



Ecclesiastes 9:11-18

"Life is Unpredictable"

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Transcript

21:55

We are in Ecclesiastes chapter 9. We're going to attempt to finish chapter 9 this morning. Our passage is verses 11 through 18 but we're going to start in verse 1 just as a little bit of a reminder of what we've been talking about in the last couple weeks. So in verse 1, chapter 9, in the beginning of this chapter we spoke of an appointment that we all have but do not want to keep and that's death.

22:37

Solomon talks quite a bit about death in this book of Ecclesiastes and death is what people fear the most next to public speaking, I'm told. I can understand that but it's kind of strange so like if you were at a funeral the people listening to the funeral would rather be the guy in the box than the one given the eulogy.

23:10

I don't know. But death is unavoidable and that is a great fear that people live with and so I did a little survey myself. I went out and found the toughest, meanest, fearless

person I know. So I went to Dave Rondou and I said Dave, Dave are you afraid of dying?

23:38

And he looked at me and says I am not afraid of dying, I just don't want to be there when it happens. Life and death are in the hands of God it says in verse 1 and throughout this book the preacher has emphasized our freedom of discernment and decision -making, but only God knows our future and the decisions that we make today and how they will affect our future.

24:08

And the opening verses of chapter nine suggests that no matter if we obey the law or disobey the law, if we make promises or break promises, we all die just the same. Yes, we share a common destiny here on earth.

24:26

We all die, death in the grave, but we do not share, all of us do not share a common destiny in eternity. Back in verse seven, he tries to cheer himself up a little bit now. He says, go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

24:50

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 toll which you toil under the sun.

25:13

So he says go, go make the best of it. Make the best of your meaningless vain life. Just accept it and do the best you can with your meaningless life. So that's kind of the flavor of this, the flow of it and we know that he doesn't speak from a true premise but we know he speaks from a common one.

25:33

As believers we know that there is a world beyond and we know that there is a judgment seat of Christ by which every one of us will give an account. We know that there is an eternal king and we know that there is a choice of eternal destinies.

25:53

We know these things and that's what makes life meaningful for us, but not from Solomon's perspective. So last time we saw that death is unavoidable and now in the last half of this chapter we're going to see that life is unpredictable.

26:16

So if we could take a minute and gain some wisdom from one of the most respected philosophers of the 20th century.

26:36 – [Video from Forrest Gump:](#)

Hello, my name is Forrest, Forrest Gump. Do you want a chocolate? I could eat about a million and a half of these. My mom always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get.

27:04

Right? Great wisdom, Forrest. So verses 11 through 18 we're going to jump into. He begins by making a declaration. He makes a declaration followed by an observation, a parable. And then he's going to give us a conclusion. So in other words, this is what he's saying. He says, this is what I know, this is what I've seen, and this is how I'm going to live.

27:39

That's basically the outline of our section. So would you read along? Verse 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.

27:59

But time and chance happen to them all, for man does not know his time, like a fish that are taken out in an evil net, like birds that are caught at a snare. So the children of man are snared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them.

28:17

I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with a few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building a great siege work against it.

28:31

But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom 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.

28:48

The words of the wise heard and quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. So, expecting the response of his listeners and readers, he turns from the discussion of death to begin the discussion of life.

29:20

So, some would argue if death is unavoidable, the smartest thing that we could do is concentrate on life. Let's make the best of our life so when we get to the end we can have the satisfaction that we achieve some success with all our hard work.

29:39

Verse 11, he tells us, them all for man does not know his time." So Solomon tells us that you can't guarantee what will happen in life. To begin with, our abilities are no guarantees of our success. While it is generally true the fastest runners win the race and it's generally true that the strongest soldiers win the battles and the smartest and most

skillful workers get the best jobs, it's also true that these same gifted people can fail miserably because of circumstances outside their control.

30:35

In chapter 8 we read that the successful person knows how to make the most out of time and procedure, but we see here now that the only the Lord can control time and chance. There was a meteorologist and a minister and they were buddies and they would play golf every weekend.

30:56

So they're out playing golf and it starts to rain. So they run into the clubhouse to get out of the rain and they're waiting and waiting. Rain didn't let up. It got worse. So the minister turns to his friend, the meteorologist, and said, you know, you would think between the two of us we could do something about this.

31:17

But you can't. It's not in their control. One of the greatest missionaries of India was called E. Stanley Jones and he lived a very adventurous life. And he wrote something that I found to be very comforting.

31:37

E. Stanley Jones said, many live in dread of what's coming. Why should we? The unknown puts adventure to life. It gives us something to sharpen our souls on. The unexpected around the corner and gives us a sense of anticipation and surprise.

31:54

Thank God, he says, for the unknown future. If we saw all the good things which are coming to us, we'd sit down and degenerate. If we saw all the evil things, we'd all be paralyzed. How merciful God is to lift the curtain on today as we get the strength today to meet tomorrow.

32:19

Then he lifts the curtain on tomorrow. He is a considerate God. So Solomon has already confirmed in chapter three that there's a time for everything. Chapter eight that there's a purpose and place for everything.

32:35

The word *chancier* simply means an occurrence or event. It has nothing to do with gambling. We might say I was just in the right place in the right time when something happened. I had very little to do with it.

32:52

Of course, Christians do not depend on things like chance and luck, lucky numbers. Our confidence is in the providence of God. A Christian doesn't carry a rabbit's foot or lucky charms or any of that, right?

33:11

But speaking of luck, Thomas Jefferson said that he was a great believer in luck, and the harder he worked, the more he had of it. We trust God to guide us in making decisions, and we believe that His will is the best.

33:31

So we leave time and chance in God's hands. Verse 12 tells us that, who knows when trouble will arrive on the scene and wreck all our great plans, like the fish that are caught in the net and the birds in the trap.

33:50

So men are snared in evil times. Sudden events happen beyond our control. That's why we should take to heart what James told us. And James chapter four is a warning against boasting. It says, come now you who say today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there in trade and make a profit.

34:13

Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. For what is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say if the Lord wills we will live and do this or that.

34:31

So Solomon wondered if this is all there is to life then why doesn't life make more sense? See the swift would always win the race and the strongest would always have victory, win the battle. But it doesn't always work that way.

34:50

Proverbs 16 he tells us we may throw the dice but the Lord determines how they're gonna fall. So here again he's struggling with fatalism. He previously said that God manages everything. Now he's wondering if everything is just happening according to time and chance, randomness.

35:19

I agree with a fellow that said life is just a process of getting used to unexpected things. I like that. Unexpected and unpredictable. Time and chance he says happen to them all. Some might agree that life is haphazard.

35:38

If you're in the right place in the right time it's all by chance. But the Hebrew word here, chance, just simply means an event. And usually it means an evil event. This phrase refers to a time of judgment directed by God when he allows certain events to overwhelm people.

36:03

In other words, you see a guy with great abilities and great resources and you think, well, they'll never fail and they do. Why? Verse 12 tells us, like a fish caught in a net and bird in a snare. So are the sons of men snared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them.

36:25

See that word "suddenly"? That's a key word here. And I bet all of us can think right now of somebody that was rich, strong, healthy, successful they were the fastest, whatever and all of a sudden it was all gone.

36:43

Earthquake, fire they had great health and it was gone in an instant. See, there's unpredictable situations and circumstances that are outside our control. That's when life becomes like that box of chocolates.

37:01

You grab for that piece and you go, oh, this is the one I hate. And that's usually the one that's in the bottom of the box, right, that nobody else wanted. So the primary idea of these verses is it's vain to trust in human qualities.

37:20

Instead, we need to trust in divine sovereignty. In Proverbs 21, Solomon says it this way, human plans, no matter how wise or well -advised, cannot stand against the Lord. The horses are prepared for battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

37:44

Now, that strikes against humanistic philosophy that says I'm the captain of my own soul, I'm in control of my own destiny, yeah, until something goes wrong and then it's out of control. So it's foolish to trust in our own abilities during those times, especially for believers.

38:05

We ought to know this by now. It's not a matter of coincidence, it's a matter of providence. Providence is God acting supernaturally, naturally. Not giving you miracles as much as arranging events for His purpose.

38:27

Example of providence, there was a man named Jones and he lived in a valley. In the valley flooded, the rivers overshot the banks and the whole valley was flooding. The water's getting higher to higher and a rowboat comes by and says, Jones, hop in.

38:47

I'll take you out of here. He said, no, no, no. I'm trusting in God. God's my deliverer. So now he's on the rooftop of his house. Water's getting higher and higher. A motorboat comes by. Jones, hop in. Come on. He said, no, I'm trusting in God. I'm trusting in God. He's my deliverer. I've committed myself to God. So now the water's up around his neck. And a helicopter comes by, throws down the rope.

39:22

He says, Jones, grab on. We'll take you out of it. Nope. I'm trusting in God to deliver me. So now he's treading water. Well, you know what happens, right? He dies. He gets to heaven, and of course St. Peter's checking him in. And Jones seems a little confused, and he's a little bit upset. Peter says, what's wrong with you? He says, I was trusting in God. I don't understand what happened. So Peter says, oh, let me check the records.

39:54

He opens them. Oh, I see. We sent you a rowboat. We sent you a motorboat. And then we sent you a helicopter, Jones. What more did you want? I like the way John Darby said. He said, God is always behind the scene, but he moves all the scenes that he's behind.

40:19

So now the writer is going to make an observation, and he's going to make it by way of a parable, verses 13 through 15. I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.

40:38

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

40:53

Yet no one remembered that poor man. So picture a little village somewhere in Israel. Not a lot of people in it. They had a wall around it. It wasn't much of a wall because they weren't expecting anybody to come at them.

41:12

Then one day they heard the horses hoofs and the marching of the army outside the wall, and they look outside, and here's this king that they've heard about with all the latest military equipment, chariots of iron, catapults, the rams.

41:32

And they looked outside, and they knew, hey, they didn't have long to live, and there was nowhere to escape. It was impossible until some unknown but very wise poor man maneuvers through his negotiation skills, maybe, and his wisdom, saved the city.

41:51

Now maybe Solomon was just throwing out this example or it might have been a real - life story that he remembered when he was a kid in his father's house, King David, when General Joab did the exact same thing.

42:05

You could read about that in 2 Samuel chapter 20. But this story could also be translated another way. It's not clear whether the wise man actually delivered the city or whether he could have saved it and was asked but he wasn't listened to.

42:23

So the Hebrew allows for the translation in either way, could have. The little city was besieged and the wise man could have delivered it but nobody paid any attention to him. And then verse 17 suggests that this ruler with a loud mouth, he got all the attention and he led the people into defeat and the man that spoke quietly was ignored.

42:47

He had the opportunity for greatness but was not listened to. He was frustrated by one loud, ignorant man. Now the tragedy of this story was the people's heartlessness towards this poor hero. Nobody recognized him.

43:06

Nobody honored him. They didn't give him a parade. They didn't make a statue of him. And this happens frequently, right? We often overlook the real heroes behind the scenes. We praise the singer. We forget about the songwriter.

43:24

We applaud the actor, but what about the screenwriter? We magnify the politician. What about the campaign manager? And we do this in church, by the way, right? Have you ever heard of Martin Luther? Who hasn't?

43:38

But I bet you haven't heard of Philip Malecon. Most of us haven't heard of him yet. He was the guy that encouraged Luther and supported him in his toughest times of his life. How about Dwight L. Moody, famous evangelist over 100 years ago.

43:58

But if it wasn't for his Sunday school teacher, Edward Kimball, who walked in that shoe store and shared the gospel with him, none of it would have happened. So my point is, anonymous does not mean unnecessary.

44:15

The most important man in the city in this parable was poor, quiet man who could save the city. So don't stop influencing your family, your organization, your fellowship, just because you're you're unrecognized and unappreciated, quiet heroes are the ones that keep our ministries going.

44:44

I found a little axiom that I think goes along with that. It says, for the loss of a nail, lose a horseshoe. For the loss of a horseshoe, lose the horse. For the loss of a horse, lose the soldier.

45:02

For the loss of a soldier, lose the battle. And for the loss of the battle, lose the kingdom. Something else, this parable that we read, people still do today with Jesus Christ. They still pass over the wisdom of Christ coming into this world to save them from their sins.

45:29

See, our soul is much like this little city. It's small, defenseless, and Satan, this powerful king outside the city, seeks to destroy us. But the deliverer comes, poor, wise. and he comes to deliver his people from the bondage of sin yet he's not recognized.

45:52

Isaiah said that he had no beauty that we should desire him. The world lives today as if Jesus Christ never came and died for their sin. He came into his own and his own received him not. Let's now move down to the last section verses 16 through 18.

46:21

So after he has made his declaration and his observation he now has a conclusion and that is the superiority of wise living verses 16 through 18. I say that wisdom is better than might though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

46:45

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than the weapons of war but one sinner destroys much good. Get the flow of the passage life is uncertain and wise people are often unrewarded which could lead us to conclude life is so random just live it however you want eat drink and be merry.

47:15

But Solomon would say no no wisdom still is a superior way to live. Verse 16 he said wisdom is better than strength. Verse 18 wisdom is better than weapons of war and by the way this word wisdom we think sometimes we think of it as an intellectual thing but the way that Solomon uses this word wisdom is being skilled, skilled at godly living. That's how he uses the word here and also in Proverbs over a hundred times. So folks, there's things in our life that we can control, but there's things in our life we can't control.

48:07

But the one thing we can control is how we respond to all those things that we can't control. People are gonna say what they're gonna say, things are gonna happen, whatever. But we can control how we react.

48:25

Life is about 10% of things that happen and about 90% about how we react to it. I love what Mickey Rivers, the former New York Yankees outfielder said. Mickey Rivers, not our Mickey McDermott. But actually this sounds like something he would say.

48:46

He said, ain't no sense worrying about things you got control over, because if you got control over them, ain't no sense worrying. And there ain't no sense worrying about things you don't have control over, because if you don't have control over them, ain't no sense worrying about them.

49:05

Now that sounds real simple, but that's profound. Wisdom is the best way for us to live. We saw that wisdom can deliver a city, wisdom can deliver a people, and wisdom can save a soul. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

49:26

In the New Testament, the Bible calls the gospel the wisdom of God. And God's wisdom is primarily revealed at the cross of Jesus Christ. But not everybody sees this or understands this. You won't find people in the world loving the gospel.

49:49

Mostly people despise the gospel, why? Because the gospel says that we're all sinners, that we're a failure, that we have no hope. The gospel says we need a savior, and we need to repent. And that's a message that the world does not want to hear.

50:10

First Corinthians, the first chapter of Paul says, for the word of the cross, or the preaching of the cross, is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

50:26

So, that would seem to divide all of us into two categories. We're either perishing, or we're being saved. And that last phrase, one sinner destroys much good. And that's a truth that we see all through the scriptures, right? Many, many examples you could think of. How about Achan and Joshua? Achan sinned and he brought defeat on the Israeli army. David brought sin and trouble to Israel. The revolt of Absalom took the nation into a civil war.

51:09

But there was one sinner that messed up everything by his work of disobedience. His name was Adam. When we get to heaven, I feel sorry for Adam. I bet there's a few of you out there that want to have a nice conversation with him.

51:32

He's screwed it up for everybody. So one man, yes, changed the world. Adam, by his one act, impacted the whole human race. But by another man's work, by his work of obedience he affected salvation for all that would believe.

51:54

So let's end today by turning to the greatest book in the Bible. What book are you turning to? Romans. This guy goes to the head of the class right here. Romans. Here Paul is going to explain by comparison Romans 5:12.

52:22

Therefore just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin and so death spread to all men because all sin. This is the answer if somebody would ask you the question. This is the answer to why there is sin and death in our world.

52:40

Death reigns because of the presence of sin and sin exists because of one man. It all came through one man. In fact one man's act. So the reign of death over the human race is the result of Adam. The Old Testament tells us that the soul that sinneth shall die and the New Testament says the same thing.

53:06

The wages of sin is death. Let's look at Romans 5 verses 15 through 17. But the free gift is not like the trespass for if many died through one man's trespass much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

53:34

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin for the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation. But the free gift following many trespasses brought justification, for if because of one man's trespass death reign and through that one man

much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in the life through that one man Jesus Christ.

54:08

So that's the much more, the much greater, the much more far -reaching, the much more glorious. You can't earn it, you can't win it, you can't do some religious gyrations to appease God. We can't gain access by our morality or our good works.

54:27

There's nothing we can do to contribute to it. It's the work of one, Jesus Christ, who has accomplished salvation which is granted to us by grace through faith. and in Romans 5, 18, and 19. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

55:00

For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience, many will be made righteous. The message that Paul wants to communicate to us throughout the book of Romans is that forgiveness and sin of sin and access to God is by one person, Jesus Christ.

55:23

So aren't you glad that you live on this side of the cross? That we can know the Savior in more detail and we have more information than Solomon ever could. Solomon knew about the sinner who could destroy much good, but we know about the Savior who restores all things.

55:48

So the good news is that Jesus Christ has come to redeem all things and to make all things new. Solomon was the son of David, but we have a much greater son of David, Jesus Christ, to put our trust in.

56:05

As much as Solomon saw the problems of the meaningless of life, Jesus brings the answer to us of a life full of meaning. He said, I've come that you might have life and that you have it more abundantly.

56:24

So since death is unavoidable and life is unpredictable, the only course we can safely take in this world is to yield ourselves into the hands of God and walk by faith in His word. We don't live by explanations, we live by promises. We don't depend on luck but we depend on the provincial working of our loving Father as we trust in his promises and walk in his will. As we walk by faith we need not fear our last enemy because Jesus has conquered death.

57:11

In the first chapter of Revelation, John tells us, when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead, but he laid his right hand on me saying, fear not, I am the first and the last, died and behold I am alive forevermore.

57:34

Because he is alive, we live in him. We don't look at life and say vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Instead, we echo the confidence of Paul the Apostle when he said, thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

57:52

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. So we cannot help being in Adam, our first birth, which we had no control over, but we can help staying in Adam.

58:18

For we can experience a second birth, a new birth from above by Christ. This is why Jesus said, you must be born again. Would you pray with me? Father, we thank you for your word that guides us, Lord, that illuminates our path.

58:38

Lord, we are thankful that you have given us the meaning of life, Lord. Lord, that you sent one savior that brought us a new life by putting our trust and our faith and our hope in him right now, Lord.

58:56

We thank you for your word, for your presence here today. And I just ask, Lord, that you would go with your people this week as we follow you. In the name of Jesus, amen.