

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10 – Finding Joy in a Sinful World

Introduction:

As we have seen in the past 2 sermons, the main theme in the book of Ecclesiastes is the vanity of life under the sun and the reality of death. We can't escape it!

If we look at the immediate context for our text today, Ecclesiastes 9:1-6 tells us that death comes to all. Verse 2 says that **“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.”** Death is certain.

And at this point in time, you might wonder whether the book of Ecclesiastes has any other point. Are there any optimistic points in this book? And I think there is! I think because our preacher is very realistic. Because he understands the reality of the vanity of life under the sun and that death comes to all, he is able to give wise counsel in how we are to live. One of the recurring ideas that pops up in the book of Ecclesiastes is the point that wisdom and living wisely has relative benefit than being a fool. Ecclesiastes 2:13 **“Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.”** He knows that living in the light is better than being in the dark. Last week we looked at the first 4 verses of Chapter 7. The preacher shows the contrast of wisdom and folly. It is better to do one thing than another. If you look at Ecclesiastes 9:16-18 he again reiterates the point that being wise is better than being a fool or even using the strength of your might.

What I think this implies, is that the preacher is not a Nihilist. Meaning that he does not preach a message which says that “there is no reason to live and to die”. If there was no reason to live, then why would he bother explaining why it is better to live a wise life. Why would he bother to give practical examples of a life lived wisely. Why would he say **“it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting”** (7:2) if he believed that this life didn't matter.

The preacher does believe that there is more to life than life under the sun. Although he doesn't explicitly give us the solution, he implies the solution, which we looked at a few weeks ago. We must look above the sun. We need to look at a perception of life with God.

And so that being in mind. When we look at our text today in Ecclesiastes 9:7-10, the preacher wants us to see and do something. He wants us to see that although we all die, and that this life under the sun is temporary, there are things we can do and should do. 7 times in the book of Ecclesiastes, spread out throughout the whole book, the preacher, preaches a message of Joy. He calls us to enjoy life. You can find joy in a sinful and broken world. But his reasoning behind enjoying life is not the same as the world. The world pursues pleasure and drowns themselves in it. We know he thinks the pursuit of pleasure is meaningless because of what he says in chapter 2. And so, he is not saying just pursue whatever makes you happy.

But I think his point is this,

1. Enjoy life
2. Enjoy marriage and family
3. Enjoy work

Because, they are God's good creation and blessing. He acknowledges that these aspects of life are not man made. The good things of the world are not man made. The ability to eat and drink and to taste is not man made. The beauty and preciousness of marriage is not man made. The ability to work and receive it's reward is not man made. They are blessings and gifts from God. And they are to be enjoyed.

The reason why I say these things is because of what each of the call to enjoyment says about these aspects of life. And so we will be looking at one of the bigger sections which talk about these joys and we will look at the other ones in part when it is appropriate.

Verse 7-8: Enjoy Life

Verse 7 begins with an imperative. That is interesting. He is commanding us to do us something. What are you to do in light of life's reality. What are you to do in light of the reality of death. You are to Go. Go, **"eat your bread"** and **"drink your wine"**. But you don't do these things in sadness. Many people don't enjoy eating and drinking any beverages. There are many people who eat and drink things just so they have enough nutrients to live. Some even starve themselves. The interesting thing is, the preacher commands you to eat and drink with joy, and with a merry heart. Why? End of verse 7, **"for God has already approved what you do"**. He is not saying that God approves every hedonistic decision in this world. He is not saying that God approves every decision you make which makes you happy. Because he knows that there are things which are wicked and displease God. And that means when he says drink your wine with a merry heart, he doesn't mean to get drunk. But all he is saying is that God has designed food and drink to be enjoyed and this life to be enjoyed. It brings us back to the garden of Eden. God created all of creation. He said it was not only good, but very good. He created Adam and Eve to have communion with him. It tells us that God **"walked in the garden in the cool of the day"**. He made them to have a relationship with him. And he created all of it for them to enjoy. He told them in Genesis 2:16, **"You may surely eat of every tree of the garden"**. The fruit of the trees and the plants were ripe for picking. In the account of the fall, it tells us in Genesis 3:6 **"When the woman saw that tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes"** it tells us something about creation. It is meant to be delightful. God designed it to be delightful.

Psalms 104 praises God for his greatness and all his mighty work in sustaining and creating the world. In verse 14 and 15 it says,

**“¹⁴ You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for man to cultivate,
that he may bring forth food from the earth
¹⁵ and wine to gladden the heart of man,
oil to make his face shine
and bread to strengthen man's heart.”**

Here we have another example in the Old Testament where we have food and wine as a means to bring joy and strength to man.

In the new testament, in 1 timothy 4:3-4 in the context of explaining that there will be some who depart from the faith, it says that these people “ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that **God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good”**

Or in 1 Timothy 6:17, **“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy”**

And I think this is the key reasoning to the call to enjoyment. We have here a command to enjoy life because God designed it to be enjoyed.

Earlier in Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, it tells us that **“²⁴ There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?”**

Or in Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 it says, **“¹² I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.”**

In Ecclesiastes 5:19, **“¹⁹ Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.”**

The source and giver of joy and all good things is God.

Ecclesiastes 9:8 continues this theme of enjoyment by saying **“Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.”**. This verse can be taken in 3 ways. Some have taken it to mean “pursue purity and righteousness”. Others have taken it to mean an act of celebration and joy because wearing garments of white as well as having oil and perfume accompanies celebrations. An example of that would be in Esther 8:15 where Mordecai dresses in blue and white. The third possible interpretation could purely be a practical reason since wearing white would be cooling in the heat and the sweet oils would moisten the scalp and hair. It is about enjoying being clean and refreshed. Dress in presentable attire. I think in the context of what the preacher is saying, it would make best sense to take this verse maybe as a mixture of the last 2 ways. It is about celebrating and enjoying and relaxing in life. God has

given you good gifts to enjoy. To reiterate however, he is not saying to live in sin and to pursue wickedness, but enjoy the good things that God has given you. Celebrate!

As well as enjoying the good things in life, he tells us to

Enjoy Marriage and Family (v9)

We live in a society which has strayed away from the biblical perspective of marriage. People have forgotten and rejected God's design and purpose for marriage. Today, many young people are finding very creative ways to hold a wedding ceremony and even reject the concept of marriage itself. I recently went to a wedding and the person who officiated was just a good friend of the bride. She wasn't a minister or anything like that. They would later need to go to someone who could legally sign the documents. They used a Disney song as a processional. The wedding event was more of a formality and excuse to party than a recognition of God's original purpose. More and more people are coming from broken homes and as a result are suspicious of marriage. People have no issue in living with each other, but when it comes to getting married, the cost of commitment scares them! The value of marriage and the family has been lost.

So, when we read verse 9 it can shock us. He says **"⁹ Enjoy life with the wife whom you love"**

He obviously has a male reader in mind but the principle applies to women as well. His point is, enjoy this life and all the things that we have seen in verse 7-8 with your wife, whom you love. Cherish marriage. Cherish the time and find joy in marriage. By extension that means also to family. But that doesn't seem possible to us in a world with broken relationships and family. I can imagine some responding with anger and hurt. Sometimes it seems so hard to love life because it can feel like life's problem is your husband or wife, or children!. And that is a problem because the world's experience of family and marriage is completely different to God's intentions for marriage and family. The preacher believes that marriage is instituted by God. God created marriage. He designed the family unit. It all begins back in Genesis 2:24, **"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."** And if you were here in our series in Ephesians, you would have heard that human marriage is designed to reflect Christ and the church. It is supposed to point us to the greatness of God and his deep love for his people. But his point is something that hopefully at least some can understand. Marriage and having a family is supposed to be a delightful thing. No one gets married in hope for divorce and broken relationships.

But the preacher doesn't get carried away. He is still realistic and qualifies the duration of this joy. The middle of verse 9 says that this enjoyment is for, **"all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun"** Don't get too carried. This joy is only temporary. It lasts only until death. And even your life is a gift from God because he is the one who has "given you" that life.

The end of verse 9 says that "because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun." It brings us to the immediate context of Ecclesiastes 9. In v5-6 it says, **"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.”

The living is able to enjoy their portion. The dead cannot. And so, while you live enjoy toil and what your toil brings. Now it must be said that there is a difference between portion and gain. Your portion in life is the reward for your hard work but it is not gain in the sense of eternity. You can't bring what you work under the sun into eternity. Your status in your career means nothing after you die.

This is further developed in verse 10, which tells us to **Enjoy Work**.

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.

The preachers advise to us, is whatever path of duty that comes your way in God's providence, (because work is a gift from God and he is sovereignly in control), you are to work it with all your might. In the book of proverbs and in the New Testament, slothful and lazy living is rejected.

Proverbs 10:5, **“He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.”**

Proverbs 19:15, **“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.”**

In the New Testament, 2 Thessalonians 3, there were idle people because they thought Christ would be coming again soon. V6 **“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.”** Further along in verse 10-11, **“10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.”**

In Colossians 3:23, **“23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men”**

His advice to work mightily is consistent with the rest of scripture. And we are to enjoy it because work is a gift from God. God instituted work in creation. I am not sure if you noticed but if you look at Genesis 2:5 it says there was no bush of the field and small plant because the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground. God created us to work and enjoy it. He didn't mean for it to be tiresome. Adam was to work and keep the garden of Eden and enjoy it! We have already read in the other calls to enjoyment that we are to take pleasure in all our toil because it is God's gift.

One that we haven't seen,

Ecclesiastes 3:22

²² So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot.

But in case you are like some who find purpose, meaning, fulfillment and complete joy in your work, the preacher reminds you again that work does not last forever. **“there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”** Sheol in the Old Testament is generally seen as the place where one goes after one has died. Often, the word simply means “grave.”. So, while you have the opportunity here on earth, work mightily, seize the moment and enjoy the duty that comes your way.

Finding Joy in a Sinful World:

These calls to enjoyment doesn't and can't answer our main question found in 1:3. But the wise preacher wants to remind us that God has given us things, for the purpose to enjoy. He didn't create us to be unhappy, to be unproductive. He didn't create things which were bad or unpleasant. The reason why life is so vain and even the good gifts from God seems so tiresome, The reason why life may seem so bleak, is because sin has perverted God's good creation. There is a perversion of God's good creation and all his good gifts. The reason why people don't enjoy nature and food and drinks is because of an ungrateful heart. The reason why marriage and family seem to be a burden is because of selfishness, lust, hatred. The reason why work seems to be a chore is because of laziness. Yet at the same time, these good gifts, although tainted, still exists as a blessing for us. Even though there is sin in this world, I'm sure you have experienced the joy of these things.

Have you ever cried eating food? Might sound a bit silly. But I have. Kobe beef is one of the most expensive piece of meat you can find in this world. They come from these cows in Japan who have the most luxurious life. Their diet includes lots of beer, daily massages, sometimes sake which is Japanese rice wine. They listen to classical music as a form of relaxation. They are treated like kings. By treating them likes kings, they produce the king of beef. The meat looks incredible. It is so tender and delicate. And it literally melts in your mouth. A few years back I went to Japan with my older brother. We could never afford expensive Japanese beef. But we were at a restaurant one day and the owner of the store came to us and asked if we could speak Chinese. I couldn't but my older brother could. And the owner asked if he could help translate the menu into Chinese. So, my brother tried and after he translated the menu the owner came out with the most spectacular plate of Kobe beef. I did not need to be sinless to know that I had tried the best piece of meat in my whole life. I literally was in tears. When I got married and I saw my beautiful bride come down the isle, I did not need to be sinless to know that I had experienced joy. When I received my first job, I didn't need someone to tell me that I was blessed to have a job.

Although we live in a sinful world, God has given us good gifts which we can still enjoy. But there is a reason why we have good gifts. And I think the reason should be obvious. The good gifts in life point us to God's goodness. There are buckets full of texts which tell us of God's goodness in creation and all that he gives. And these texts point us to the glory of God. We have a good, abundantly rich, generous father, who loves giving good gifts to his children and also to this world. And we are to respond to God for the good gifts that he gives us. The sun we see, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the relationships that we have are all there waiting to be enjoyed without any payment. He gives it to us abundantly and what we should do is respond to him in gratitude and thanksgiving.

John Calvin says that although these good gifts are temporary, "they are ladders by which we may ascend nearer to God, by his benefits, it gently attracts us to himself, by giving us a taste of his fatherly sweetness". The good things in this world are just a foretaste of his greatness.

But because of sin we often worship the creation instead of the creator. We enjoy the gift instead of the giver. We worship the experience rather than the one who creates the experience. Instead of loving and seeing the source and giver of joy, we take it for granted. Calvin again says that "there is nothing into which we more easily fall than into a forgetfulness of him, especially when we enjoy peace and comfort".

Garam and I went to have frozen yogurt on Wednesday. I remember taking the frozen yogurt for granted and just eating it as if it was mine for the taking. I ate it without thinking twice about how privileged I was to enjoy such a tasty treat. And because I was thinking a lot about text, I said to Garam just as we were about to finish, we should enjoy this. We shouldn't take it for granted. God gave us this frozen yogurt to enjoy and he made it! Often, we take it for granted. We often aren't thankful for all the good things that he gives us. I read recently that "we should be attentive spectators in the theatre of God's glory and goodness, seeking to recognize the actor on the stage by means of the powers revealed in God's actions."

But none of the good gifts can compare to the greatest gift. The greatest gift who is Jesus Christ. All the small but significant enjoyments in this world is just a fraction of the immeasurable gift in Jesus. Freedom from sin. Salvation from the punishment of God. Adoption into his family. The Holy Spirit living in us. And the answer to Ecclesiastes 1:3. A life in eternity where things are gain. We as new covenant people are able to experience the greatest joys in this sinful world and know who has given it to us. We are able to enjoy life and all that we can experience in this world, we can enjoy marriage, family and work, because God has given it to us. And we can find eternal joy in Jesus Christ **"who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."** (Hebrews 12:2) Amen.