


Ecclesiastes 8:16-9:6 "Prepare to die"

Solomon was clearly troubled by the prosperity of the wicked and the difficulties of the righteous.

 Hughes... Solomon says "One of the best ways to regain God's perspective on good and evil is to go to someone's grave, especially the grave of someone evil. In his struggle over witnessing injustice, the Preacher also needed to see the end of the story. So do we, if we hope to keep our spiritual sanity in a fallen world."

Verse 12 of chapter 8 "yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. **Verse 13** But it will not be well with the wicked;

Judgment is coming maybe sooner than we think but God is giving man more time to repent.

Even if he does not explain exactly what happens after death, **Solomon knows that justice will be done.** Although he knows that the world is full of injustice, he also believes in the final justice of God.

THE GREATEST JOY OF HEAVEN WILL BE GOD'S PRESENCE
The greatest agony of hell will be God's absence

Hell is a furnace of unquenchable fire, a place of everlasting punishment, where its victims are tormented in both their bodies and their minds. Hell is a place from which God's mercy and goodness have been withdrawn, where God's wrath is revealed as a terrifying, consuming fire, and men live with unfulfilled lusts and desires in torment forever and ever.
No parties going on in hell utter aloneness!

 So do not envy the wicked, **even when they seem to prosper.** It will not go well for them on the Day of Judgment.

Verse 15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry

“Yes, there is vanity under the sun. Yes, we see injustice that is hard to accept and understand. Yes, we have a lot of hard work to do. Nevertheless, there is joy for us in the ordinary things of life – eating, drinking, and sharing fellowship with the people of God.” **PRAY!**

Believe it or not, the English Department at the university of Wyoming offers a class to teach its students how to communicate with aliens. "*Interstellar Message Composition*," the course is called, and it is sponsored by a grant from the (NASA). According to Wyoming's Web site, it is "[the first class to enlist creative writers in a potential cosmic conversation.](#)" "We've thought a lot about how we might communicate with other worlds," the professor says, "but we haven't thought much about what we'd actually say."

One of the first assignments the instructor gives his students is to summarize the human condition in 10 words or less- A short, simple statement they could send as an S.O.S. to the universe. One English major completed the assignment in just nine words: "**We are an adolescent species searching for our identity.**"

If this is what passes for higher education in America these days, then it is hard to know whether to laugh or cry. But we should also respond with pity for what it tells us about the condition of fallen humanity. People are searching for meaning, calling in the darkness and hoping there is someone out there who can tell us who we are.

Have you discovered the meaning of life, or are you still searching? Do you understand your place in the universe, or are you still trying to figure out who you are and what you are doing here?

Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, **17** then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover *it*, yet he will not find *it*; moreover, though a wise *man* attempts to know *it*, he will not be able to find *it*.

What has he learned so far? Only this: **life is a weary business**, and it is impossible to know for certain what God is doing in the world. If anyone tries to tell us any different – if anyone claims to have figured out the meaning of life or to have unlocked the secret plans of God – he is only telling a lie. Solomon’s understanding anyway...

Verse 16 tells us that Solomon had many a sleepless night in his pursuit of wisdom and discovery to the meaning of life.

The Preacher... Solomon... the writer of this book; had embarked on a lifelong quest to discover the meaning of life.

As said by Ryken... “His quest did not end the way that one might expect, however. Usually when people try to figure out what life is all about, they hope to come up with a simple, unambiguous answer – something memorable enough to print on a poster and hang on a bedroom wall. But the Preacher-King never seemed to get a final answer. The more he looked into things, the more he struggled to make sense of his world.”

Ecclesiastes is not the kind of book that we keep reading until we reach the end and get the answer, like a mystery. Instead it is a book in which we keep struggling with the problems of life, and as we struggle, we learn to trust God with the questions even when we do not have all the answers.

Discipleship is a journey, and not merely a destination.

Historian Will Durant surveyed human history in his multi-volume *Story of Civilization* and came to the conclusion that “*our knowledge is a receding mirage in an expanding desert of ignorance.*”

As skeptical as he is about his ability to know the mind of God, he nevertheless believes that what happens in the world is **“THE WORK OF GOD”** (verse 17)

Francis Bacon was right when he warned us not to “draw down or submit the mysteries of God to our reason.” Instead we should lift our hearts to the praise of God, as Paul did when he confessed his faith in the great mysteries of the mind of God...

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out! **34** "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" **35** "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" **36** For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

This ends Solomon's reexamination of "**the vanity of wisdom**" (1:12–18). Instead of rejecting wisdom, the king concluded that wisdom is important to the person who wants to get the most out of life. While wisdom can't explain every mystery or solve every problem, it can help us exercise discernment in our decisions.

In Chapter 9 Solomon will draw two conclusions:

- death is unavoidable (1–10) and
- life is unpredictable (11–18).

So glad Jesus is in charge and in control.

9 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.

With these words, the Preacher leaves God's people in **God's hands**.

Psalm 48:10, says that God's "**right hand is filled with righteousness**" in **Psalm 95:7** that we are the "**sheep of his hand**", and in **John 10:28** Jesus reassures us that "no one can ever snatch us out of his hand".

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that "**It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God**" (Hebrews 10:31).

Anthropomorphic terms. . . Ascribing human characteristics to God so our human minds can somewhat understand His character and nature. . .

The finger of God **In His nostrils. . .** **Ears** hear. . . **feet are planted. . . Eye is not closed. . . arm is not too short**

HAND OF GOD

The Bible uses the image of “the hand of God” to express God’s **power, love, supervision, and control**. Here the metaphor expresses his sovereign supervision of his people and their actions. God really does have **“the whole world in his hands.”** *We know that the hand of God is a hand of love.*

Continuing with verse 1... 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. **2** All things *come* alike to all: One event *happens* to the righteous and the wicked; **This develops Solomon's idea that all share the destiny in this meaningless life of ours. This is certainly how things appeared to Solomon with his “under the sun” premise.** We share a common destiny on earth—death and the grave—but we do not share a common destiny in eternity.

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. **3** This *is* an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing *happens* to all. **AGAIN,** the one thing is death. **This is not the first time the subject of death has come into Solomon’s discourse, nor will it be the last.** (Cf. 1:4; 2:14–17; 3:18–20; 4:8; 5:15–16; 6:6; 8:8; 12:1–7.) 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. **So much evil in the world it can drive us mad...** The “madness” that the Preacher mentions may be defined as **“a moral wildness that is impetuous and irrational.”** People commit acts of lawless violence, *like killing police officers*. They pursue self-destructive addictions, *like sex and drugs*. They hurt people they love the most and need the most, *including members of their own families*. **We are living in a mad, mad, mad, mad world.**

He now ends verse 3 with the encouraging words (Not), “and after that

they go to the dead". **In the words of one bumper sticker, "Eat well, stay fit and die anyway."** **As one man notes, This is as frustrating as anything we have seen in Ecclesiastes. It all seems so futile. Does anything really matter?**

Once again the Preacher is confronting us with *our own* mortality. Most people try to avoid even thinking about death, but Solomon talked about it as often as he could.

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

In order to compare life and death, the Preacher repeats a memorable proverb, which contrasts a living dog with a dead lion. The lion is a noble beast, as everyone knows {*Proverbs 30:30 ...* A lion, which is mighty among beasts And does not turn away from any;}

This was especially true in Biblical times, when the lion served as the royal insignia of the house of David – the emblem of our Messiah (see *Genesis 49:9*). By contrast, few animals were more despised than dogs. Some people are fond of dogs, but in those days they were considered wild and filthy animals. The kind of dog that Solomon has in mind is not a household pet but a *street scavenger*. To get a sense of the way people regarded dogs in those days, think of Goliath's taunt to the boy David: **"Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?"** (1 Samuel 17:43).

Even the most ardent dog-lover would admit that dogs are no comparison to lions. When people go to the zoo, for example, they do not go to see the hyenas (if the zoo even has any). They want to see the lion exhibit, of course. Yet the situation changes if the lion happens to be dead. Then the dog comes out on top because at least he is alive!

SIMPLE POINT ... better to be alive than dead. This is thinking apart from God and what God has waiting for us in eternity. **As Paul said, to live is Christ to die gain!**

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.

These dark thoughts and words are true without Jesus and the resurrection. Solomon in his “under the sun” thinking says the main advantage of living turns out to be the knowledge of dying. **HOW HOPEFUL IS THAT?** According to some Bible scholars, this is only *“a sarcastic or bitter preference.”* Life may be better than nothing, but not by much.

So glad Solomon is not done with his quest... because again here he has some really stinkin’ thinkin’. When we get to chapter 12, we discover that there is also a life above, where “the spirit returns to God who gave it” (v. 7).

On the positive side I think Solomon could be alluding to knowing that we will die gives us time to prepare for death, and also for eternity.

The fact of death and the fear of death will either bring out the best in people or the worst in people; and too often it is the worst. When death comes to a family, it doesn't create problems; it reveals them.

We all prepare for the future with life insurance, medical insurance, car insurance... Have you prepared for death?

Have you trusted in Jesus alone for the forgiveness of your sins? I have death insurance... There is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved... **NO OTHER NAME!** Acts 4:12

"We are an adolescent species searching for our identity." The search is over!" Our identity is in Christ

You may feel like Woody Allen... “I’m not afraid to die; I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” But each of us will be there when it happens because there is no escaping death when your time has come. Death is not an accident, it’s an appointment!

I like what one man said, “THE PERSON WHO TREATS DEATH LIGHTLY MAY FEAR DEATH THE MOST. IF WE TAKE LIFE SERIOUSLY AND WE SHOULD—THEN WE CAN’T TREAT DEATH FLIPPANTLY.”

Not only for salvation but I also think it is good to prepare for death in very practical ways.

You should have a will or a trust. Something with specific directions to determine what your wishes are in all areas of death.

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 does not have all the answers, nor does it claim to. Remember, this is not the kind of book that we keep reading until we get the answer, but the kind of book that helps us know how to serve God when we do not have all the answers.

We always need to read Ecclesiastes in the context of the whole Bible.

Jesus came, lived, died and rose again... He is waiting for us to return home with him.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. **26** And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" **27** She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Now the promise of God for every believer in Christ is that we too shall live.

This means that our life will not end in mindless oblivion.

1 Peter 1:3-4... Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

What hope these promises bring to life, and what confidence they give us for the day of death! Consider the dying words of the infamous Giacomo Casanova. Like

the Solomon of Ecclesiastes, Casanova had tasted almost everything that life has to offer, including many sinful pleasures. We know from his writings that none of these experiences ever satisfied his soul. Yet we also know, by the testimony of multiple witnesses, that his last words expressed his hope in resurrection life. “I have lived as a philosopher,” Casanova said, “and die as a Christian.”

As we read Ecclesiastes, we learn something about what it means to live as a philosopher. With the Preacher as our guide, we experience almost everything that life has to offer and struggle to find the answers to life’s questions. Many of us have learned some of the same lessons from our own experiments with life and our own experiences of suffering. Like Casanova, we have “lived as philosophers.”

But will we die as Christians? This is the most important question of all. If we are wise, we will get ready to die now by asking Jesus to forgive our sins and by trusting him to raise our dead bodies to eternal life. Then, when we come to the last our days, we will be ready to die with full confidence in Christ.

"We are an adolescent species searching for our identity." The search is over!