

Eat and Drink, for Tomorrow We Die

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, as we look through Ecclesiastes 9, there's actually a number of verses that could qualify for our Ecclesiastes fridge magnet competition. But this one really stands out for me.
- It's the end of verse 4. Have a look at it. Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion. Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion.
- Now, you need to understand what this means, especially for people in that culture. A lion was the most powerful and gracious and majestic animal that they knew of, really.
- The lion. And the dog was the opposite. The dog was at the other side of the spectrum. Back then, they didn't domesticate dogs like we do. They weren't fluffy companions. They were just street urchins, basically.
- The dogs in the Middle East were the lowest of the low of life forms. They just were the animal form of beggars on the street.
- [0 : 5 7] That's all dogs were. And that's why this little proverb that Ecclesiastes gives in the middle of his passage is so surprising. Better off a living dog than a dead lion.
- So, even though dogs were despised, once a lion is dead, once a lion is just rotting meat, even a mangy dog is more valuable than the dead lion.
- And what he's trying to say is it's life that gives things value. It's life that gives us value. The life that is inside us. And once that leaves us, then we're just meat.
- Once that life leaves us, we're nothing. And we do nothing. And so, treasure every day you still have life inside you.
- And make the most of it while you still can. That is really the point of this passage. That's the point of what he's saying here. As Ecclesiastes has been reflecting on a number of different aspects, the hard edges of this life we live in this world under the sun.
- [2 : 1 4] He now focuses front and center on the one that is, you know, we like to avoid the most. But the one that is inevitable. And that is death itself.
- And he makes this point. Because of death, you've got to treasure the life you have every day that you have it. And he makes this point in two parts, which we're going to see this morning.
- The first is he starts by highlighting the sobering truth that we don't like to think about. That we all end up dead. We all end up dead.
- Think about that. No matter what a person achieves in this life. No matter what they gain. No matter how clever they are. No matter how many qualifications they have. No matter what kind of knowledge they accumulated. What achievements they've done.
- No matter how wise they've become over the years of their life. Everybody still ends up in the same place. Look at how he puts it in verse 2 and 3.
- [3 : 1 3] 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 man, so with the sinner. As it is with the one who takes oath, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun. The same destiny overtakes them all.

Which makes what we do in life far less important than we like to think. You know, we like to think that the things we achieve in our lives are going to last and they're important.

But Ecclesiastes is saying not really. Because at the end of the day, everybody ends up in the same place. In the grave. All share a common destiny. The righteous and the wicked.

The good and the bad. And so technically it doesn't matter if you're Hitler or Mother Teresa. Either way, you end up dead. It doesn't sound very biblical, does it?

[4 : 16] It doesn't sound like how a Christian is meant to think. But remember, Ecclesiastes, a lot of it is a thought experiment. This is Ecclesiastes or Solomon. Ecclesiastes was his pen name.

His observations of life under the sun. If you limit your thinking to just what you can see, what you can observe with no reference to eternal things. Well, this is where you'll end up.

If you limit your view in life to this life only. Well, then you've got to admit that whatever you do with your life makes little difference. And many people do limit their lives.

Even people who are people of faith or people, religious people, still actually focus primarily 99% of their time on life under the sun.

And Ecclesiastes is drawing us to the harsh reality that if that's the case, then whatever you actually do under the sun doesn't make a difference. Now, you would think that that leads to hopeless despair.

[5 : 19] You know, it takes away all the motivation for living. If nothing we do here matters under the sun, then because we're all going to end up in the same place, we're all going to die, we're all going to be terminated in the end.

Then, well, what's the point of living? You would think that's kind of the atheists of the world will all be walking around moping. Oh, there's no point to anything because we're going to die.

But Ecclesiastes says, no, actually, that's not where it ends up. In fact, it has the opposite effect. You see, for those who know death is coming, religious or not, you may as well live the life you have to the full while you still have it.

And so, actually, the reality of death, Ecclesiastes goes on to observe, leads to an enthusiasm to live and milk life for all it's worth.

Just like the banned Xbox ad in 2002. I don't know if any of you saw that. When Xbox, the gaming console, was released in 2002, they aired an ad to promote it in the UK that was very quickly banned because it offended so many people.

[6 : 28] And you can see it on YouTube. But this is the way it goes. It starts, it's just a minute long or so. It starts with a woman giving birth in labor in a hospital. She's busy giving birth.

The baby's about to come out. And then the baby comes out, but not like you expected. It shoots out through the hospital window and goes flying in the sky. But as it's flying, it's aging.

So it starts out with this little crying baby flying through the air. And then it becomes a young boy. And then it's a teenager. And then it's a young adult. And then it's a middle-aged man. He's aging as he's flying through the air.

And then he gets to an older man. And then he's an old man. And then he's a really old man. And then he goes and lands in a grave. And there's just five words that appear on the screen. Brilliant advertising.

It says, life is short. Play more. And so many people were offended by that. And yet Ecclesiastes would have said, well, actually, they make a good point.

[7 : 30] Life is short. Play more. If you're inevitably going to die, now this is Ecclesiastes' next point in his passage, then just make the most of the time you have. But not just playing.

Doing more than just playing Xbox. Living life to the full. Living life as full as you can. That's his point. Getting from it all that you can. So have a look. He makes this point in verse 7 of Ecclesiastes 9.

Go, eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a joyful heart. For it is now that God favors what you do. In other words, I think that just simply means what he's saying is, God has favored you today by giving you life so live it.

Right? Verse 8. Always be clothed in white and always anoint your head with oil. Now, I don't think there's any symbolic meaning to those things.

In Ecclesiastes, he doesn't speak symbolically like that. I think he's just referring to living a comfortable life. In the Middle East, in a hot and dry climate, the most comfortable you could be is wearing white and anointing your skin with oil as kind of a moisturizer.

[8 : 41] So he's saying, you know, have a happy life. Enjoy the gifts you have. Try, have a comfortable, as comfortable a life as you can. And then verse 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 the lot, your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. For in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. Okay, so in summary, have the best marriage you can and work as excellently as you can.

And if we pause there and read this, it's actually really good advice. It's really sobering, wise advice for anyone, religious or not. You know, life is too short to have a bad marriage.

Okay? And spend most of it bickering because of your pride or your selfishness or your unmet expectations. Get over yourself. Treasure your spouse.

[9 : 47] Value your marriage every day that you have it. Because this is probably the best opportunity you'll have in this life to be happy. So don't throw it away. And also, likewise, life is too short to be lazy.

Verse 10. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. Do it with all your might. Life is too short to sit on your backside doing nothing.

Especially, this is especially important wisdom, if you're a young adult and maybe you're out of school. Maybe you're still living under your parents' roof.

And you think, I know because I was there, you think you've got unlimited time in your life. You've just got an endless horizon ahead. But you don't. You don't.

Time is precious. Your time is precious. You can't get it back. Every hour that you sit, idling your life away, you cannot get it back. It's gone.

[10 : 47] And you're an hour closer to dying. So don't waste an hour of your life. Take these words to heart.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. For in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

So while you can, do your work, do your planning, gain your knowledge, gain your wisdom. Don't waste your time. There's a website called deathclock.org.

I encourage you, if you're brave enough, to go on this website. Because the purpose of this website is, you plug in, it asks you at the front page, you plug in a number of details about yourself, your date of birth, the country you live in, your body mass index, whether you smoke and drink and how frequently, your level of fitness activities.

And it calculates kindly for you the estimated date of your death. And it puts there, and it gives you an option to pin it on your computer screen when you're working, a little countdown clock, where it shows you how many days and hours and minutes and seconds you have left.

[12 : 10] And you pin it there as a reminder. Now I know it sounds morbid, but I tell you, if you do that, it's going to motivate you to make the most of those 15,236 hours that you have left that are ticking away.

It's an important reminder to make the most of your time. And that's essentially what Ecclesiastes is saying. Because life is terminal, because it is going to end, don't waste it.

Make the most of it. And so that's his best advice. Under the sun. Live your best life now.

And you know, we all tend to follow that advice. Even Christians, who believe in heaven when we die, can't help trying to do what Ecclesiastes is suggesting we do here, and getting the best from our lives that we have here.

Getting as much from this life on earth as we can, because even Christians, even religious people, have the sneaking suspicion in the back of their minds that what we have here now, we're not going to have again.

[13 : 25] So let's enjoy it while we can. We agree, you see, with Ecclesiastes' conclusion here. To live the best life we can now.

And that's why typically we do, just like he says, focus on having a comfortable and happy life as much as we can. Because we do the same calculation that Ecclesiastes does.

We better make the most of it while it lasts. And yet there's one thing that Ecclesiastes, for all his wisdom, the wisest person who has ever lived, one thing that he never considered, one thing that throws a huge spanner in his conclusion and his calculations about how best to spend your life.

And to be fair, it's something that we couldn't have expected even him to consider, because it's something so crazy, so outlandish, that not even Jesus' own disciples believed it until it happened.

And that is the simple but profound truth of resurrection. The reality of resurrection.

[14 : 46] I'm not going to heaven when you die. That's not what I'm talking about. But the reality of physical, material resurrection from the dead on this planet.

Something that, if a person really believes, changes everything for them. Changes how you live and what you live for.

And that's where I want us to conclude this morning, is to consider how resurrection changes this view that Ecclesiastes and the rest of us typically have on life.

How it changes everything. And in 1 Corinthians 15, that's where I want us to go now, that's one of the greatest New Testament passages teaching about this reality of resurrection.

And Paul the Apostle is making the point that the resurrection of Jesus, Christ, from the dead, from the grave, on this planet, right?

[15 : 54] Just remind you what that means. Jesus was dead. His heart stopped. He was dead for a number of days. And then his heart started again.

And then after he died, his body came back to life on this planet. It happened. You can go to the place that it happened. It happened in history. It happened in this world.

And Paul is here making the point that the resurrection of Jesus, which promises the same kind of resurrection of all those who are united to him, all those who are truly his people through faith, how that fundamentally changes the life of a person who really believes it.

Because here's the thing, the Corinthian Christians who he was writing to, they were Christians, they believed the gospel, but they didn't yet believe the resurrection. So they didn't actually fully believe the true gospel.

They were Christians, but they didn't yet believe the resurrection. They believed in an afterlife as most people in the Greco-Roman world in the first century did. That we've got this immortal soul that flies away and goes to another dimension.

[17 : 04] But they really struggled to believe in Paul's talk about a resurrection on earth. And so Paul writes them in this chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, and basically says, belief in physical, material resurrection is actually central to being a true Christian.

I'm going to say that again, and that's the point Paul's making in 1 Corinthians 15. Belief in a physical, material resurrection on earth is central to being a true Christian.

Is that a belief that you have? Yes, you just said it a few moments ago in the Apostles' Creed that you believe in the resurrection of the body.

But do you really believe that? Because if you do, it will change your life. If you don't believe it, you will just live as Ecclesiastes says.

And that's how you can tell whether you truly believe in physical resurrection or not. Because if you don't, this is how you will live. 1 Corinthians 15, 32. If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

[18 : 14] Exactly what Ecclesiastes concluded, right? Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Focus primarily on just living the best life you can. Now that's what you will do if you don't truly believe in resurrection.

But if you do, if you believe that Jesus Christ really in history rose from the dead and that if you are His, if He is your Lord and you've trusted in Him for the forgiveness of your sins that He earned on the cross, that you too will rise just as He did on this earth, physically, after you die, if you believe that.

It will change how you live because primarily it will break you out of the under the sun pattern of having to live your best life now. And it will free you to live for far more important things.

even if it's not the best life you can have under the sun. And that's why He says in 1 Corinthians 15 why He has given up so much of the comforts of His life.

Did you notice that in the passage read earlier? Let me just point out some of the verses. 1 Corinthians 15 30 to 32. And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?

[19 : 29] He's talking about the apostles, the evangelists who were sharing the gospel. I die every day. I mean that brothers. Just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained?

See what he's saying? He's saying if resurrection is not real, brothers and sisters, I may as well have lived a comfortable life. And if it's not real, you may as well make that your priority too.

I didn't do all that, Paul says, because I had some airy fairy hope in my soul going to heaven one day. No, I did all that because I have a solid and firm hope in the reality of resurrection on this earth.

And it's because of that solid hope that Paul was changed, that all true believers in Christ will be changed slowly but surely. They will live for greater things than life on this earth.

And it's why he closes his whole chapter with these words. Let me read from 1 Corinthians 15 from verse 54. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, he's talking about the replacement of the physical and temporary nature of our flesh that ages with something that doesn't.

[20 : 50] With a physical, just as physical, just as material body that doesn't age and doesn't perish. when the perishable is clothed with the imperishable and mortal with immortality, then the saying that has been written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is His closing statement. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

It is not meaningless. And it's fascinating. What are you saying there? When you compare it to how Ecclesiastes concludes, right?

In Ecclesiastes 9. So Ecclesiastes basically concludes, you should make the most of your life now even though it is all in vain. You may as well still make the most of your life now.

[22 : 04] Paul says, all the more you should make the most of your life now because it's not in vain. And so, the gospel that we read in the New Testament of resurrection and salvation doesn't contradict Ecclesiastes' conclusion.

It intensifies it. Do you see that? So Ecclesiastes is saying, listen, you should, even though it's all in vain, you should still not waste your time here.

Paul is saying, because it's not in vain, you should definitely not waste your time here but you can actually use it for things that matter. you should make the most of your life now.

More so, but making the most of your life, making the most of your time on this earth is different. It looks different if you're a Christian. For someone who believes in the resurrection, making the most of your time now is not about living the best, most comfortable life you can, but living a life that matters for eternity.

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

[23 : 15] You know what this verse says? He's writing to ordinary Christians, everyday ordinary Christians and he says, give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. In other words, ordinary Christians have been given the work of the Lord to do.

Every Christian is called to the work of the Lord, not just people who preach full-time or in full-time missionary work. Every Christian, even if you've got another job, has been called to the work of the Lord.

Jesus has given every Christian work to do that counts for eternity. He's given us each something to do that is going to count for eternity. Are you doing it yet?

Not, are you on the church roster? That's not what I'm asking. But are you living a life daily for Jesus and for His kingdom on this earth where He has placed you?

Are you finding ways, as we looked at in our growth group this last week, to bring the truth of the gospel into the lives of the people that God has put around you, into the world around you, while you still can?

[24 : 25] that is the challenge. If you believe in the resurrection, that is what you will more and more in your life be focused on doing. While you are less and less focused on living a comfortable life and more and more focused on living a meaningful life because Jesus has given you work to do that lasts.

are you doing it? In closing, I thought it would be a good idea to get that deathclock.org little reminder window on my computer but not for my own but for the people around me.

The people I know who are not Christians, who do not yet believe in Christ, who have not had their sins forgiven. People maybe that God has placed in your life.

Family members, work colleagues, people at school. Just imagine having a death clock for each of them. Imagine that death clock is hovering on the top of their heads and you can see it as they're walking around.

You can see the hours they've got left. Well, you know what that would do? It would cause you to not waste your time on earth.

[25 : 45] But if we had that death clock hovering around our friends and our family members every day and we were reminded that their life is terminal, that they're not going to be here forever, well then we would also.

And I pray that we will give ourselves fully to the work Jesus has given us to do while we can still do it. Let's pray. Oh Lord, this reminder of the inevitability of death is something we don't want to hear and yet we must.

And that's why you've put it here in your word. It is so important for us to remember this and so we thank you for this reminder but we also thank you for the great amazing comfort that the gospel gives us in the face of death, that Jesus has conquered death through resurrection, that we don't have to despair and that we don't even have to try to just live comfortable lives.

We can do something that matters and Lord help us to do that. Help us to leave this place seeking to do the work you've given us. And so help us to remember that that work that we do for you is not in vain.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.