

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

Carpe Diem, Coram Deo

I came up with two opening lines for this teaching. And as I worked on my sermon I couldn't decide which to use. So I decided to use both and here they are. The first is Latin: Carpe diem, coram deo. The phrase means seize the day, before the face of God. The other line is this: The only way to be prepared to live is to be prepared to die. You'll understand the reason for these two sentences as we move into the Scriptures.

In Ecclesiastes 9 Solomon makes two conclusions from his search for wisdom in life. The first is death is unavoidable. And the second is life is unpredictable. From these two conclusions he puts forth an exhortation: make the most of each day.

At the end of chapter 8, Solomon said that even though he put forth great effort he could not discover the full work of God in the world. What he meant is that, as we have learned in previous chapters, sometimes the righteous suffer while the wicked seem to prosper. And there is not always a clear reason for that. But Solomon's search for wisdom also taught him that ultimately God's people are under God's care.

For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything *they* see before them.
(Ecclesiastes 9:1)

"I've been thinking about this" the Preacher said, "And I've concluded that even though we know we are in God's hand, it's not always easy to know if God loves us by what we face in life." We've learned from Ecclesiastes that prosperity is not always a sign that God loves you. And adversity doesn't always mean that God is angry with you.

To give you a few biblical examples: If Abraham was rich (Genesis 13:2), so too was Haman¹ (Esther 5:11). If wicked King Ahab was slain in battle (1 Kings 22:34), so too was good and righteous King Josiah (2 Kings 23:24, 25, 29). The question of whether God is for us or against us is not necessarily answered by

¹ Haman was a wicked man who wanted to exterminate all of the Jews.

what we experience, but by what God reveals to us in His written Word, especially about our salvation in Christ. For example John 3:16 declares that,

God **so loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And Romans 5:8 tells us that God "**demonstrates His own love**² toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God's love for us is not necessarily seen in the new car we drive, but in the new life, everlasting life we receive through Jesus Christ. Now Solomon points out conclusion number one: death is inevitable.

All things come alike to all:
One event *happens* to the righteous and the wicked;
To the good, the clean, and the unclean;
To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.
As is the good, so is the sinner;
He who takes an oath as *he* who fears an oath.

³This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing *happens* to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness *is* in their hearts while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead.
(Ecclesiastes 9:2, 3)

Death is the great equalizer. It doesn't matter if we are good or bad or indifferent, everyone is going to die. And if you are a thinking person at all, death is the great proof that humanity is flawed. It forces us to face that evil is in us. Notice what Solomon wrote in the middle of verse 3: "Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness *is* in their hearts while they live".

This is the reason for death. According to the Scriptures death comes because of sin. Romans 5 tells us that through one man, Adam, sin came into the world and death through sin.³ Everyone sins and yet how difficult it is for some people to realize they are sinners. Even if you have never committed a so called "bad" sin, it is evil and madness and folly to turn your heart from God your Creator. And people do this all the time.

God told Adam that on the day he sinned "dying you will die"⁴ "For dust you are and to dust you shall return."⁵ In the words of an old hymn: "Time, like an

² My emphasis in bold in John 3:16 and Romans 5:8

³ Romans 5:12

⁴ Genesis 2:17

ever rolling stream bears all its sons away; They fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.”⁶

But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope,
for a living dog is better than a dead lion.
(Ecclesiastes 9:4)

Where there is life there is hope. You ask hope for what? There is hope to repent, to turn in faith to God before it is too late.

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 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have
now perished;
Nevermore will they have a share
In anything done under the sun.
(Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6)

This is the darkest biblical description of the dead. The dead are unconscious.⁷ They do not know what is happening on earth or in heaven. There is no immediate life for anyone in another realm after death. The dead cannot do a good or evil work. They cannot add to their reputation. They cannot love or hate. There is no part of us that goes on living when we die. Our only hope for life beyond the grave is in the grace, mercy and love of God to us through Jesus Christ. This is why Job, in hope, could say,

For I know *that* my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
²⁶ And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷ Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!
(Job 19:25-27)

⁵ Genesis 3:19

⁶ Isaac Watts, [O God Our Help In Ages Past](#)

⁷ Often the Bible calls death “sleep.” The reason for this is that during your deepest sleep you are unconscious to all that is going on around you. But in the morning you awake and it seems like hardly any time went by at all between the time you went to sleep and the time you awoke. When believers die they are figuratively asleep in the grave. But they will be awakened at the resurrection (Daniel 12:2; John 11:11-13; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14).

And this is why in Psalm 16 David could prophetically sing,

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope.
¹⁰ For You will not leave my soul in Sheol [the grave],
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
¹¹ You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
(Psalm 16:9-11)

And this is why the apostle Paul could write so confidently about our resurrection.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.
(1 Corinthians 15:2-23)

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns death will be swallowed up in victory.⁸ But there is another truth back in Ecclesiastes 9. Until the return of Jesus Christ to give life to his people all of us will face death. Therefore if our present existence is to have any meaning at all it must be found now.

Go, eat your bread with joy,
And drink your wine with a merry heart;
For God has already accepted your works.
(Ecclesiastes 9:7)

The command is "Go"! It is a wakeup call. There is no time to waste. Enjoy life when you can. Have a dinner party. Enjoy meal time with your family. God made us so that we not only need food to live, but so we can enjoy it. He provided us with a rich variety of foods, tastes and aromas. The Preacher saw life in all of its complexities and he wants us to come to grips with it too. But he also wants us to know that there is joy in life, especially if we are God's people. Eating and drinking and working and loving are all gifts of God. Solomon has said this 4 times in Ecclesiastes.⁹

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:54

⁹ Ecclesiastes 2:4; 3:13; 5:19; 9:7

The New Testament tells us this as well. In 1 Timothy 6:17 Paul wrote that God “gives us richly all things to enjoy.” In Acts 2 we read that the early “breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”¹⁰

There are some people who think Solomon’s advice is cynical. They assert that it is like the pagan slogan “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” It is nothing of the sort. That slogan is shallow and selfish. Solomon has God in mind here. At creation God placed the first humans in a lush garden and gave them a variety of foods from which to freely eat.¹¹ And Psalm 104:15 says that God gives,

wine that makes glad the heart of man,
Oil to make his face shine,
And bread which strengthens man’s heart.

This is why we pray before meals; to thank God for His goodness to us. And let’s dress up for dinner.

Let your garments always be white,
And let your head lack no oil.
(Ecclesiastes 9:8)

White garments were the dress up clothes of the ancient near east. Many festive occasions were adorned by white. White robes were worn by war heroes in victory parades. They were worn by priests on holy days. And in Revelation 3:5 Jesus Christ declares that one day we will walk with him in victory clothed in white.

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of
your vain life which He has given you under the sun,
all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life,
and in the labor which you perform under the sun.
(Ecclesiastes 9:9)

God gave Eve to Adam for the joy of companionship. If you are married then love and enjoy one another deeply and intentionally. If you are not married then love your family and your friends. You don’t know how much time you have—and it’s never enough—seize the day!

Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might;

¹⁰ Acts 2:46

¹¹ Genesis 2:15, 16

for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom
in the grave where you are going.
(Ecclesiastes 9:10)

Solomon reminds us that death awaits us. If you have the chance to do something do it now. Whether you work in law, medicine, construction, sales, science, art, homemaking or ministry, whatever it is put your whole heart into it. In whatever work you are doing God has called you to that particular mission field. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we are told "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." And in Colossians 3:23, 24 it says,

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord
and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will
receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve
the Lord Christ.

Finally in Ecclesiastes we read,

I returned and saw under the sun that—
The race is not to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor bread to the wise,
Nor riches to men of understanding,
Nor favor to men of skill;
But time and chance happen to them all.
¹² For man also does not know his time:
Like fish taken in a cruel net,
Like birds caught in a snare,
So the sons of men are snared in an evil time,
When it falls suddenly upon them.
(Ecclesiastes 9:11, 12)

Ordinarily we would expect things to go well for people with strong abilities. At times they do, but having speed or strength or smarts does not guarantee success. Someone running in a race can slip. Goliath met David. Smart people can lose their jobs. It is how we react to success or failure that makes us a true winner or loser. And we must always remember Romans 8:28.

And we know that all things work together for good
to those who love God, to those who are the called
according to *His* purpose.

Finally, we do not know the time we have in life. Each and every one of us has a time to die. But that day will be like a snare and evil if it finds us unprepared for the Day of Judgment. So many people fritter away their days with meaningless pursuits. We waste our days as if we had an unlimited number of them.

Let us turn to the Lord in faith today. Let us reach out with the gospel today. Let us love and serve one another today. Death is unavoidable. Life is unpredictable. *Carpe Diem, Coram Deo*—seize the day before the face of God.