

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 9

Death is Coming

Ecclesiastes teaches that death is a certainty for us all, but *when* it will come for each of us is very uncertain. These two realities should influence the way we should live.

[Slide 2] *3 questions to consider*

- **If you knew that you had exactly 50 years left in your life, what would you do?**
- **If you knew that you had exactly 10 years left in your life, what would you do?**
- **If you knew that you had exactly 30 days left in your life, what would you do?**

Likely we'll see that with 50 years your plans might not change much. 50 years seems like a long time and roughly a lifespan. (We used 60 years here with the youth.) Even 50 years might put some of us well over 100!

10 years might mean a greater sense of urgency which might affect decisions about family or life in general.

With only 30 days, we would almost certainly make drastic decisions to make the most of the remaining time.

In view of the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of when it will occur, we should make the most of our lives.

[Slide 3][Slide 4] Read Ecc 9:1-6 (p 558)

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ 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.

⁴ But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.

(9:1) As before, there are certain aspects of life that we cannot understand. We cannot predict either prosperity or adversity. God is in control. He sees the actions of the righteous and the wicked even when it seems like he doesn't.

(9:2) ceremonially clean/unclean

(9:3) Then he repeats an idea we've heard earlier in Ecc: no matter what we do in life, death awaits us all. Cf 2:12-17, 3:16-22

[Slide 5] Still, he argues, life is better than death. V4: But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Let's contrast this with what we read in Ch 4:2 And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.

Discuss: So how to these two passages fit together?

Remember that Ch. 4 was in the context of oppression. The severely oppressed may feel that death would be better than life, but here in 9 we see that when a person is dead, they are no longer have the opportunity to enjoy life. So it's not a contradiction, just a view from two different perspectives.

Let's look closely at v4: But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

That might seem 'normal' to us, but consider that in ancient Israel, dogs were a despised animal.

[Slide 6] 1 Sam 17:43 And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. (p240)

2 Sam 9:8 ⁸ And he paid homage and said, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?" (p261)

[Slide 7] Mk 7:26-28 ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." (p 843)

By Roman times, dogs were allowed into the house, but in ancient Israel dogs were considered unclean; and scavengers.

So the basic idea here is that it is better to be alive in a lowly position than to be dead and honored.

(9:6) The dead have no capacity to enjoy life as the living can "under the sun".

So what should we do, knowing death is inevitable? Do we despair? Or sit and wait for it to happen? This next passage provides the answer to that question.

[Slide 8] Read Ecc 9:7-10

⁷ Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸ Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹ 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 in your toil at which you toil under the sun. ¹⁰ 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.

What had before been advice (2:24–26; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20) is now a call to action.

The basis of contentment is God's favor. Humankind has to receive contentment as God's gift (recall 3:13); it is in such a context that God will approve of the person's activity.

The Jews wore white garments on festive occasions, as emblems of joy and innocence. Be always pure, and always happy.

Recall in Mt 6:17 the direction to anoint the head with oil. Generally also used in joyous times.

The marriage referred to is affectionate, life-long, monogamous. “All the days of your vain life”.

What one’s hand finds refers to what is available and within one’s ability. Life is to be active, energetic, practical. Death is the end of opportunity.

These verses affirm that God does not simply *allow* humans to experience enjoyment, he **desires** them to experience it. Enjoy fully.

In all our actions, carpe diem.

[Slide 9] Read Ecc 9:11-12

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, but time and chance happen to them all. ¹² 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.

More verses that spell out the uncertainty of life. In context and as written, the intent is “the race is not *always* to the swift, nor the battle *always* to the strong...”

Shows the unpredictability of life. We do not see what will happen to us ahead of time; and not always able to do much about our circumstances as they develop.

The five accomplishments (race, battle, food, wealth, favor) listed in verse 11 are tempered in light of the 2 limiting factors in v 12: time and chance.

In our culture, we don’t like to talk or think about death much. Still, the Teacher emphasizes that death cannot be avoided. Realizing this fact should influence the way we live. God’s word helps us see life as a gift and encourages us to make the most of the time God gives us.

In light of these verses, seize the opportunities as they occur and make the most while you can; a further warning to “seize the day”.

[Slide 10] Read Ecc 9:13-16

¹³ I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. ¹⁴ There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

While the specific reference is not mentioned, it is similar to two events recorded in scripture: Judges 9:50-55 and 2 Sam. 20:15-22

Wisdom is always close to the teacher's mind, and in this section he has some thoughts about it.

The humble circumstances of the poor person count against him and his wisdom is sometimes unheeded. Having wisdom can help us recognize wisdom in unexpected places.

Discuss: What was the poor wise man's reward for saving the city?

(Nothing...no one remembered him.) Still, it was his wisdom that delivered the city.

Earthly reward vs heavenly reward.

[Slide 11] Read Ecc 9:17-18

¹⁷ The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. ¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

It's not the volume, but the value of wisdom. Human politics often involves a loud voice and weapons. (There is nothing new under the sun.)

"sinner" in contrast with wisdom would indicate moral error and absence of acting wisely.

Scriptural examples for Ecc. 9:18,

[Slide 12] Joshua 7, when Achan disobeyed: (highlights here) (p 182)

Jos. 6:18 But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, so that you do not covet them and take some of the things under the ban, and make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it.

Jos. 7:11 Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban

and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.

[Slide 13] Jos. 7:20-21 So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it."

[Slide 14] Also, 1 Sam. 22:18 when Doeg killed the priests. (p 245)

Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn around and attack the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod.

[Slide 15] repeat of Slide 11, 9:17-18

There is nothing new under the sun...