

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes: Ecclesiastes 9

"Solomon's Final Conclusions"

5/22/13

SUMMARY

Solomon continues to share counsel gleaned from observations on life made during his search for meaning. He noted that all things come alike to all, it matters not that you are righteous or wicked. One thing that certainly happens to all is death, after which one is soon forgotten and has no share in this life (things done "under the sun"). Should one therefore despair? No, the Preacher again encourages us to live joyfully, especially with the wife of our youth, and to work diligently in what time we have in this life. Once you die, you won't be able to continue your efforts in the grave. This is our portion in life, and God has already accepted our works (1-10).

Solomon also observed that time and chance happens to all, and that evil times come suddenly. The uncertainty of life can be softened with the aid of wisdom, which the Preacher praises as better than strength and the weapons of war. Thus the words of the wise should be heard, even when spoken softly, or coming from a poor man (11-18).

OUTLINE

A. DEATH HAPPENS TO ALL (1-6)

So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. ² All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.

³ This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. ⁴ Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! ⁵ For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. ⁶ Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

1. It happens to both the righteous and the wicked
 - a. While the righteous are in God's hands
 - b. And the sons of men are full of evil
2. While we live, there is hope; when we die...
 - a. We know nothing of what goes on here on earth
 - b. Others' memory of us soon fades

ECCLESIASTES 9:5

When Solomon says the dead know nothing and that there is no work, planning, knowledge, or wisdom after death, he is not contrasting life with afterlife, but life with death. After you die, you can't change what you have done. Resurrection to a new life after death was a vague concept for Old Testament believers. It was only made clear after Jesus rose from the dead.

B. ENJOY LIFE (7-10)

⁷ Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸ Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

1. While death is inevitable, we should still enjoy life
2. Live joyfully with the wife God has given you
3. Work diligently while you are here; you won't be able to do anymore after you die

ECCLESIASTES 9:7-9

Considering the uncertainties of the future and the certainty of death, Solomon recommends enjoying life as God's gift. He may have been criticizing those who put off all present pleasures in order to accumulate wealth, much like those who get caught up in today's rat race. Solomon asks, "What is your wealth really worth, anyway?" Because the future is so uncertain, we should enjoy God's gifts while we are able.

ECCLESIASTES 9:9

Solomon also wrote a proverb about marriage. "The man who finds a wife finds a treasure and receives favor from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22). How sad it would be to be married and not appreciate or enjoy the companion God has given you.

ECCLESIASTES 9:10, 11

It isn't difficult to think of cases where the fastest and the strongest don't win, the wise are poor, and the skillful are unrewarded with wealth or honor. Some people see such examples and call life unfair, and they are right. The world is finite, and sin has twisted life, making it what God did not intend. Solomon is trying to reduce our expectations. The book of Proverbs emphasizes how life would go if everyone acted fairly; Ecclesiastes explains what usually happens in our sinful and imperfect world. We must keep our perspective. Don't let the inequities of life keep you from earnest, dedicated work. We serve God, not people (see Colossians 3:23).

II. ENDURING THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE (9:11-18)

¹¹ I have seen something else under the sun: 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 favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

¹² Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. ¹³ I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: 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. ¹⁶ So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. ¹⁷ The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. ¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

A. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED (11-12)

1. Time and chance happens to all
 - a. Being swift and strong does not mean you will always win
 - b. Being wise, understanding, and skillful does not always ensure food, riches, or favor
2. Sometimes death will come unexpectedly, like animals caught in a trap

B. ESTEEM WISDOM (13-18)

1. Solomon saw how wisdom saved a city
 - a. Even though found in a poor man
 - b. Even though the man was soon forgotten
2. Therefore he praises the value of wisdom
 - a. As better than strength, though a poor man's wisdom is often despised
 - b. As better than weapons of war, though spoken quietly by the wise

ECCLESIASTES 9:13-18

Our society honors wealth, attractiveness, and success above wisdom. Yet wisdom is a greater asset than strength, although it is often overlooked. Even though it is more effective, wisdom from people who are poor often goes unheeded. From this parable we can learn to appreciate wisdom, no matter whom it comes from.