

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

Date: Sunday, 15 November 2020

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

Sermon: Dealing with Death

Preacher: Justin Ang

Passage

Eccl. 9:1 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.

Eccl. 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

Eccl. 9:8 Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

Eccl. 9:9 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.

Eccl. 9:11 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.

Introduction

Today, I wanted to ask you a question, have you considered what others might say at your funeral? I have wondered that, I know that might sound morbid considering that I am not that old, but when you go to funerals, you are face to face with death. Maybe you're at a funeral of a close loved one, or maybe it's just an acquaintance. Whoever's funeral you are attending, death is there staring you in the face. What would people say about you at your funeral?

Today, as we look at Ecclesiastes 9, the preacher wants to encourage his listeners about the truth about our lives. It is rather depressing because the preacher raises an issue that we've come across. And it's the theme of death. I want to draw your attention to three things that we need to learn. Three truths that we need to be reminded of in order to live well. In order to live wisely.

Firstly, we will all have to face death. Every single one of us. Secondly, we will all face uncertainty in life. Thirdly, we can enjoy the great banquet.

We will all have to face death

So let's look at that first point, that we will all have to face death. It's a theme that we've seen in this book. Life is hebel, it is a mist, it is here one day and gone the next. The preacher wants us to know that and he wants to reinforce that to us. No matter who you are, every single one of us will have to face our own death.

I want to show you, have a look with me at verse 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. (Ecclesiastes 9:1 ESV)

The preacher, he's brooding, but he argues that we are in the hands of the Lord. He acknowledges that humans are nothing in comparison to the Lord God. But he then makes this comparison that is interesting. Because he argues that death is blind to our circumstances. Death affects every single person, including you and me.

Have a look with me at verse 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. (Ecclesiastes 9:2 ESV)

Here is the preacher making comparisons. On the one hand, there's the righteous. But on the other, there's the wicked. Again, on the one hand there's the good. And on the other, there's the evil. The clean, the unclean. The one who sacrifices, and the one who doesn't. And the point that Solomon is making between these five pairs is the fact that it doesn't matter who you are, what you've done, it doesn't matter your background, death will affect you. Death is indiscriminate. And that's Solomon's point, that he repeats, over and over, have a look. Verse 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. (Ecclesiastes 9:3 ESV)

Everyone will end up dead. It's not a very pretty picture that Solomon is painting. Is it? In fact, he comes to an interesting conclusion when he realises that everyone will die. Have a look at verse 4.

But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. (Ecclesiastes 9:4 ESV)

He says that everyone will end up dead but it is better to live than it is to be dead. But then he makes a comparison between a living dog and a dead lion. For Solomon's original audience, dogs were not your lovable animals. They were wild, they might have hunted in packs, they would have eaten the flesh off dead bodies

if given the chance. And the point that Solomon is making is, "Yes, living is better than death but it's not that much better because we will all die."

I remember the first time I was confronted with the death of someone who was close to me. It was my grandfather, my dad's dad. We found out the news that he had died, and so we decided to go back to Malaysia for the funeral. It's not your typical, western funeral, where you might have the casket. On some rare occasions, you might have an open casket, but that's the exception to the rule in my experience. But when we went back, it was days of mourning for my grandfather, I believe that we saw his body, lying there open casket, and people would come for days to pay their respect. When you're in that environment, it's really confronting. But death is meant to be confronting. Our society, we push death to the side, why? Maybe because we don't want to be confronted by it, we don't want to think about it. Is that you?

But here's a personal application. Are we confronted by our deaths? Maybe what I'm saying is confronting, and you're finding it hard to deal with this, but if we don't confront our deaths, then we will not end up living well. If we think we're going to live forever, if we don't remember that we will die, then we're going to place priorities on the wrong things. There's not going to be any urgency to our lives sharing the gospel. If we don't face death, then we're not facing our own sin. The reason why we die, is because of our sin, because we have a broken relationship with God. And when we're confronted with death, it should confront us about how broken, imperfect, and torn this world really is. We're confronted by how broken our relationships can get. With our family, with our spouses, with our brothers and sisters, with our parents, with our friends, with our neighbours.

When we understand that we will all face death, it should change us to be more honest with ourselves and the world.

We will all face uncertainty in life

The second thing that we learn is that we will all face uncertainty in life. It's another theme that we may have picked up as we've read through Ecclesiastes but it's worth looking at again. I want to show you from the last two verses of this passage that we're looking at.

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. 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.

(Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 ESV)

Solomon makes a true observation, he looks at a race. And he says, often the winner isn't the one who is most swift. It's like the Melbourne Cup. I don't remember the favourite winning the race. Most of the time it isn't. You look at a battle, and it's not often the one who is strong that wins the battle. Life is uncertain. Life is rarely $1+1=2$. Life is often $1+1=\text{losing}$. And isn't that what we find to be the case? We try our best, and yet, it's the cheaters who win. It's those who cheat and swindle that come out on top. How is that fair?

When I was growing up at home, I would get into fights with my brother. And I would be the one who started it. I'm ashamed to say that! And when my mum got home, I'd tell my mum before my brother got to her so I wouldn't get punished. But how is that fair? Me getting off free? It isn't!

We quickly learn that life isn't fair. It's something that we learn very early. Life isn't fair. Those who cheat, steal, often get off. But it comes back to sin. It might not be your sin that is why you're struggling with life, but it's the way that our world is broken, imperfect and torn. It is the simple equation world+sin=suffering.

And as a personal application, do we see how unfair life gets? Are we confronted by it? Or do we seek to try to control our circumstances? Do we get bitter by the injustice that occurs? I would say it is right that we get frustrated and angry at the injustice that can occur in the world. Especially when others around us are being mistreated. The preacher is helping us to face the reality of life in this imperfect world.

Now, I may be talking a lot about sin. But the bible talks about sin, and if I don't talk about sin then I'm not doing justice to the Scriptures. And it's a big theme, our sin, our brokenness, the imperfection of the world. Why is there so much suffering in the world? And some of us may question why we're looking at Ecclesiastes, but it's part of the Word of God. And Ecclesiastes is important because it teaches us that life can be unfair. And we can struggle with how unfair life is especially if we choose to ignore God. If we forget that God is in charge, then we will get frustrat-

ed, angry, upset at how life can feel so meaningless. Life without God is meaningless.

So we will all face death.

We will all face uncertainty in life.

We can look forward to the great banquet

This brings us to our third and final point. When we are confronted with death, and the uncertainty of the world. When we are confronted with sin in the world, where do we turn to? Where is your hope? We need hope. This brings us to our final point, we can look forward to the great banquet. What do I mean? When we suffer because of someone else's sin. When we suffer because of our own sin. When others are hurt because of our sin, where can we turn to?

Now Solomon provides an answer. But it's not a very satisfactory answer. Have a look with me at verses 7 to 9.

Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always 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 in your toil at which you toil under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 ESV)

Solomon's answer to death and the uncertainty of this world is to just enjoy what you have right now. Eat and drink! Have garments that are white. What he means is enjoy what you have! He calls his listeners to enjoy the wife of their youth, to enjoy their spouse. In fact, it seems like he gives a picture of a wedding banquet in these verses. It's a wedding banquet with the image of food, drink, a husband and wife. Enjoy life like a wedding banquet!

But it's not a very satisfactory answer because Solomon's answer to death and uncertainty, is to enjoy now even when he feels that there is no hope! Because what does he say at the end of verse 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. (Ecclesiastes 9:10 ESV)

But that's a very dim outlook Solomon has, doesn't he? It's a dim outlook isn't it because he still hasn't solved the problem of death, or uncertainty or sin! What he needs is true hope. And if we were only given this book, then yes, we would be in the same position as Solomon. Hopeless.

But we have a deeper, richer understanding of God's purposes. Whilst Solomon tries to enjoy life like a wedding banquet, we have an even greater wedding banquet to look forward to don't we? In Revelation 19, John sees a vision of what we get to look forward to. The great wedding banquet. He writes,

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9 ESV)

In December, it will be Rachel and my 5th wedding anniversary. We were married on the 12th December 2015. It's one of the reasons why we went away last week down south. And I fondly remember our wedding banquet. It was a twelve course meal at Marigold Chinese restaurant. You should have seen my bible college classmates. They were amazed at the banquet. Pork crackling, steamed fish, lobster, abalone, fried chicken, beef. It was a feast. It was amazing.

The banquet between Christ and his church will be infinitely better than our wedding banquet. It will be the banquet of banquets. Between Jesus and us. Between the lamb who takes away the sins of the world, and the church. Accomplished through Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection.

See, we have a much greater picture than Solomon. Solomon tries to enjoy life as a wedding banquet, but he never sees beyond death does he? But we see what Christ did through death and we get to look forward to the ultimate wedding banquet. Even the most enjoyable things that we have on earth will not compare to what is in store for us when we see Jesus face to face.

So let me end it here by asking one final application point. Do you find yourself confronted with death? Or do you find yourself disappointed, frustrated, angry with the uncertainty with life? Do you find yourself without hope when you look to the world? Do you find yourself confronted with your own imperfections, and failures?

Lift your head to Christ, and look to him. Look to what the lamb has accomplished through his death and resurrection. Sin destroyed. Satan conquered. Death overcome. We have a great wedding banquet where all things will be made new. Maybe you're sitting on the fence with Jesus, the invitation is before you. He gives you the invitation. "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast." (Matthew 22:4). Will you accept the invitation?

Let's pray.