

Ecclesiastes sermon – Ecclesiastes 9:1-16

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I want to begin today by asking you to write down three things that you plan to do in the next week. (Ask for responses) e.g. Celebrate my birthday. Go to work. Go out to dinner. Go on holidays...

But what if you die today?

It's not something we like to think about. And it's not a great conversation piece for parties!

Ecclesiastes reminds us that **everyone dies**.

2:16 – "Like the fool, the wise man too must die."

3:2 – there is "A time to be born and a time to die."

7:2 – "For death is the destiny of every man."

EVERYONE dies!

And I think as Christians we KNOW how to die well. We know how to grab hold of that promise of God when Jesus says in John 3:16 - "...whoever believes in him (Jesus) shall not perish but have eternal life."

We know how to DIE! Christians KNOW how to face death. We're ready for death. We know that our death and eternity is in God's hands. But I think we often put forward a religion of "death", if I can put it like that.

So what I want to ask today is "Do we know how to ***LIVE***?!"

Chapter 9 reflects the big themes of Ecclesiastes. **Death** and **Life**. So let's look at them now.

- **DEATH**

- 9:3 – "The same destiny overtakes all."

You don't know what's around the corner in life. The righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean... the good man and the sinner... no-one knows what is coming next. Except death is just around the corner.

Down to verse 11 –

*"The race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; **but time and chance happen to them all**. Moreover, no man knows when the hour will come..."*

We don't have control of the things in this world. We don't have control of the events in our life. Tomorrow is unpredictable **and** death is just around the corner.

And to add to this, verse 3 says: *"The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil..."*

People are evil, tomorrow is unpredictable **and** death is just around the corner. That's the reality of life on this earth. And there's a depressing example of this in verses 14-15:

“¹⁴ There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. ¹⁵ Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man.”

A poor wise man saves his city. And nobody remembers that poor man. Because life is unfair. People are evil. Tomorrow is unpredictable **and** death is just around the corner.

The comedian Woody Allen once said: “Life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering - and it's all over much too soon.”

Ecclesiastes says, verse 4:

“Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!”

The dog, in those times, was a disgusting animal. A dirty scavenger. It was an insult to call someone a dog. The lion, on the other hand, was a powerful and majestic beast. But, the preacher says, you're better off being a living dog than a dead lion! Why? Because at least **while you live, there is hope!**

He's just finished saying that life is unfair, people are evil, tomorrow is unpredictable **and** death is just around the corner. But... you're better off alive than dead. Once you're dead, you can't change anything. But while you're alive, there is a chance to know what life is all about.

And so now, he goes on to talk about the second big theme: life.

- **LIFE.**

- Truman Capote said “Life is a moderately good play with a badly written third act.”
- John Lennon said: “Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans”
- Someone else said about life: “If at first you don't succeed, skydiving is not for you!”

But what is life according to Ecclesiastes?

Look at verses 7-10. 2 things to consider today about how to really live:

1. Enjoy life
2. Work hard

Number 1 – God has given you life – enjoy it!

Verse 7: Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart...”

Enjoy the things that God has given you in this life! Life is uncertain, and you don't know what lies ahead. And we can worry about those things all the time. How much time do we spend thinking and worrying about our future, when death might come tomorrow? How often do we rush our breakfast to make it to work or school on time? How often do we try to fit a million more things into our life rather than find joy in what we're actually doing?

He's not saying – just go out and have fun and forget about your responsibilities!” He's saying – enjoy the moments in life!

People say “life is busy, life is hard. I don't have time to enjoy it!”

Then at least eat your food with joy, rather than just rushing from one thing to the next! Find the joy in life's everyday moments.

- **Number 2: Work hard.**

- Verse 10 – “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.”

This verse actually takes us back to Genesis chapter 3 – after Adam and Eve sinned, God banished them from the Garden of Eden and they were left to work the land. This is life! And this is where we will find joy and contentment. Hard work. God has made us, designed us, to find satisfaction and contentment from our daily work. Don't hate your job, don't complain about it – find the joy in working with your hands and your mind. Find the joy in being ABLE to work.

Enjoy life. Work hard. That's how to get a life.

WE can take a great lesson from the Paul in the Bible – In Philippians 4:12, Paul writes:

“¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

Paul knows what it means to live life. Not to want more, not to be lazy, but to make every moment count. Contentment comes from finding joy in what God has given us, even the most basic things like food and work. Any moment life could end here on earth for us. Think of the hours wasted complaining, gossiping, whinging, and worrying about things that don't really matter... yet we could be content every moment if we recognised what Paul did about life:

Paul knew what it was like to face suffering and persecution, he knew what it was like to have abundance and to have nothing. And he could be content every moment **because of God**. He found contentment by being in a relationship with God every moment of his life.

A lot of us may feel we know how to **die** as Christians – but do we know how to **live**? Do we know how to enjoy the life we have been given **today**? Heaven will certainly be better than this place! And I can't wait for that! But now is now! God wants us to find *joy* in the life he's given us **today**, as well as looking forward to our future destination of heaven. The destination is great, but the journey along the way, although difficult at times, is fantastic! Don't forget to look out the window as you're flying down the freeway!

If you are in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, think about this – God is happy with you! That's what verse 7 means when it says: *“for it is now that God favours what you do.”*

You're not God's enemy, you're his friend! So, are you enjoying life as God's friend? Of course there will be suffering, hard times, crises – but what about now? Right now? Are you enjoying this moment as God's friend?

Life is unfair, people are evil, tomorrow is unpredictable **and** death is just around the corner, but God is happy with you! Ecclesiastes wants us to be wise enough to enjoy our food, to enjoy time with people, to stop rushing, stop worrying, to stop sucking the joy out of life.

Look at those 3 things you wrote down for next week. Ask yourself – “How will I find **joy** in these things?” Let me encourage you just to enjoy your lunch today. Then enjoy the afternoon. Life is unfair, people are evil, tomorrow is unpredictable **and** death is just around the corner, but when you're in a relationship with God through Jesus, God is happy with you! Take hold of the small moments. The friend you see, the lunch you have, the red dust blowing across your face, the smell of a dirty nappy, the moment you're just about to drift off to sleep, the dog barking in the middle of the night, the hard work each day, your aching hands, your tired mind. Enjoy it all. It is life given to you by God. Real life, real joy, comes from being in a relationship with Jesus and knowing that each day you live on this earth, God is happy with you.