

The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 8:1 - 9:12

Who is like the wise?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom makes his face shine,

and the hardness of his face is changed.

² I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. ³ Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. ⁴ For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" ⁵ Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. ⁶ For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. ⁷ For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? ⁸ No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. ⁹ All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

¹⁰ Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.

¹¹ Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. ¹² Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. ¹³ But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

¹⁴ There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. ¹⁵ And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

¹⁶ When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, ¹⁷ then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.

However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

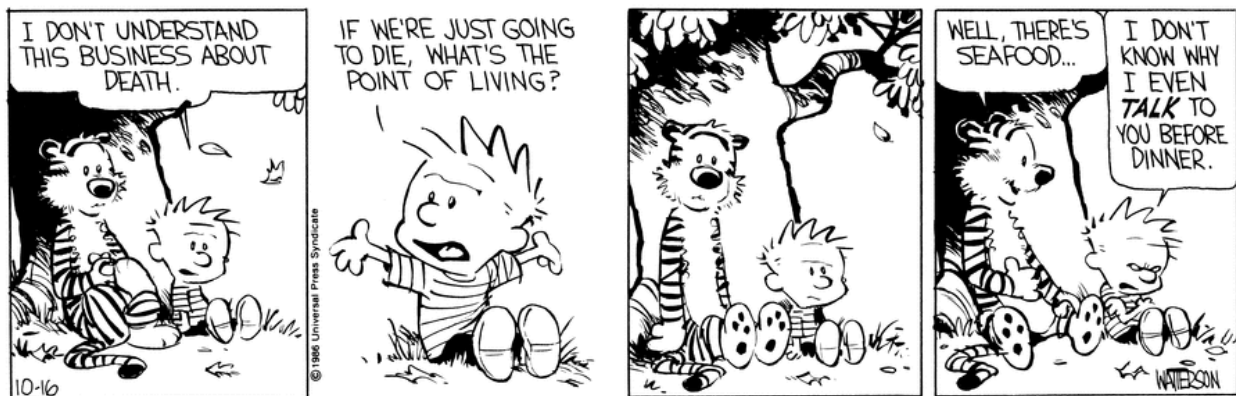
9 But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. ² It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, 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. ³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. 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. ⁴ But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 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. ⁶ 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.

⁷ Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

⁸ Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

⁹ Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

¹¹ Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. ¹² For man does not know his time. 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.



“In the created world, you can only truly enjoy what you do not worship. The man who makes sex his god, and who worships it, discovers that actually what is normal, pleasurable, soon becomes inadequate, not enough, and he becomes chained to a path whereby he begins to enjoy only perversion - which of course is no enjoyment. The woman who makes her family her god and who worships her children discovers that they fail her and disappoint her and do not achieve all that she wanted them to achieve, and so she is left empty and unfulfilled... When you worship God’s gifts, they will never ever deliver what they promise and instead will leave you empty and broken...

But when we worship God and trust him and love him and walk with him...what we discover is that God is like the host who welcomes us into his kingdom and to the most lavish of banquets for us to enjoy.”

- David Gibson

Outline:

I. 8:1-9 Wisdom for Relating to the Government

II. 8:10-17 Righteousness in a Fallen World

III. 9:1-12 How to Respond to the Ever-Present Reality of Death (Again)

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What strategies do you tend to use to try to control the deep and profound uncertainties of life?
- 2) How can we have joy in the midst of a fallen world?
- 3) Why does Jesus’ victory over death give us “strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow?”