

"When I Get to Where I am Going"
Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

Intro:

"When I Get To Where I Am Going"

*Yeah, when I get where I'm going
There'll be only happy tears
I will shed the sins and struggles
I have carried all these years
And I'll leave my heart wide open
I will love and have no fear*

*Yeah, when I get where I'm going
Don't cry for me down here
So much pain and so much darkness
In this world we stumble through
All these questions I can't answer
So much work to do¹*

I really like this Brad Paisley song. It actually is not a depressing song although these two verses sound kind of sad. In light of Ecclesiastes, they remind that if we are not careful that we can go through life with very little joy. Anxieties are always hiding outside our hearts seeking to break in and steal our joy. **We tend to get anxious about the economy:** being laid-off work; how to pay for college; what if I am disabled in an accident; what about gas prices; how can I afford to retire; how do I make ends meet? **Others of us worry about our health:** Will the cancer return? What if I have a stroke and it leaves me paralyzed? How do I care for my aging parents? **Others of us are anxious about death:** Will I suffer? What if my child dies? What if my parents die? Who will take care of my children if I die? Am I ready to stand before my Maker's face?

Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount to be anxious for nothing but the sad truth is that in the quiet still moments of life we often fail to set the guard of trust at the door of our hearts and instead of keeping anxiety out he walks right in and steals what little joy we may possess. Anxiety kills the joy of living life. It is as true today as it was in Solomon's day.

In **Ecclesiastes 7 and 8** the Preacher dealt with the questions of why bad things happen to some good people and why good things happen to some bad people. It should not be this way. How can God allow this to occur? Then Solomon ended **Ecclesiastes 8** by saying that no one can find out all the work of God, even the very wise cannot know the ends of all things.

Now he begins **Ecclesiastes 9** by saying, "*But all this . . .*" He is doing what he told us to do in **Ecclesiastes 8**, he is *considering God* in light of everything he has just said. He is beginning to draw his conclusion as we approach the end of Ecclesiastes. It is time for him to make clear what he has learned and share it with us. He also allows us to catch our breaths after some heavy chapters that contain deep truth and wisdom in what life is like under the sun because it may seem to us that life is upside down and out of control but it is not. God is in control and this is one of the main messages of Ecclesiastes.

The point of **Ecclesiastes 9:1-12** and really one of the main points of the Preacher's whole sermon is found in **v. 7**, "*Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.*" This is the sixth time he has told us in this sermon *to go and eat our bread, drink our wine with a merry heart and enjoy our lot in life for this God's gift to us under the sun.*

¹ Sung by Brad Paisley, Songwriters: George Teren / Rivers Rutherford, When I Get Where I'm Going lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, Hori Pro Entertainment Group, Words & Music A Div Of Big Deal Music LLC.

Ecclesiastes is teaching us that our lives are like a mist, we cannot have it all, we cannot know it all, we cannot do it all, we cannot achieve it all, and there will be times when we are left simply scratching our heads but that is okay because we can still enjoy life in spite of our limitations if we will fear God. There are only two points this morning and I will give them to you as we move through these twelve verses.

I. All Men Die (Ecclesiastes 9:1-6, 11-12)

1. All men die because all have sinned (vv. 1-3)

The point of **vv. 1-3** is that everyone is going to die no matter if they are righteous, wise or wicked. Death comes to all people. Solomon begins in **v. 1** saying he *laid it to heart and examined it all how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God*. Even the righteous and the wise do not control their own destiny. An intense, extreme righteousness will not earn you one more day of life or keep you from the wickedness that is on this earth. God controls everything.

We cannot look at the outcome of a person's life and determine if God loves them or hates them. He says in **v. 1**, "*Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.*" In other words, just because a person has lots of good things happen to him is not an indicator of God's favor, love and acceptance. It might be a curse and he will not know it until it is too late and he stands before the Judge of the Universe. Likewise, just because a person has had many evil things happen to him in his lifetime does not mean God is angry with him.

Life is perplexing to us when the righteous suffers and the wicked prospers. The fact is we cannot tell whether it is God's love or hate resting on a person so we should not judge.

What we need to do is take comfort in the fact that God is in control of all of this. However, let's keep going.

Look in **v. 2**. **Verse 2** unpacks in more detail the point of **v. 1** . . .

In **v. 3** we get to his point. The evil that is done under the sun is that everyone dies and it is not just that everyone dies it is the way this evil works itself out under the sun. It is *evil* because this was not how God originally created mankind. This was not how it began in the Garden of Eden but now because of sin death reigns and it is an evil under the sun.

Consider the evil of death. Think about it, death takes the good along with the bad and where is the justice in that? Why should the drug dealer and the Golden State Killer receive the same fate as the upright? The good sometimes die young and evil, wicked people live long prosperous lives and then they die. It makes no sense. Death is the great enemy that captures all people in its evil net. It does not matter how old they are or how young they are, how religious they have been, whether they are clean or unclean or if they had made sacrifices or not. Death mows down all people like wheat in a field.

Sin and death had their beginnings in the Garden of Eden. It was not supposed to be this way. Life under the sun originally was good in every way but sin came in and everything changed and now everyone will die.

Application:

If someone was to say to you, "*It seems unfair that young people or good people with their whole lives ahead of them die and yet there are old wicked people that just keep on living? Why does God allow that?*" How would you answer them? Could you explain to them that this grieves God as well? Would you be able to show them in **Ecclesiastes 9:3** that God also calls this an evil under the sun? Could you explain to them how death had its beginnings in the Garden and how mankind sinned against God in the Garden of Eden and all people deserve death? Could you explain to them that God still wants people to enjoy their lives even though it is but a mist? Could then explain to them how God came in Christ to die for the sins of His people and defeat death by dying on the cross and rising from the dead on the third day and all who turn from their sin and trust Christ will have eternal life and thus death, this great evil is defeated? Learn to preach Christ from Ecclesiastes.

2. **Even though we do know death comes to all we should value life (vv. 4-6)**

In **vv. 4-6**, Solomon is reminding us that all die but he is also preparing us how to live in the face of such evil. There is a connection between **vv. 4-5** and **v. 9**. He balances the references of life in **vv. 4-5** with the admonition to enjoy life in **v. 9**.

We see the hope for life in **v. 4**. If you are *joined with the living you have hope*. Then he makes the comparison that even a *living dog has more hope than a dead lion*. A dog back in that day was not viewed like they are today. My dog has it made. Tex eats some really good food and sleeps in a nice comfy bed and if he is lucky Mac will let him sleep with him.

In Solomon's day and in most parts of the world today, dogs are scavengers and they roam the streets looking for food. They are not much more than a four-legged buzzard. But here we see the animal that is at the bottom of the food chain that is alive and is better off than the king of the beasts who at the top of the food chain but is dead.

Solomon's point is that if you are alive you have hope to consider what is most important in life. When you are dead you have no more opportunities to consider what is most important in life. All your strongest emotions—your love, your hate, your jealousy, your kindness, your anger all of it will fade and it will all be forgotten. None of it will be of any advantage to you. It cannot give you life. It is of no gain.

Here is how this works. Death makes no sense. Death leaves us in tears and perplexed. **Yet because** death works this way—life works this way and a person who is alive—has hope.

So God comes to us in Christ and says, "*Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Trust Me and walk with Me for I Am your God. Believe My word and stop trying to understand everything about life. Stop trying to be in control of everything and tie up all the loose ends and have perfect peace and wealth and health and happiness. Stop striving for all those things will rust and moth will eat away over time and begin trusting Me in your confusion because if you can't see that life does not always makes sense then something is coming that will prove it. Death is coming.*"²

Solomon's hope is that people will understand the wisdom he is teaching them. Solomon is a good evangelist and he wants people to turn to God in their short lives and trust God. His hope is that they will get wisdom and fear God so they will be able to enjoy life as it was created in the Garden. It does not mean they will not die but it does prepare them to die. In this life under the sun one must prepare to meet his Maker today. This is the point of **vv. 11-12**.

3. **We do not know when our death will come (vv. 11-12)**

In **vv. 11-12**, Solomon observes that human life is unpredictable. We would expect the fastest person to win the race but that does not always happen. He says *the race is not to the swift* because the unexpected happens. *Life is unpredictable*.

Illst: A few years ago LoLo Jones was the favorite to win the hurdles in the Olympics. There was no one even close to her times but she tripped on the ninth hurdle and came in last place. *Life is unpredictable*.

Then he says the battle is not always to the strong. Perhaps he was thinking about when his father defeated Goliath. There was no way little scrawny, shepherd boy David should have defeated Goliath but the battle is not always to the strong. *Life is unpredictable*.

Next he moves from physical prowess and uses three illustrations that have to do with intellectual superiority. He says, "*nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge.*" Of course one would think that teachers and artists would have plenty and have a really good livelihood. After all, **Proverbs 3:16** says of those who have wisdom and knowledge, "*Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.*" But there are exceptions in life

² Adapted from David Gibson, *Living Life Backward*, 109.

because *life is unpredictable*. Sometimes the very intelligent and those who are very skilled are really fools. We would think that the skillful would always be appreciated and loved but the truth is there are exceptions in life because *life is unpredictable*.

The point is you may know all of the things to do; all of the rules to follow in life but the nature of life in a fallen world is that *life is unpredictable* and you do not know when you will die. You can eat right your whole life, exercise every day and always win every Fitbit challenge and never go over your calorie allotment but that will be of no advantage to you because you do not know when you will die. *Life is unpredictable* so you must prepare today to meet your Maker.

He says in v. 11, "*Time and chance happen to them all.*" He does not mean life is unpredictable for God. He means from your perspective it is *time and chance*. In **Ecclesiastes 3** He has already told us that God knows there is a time for everything under the sun.

He illustrates the point of v. 11 in v. 12

Illst: My sister dying in a car wreck (I have told this one before)

Application:

The point is you must be ready! Awake O sleeper arise and Christ will shine on you. While there is still breath in your lungs and your heart still beats flee to Christ for rescue from this evil time for if you die unprepared the suffering in this life is nothing compared to what comes in the afterlife. To die separated from Christ is to spend eternity in Hell. Turn from your sins and trust Christ today for today is the day of salvation.

II. All Men Die But Not All Men Truly Live (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10)

This is the sixth time he has told us to enjoy life under the sun and we need to know this is the central message of the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon has been walking us through the perplexities of life. There are so many things that just leave us scratching our heads. It is like the line from Brad Paisley's song, "*So much pain and so much darkness; In this world we stumble through; All these questions I can't answer; So much work to do.*"³ There are times when we apply all the wisdom we know and life just does not work out the way wisdom says it should. *Life is unpredictable*.

But, remember like I said last Sunday (if you were here), Solomon does not become the cynic. He does not panic. Instead he looks at all of the madness under the sun and concludes—go home and enjoy life!

So we see that he is not a cynic **but** neither is he a hedonist. He does not say *eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die*. This is the hedonist. Yet neither does he take Brad Paisley's point of view, which is probably the most common view today. Paisley is saying one day it will all be over and then we can enjoy what God has made.

If we are honest most of us are in this camp. Let's just white knuckle this life because one day we will enjoy the afterlife. This is not Solomon's position either. He recognizes what God has approved of in life and says we should enjoy the basic provisions and gifts given in the Garden of Eden now.

Look in v. 7. Consider the phrase, "God has already approved of what you do." This is a way of saying, "*This is God's will.*" Have you ever wondered what God's will is? I think when we ask God what His will is we are often thinking of something we may never know for sure if it was God's will when we set out on that journey because we ask questions like: What should I major in at college? Should I buy this car? Should I buy this house? Should I marry this person? We will never get definitive answers to these questions before hand.

³ Sung by Brad Paisley, Songwriters: George Teren / Rivers Rutherford, When I Get Where I'm Going lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, Hori Pro Entertainment Group, Words & Music A Div Of Big Deal Music LLC.

However, God does show us His will about many things in His word. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification."* Then the Apostle Paul goes on to unpack that we are to not be sexually immoral and that we are to love others. We know the will of God as believer is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We know it is God's will for us to pray and share the gospel with others. We know it is God's will for us to be faithful to our spouses. We know God does not want us to murder. We have been told God's will on many things.

What we find in Ecclesiastes 9:7 is the Old Testament version of what the will of God is. Essentially Solomon goes back to Eden to remind us of what *God has approved* because it was and is the gifts He gave us in the Garden. It is still His will for us today to enjoy these basic provisions given at Creation. God has long ago approved of our eating our food with joy, drinking our wine with gladness. You don't have to wonder if God wants you to get a spouse or find a job. The answer is "Yes!" The Preacher frees us to enjoy life under the sun.

But you may object: *Isn't there lots of suffering in the world? Aren't people going hungry and doing without in other places?* Yes that is true there is so much pain and so much sorrow but that does not mean you cannot enjoy God's ordinary gifts: food, drink, a job, marriage, and have children. God has long ago said these things are good and the brokenness of the world does not remove the goodness of them.

In essence, God is saying through Solomon, *"I have not left you in the dark. I have not left you without knowing what to do. Yes, life is hard and there are things that do not make sense. Yes, there is suffering and sometimes the righteous suffer and die before the wicked do. Yes, sometimes the wicked prosper and live very long lives. Yes, there are wicked rulers in the world. Yes, life can be perplexing but that does not mean I am not in charge because I am. Trust me and enjoy the good gifts I have given you. Enjoy your basic provisions for life for the mark of a biblical wise man or woman is that despite the many painful issues in life—namely, death—the wise are able to enjoy life as God's good gift. They know when pleasure and feasting and love are appropriate"*

Verses 7-10 are like an Oasis in the middle of the desert aren't they? It is like this sad song we have been hearing throughout most of Ecclesiastes is now turning into a joyful song, a hopeful song. The dissonance of the song of life under the sun, the minor key is turning into a major key and the song is slowly being transformed into a beautiful melody.

So . . . yes, our lives are like a vapor, a mist, but in the middle of a mist is a table set for us and our Lord sits at this table and He calls us to come and eat and drink and enjoy the table that He has set before us. He calls us to enjoy the life that He has set before us.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters isn't it interesting that the two essential elements in **v. 7** are bread and wine. Isn't it amazing that we are called to have white garments and the oil to be on our heads. We are called to enjoy life with our spouse and to enjoy our toil.

Friends the bread and the juice are before us this morning. The joy of our work has been in our liturgy and if you belong to Christ this morning the spiritual garments you wear were made white because He purchased the righteousness you need by perfectly keeping the Law of God and then dying on the cross for your sin and He completed it all when He rose from the dead on the third day.

I know what you're thinking, *"You forgot to explain v. 10."* No . . . I didn't, I just waited till now. **Verse 10** is the verse that calls us to seize the day. **Verse 10** is not a theological explanation of Hell it is simply saying that death is coming and you do not know when you will die because when you die it is too late to make a wise decision. All your work will do you no good. All your knowledge will do you no good for it will be too late. His point is to fear God now while you have the life to do it. One of the points

of the Lord's Supper is as often as you do this you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Friends if you do not know Jesus you need to know He will return to take His people home—do not wait because life is unpredictable.

The Lord's Supper also reminds us that Jesus has done all the work necessary for us to enjoy life under the sun. It was His body that was broken and His blood that was shed in order to save us and sanctify us. The Lord's Supper reminds us that God has not left us alone but He is here with us. The Lord's Supper calls those who have never trusted Christ turn from their sin and trust Jesus' work on their behalf for their salvation. The Lord's Supper reminds us that Jesus will return and one day we will eat the Marriage Supper of the Lamb with Him and He will serve us at His banqueting table.