

March 5, 2017

“In God’s Hands”

Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 9:1-18 (NASB)

Cross References: Daniel 12:1-2; Proverbs 5:18-19; 14:31-35; 18:22; Matthew 19:4-6; John 5:24-29; Acts 24:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:12-32; Galatians 5:7-10; Ephesians 5:21-33; Hebrews 9:27; 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Revelation 20:11-15

Lesson Idea: Since our lives are in God’s hands, we should devote ourselves to spending every day well.

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Feb 26 Numbers 35-36	Feb 27 Deut 1-2
Feb 28 Deut 3-4	Mar 1 Deut 5-7
Mar 2 Deut 8-10	Mar 3 Deut 11-13
Mar 4 Deut 14-16	Mar 5 Deut 17-20

Background: In this passage, Solomon continues to have an “under the sun” mindset. He recognized that all of life is ultimately in God’s hands, and we should as well. However, he expressed an almost hopeless belief that fate and chance limit a person’s options. As believers, we should have a more optimistic view of life. We receive wisdom, peace, and joy from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit every day. In addition, we also know that in Christ “death has been swallowed up by victory,” so this life that we know is not the only life we will experience, and not even the best life there is (see 1 Corinthians 15:54-58). We can rest assured that we are in God’s hands, and we should use our hands to do what glorifies Him.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9 In the Hand of God

1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.

2 It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.

3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

4 For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.

5 For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.

6 Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.

8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.

9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

DISCUSSION:

- v 1. How are our deeds “in the hand of God?” Why should our uncertainty about what awaits us cause us to depend on God even further?
- v 2-3. What is the same for all people? Why does Solomon see this as an “evil?”
- v 3-4. What did Solomon see as the condition of men’s hearts and lives? What does he mean to emphasize by the proverb: *a live dog is better than a dead lion*?
- v 5-6. Solomon is continuing to look at “life under the sun” (and you could also say: “life without the Son”). How does he contrast the living and dead? Is this depressing to you? Why or why not?
- v 7-9. What was Solomon’s advice about life? How has God “already approved your works?”
- v 8. What does this verse mean concerning our appearance every day? How does the way we dress matter? (see 1 Peter 3:3-4)
- v 9. How did the Preacher view marriage? (see Proverbs 5:18-19; 18:22; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:21-33 ; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

Ecclesiastes 9:10-18 Whatever Your Hand Finds to Do

10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.

14 There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and

constructed large siege works against it. 15 But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded. 17 The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

DISCUSSION:

- v 10. What advice does Solomon give about our life's activities? Why? What do we know about death that Solomon does not account for here? (see Daniel 12:1-2; John 5:24-29; Acts 24:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:12-32; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:11-15)
- v 11. What does this verse say about the fairness of life? Why is life frequently unfair?

NOTE: from David Guzik:

I returned and saw under the sun that – the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong: Solomon wondered, "If this life is all there is, then why doesn't this life make more sense?" In a world that made more sense under the sun, then the swift would always win the race and the strong would always win the battle. Yet it doesn't always work that way.

But time and chance happen to them all: The Preacher again struggles against a sense of fatalism. In his somewhat contradictory way, the one who previously proclaimed God's management of all (Ecclesiastes 7:13 and Ecclesiastes 9:1) now wondered if it didn't all happen according to time and chance.

"Time and chance are paired, no doubt because they both have a way of taking matters suddenly out of our hands." (Kidner)

The sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them: From his under the sun perspective, it seemed that man was more subject to the whims of time and chance than of a loving, all-powerful God.

- v 12. How are people "trapped" by time? What is Solomon's reason for pointing this out?
- v 13-16. What is the main point of this parable? Why can wisdom win against a stronger opponent? Why did no one remember the poor and wise man?

NOTE: from Guzik:

Yet no one remembered that same poor man:

Under the premise that death ends existence and consciousness for all, Solomon protested that the only lasting meaning this man might have – to be remembered – was taken away. The almost unbelievable fleetingness of fame added to the sense of meaninglessness of life.

Men quickly forget, but God never does. He knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19). He has a book of remembrance before Him for those that fear the Lord (Malachi 3:16), and their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

- v 16. Why do people usually not listen to poor people and often despise them?
- v 17. Why is wisdom often found in quietness, and foolishness is often very loud? What should that call us to do? (see Psalm 46:10)
- v 18. How is wisdom better than weapons? How does one sinner destroy much good? (see Proverbs 14:31-35; Galatians 5:7-10)

NOTE: from Guzik:

Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good: Wisdom is better – better than strength (weapons of war), better than foolishness – but all the good that wisdom does can quickly be taken away by one sinner who destroys much good.

Solomon sensed that it was much easier to destroy than to build. Establishing things by wisdom is much more difficult than destroying them by the work of even one sinner.

"Adam's sin infected the whole race of man; Achan's transgression caused Israel's defeat (Joshua 7:11-12); Rehoboam's folly occasioned the great schism (1 Kings 12:16)." (Deane)

APPLICATION:

- ✓ How do you acknowledge that your life is in God's hands?
- ✓ What do your hands find to do, and how well do you do them?