's saying, it may be better to be alive, but life is still miserable.

The fact and finality of death leaves a fog over everything. Film director Woody Allen captures the devastation of death in a startling way.

He says, I always see death's head lurking. I could be sitting at Madison Square Garden where the Knicks play at the most exciting basketball game and they're cheering and everyone's thrilling.

[17 : 02] Everything is thrilling and one of the players is doing something very beautiful and my thought will be, he's only 26 years old. I only wish he could savor this moment in some way because this is as good as it's going to get for him.

And that's just the way it is. Death's head is always lurking. Life keeps flying by. You don't get a chance to relish your joys. You don't get a chance to relive the good old days.

You don't get any takebacks. There's no opportunities to white out your pain. Life is just a current. It's a river. It's a Niagara Falls running to one place. Death.

Maybe today. It may be tomorrow. It may be a long time coming. But coming it is.

One thing in life is certain. Point two, many things in life are uncertain. Many things are uncertain. Because this passage is carefully structured.

[18 : 08] If you notice, the commands of joy are in the middle. beginning in the back, sandwich it very carefully. And so we're going to take up verses 11 and 12 now.

Look in verse 11. He says, Again, Solomon is saying, what he said here, what he said again and again throughout this letter.

The world does not work properly. Five examples. The fastest do not win. Always. Now he's not using qualifications so that it comes off.

The fastest do not win. The strongest do not win the battle. The wise do not get the bread. The intelligent do not get the riches. The knowledgeable do not get the favor. The takeaway, what he's saying is, many of the things we think are certain in life are not.

Many of the things we think that would be a given, a shoe in, an easy win are not what happens because sudden misfortunes happens to all.

[19 : 24] Time and chance happen to all. Now that's not Solomon's way of saying he's not in control of everything. It's time and chance. What he's saying is, is that things that happen, they appear to happen randomly, haphazardly, suddenly.

Solomon's not saying there's no order in the world. Solomon's saying it's just harder to see order now. One description, one author describes a helpful illustration for how these things put together and how Ecclesiastes relates to a book like Proverbs, which is very blunt, diligent rule, wicked parish.

He says, Proverbs is like a well-planned city. A street, B street, C street, D street. Crossing those are first, second, third, fourth.

But there's been a big earthquake in the city. It may still be best to take B street from your house to 9th street, but the road may be closed or under construction or blocked because of a fallen building or a crushed car.

It may, it is still best to pursue the order of Proverbs, but it won't eliminate life's uncertainties. We have to come to grips with this.

[20 : 59] David Gibson says, we tend to live as if the one thing that is certain will never come while the many things that are uncertain are certain. The one thing that's certain is death.

Many things uncertain are everything else. Solomon advises, if you're going to live life under the sun, get comfortable with uncertainty. We don't know what lies ahead.

All your plans, all your dreams, all your aspirations, all of them should be written with an asterisk. If the Lord wills.

All the coloring books of your future, you should be very careful how much you color in. Sometimes our lives are shaken by sudden tragedy, but often it's just a long string of unexpected twists and turns.

When we're young, we want to be an astronaut, a firefighter, or a ballerina. But as we get older, we just want a job we can be proud of. We just want a few close friends, a happy table at Christmas, a house with a yard, a long life, grandchildren, a peaceful retirement.

[22 : 16] Solomon's saying, watch out what you bank on. Watch out what you hope. And in fact, Solomon continues with two tough images of what life is actually like.

Time and chance happen to them all. Look in verse 12, for man does not know his time. Because these random, haphazard things keep happening. Like a fish that are taken in an evil net and like birds that are caught in a snare.

So the children of man are ensnared in an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them. Solomon's using two images to evoke the horror of living in this world.

We're like fish in a net swimming along suddenly and then wham! We're in a net. We're like a bird that lands down to grab a few sunflower seeds and then whap!

A trap smashes over them. That's what life is like. You may feel invincible sometimes. You may feel free. You may feel like you have your whole life ahead of you. You may have desires and dreams and plans but none of those things are certain.

[23 : 22] The only thing certain in your life is uncertainty. In one particularly serious comic strip, Calvin and Hobbes put a finger on what we all feel.

Calvin, the boy, and Hobbes, his stuffed tiger who comes to life in his imagination, find a baby raccoon that is barely alive. Calvin runs to his mom's, runs to get his mom for help and Hobbes says, I'm sure she can help.

Calvin, now running away from Hobbes, yells back, of course she can. You don't get to be a mom if you can't fix everything just right. When mom gets there, however, she realizes that the raccoon is likely to die.

She puts the poor creature in a box and brings him home. They keep him in the garage and bring him food and water. Even Calvin puts on a generous spirit.

He says, chances are I am happy to donate most of my dinner. He tells his mom, she replies, Calvin, you don't even know what we're eating. Before Calvin and Hobbes go to bed, the boy peers over the lid of the box with a sad expression on his face.

[24 : 34] Don't die, little raccoon. Don't die. In the morning as Calvin is running to the garage, he is met by his dad. Dad, dad, did you check on the little raccoon this morning?

Yes, Calvin. I'm afraid he died. Calvin cried, what? What? After they buried, I love this line, after they buried the little raccoon under the tree, Calvin says, I didn't even know he existed a few days ago and now he's gone forever.

The trip ends with Calvin back to the reader whispering to Hobbes, what a stupid world. That's the way it can feel like.

What a stupid world. How can it be that the beautiful life God has made shriveled down into a short life with one certainty and many, many uncertainty?

What's going on? Why are faithful employees laid off? Good reputation destroyed, godly families broken by law. Why are the hopes of young moms dashed in miscarriages, young athletes in injury, young businessmen in bankruptcy?

[25 : 56] Why does chronic pain cripple plans for retirement, cancer cancel plans with grandchildren, Alzheimer's, erased the memories of all that's happened before? Why, as one of my friends has said, who's gone through unimaginable loss, why would he say, I've come to believe there's no, there's safe people in the world but no safe places?

This is not a safe place. No place under heaven, under the sun, is safe. what's going on?

What? What a stupid world. Broken world. Many things in life are uncertain but Solomon is not saying this so that we would throw our hands up and say, what a stupid world.

Solomon is saying it so that we'd learn how to live for what's good. Point three, a few things make life good.

A few things make life good. It would be tempting to just be consumed with the brokenness of life.

[27 : 19] This book presents to you and me the knife edge of life. It's a knife edge. You can fall into a pit of bitterness so easily.

in this world. Bitterness, anger, despair. Just bide your time grimacing until death.

But Solomon lays out a few things that make life good. Like Jeremiah, Solomon knows in this book he has a hard word. He's got to pluck up and break down, destroy and overthrow.

But now, just like Jeremiah, he's beginning to build and plant. The book of Ecclesiastes, as you know, one of the things that ties this book together, this perplexing, confusing book together, are the refrains of joy.

It's peppered with these refrains of joy. There's nothing better than to eat and drink. There's nothing better than enjoy your lot. This is your lot. This is your portion. There's nothing better. But these verses are set apart than all the others.

[28 : 29] They're longer. They're more specific than all the other joy refrains. There's no comparative statement. Solomon is no longer using a better than statement. He's no longer using a sense of suggestion.

These verses are commands. Seven commands in three verses. Daniel Frederick says it well. The preacher has turned from a mere comparative statement, mere comparative statements, to imperatives.

Those are commands. In order to express what Brown describes as the moral urgency of pursuing enjoyment. So it's vital what he's laying out.

If there's one thing that's certain, you're going to die. There are many things that are uncertain. Well then, life lived under the sun is a life lived urgently for what is good right before you.

Solomon is no longer suggesting a wise way to live. He's urgently laying out the way to live. He's telling us the positive will of God.

[29 : 31] What is the will of God for your life? You know, we have all these ideas of the will of God. I'm called to do this, called to do that, called to do this, called to do that, whatever, you know, but this is actually the will of God.

This is the positive will of God under the brokenness of life, under the sun in a word you're called to love. Enjoy your wine, enjoy your wife, and enjoy your work.

Enjoy your wine. I think that sums up, plus it lands pretty well in an alliteration. Enjoy your wine. The first, most basic necessity of life is food and drink.

That's where Solomon begins. Look in verse 7, go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine for a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. The idea, what do you say, God's already approved of it.

The idea, what he's saying is, instead of chasing all the uncertainty of life under the sun, instead of searching for gain, there's no gain. Remember, all is vanity, all is striving after the wind.

[30 : 37] So instead of chasing all those things, learn to enjoy what God gives. In a word, one preacher said, gifts not gain is your new motto. You know, there is so much of this world that just says, gain is your motto.

It's your motto. It's what you're chasing. But no one will remember it. Gifts not gain is your new motto. And begin with food.

Eat your bread with joy. We should be a lot more like Bob. And what about Bob? One of our family's favorite movies because he's just enjoying everything.

He's eating dinner with his psychiatrist where he just kind of broke in and got to go on vacation with his psychiatrist. He's just eating everything he eats. He's, oh, mmm, ah, is this hand-shocked corn because it's so delicious.

And that's what life is meant to be like under the sun for those who deserve the wrath of God. Every bite should lead to delight. So don't scarf down every lunch so you can get back to looking busy.

[31 : 46] Don't rush dinner so you can start devotion. God's already approved of what you do. God doesn't need you running around trying to impress people or impress him. God knows you need food.

God wants you to stop and receive and rejoice. Drink your wine with a merry heart. Uh-oh. Now Solomon's not endorsing drunkenness.

It's immediately what people say. But he is encouraging a little wine to wash down life's brokenness. Wine is a gift to gladden the heart in life under the sun.

He continues with clothing. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. The idea is not you wear white because you're as pure as driven snow.

like the Pope. You wear white because you're happy. You're going to a party. You know, Johnny Cash, I mean, I love Johnny Cash.

[32 : 52] He got it wrong here. He said, I'm the man in black. I'd love to wear a rainbow every day and tell the world the world's okay. But until things get better, I'm the man in black.

Well, and I have one of my great aunts lost her husband and wore black for 40 years. That's not right. That's not right. That's not the language of joy and celebration of enjoying God's good gifts.

So don't dress like you're going to a funeral. Dress like you're going to a party, like a wedding. Don't dress like you're going snow skiing in July or like you're going to a homeschool convention.

Dress to show strength. Dress to show strength and beauty and joy. Display the beauty of living in the language of joy.

Enjoy life under the sun. Enjoy your wife. Enjoy life with your wife whom you love all the days of your vain life that He's given you under the sun. That's your portion.

[33 : 58] Don't live with your wife. Don't put up with her. Enjoy her. Life, you know, life is brief. We often live as if our spouse will always be there.

After I get time for the kids or work or the game or whatever, I'll be able to give some time to my spouse. But one day she won't be there. That's what He's saying. There's a wonderful nowness to these verses.

She's not going to be in the bed. He's not going to be in the bed next to you soon. I'll never forget R.C. Sproul Jr. saying after his wife died at 46, I wish I held her hand more.

You're not going to miss the game when she's gone. Are you enjoying her? Enjoying Him? Are you assuming you can get to it when you have?

What if I'm not married? How do I enjoy this? At a minimum, I think Solomon would say marriage is one of the few stubborn good gifts you should regularly pray for and long for.

[35 : 04] It's a good gift under the sun that you should long for with all your heart to walk this out and enjoy the good gifts. Enjoy your work, He says. Look in verse 10. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

Don't plan to work later. I think that's what He's saying. Just do it now. Work. Build a tree house. Whatever. Work now. One day you won't clock in anymore.

But this list is not meant to be exhaustive. The point of this list is to enjoy your life right now. Don't press. Don't delay.

Don't push it off. This is an imperative. This is something you should do right now. Enjoy your life, David Gibson healthily says. Ride a bike. See the Grand Canyons. Go to the theater.

Learn to make music. Visit the sick. Care for the dying. Cook a meal. Feed the hungry. Watch a film. Read a book. Laugh with some friends until it makes you cry. Play football. Run a marathon. Snorkel in the ocean.

[36 : 01] Listen to Mozart. Ring your parents. That means call. He's a Brit. Write a letter. Play with your kids. Spend your money. Learn a language. Plant a church. Start a school. Speak about Christ.

Travel to somewhere you've never been. Adopt a child. Give away your fortune and then some. Shape someone else's life by laying down your own. Enjoy your life. One of the most satisfying things of my life every week is taking a nap with my youngest son on Sunday afternoon.

There's something that feels so right. If you know my youngest son, you know why. That's what life is like. Don't push it off.

These are God's simple daily gifts. They demand your attention. They demand it. These are commands. These are the things. You don't know what to give your life to?

These are the things. Give your time to these. Give your life to these. They demand your attention but they're easy to miss. In the same way that it's so easy to miss these joy refrains in the midst of all the description of brokenness and ecclesiastes.

[37 : 07] It's so easy to miss God's gift and the striving for gain every day. It's easy to be caught up in the wrong things. It's easy to miss these things. So find a way to force yourself to stop, receive, and enjoy.

These verses, in fact, not that I get too much into this stuff, you may, are my verses for the year. Eat your food with joy.

Okay. Drink your wine with a merry heart. Enjoy your way. Work hard. That's what I wanted more than anything else.

Not knowing we'd be in Ecclesiastes. Enjoy these simple daily gifts not merely because they're good now but because they're foretaste of a world to come.

In the movie Shawshank Redemption, there's one scene that's hard to forget. It's an incredible movie. I don't want to overstate it but I think it is a very good movie.

[38 : 19] The movie follows the friendship of two men in prison, Red and Andy. There's one scene that for me is unforgettable.

Andy, I think he's in charge of cleaning or something like that. One day, he locks himself in the warden's office at the prison.

Now, the warden was not a nice guy. You don't lock yourself in his office. He turns on the record player and plays Mozart through the whole prison. He locks the door.

There's this glass wall. The warden's banging. He's just playing Mozart. The convicts are spellbound by the beauty that comes into their ears and I love music.

I hope you do too but it just fills their ears and their hearts with joy and then Red, who's played by Morgan Freeman's voice, comes over the scene and reminds us what a power joy can be, whatever we're facing right now.

[39 : 22] He says, I have no idea to this day what them two Italian ladies were singing about. I like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words.

It makes your heart ache because of it. I tell you those voices soared higher and farther than anybody in a gray place dares to dream.

It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away. And for the briefest of moments every last man at Shawshank was free.

That's what these gifts and the full understanding of the Bible are meant to do. Each day, if for a few moments, they're meant to lift us above the misery and uncertainty of this life to get a foretaste of the life to come.

All the good gifts, as C.S. Lewis famously said, are the sin of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a far country we have not visited.

[40 : 37] They're news telling us that this world is not all there is. They're imbissary. They're announcements telling us there's another world where sin and suffering and sickness and disease no longer roam and haunt.

There's a world where death no longer haunts, no longer hangs out dreadfully in the future, and they are foretaste of what is to come. No wonder Isaiah 25 ends by talking about a feast of rich food, well-aged wine, a feast celebrating the swallowing up and the emptying out of death forever.

That's the feast we celebrate by the power of the gospel that we are feasting in part, though not with communion today, we're feasting in part because of the promise that it will come in full, that all who believe in Jesus Christ have eternal life, have a relationship with God the Father and they will never die.

And so these gifts are little gifts to lift us above and to press us on. So the choice is yours.

Stay bitter or start enjoying God's gifts. Become a victim or become wise.

[41 : 55] life is brutal. Life is broken. All you have to do, D.A. Carson says, live long enough and you will suffer.

But you can start to live. I want us to hear from one more person who didn't survive Auschwitz.

A lady also from Holland, E.D. Hilseum, found a capacity for joy that I long for. Writing on August 18, 1943 in prison before being sent to death at Auschwitz, she addressed God with these words as shackles still remained on her hands.

You have made me so rich, O God. Please let me share out your beauty with open hands. My life has become an uninterrupted dialogue with you, O Lord, one great dialogue.

Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on your earth, my eyes raised toward your heaven, tears sometimes run down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude.

[43 : 17] At night, too, when I lie in the bed and rest in you, O God, tears of gratitude run down my face and that is my prayer. I've been terribly tired for several days, but that, too, will pass.

Things come and go in a deeper rhythm. People must be taught to listen. It's the most important thing we have to learn in this life. I always end up with just one single word, God.

The beat of my heart has grown deeper, more active, and yet more peaceful. And it is as if I were all the time storing up inner riches.

Less than four months later, she's dead. but her faith still speaks. May God help us.

Father in heaven, we thank you that we can agree with this message wholeheartedly.

[44 : 20] we can feel very deeply within our spirit the brokenness, the agony, and the utter horror of life under the sun.

There's no doubt in room this size there's far more aching and brokenness than we care to admit. And yet, God, we can at the same time acknowledge the avalanche of good gifts that you've poured into our lives.

Father, we pray that you would open our eyes and keep them peeled, aware of how good you've been to us. That we might live not with tomorrow's trouble, on our mind, or yesterday's past on our heart.

We might live with the food and drink and the friends and the family with all our heart and for your glory. Help us, God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

[45 : 42] Thank you, God, you