

Joy Under the Sun – Ecclesiastes 9

Main Idea: Let not the circumstances around you, or the praise or even approval of others, become a condition for you to rejoice in the Lord.

I. How Can We Rejoice When Death is Certain? | Ecclesiastes 9

Solomon opens chapter 9 by reminding us of a reality humanity works tirelessly to avoid: every person—righteous or wicked, wise or foolish, believing or unbelieving—will face death. Like he does in chapter 8, Solomon forces us to look at the tension between what we know and what we cannot control. **Solomon defines death as an “evil” (v.3) that occurs under the sun, because death entered creation as the result of sin (Rom. 5:12), and because of sin, every one of us carries within ourselves the certainty of our mortality.** Just as in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:5-6), the hearts of men remain filled with evil, and death stands as both judgment and consequence (Rom. 5:12; Rom. 6:23). Even Jesus Himself, standing before Lazarus’ tomb, wept—not because He lacked power over death, but because He witnessed the devastation of sin upon His creation (John 11:33-36). Death is not merely an external enemy; it is the final expression of an internal problem. Humanity stands condemned not simply because life ends, but because sin reigns. Left to ourselves, we cannot escape judgment (Heb. 9:27). Yet into this dark reality Scripture speaks hope: Christ has conquered death itself and stripped it of its sting (1 Cor. 15:55).

Having laid the inescapable reality of death before the congregation of Israel, instead of despair, Solomon urges joyful living. **Just as in Ecclesiastes 8, where he urged us to trust God’s stillness even when we do not understand His ways, in chapter 9 Solomon tells us that the brevity of life is not a reason for fear but a call to repentance and worship before the living God.** Even a “living dog”—an unclean, undesirable animal in ancient Israel—is better off than a dead lion. The proverb shocks us intentionally: the lowest form of life is greater than the greatest form of death, because **the living still have the opportunity to know, worship, repent, love, and obey God.** The dead have no more portion in what is done under the sun; their choices are sealed; their lives await judgment (Heb.9:27). And from this truth flows Solomon’s next instruction: “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do” (v.7). **Far from promoting indulgence, Solomon calls us to receive and enjoy the ordinariness of life as a divine gift.** Scripture repeatedly reveals that God delights in the feasting of His people—not because He needs their celebration, but because He wants them to rejoice in His goodness (Ex. 12:1-30; Lev. 23:33-44; Deut. 16:13-15). Passover, Booths, Pentecost—these feasts were commanded celebration meant to reorient the hearts of God’s people back to His goodness. Even Jesus’ first miracle took place at a wedding feast, affirming that celebration and abundance were never foreign to God’s purposes (John 2:1-11). Yet Solomon also warns that **joy is not an excuse for foolishness.** Wine is a gift, but drunkenness is sinful (Eph. 5:18). Marital intimacy is a gift, but it belongs exclusively within covenant marriage. Work is a gift, but laziness or despair corrupts it. **Joy is not found in ignoring God’s boundaries but in enjoying God’s gifts within those boundaries.** The problem arises when we love the gifts more than the Giver or when we misuse what He has given as though we were wiser than He. **Joy becomes impossible when we distort God’s design.**

To Ponder:

1. Where do you personally feel the tension between enjoying God’s gifts and respecting God’s boundaries?
2. Which simple, God-given gifts (food, rest, marriage, community, work) do you tend to overlook or take for granted? How can you reorient yourself to enjoy and rejoice over those gifts?

Solomon then returns to a matter deeply connected to chapter 8: **life is unpredictable to us, but never to God, “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong”—human strength, intelligence, and strategy cannot guarantee results.** “Time” and “chance” can only affect man—not because the world is random, but because we are not sovereign. **While modern culture uses the language of luck; Scripture uses the language of providence.** What people call coincidence, Scripture calls God’s deliberate timing. The birth of Christ, the cross, the resurrection—all happened “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). What seems uncertain to us is never uncertain to Him. Because of that, our joy under the sun rests not in controlling life but in trusting the One who controls all things.

The chapter closes with a quiet yet profound illustration: a small city saved not by might, wealth, or influence, but by an unknown poor man whose wisdom delivers the people—yet no one remembers him (v.14-15). Under the sun, people always tend to evaluate others by appearance, status, charisma, and power. But **God repeatedly shows throughout Scripture that true wisdom often comes from the overlooked, the unseen, the unimpressive.** Samuel misjudged Eliab; God chose David. Israel dismissed Jesus; He was the Messiah. The world applauds strength, God honors meek (Matthew 5:1-8). **Solomon’s closing reminder is sobering: joy is not rooted in being praised, remembered, or admired, but in fearing God and living wisely before Him.** A life lived under the grace and mercy of God remains significant—even if forgotten by men. And if death is certain, then joyful obedience becomes all the more urgent.

Solomon’s lessons in Ecclesiastes 9 ultimately remind us that the call to rejoice is not a call to escape reality but to interpret reality through the lens of God’s grace. Joy does not arise from pretending life is easier than it is or ignoring the pain that comes with living in a fallen world. Rather, it grows from understanding that every breath we take, every meal we enjoy, every relationship we cultivate, and every day we labor is a gift from the God who holds our lives in His hands. **Rejoicing “under the sun” is therefore an act of obedience. It is choosing to rest in the goodness of God even when outcomes remain uncertain. It is receiving today—its blessings, its limitations, its responsibilities—with gratitude instead of anxiety.** Joy is not rebellion against suffering; it is obedience to God’s invitation to trust Him. No lasting joy can be found under the sun unless it is rooted in the One who came from beyond the sun. Christ entered the world that groans under the weight of sin and death so that we might taste the joy that cannot be taken from us (John 15:11). His resurrection ensures not only that death is defeated, but that every moment of earthly joy becomes a small shadow of the eternal joy to come. **The certainty of death no longer threatens the believer—it clarifies what matters most.** We rejoice now because Christ has redeemed us; we rejoice in death because Christ has gone before us; and we will rejoice forever because our lives are hidden in Him. Thus, Ecclesiastes 9 closes not with fear but with hope, inviting us to live fully, love deeply, work faithfully, and rejoice confidently in the God who gives meaning to every moment under the sun.

To Ponder:

3. What “joy killers” most often rob your heart—comparison, fear, anxiety, envy, guilt, or distraction?
4. How can you cultivate consistent, grateful joy even in seasons of pain, unpredictability, or loss?