

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] Harold Crick is an IRS agent who lives a fairly boring life. He eats alone, works alone, and lives alone. He spends his days following an exact schedule where he counts all of his steps and even every brushstroke while he brushes his teeth. One day something unexpected happens. He begins to hear the disembodied voice of a British woman who seems to be narrating his life. She describes what he is doing, how he is living, and even his innermost thoughts. As you can imagine this frustrates him cuz he's trying to figure out what in the world is happening. But his anxiety reaches a new level when he hears the narrator say, "Little did Harold know that events had been set in motion that would lead to his imminent death." This moment of discovering that his death is impending is the inciting incident that leads Harold on a journey of self-discovery. He begins to make changes in his life and rediscovers what it really means to be alive.
2. [Need] Now you may not hear a disembodied British woman's voice narrating your life. But as we read Ecclesiastes chapter 9 this morning you are going to hear a Divine voice declare over you that your death is coming. My Hope is that like Harold in the 2006 movie Stranger Than Fiction we will heed that Divine voice and change how we live.
3. [Subject] So this morning as we read our passage in Ecclesiastes 9, let's listen to The Voice of God.
4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 9.
5. [Preview] In order for us to change we need to adjust your expectations. Because once you expect that you are going to die you can finally begin to make changes. So this morning we'll talk about three things we need to expect.

Point number 1 if you are taking notes is **You can expect to die unexpectedly. You can expect to die unexpectedly.**

Let's talk about the first part of this phrase.

You can expect to die.

The inescapable fact of life is that it ends.

We've hit this over and over again as we have studied this book.

Because the reality of death should stop us in our tracks.
It should make us lay awake at night as we ponder it.
And Solomon has spent chapter after chapter trying to flesh out all of
death's implications and what it means for us.

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. It is the same for all,"**

He is examining it from every angle.
But there is no escaping the fact that we are all **"in the hand of God."**
It is like the children's song "He's Got The Whole World in His Hands"
This is a reference to the Sovereign Providence of God.
A reminder that he is in control and our lives are very much in his hands
But from the human perspective,
sometimes it's hard to see whether that's a good or bad thing.
This is why some will deny God's sovereignty or control over our world.
Because man doesn't know what God is doing.
And when bad things happen we think that maybe God dropped us.
It is beyond our understanding as we talked about last week.

"since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked,

The same event happens to all of us.
He's using euphemisms but we know what he's talking about.
The event is death.
And it comes for all of us whether we RSVP or not.
You don't have to put it on your calendar.
You don't have to remember that it's coming.
It comes whether we like it or not.
We can all expect to die.
Not just some of us but all of us.
Whether we are followers of Jesus or not.

Verse 2 **"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. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all."**

When I was a child my dad would sing me a lullaby called

"everybody dies."

It goes just like it sounds.

He would just list people and professions and say "they die"

Verse two sounds just like the song my dad would sing to me.

As a child the absurdity of it made me laugh

But it is a cold hard reality.

The righteous die.

The wicked die.

The good people die.

The bad people.

Those who obey God's commands die.

Those who completely disregard his commands die.

The holy die.

Sinners die.

The Trustworthy die.

Non-stop liar dies.

Death comes for all of us.

But before we die we get to live.

Verse 3 continues **"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. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion."**

From a human perspective, it's just good to be alive.

The alternative is to be in the place of the Dead in the ground.

This is why it says that a living dog is better than a dead lion.
From our perspective on this side of Eternity,
 it's better to have a heart full of evil and madness but be alive
 Than to be righteous and dead.
After all, you might be wicked, but at least you're still here.

Why would he say this?

Verses 5-6 give us the answer

**"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.
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."**

When you're alive at least you know that you're going to die.

Your story is not yet finished.

When you're dead that's the end it's over.

There are no more second chances, no more trying again

All that we carry with us all of our love

All of the things that we enjoy and find beautiful

All of our hatred and our sins

Our stories are done there's no sequel.

And you're not going to come back.

The finality of death is what makes it so terrible.

But that end comes for all of us.

The problem is that we don't see it coming.

Because most stories we know when we're getting close to the conclusion.

I read a book I can look and see how many pages I have left.

I listen to a lot of books as well.

One thing I like is that it'll tell me how much time I have left in the book

 no matter how fast or slow I'm listening to it.

And knowing when the end is coming

It gives me some comfort as I engage with the story.

It can give me hope that things are going to start getting put together because we're almost there.

It can let me know when suffering comes that the story's not even half over so there's probably a lot more hardship coming.

But there is no tracker like that for our lives.

Our lives are races where we never see the Finish Line until we passed it.

Verse 10

"Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, not the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time."

None of us know our times.

You can expect that you're going to die but you can expect that it will be unexpected on the day that it comes.

Being fast or strong or rich or smart will not help you escape it

Nor will it help you know when it will be.

The race of life is not won by those who are fast,

But by those who run to Jesus

The battle of life is not won by the strongest,

But by those who find their strength in God.

Daily sustenance not won by the wisest in the world,

But by those who embrace the foolishness of the gospel.

Riches are not won by the smartest,

But by those who live generously because we found the pearl of greatest price

Favor is not found by those who know everything

But by those who know Jesus as their savior.

And who find favor in God's eyes.

All of us are going to die and the most important thing after you die is whether or not you have put your faith in Jesus Christ as your only hope. Because the rich, strong, and wise will all die.

Verse 12 **"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."**

No fish expects to get caught on a hook when he finds a nice meal.
No bird flying through the air thinks they get shot today.
None of us wake up thinking that today is the day we die in car wreck,
Or have a heart attack,
Or pass out and never wake up.

At the beginning of the sermon I mentioned the story of Harold Crick. Throughout the story he does make changes to his life. He learns how to loosen up, and how to have fun, He even follows some of his dreams and learns how to play the guitar, And most of all he falls in love. But it's at this moment that he finds out is imminent death really is coming. He knew he was going to die but now the moment is finally here. And he has a profound moment through tears he cries and says, "it's just a really bad time right now."

Finally, he's beginning to live his life and this is when it's going to end.

The reality for all of us is that your death will probably come at a really bad time. We won't get to choose when it comes. We can expect to die unexpectedly.

[Transition] But if that's true what can we do? Do we just fall into resignation or depression? Do just make the most of it?

Our second point is this. **You can expect today to be a fulfillment or a foretaste. You can expect today to be a fulfillment or a foretaste.**

I'm going to try and explain what I mean by that.

The reality is we have a choice.

You might die tomorrow so what should you do today?

For the sixth time in the book, he gives us a refrain of "enjoy today"

Enjoy it by "**eating your bread with joy**" in verse 7

Enjoy it by "**drinking your wine with a merry heart**"

Enjoy by always wearing "**white garments**" because white is a symbol of Joy instead of Lament

And enjoy life by always having oil on your head

Because the oil is a sign of abundance and feasting.

And "**enjoy your spouse**" for your family the loving relationships but you have.

And when he says "**whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.**"

He means whatever you can enjoy just enjoy it.

They're different ways we can enjoy these things.

And I want you to see that you can either enjoy it as fulfillment or as a foretaste.

What do I mean by fulfillment?

I mean that all of those things you can enjoy in life are all that you will get.

Since we are going to die, eat drink, and be merry.

This way of living chooses to embrace the gifts of today as the fulfillment of all of their hopes and dreams and desires.

It is the idea of bucket list living.

Having a list of wonderful things to experience before you die.

Things like climb a mountain, drink wine in Tuscany, write a novel.

We might try to do all we can before death comes because after that the story is over.

But there's a problem with that kind of living isn't there?
Solomon's already explained it in detail in the early chapters of this book.
These things will not fulfill you.
No relationship romantic or otherwise will fix your loneliness.
No meal no matter how good will ever satisfy your hunger completely.
No amount of money will satisfy your greed.
And no drug will keep you high forever.

There is always another experience to chase.
There is always another place to travel to.
I've never seen a travel blogger/influencer say "well I'm done I have seen everything."
I read a lot.
And I usually read over 100 books a year and this year I've read 146 so far.
But they keep writing books.
And no matter how fast I read, there is always more that I want.

If you believe that today can meet all of your needs.
That this book or experience could fulfill and satisfy you,
Then you are always going to be disappointed.
And most of our anger and sin in life comes out of this disappointment.

So some may embrace today as fulfillment with foolish joy thinking that it will work.
There are others who will embrace the day as fulfillment but they will do so not with joy but with despair.
He will think that this is all there is this is as good as it gets "oh well."
they will know that couldn't drink will never fulfill the void in their heart,
but I won't stop them from drinking.

But there is another choice we can make.

Instead of expecting today to fulfill all of our desires.
Instead of making idols out of the gifts of God.
Instead, we can expect today to be a foretaste of eternity with Jesus.

This is not the kind of Christianity that looks at today and says well we will die and then we get to heaven and we'll get to experience real life.

This is a Christianity that embraces today not because it's the end but because it is only the beginning.

Is the faith that tastes the good things of God and knows that they are but a meager sample of what we will eat in eternity.

They are an appetizer that we dig into and marvel at all the while knowing the chef is going to send something even better for the main course.

And I really do believe that we should do this with small things like food and drink.

That is why he says **"eat your bread with joy"**

Not thinking that this bread will give your life meaning,
But eat it knowing one day you will eat with Jesus

"Drink your wine with a merry heart."

Not because this wine will fix your problems,
But because it's amazing that God made it.

And one day we will feast with Him in eternity.

"Wear white" not because life is always easy and happy,

But because there is so much good in the world

And one day when Jesus returns all evil will be cast out.

"Enjoy life with the wife whom you love"

Not because marriage is what gives life meaning,

But because we were made to be in relationships with each other.

And in eternity we will get to experience the beauty of friendships without the heartbreaking effects of sin.

What if before you prayed for your meal later today you didn't just thank him for giving you the ability to eat but thanked him for making the food and drink tastes so wonderful.

I want you to think of the best meal you have ever had.

For me, one of the best meals I've ever eaten was in Dallas on one of our anniversaries.

We went to a fancy restaurant week couldn't regularly afford. I got a filet with a mac and cheese crust over a bowl of grits and I love grits. And Breanna ordered a bacon-wrapped jalapeno stuffed quail. I didn't even know people ate quail.

We ate there years ago. But when I close my eyes I can still picture that meal and I can almost taste it.

I don't know what your best meal was, but I want you to picture it.

Then I want you to know that the best food you've ever had it's just a tiny sample of how good the food will be in the life to come when our savior returns.

And so we should eat and make great food and praise God for it and enjoy it.

It is just a sample.

It is a foretaste the life to come through Jesus.

Not just food but all joy and every good thing.

This is why as followers of Jesus we can live confident lives in the face of death.

We don't have to try and squeeze in everything today, because today is just the beginning.

And God has already appointed what he has given.

When it says God has already approved what you do doesn't mean he's stamping his approval on it.

Means that he is giving all of us a sample and we should take and eat.

We should enjoy our spouses or families or whatever relationship it is that God has given us and blessed us with.
Because it is our portion.
It is a gift and a blessing that he has given to us to enjoy today.

Heaven and Eternity are not just far off into the future.
They do not just await you when you die or when Jesus returns.
God has written eternity on our hearts.
And when you recognize that eternity it can allow you to enjoy the finite moments now.

You can enjoy it not thinking that it will satisfy you.
But enjoying the God who made it.

And we can do whatever it is God has given us to do knowing that it is just the beginning.
It is just a foretaste of the life and the adventures to come.

[transition] But you might ask how can I do that? How can I do that when death is all around us? How can I do that when thinking about my own death gives me anxiety? We can do this with hope because of Point number three

Point number 3 **You can expect death to die. You can expect death to die.**

This is our hope.
This is how we can enjoy today as a foretaste.
This is how we can grieve at funerals as those with hope.

All of us in this room are going to die.
But we know who else is going to die.
Death.
One day death itself will die.

I want you to hear me Church family.
Death's days are numbered.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 25.
This passage was our call to worship this morning.
It describes the prophetic hope that is fulfilled in Jesus.

Look at verse 7

"And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, that veil that is spread over all nations."

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And what is that veil?

What is that covering?

What is it that is haunted humanity since we were exiled from the Garden of Eden?

What is the great problem that we have read in every single chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes?

It is death.

The great and terrible power will one day come face-to-face with Jesus for round two.

You see death thought that it conquered Jesus.

Satan and death thought that they had beaten even God.

But Jesus ran right out of that grave.

Because death had no power over Him.

Jesus can come and go as He pleases.

And one day Jesus will return for the rematch.

Jesus already won the victory,

But He will come back and give death a knockout blow.

Look at verse 8

"He will swallow up death forever."

The fish swallow Jonah three days later it spat him back out.
The grave swallowed Jesus but three days later it spat Him back out.
Jesus will swallow death and He will never spit it back out.
Jesus will swallow it up like a snack or a piece of Halloween candy.
Death will be finished forever.

And God himself will wipe away all of our tears and pain forevermore.
And He will take away all of our reproach and our sin.
When you put your faith in Jesus the Holy Spirit gave you new life.
You took away the guilt of your sin
He gave you a new nature.
But when Jesus returns on that day He will wash you white as snow.

What do you think we'll do on that day after Jesus accomplishes all of this?
It seems like we're going to celebrate.
Jesus will throw the greatest feast we've ever had.

Verse 6 **"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined."**

It will be a feast filled with good food.
The one-time Jesus went to a wedding in John 3 he brought good wine.
And people said wow usually you give the good wine first but this is the best wine.
And Jesus did that with just water.
He did that last minute at a wedding He was just attending.

Now I want you to imagine how good the wine must be at Jesus's party.
The food here will be rich and good.
I have no doubt it will be the best food you have ever tasted.
If I'm honest I don't even really like wine.

I tried it a lot but I just don't care for it.
I have a feeling when I try Jesus's wine I am going to like it.

When I said that every meal today can be a foretaste of what is to come.
This is the meal I'm talking about.
And what a celebration that feast will be.
On that joyous Day of Victory.

When we gather with all the saints.
When we gather with those that we love who put their faith in Jesus
When we gather with those whose stories of faithfulness we have read and
been inspired by
When we gather to eat and drink with every member of that great cloud of
witnesses.
We will celebrate because death is dead.

But it's not dead yet.

Verse nine **"It will be said on that day, Behold this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us."**

On that day we will feast and drink and laugh and dance.
But for now we wait.
We wait in hope.
It is not a vain or empty hope.
It is not an overly optimistic hope as if suffering and death will not reach us
here.
Sometimes we hope through tears.
Sometimes we hope in the midst of unimaginable suffering.

But we hope not because we have any inner quality that we may have.
We hope not because we have such great faith.
We hope because we know that Jesus is coming.
And we know He beat Death once and we wait for Him to do it again.

But for now we have to wait.

Church family we can face our deaths knowing that it will not win.
It has no victory.
It has no sting.

Beloved if you put your faith in Jesus.
Then one day you will say the same thing about death.
When you get to the other side and you see Jesus's face.
You will say, "huh" death where is your sting?
"Where is your victory?"
All I see is Christ.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] We can expect to die unexpectedly. We can either expect today as the fulfillment of all our dreams or as a foretaste of what is to come. And through faith in Christ, we can expect death to die.
2. [Challenge] Put your faith in Jesus the God who conquers death.