

## Part 9 - The Outrage of Death

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, all right, good morning, One Harbor. How are you? Good, man. Everyone full of gravy and turkey still? A little bit, yeah, someone's yawning over there.

I see that, man, tryptophan still hasn't got out of our system. That's all right. Hey, just real fast, hey, we never do this, but there is a child that is desperately wanting their parents, and we're going to flash up the number here on the screen.

It's associated you might have got a tag as you dropped your kids off. You should have gotten a tag as you dropped your kids off. So what we're going to do to keep you from being embarrassed is we're going to bow our heads and pray before we get into the sermon. All right, all right, so, Lord, we thank you.

We thank you for all that you do. We thank you for your love for us, your goodness. And, Lord, I just have to confess my thanks that just even during our time of singing praise to you today that, man, my soul so needed what we sang, and my soul so needed the other voices of faith that sang with faith, and they truly helped me that, man, I could just feel their faith, and thank you for your spirit that comes and ministers.

And I pray now, Lord, just that you would be here. Holy Spirit, you don't relegate different times for how you work. You're there with us, and you're ministering to our hearts in the singing, and you're also doing it as we preach.

[ 1 : 16 ] And so I just pray that you would do what only you could do, open our ears, soften our hearts to receive what you want to say to us today. Amen. All right. So, again, good morning.

And if you're new, some of you I met, you are new. So happy that you're here with us. Probably a lot of people may be listening to this online later on in the week. Probably went to different places traveling for Thanksgiving and whatnot.

So glad that you guys are keeping up with us in this series on Ecclesiastes. We are already in Chapter 9. Believe it or not, that means we only have a few more weeks to go, right?

Some of you may be excited about that. Some of you may be bummed. I don't know. It depends on your personality and how much you like this book, right? But the point is we're going to be wrapped before Christmas in this series.

Pun intended. Yeah. It's going to be one of those Sundays, guys. So, all right? No, I'm just kidding. All right. So, trust you've been enjoying it. Ecclesiastes is one of those books.

[ 2 : 13 ] It reads like a wise old sage who just stopped caring about hurting people's feelings. I mean, he just shoots it straight time and time again. You're just like, holy smokes, man. Can you soften the blow a little bit?

But he doesn't do that. And no surprise that this chapter isn't any different. We're just going to jump right into it. We're in Chapter 9, starting in Verse 1. Verse 1.

So, this chapter starts out with quite a humdinger, right?

Not like chicken soup for the soul stuff. It's like pretty, wow. Okay. And what it's getting at, what this passage is getting at, and what it's leading into, it's talking about death, and it's showing us and speaking that death is this great equalizer.

Happy holidays. We're all going to die. Death is coming for us all. He doesn't pull any punches.

That's what he's telling us. You can't buy your way out of it. You can't do enough good to earn your way out of it.

[ 3 : 49 ] And here's the other thing it shows us here is death is no respecter of persons. It comes to the greatest king and the poorest man. It comes to the saint and the serial killer. Death comes to all of us.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. You and I are going to face death one day. As one famous Tibetan Buddhist put it, no one can avoid death. It is inevitable.

Therefore, I should create in my mind a kind of willingness and accepting for that event without any fear. That's hard to do. Just kind of accepting the fact that it doesn't matter what we do, no matter what happens in our life, at some point we are going to die.

We don't even know when that's going to happen. How often do you and I think of dying? We often don't because it's our greatest fear, right? Apparently, it's the greatest fear right after public speaking.

I don't know why that is, but apparently it is. And like most fears, we run from them rather than face them. And let's think about it. Let's be honest. Let's think about death. Death is a hard reality to face.

[ 4 : 55 ] A big reason we don't reckon with death is that it seems to be severe and wildly inconsistent. Think about it. If the good die early, what's our response?

Man, that's unfair. If, however, they live a full life beyond their 70s or into their 80s or 90s even, well, then we aren't as fussed about them dying.

We think like, hey, they lived a good number of years. But then conversely, if death comes early to the wicked, we say, you know what? Actually, things worked out right. Man, that was a justice done. But if the wicked live for a long time, what do we say? Man, what a tragedy. It seems unfair. Death, when we look at it, seems wildly inconsistent, doesn't it?

And it's because you and I, we have a moral matrix with regards to death. We kind of see death as we approach it and we think of it like karma. And if we have that kind of moral matrix, man, death does seem very unfair.

[ 5 : 54 ] And if there's anything that makes life absolutely maddening, it's inconsistencies. And it's probably why we don't like to wrestle with the reality of death. Death always leaves us with more questions than answers.

But are we really left without sufficient answers? The very end of that passage we read in verse 3, it says, The hearts of the children of men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to death.

See, we look at death, and we see death as this judgment, this punishment, and like this form of justice. And we have a hard time reckoning with it because of that. But it looks very inconsistent by our standards.

But we step back, and if it's true what this passage says, that God holds our deeds and our hearts in his hands, which means he sees who we really are. He sees the truest reality of who we are as people.

And guess what? He says this. He looks into our hearts. He looks into our minds. He knows us even better than we know ourselves. And this is his judgment. No one is innocent. We are full of evil. It doesn't mean we're completely evil, but we're evil.

[ 7 : 06 ] Does that shock you? Does that idea of thinking like, oh my gosh, I'm an evil person, does that surprise you? Does it shock you? Well, you know what? I'm not here to coddle you. I'm here to agree with the Bible and tell you that you, me, and my seven-year-old son have hearts that are full of evil.

One of my favorite comic strips is Calvin and Hobbes. I love Calvin and Hobbes. In one of them, Calvin asks Hobbes, do you think babies are born into the world as sinners?

And Hobbes thinks about it and responds, no, I think they're just quick studies. So it doesn't matter. Whichever place you kind of land on that theological spectrum, you have to agree that, man, it doesn't take long for kids to start showing and acting like sinners.

It seems the older we get, the better we are at sinning. I don't know about you, but I'm pretty sure I got my PhD in sinning by the age of five, right? And I've won plenty of awards in that category since then.

The point is that none of us are innocent, none of us are pure, and none of us are holy. According to the Bible, death isn't unfair at all.

[ 8 : 14 ] Because of our shared depravity, we all face death. We all will face death. Now, while this may settle the fact in some of our hearts, okay, okay, cool, I get it. Death isn't as unfair as I thought it was going to be.

It doesn't really settle the finality of death. And that is a whole other reality of death that we have to face. Death takes everything, and it gives nothing. Verse 4, but he who is joined with all the living has hope.

For a living dog is better than a dead lion. Who wants to be called a living dog? No one? All right. Oh, there we go. Let's go. Sweet.

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. And they have no reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 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.

This is the dark side of death. We lose all the good things we've worked for and striven for our whole life. The name you've built, the corporation you may have created, the wealth you've amassed, the family that you've loved, it's gone.

[ 9 : 23 ] Death takes it all away from you. And that is the deeply distressing reality of death. And death, it's all gone. There's no reward to enjoy anymore in all the good things of life.

When you're dead, you are gone and you are forgotten. That's what it says. It doesn't take that long. A couple generations, you may have a grave marker. Remember, nobody's going to visit it.

Sorry to say. But then, there is another perspective. You're like, sweet, is there something good that he's going to say? There's another perspective about death that says it's also a release from burdens.

Think of the guilt and the shame you carried with you like a scarlet letter. The emotional turmoil and suffering that plagues some of us. The pains of a cancer-riddled body.

Those, too, go away in death. For some, death is a doorway to releasing the crushing burdens and the suffering of their life. In Viktor Frankl's seminal work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he describes his experience as a Jew surviving a Nazi death camp.

[ 10 : 35 ] It's a great read. One of the fascinating remarks he made about the human condition is how effective the hope of rescue was to keeping people alive in those impossible conditions.

I mean, we are talking about places where people were living that it was like somewhere between life and death, you know? They were alive, but, man, it felt like a living death that they were living. And the Nazis' whole purpose was to kill them or to make their life as miserable as possible through meaningless suffering.

And to be honest, the worst kind of suffering is suffering that doesn't have any meaning or point to it. For many Jews in those camps, dying became the better option.

Frankl commented on how there seemed to be this link between death and a loss of faith or hope in the future or hope in life. He saw it happen over and over again. And here's a story that kind of drives it home.

He tells this little anecdote. There was a man who dreamed that a voice told him in his dream that the war was going to be over March 30th of that year, which was only a couple weeks out. And as news about the war would trickle in and they would hear about it, it became very clear and very apparent that this wasn't going to happen.

[ 11 : 44 ] And on March 29th, this man became ill and ran a high temperature. And on March 30th, the day of his prophecy to be set free, he became delirious and slipped into unconsciousness.

March 31st, he was dead. What happened? That's right. He lost faith for the future. He lost hope for any change.

Death became a better option to life. This was proved again in that the chief doctor of the concentration camp told Frankl that the death rate in the camp increased dramatically between Christmas of 1944 and New Year's of 1945.

And the doctor went on to disclose to him that this was due to the fact that many had come to believe that the war would be over by Christmas. And when that didn't happen, they just started dropping like flies. They lost hope.

They lost hope that anything was going to change. In a very real way, they stopped fighting to live. Death had more hope in it than life. But Ecclesiastes, what we just read, it says, man, it's better to be joined to life.

[ 12 : 53 ] It's better to be a living dog rather than a dead lion, which is a kind of a fancy way of saying it's better to be a living nobody than a dead somebody.

But how do we do that? How can we cope with that in all the ways of suffering we may be joined to? And I think this passage gives us some tools here.

And one of them is don't get so focused on life's problems that you miss life's rewards. Verse 7, it says, Go, eat your bread. It doesn't say eat your ribeye.

It says eat your bread with joy. Drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white, and let not your oil be lacking on your head, which garments of white and oil was what you reserved for party time.

So he's saying, man, go have fun. Go celebrate. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the husbands in the room said. 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.

[14:04] Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol or the grave to which you are going.

See, this shows us why life is good. It reminds us. And the things he points at, man, they're not necessarily fancy things. They're simple things that are available to everybody.

These verses highlight the common graces that God has afforded to all of us. You don't have to be a good person to enjoy bread and wine. You don't have to be a good person to have friends over and celebrate and play Catan.

You don't have to be a Christian to find delight in your spouse or even in a beautiful sunset. You know, Christians, kind of we've given ourselves a bad rap, right?

We kind of claim that God's up there working to make everyone's life miserable unless they believe in Jesus. But that isn't how God's providential grace works in this life. He bestows good things on everyone.

[15:12] But here's the funny thing. We often don't judge him on those things, do we? We don't tend to remember God until bad things happen. Then we're like, oh, yeah, wait a second.

God's real. Let's judge him on those bad things. So in one sense, we don't want God to tell us how to live or what to do. We want to live life our own way. We take all the good parts of life for granted. We think that we've earned them. We've worked hard for them. They belong to us. I can attribute to myself and credit myself, which is really just a whole lot of, like, living and striving. And it's rejecting grace.

And when we do that, God never gets credit when good things happen. But how often when bad things happen or unfair things happen, all of a sudden we take off our atheist and agnostic jersey? Suddenly, God becomes a person we can question and blame. How can you allow these things to happen? Do you see the inconsistency here?

[16:11] In one sense, we're saying, God, leave me alone. I want to live life my own way on my own terms. Then bad things happen or we get ourselves into trouble. And then we stop and we say, God, how could you do that?

It's all your fault. It's dishonest. It's dishonest. And if that's the way we live and that's what we think, we are deceiving ourselves. We're living in self-deception. But this kind of thinking has much more dire results than just self-deception.

In the end, what happens is we start to obsess over preventing life's problems as if we can control them, rather than enjoying God's common graces.

And that's the second part of, like, figuring out how to enjoy this life. Don't ruin today's joys by trying to control tomorrow's outcomes. Verse 11 says this, 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. He doesn't know when he's going to die. 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.

[17:25] What is it saying here, man? Life's outcomes can't be predicted. Life's outcomes cannot be predicted. You can't do it. I can't do it. Madame, whoever can't do it with her crystal ball or her tarot cards.

Man, we've all known people, maybe some of us are these people, that can't enjoy today because we're so afraid of what might happen tomorrow. And in Matthew 6, 25 to 34, Jesus taught something that we need to all get permanently embedded in our minds and hearts.

Jesus says essentially in this passage that your worries today aren't going to shift tomorrow's outcomes. It doesn't matter what you plan, what you do.

You can expend all the emotional energy because of anxiety. That's not going to change a thing about tomorrow. You can plan for every possible threat your mind can perceive. But you know what?

You can't stop another person running a red light and T-boning your car. I know of people that were like really into healthy living, exercising, eating well.

[ 18 : 32 ] They're vegetarians. One of them got terminal cancer before they were 40. All the hard work and discipline he took to prolong his life didn't work. He tried to live guaranteeing tomorrow's outcome.

So he said no to cheesecake, ribeyes, and IPAs. And he said yes to bok choy and Brussels sprouts. He never got into a serious relationship because, you know what?

It would just be more time away from distracting him from healthy living. He did everything he could in his life to control his outcomes. And the irony is that in the end, the very thing he tried to earn and guarantee by his own strength and striving was taken away.

Now maybe we don't go to that extreme of living. But this, in some way, shape, or form, is a lie we all latch on to. I can find peace once I get more control, more power, and more leverage.

But that peace never comes. No matter what we do and what we try. And that's the irony. The more power and profile and wealth we have, we think, man, that's going to fix our problems. But the more we have, the more we have to fight to keep it or grow it and increase it.

[ 19 : 44 ] I knew a guy. He was a CEO of a \$100 million company. Did really well for himself. And he once told me, he got in this conversation. He once told me that he could never rest because his job was always on the line.

He lived in constant fear of losing to someone else. Losing his job to someone else. So he had to work hard. He had to perform. He had to make sure that his balance sheet was always looking better and better and better.

And that his company was moving in the right direction. See, life doesn't come with a guarantee. It just doesn't. It would be nice, but it doesn't. And I don't know about you, but that makes me think twice about what I'm living for today.

Let me give you a big picture. Everything I'm stressed out about is stuff I'm trying to hold on to. My reputation, my career, my house, my family's love. But these are all things that can be lost.

I'm one bad decision away. I'm one false accusation away from my reputation being ruined, my ministry being taken away, and even perhaps losing my family.

[ 20 : 52 ] That's the reality of it. I'm one hurricane fire or tornado away from my house being gone. I don't have control over that. My kids may grow up to reject me.

I have no control over that. Why would you do that, though? So after the service, we'll have a family hug off to the side, all right?

The wealthy were cruising along in the first part of the 20th century, and then 1929 hit.

Stock market crashed. Just about everyone lost their money. The thing that they loved, the thing that they thought was so secure, it could never end. Nobody was ever going to take it away. They lost it all.

I can run you through the last 100 years of history in the United States and show you how tenuous life's rewards are, how many families lost loved ones to war, how much wealth and jobs were lost in bursting economic bubbles and recessions.

[ 22 : 07 ] See, if you build your life around those things, you're never going to experience peace. So what's the answer, then? Live like a burnout?

Give up on life? Move out into the hills and, like, turn into the Unabomber or something? But that isn't living either. So what other option do we have?

What other option is there? The answer we're going to find out here is to build our lives around what can't be lost. And wisdom, as we shall see, is the best among life's rewards.

Verse 13 says, I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with a few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it.

But there was found in it a poor wise man, and he, by his wisdom, delivered the city. Yet, no one remembered that poor man.

[ 23 : 13 ] But I say that wisdom is better than might. Though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard, the words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a

ruler among fools.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. You remember that old, those old priceless MasterCard commercials, right?

Kind of went like, this is the storyline, it was something along this, like, it shows like a dad and his son walking through a turnstile, and it says, two tickets to a baseball game, \$36.

And then they're like at the concession stand getting stuff, two sodas, two hot dogs, \$500, or something like that. You know, it's... Close. Yeah, it is close, it is close, right?

Meaningful conversation with your 11-year-old son, priceless. We all get a lump in our throats when we think about those things, man. It pulls at our heartstrings because we get that.

[ 24 : 15 ] There are certain things that money can't buy, and those are the things that can't be taken away. They're priceless. And I want to say this, every person is born with this longing for what is priceless.

That's what our soul is constantly searching for. It's a longing for what is transcendent and for what can't be taken away. It's deep in my soul, it's deep in your soul.

But here, guys, is the problem. There's a contradiction in our souls. Because we happily trade what is priceless for things that we can measure. We chase power.

We chase prestige. We chase popularity. We chase those things because, you know, we get to keep score in those categories. We can determine who the winners are and the losers are in that. And we mistakenly assign wisdom to rich and powerful and celebrity. We look at those people and we think, man, they've built something impressive. They must have wisdom.

[ 25 : 23 ] But in the end, all of those things are like that King Siegeworks that we were talking about. He built them, big, impressive. But you know what? He lost to wisdom, didn't he?

Here's the question for us. What are you and I building? When I was 20, I had some luck through hard work.

I was on a decent career path. I had a very clear vision of what I was building my life on. I wanted a big house. I wanted a nice car. I wanted early retirement. I wanted to live in San Clemente by the ocean and surf every morning at the age of 40 when I had retired.

That was my big vision for life. That was my priceless vision. And then something happened. Wisdom invaded my life. Those siege works I built as the king of my life, suddenly they seemed very foolish.

They lost all their allure. Why? Because I found something better to build my life on. I found wisdom. Or more rightly, wisdom found me.

[ 26 : 29 ] Jesus spoke about this in a few of his parables. Here's one of them. In Matthew 13, verse 45, he says, Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

This is the one I want to say to us. When Jesus invades our life, when we see him, like that merchant that found that valuable pearl, we are willing to give up everything for him.

Now, that may look and sound foolish to some of us. Why give up everything for one person? Why not just stay diversified, leverage your bets, you don't know if this is going to work out or not?

And here's what I want to tell you. Because Jesus and his kingdom is the one thing death can never take away from you. Death is going to take everything away from you.

Jesus and his kingdom is not one of those things. Death cannot take it away. And that's the wisdom of the gospel, guys. I'm going to have the band come up. Let's think about what is being presented to us here.

[ 27 : 41 ] Through Jesus, we have victory over death. Death has no hold on us, which means this.

We can live freer today. We can live this life the most free we could ever live. Free from anxiety.

Free from trying to control tomorrow's outcomes.

Free to enjoy today, this moment, the simple treasures of this life, the graces, the common graces, and the special graces that God has given to us. And most of all, we're free to enjoy what can't be taken away.

That priceless thing, that transcendent thing our souls long for. And that is the king who conquered death and sin for us. All of us are going to face death one day.

Let me tell you a little story about the difference between those who believe in Jesus, how they're going to face death, and those who don't believe in Jesus, and how they're going to face death.

[ 28 : 48 ] A pastor lost his wife, had two young kids, and they're driving to her funeral. He's searching and asking God, man, how do I explain this to my kids?

What's going on? And so en route to the funeral, they passed by this big rig, this big semi-truck. And he asked his kids, what would you rather be hit by, the truck or its shadow?

The kids, of course, said, the truck's shadow. See, Jesus got hit by the truck, so we could pass through its shadow.

If you're not a Christian, I want to invite you to put your faith in Jesus today. And don't leave here. This is an invitation for you. Jesus did that, man.

He got hit by the truck. He got hit by death. He took it for us, so we could just pass through its shadow. Put your faith in him today.

[ 29 : 52 ] He's a savior who invites you, who summons you, who calls you, believe in me. Put your faith on me. I died for your sins on a cross, on a bloody cross, so that you could be free from sin and death.

If you're here and you're a Christian, let's give thanks that Jesus took on death. for us. We only have to face, face death's shadow.

We pass through it. We get to live. We get to live like never before. One day, we're going to live in the perfection of life, enjoying it. Today, we get to live in freedom.

We get to eat bread and drink wine and enjoy simple pleasures. Right now, we're going to come to the communion table as a reminder that Jesus' body was broken, which is the bread we eat, and his blood was shed, which is the cup we drink.

And he did that to forgive us our sins and defeat death for us. Let's pray. Lord, death, Lord, seems so maddening, so inconsistent.

[ 31 : 06 ] But if we were to reckon with what is true, we would actually see that there's nothing unjust about death. Lord, we are all sinners.

We've fallen short of God's righteousness. We are all sinners deserving of it, and yet, Jesus, you chose, knowing that full well, to come down and die in our place, to take on death for us.