

Perspective

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[0 : 00] Well folks, good morning. My name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here and the joy of opening up that passage to us and helping us think a little bit more about it over the next little while.

So it would be really helpful if you have that passage open in front of you, but a little bit of a history test. Well, I was going to say, do you know who this person is on the...

Do you know who this person is on the... Do you want me to use this? Yeah, okay, that's fine. I was going to say, do you know who this is? But I put the name up, so that's a bit... I've kind of shot myself in the foot with that one.

But in 1952, this is Francine Chadwick, and she was the first woman to attempt to swim from the coast of California to the Catalina Island.

And I may be thinking, well, that's not really that impressive, is it? But that's actually a 26-mile swim in cold, shark-infested waters.

[0 : 55] My worst nightmare. I have a phobia of sharks. And she swam the treacherous journey with a team of small boats around her to help in case of an emergency.

And 15 hours into her swim, a thick fog descended as she was swimming. And it completely knocked her confidence. She couldn't see a thing in front of her. As if swimming in the open ocean with sharks wasn't enough.

Now she couldn't even see. Legs and arms cramping up. She turned to her mother who was in one of the boats and said, I can't go on anymore. But she did for one more hour.

But with no visible end in sight, with no light at the end of the tunnel, she decided to stop and was pulled into one of the boats. It wasn't the cold water or the frosty air.

Nor was it swimming with sharks at her feet which stopped her swimming. But she couldn't see the end. She didn't have the perspective she needed. And as she was pulled into that boat, her mother turned to her and said, you had less than a mile left.

[2 : 05] So you imagine the frustration she felt. She just swam over 25 miles to stop just short of her goal.

But two months later, she made a second attempt to swim the same stretch of open water. And again, that fog set in which clouded her vision. But she pushed through and became the first woman to swim that 26 mile stretch.

She was asked later on in an interview, what changed? Why did you manage this time but you didn't previously? And she said that she kept an image of the shoreline in her mind which kept her through.

She knew the destination which gave her perspective in her swim. She was able to push through the pain because she knew where she was going. She knew what she was to expect.

Yes, it would be difficult. Yes, it would be painful. And going through that horrible fog again but with her end destination in mind, she managed.

[3 : 11] And that is what we're going to be thinking a little bit about this morning in Ecclesiastes chapter 9. Perspective. Maybe after reading that passage you thought, well, there is no perspective.

There is no hope. This is meaningless. And so the thick fog descends on Ecclesiastes chapter 9. And we dive in.

This morning we're going to be in the middle of that fog. We're going to find ourselves in a place of confusion, doubt, pain.

But we're also going to see that there's hope. We're going to hear truths that cut to the very core and expose the thing we hate most.

Death. But we'll be instructed that even in the face of death, even in the bleak world and fog that we live in under the sun, then we are to look above the sun.

[4 : 13] Look to God. And then and only then will we have perspective that carries us through this life. So the teacher is telling us to have perspective in light of death.

And there is hope. There is joy because we know the end goal. We know the destination that awaits us. So let's dive into Ecclesiastes chapter 9 and we'll see the certainty of death, but also the blessing of life.

So the first thing we see is the certainty of death in verses 1 to 6 and 11 to 12, the certainty of death. Now, maybe you're sitting there thinking, well, Alistair, we really don't need a reminder that death is coming.

We know it to be true. And maybe that is the case. But have you ever noticed how we try to escape or forget about death all the time?

We hide cemeteries behind big walls so that no one can see. Scientists try to prolong our lives. Cosmetic companies say if you take these supplements, you'll live longer.

[5 : 20] And even when someone has died, people rarely actually say they've died. You'll hear at some funerals that the person has, that they continue to live on in our hearts and minds.

Or that their spirit is still wandering the earth. Now, these are concepts that we've come up with to make death just that little bit easier because we hate it, don't we?

And that's because we weren't meant to die. We were created for life. But now, since sin entered the world and corrupted the whole of humanity, death is certain.

That is what the teacher says. Look with me in verse 2. 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.

Now, the teacher isn't saying that both the righteous and the wicked go to the same place. But the same destiny of death awaits them both. The righteous are those people who, in verse 1, are right with God.

[6 : 37] Those who praise and worship Him and live their lives according to His word. The wicked are those who reject God and reject His plan for humanity.

Death awaits every single living person, whether they are a Christian or not a Christian. And just in case there's any doubt left in our minds, the teacher repeats that in verse 3.

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun. The same destiny overtakes all. Death is certain. We cannot stop it.

We are not in control. Just like we cannot stop the sun from setting. We cannot stop the seasons from coming at their allotted time or the clock from ticking as the hours and weeks and months go by.

No matter how hard we run or how hard we try, death will come to us all. Death is the end for every human being because the sin and evil that causes humanity to reject God.

[7 : 59] We see that coming into the world in Genesis 3. Every human heart is sinful, corrupt, broken, full of evil, the teacher says.

And therefore, death is the result. That is the consequence of a world rejecting God. That is the fog that overshadows our lives here under the sun.

Whether we're rich and we live in a mansion or whether we're poor and we live under a bridge, death is our end. And look at the thickness of this fog in verses 5 and 6.

The dead know nothing. They have no further reward. Even their names are forgotten. Their emotions have vanished. And they will never again take part in anything under the sun.

This is real life, isn't it? This is the life that we know. And that is the heart-wrenching truth of the finality of death.

[9 : 00] We probably all know the names of our grandparents. But do we know the names of our great-grandparents or our great-great-grandparents or our great-great-great-grandparents? Probably not.

Why? Because that's life under the sun. Once it's gone, it's gone. It's gone. Never to be remembered, but lost in the horrible repetition of death after death after death.

That is why the teacher says, look in verse 4, that those who are alive have hope. For the living, there is still time to be made right with God.

There is still time to trust Him and walk in obedience with His ways. For the living, there is time to repent of their rejection of God and turn to Him. So let me ask you this morning, where do you stand before God?

That is the most important question you will ever answer in your life. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us there are two certainties, death and judgment.

[10:10] And death awaits everyone. And the Bible makes it clear that those who reject God and ignore Him will be rejected on that day of judgment. And will suffer the consequences of their sin and fullness of evil in hell.

But those who turn to the Lord will be saved from that judgment. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus that we will gather and celebrate later on in our service. That is the most important thing about being a Christian.

Because the death and resurrection of Jesus is the very reason that we don't have to fear judgment. Because Jesus took the punishment that we deserve.

So where do you stand before God this morning? And the teacher ends this small section of the book with a certainty of death in verses 11 and 12.

Verse 11 he speaks about the uncertainty of life. And in verse 12 the unexpected timing of death. Now we'd expect racing to be for fast runners, right?

[11:19] I'm not going to go up against Usain Bolt and stand a chance. I can barely run a 5k in under half an hour. Or we'd expect the strong man to win a fight. Or those who are wise and brilliant to be the ones who gain wealth, wouldn't we?

But the teacher says in verse 11 that time and chance happen to them all. In this life, under the sun, life doesn't always work out the way we think it should.

Or the way we think it might. Many unexpected things happen. But then in verse 12, we don't know when. We don't know how we will die, but we will.

Look at the language that the teacher uses in verse 12. Death catches, it takes, and it traps people. Like a fish happily swimming upstream is caught in a net and eaten.

Or like a bird that is caught to be taken to a zoo. That is how death traps people. So the teacher says, listen up.

[12:25] In life under the sun, we can all be certain of death. And we all know that this is true. Many of us in the past few years, months, or even weeks, have felt the sting of this reality.

It hurts. These are painful truths. But we have a Christian community in the church who are called to gather around, love, and care for each other.

Do not face the certainty of death without hope. But also do not face it alone. The hope is in verse 4.

The living have hope. Our hope is in Jesus, the one who said, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, and even though they die.

And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. There is no other hope that you can face death with other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The second thing we see in this passage is the blessing of life in verses 7 to 10.

[13:38] The blessing of life. So in verse 7, the teacher is explaining what that God has given gifts for all of humanity to enjoy. Read with me.

He says, Go eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. Now he isn't saying go home and sulk about how difficult life is under the sun, but he is saying go out and enjoy it.

Enjoy all the things that God has created and given to mankind. And do it with gladness and a joyful heart. Now I'm not what you'd describe as a foodie, someone who loves food and is very interested in getting loads of good food, but I do enjoy a good meal, as you will probably see.

And the teacher says, it's okay. Enjoy it. That is God's gift to mankind. That's what he's saying in verse 8 with being clothed in white and anointing your head with oil.

Those are things that people did as they prepared for festivals or celebrations. This sounds a bit strange to us, but basically what he's saying is, go put on your nicest suit.

[14:58] Go put on your nicest dress and go for that meal. Go enjoy it. Enjoy and prepare for the party. Now we need to read Ecclesiastes and sit in the place that the teacher describes under the sun.

We need to feel the pain and difficulties of life that he brings to the surface. But we also need to take joy in the good things that he brings out, like he does in these verses.

He isn't telling us to overindulge in life or try to find satisfaction or distraction in the things of this world, but he's saying enjoy them. Enjoy your food, parties, relationships with friends and families, married couples.

Enjoy each other. They are gifts from God. We are allowed to have fun and enjoy the things that God has given us in accordance with his will. People can be ashamed of or feel guilty of big purchases that they've made because maybe they worry that people think or question if they're doing enough for God.

Yes, we must be wise and sacrificial in our giving and in how we steward our lives so that in everything we do we glorify God, but we're also to enjoy. Verse 8, God has already approved what you do.

[16:23] Now this isn't a blanket endorsement of everything that humans do. God doesn't approve of the wickedness of humanity, but he has given good gifts, good things to use in such a way that he gets all the glory.

If we live in a healthy fear of the Lord, if we recognize him as God and the giver, then we will enjoy the gifts all the more and thank him for them daily.

And if we do not live this way, then the temptation is to seek satisfaction and distraction in the gifts and not enjoy the giver. The teacher then turns to work in verse 10.

And he says, Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might. For in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

So the teacher ends this bit about the blessings of life with that sober reminder that our days are numbered. And that shouldn't lead us to laziness.

[17:32] We're to put our hands to work. Now this principle applies to our paid and volunteer work, our work in the home, in church, and our general work for God.

Everything we do, we should do to the best of our ability because we're doing it for him. And all of this should be done in light of death with that perspective in mind that every single day that passes, we are one day closer to the end.

Some have suggested that the end of verse 10, the teacher is denying the afterlife and saying that there's nothing after death. But in this passage, the teacher isn't trying to convince us or answer our questions about what does or doesn't happen after death.

He's giving us the perspective that we all need. It's telling us that death is on its way. Therefore, enjoy life. But most importantly, you're still alive.

You still have hope. Think back to verse 4. Anyone who is among the living has hope. Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion.

[18:44] There is still hope. You can be absolutely down and out. You can feel as if you are crushed, weak. That is why he uses the illustration of a dog, something small and lowly in life.

But that dog is far better off than a dead, strong lion because there's still hope. Where do you have your hope?

As we sit here this morning, some of us will be in those thick, fog, Ecclesiastes moments where you're looking at life and you're almost shouting at the top of your lungs, it's meaningless.

As you feel the pain of deteriorating health. As you feel the sting of family breakdowns.

Maybe you're struggling with your mental health and you feel that there's no light at the end of the tunnel. But friends, let me tell you that whether you're on the mountaintop and life is great or whether you are in the valley of despair and pain, there is still hope.

[19:58] Your hope is not built in this life. It is built on the fact that death is coming. And if anything, friends, death is just the beginning. We have hope because of the final words of Jesus on the cross.

It is finished. That is how as Christians, we can read about the certainty of death and have perspective in life and see the blessings of life and have perspective because death is not the end.

And this means that whilst you're still alive, you can put your trust in Jesus and have life. Yes, your body will die. But you will go on to live eternity with the one who paid the price for you to live.

Jesus died the death that we deserve, which means that we can have life and life to the full. As a Christian this morning, take assurance in the truth that despite how difficult your life may be, despite how thick the fog can get, nothing, absolutely nothing, can detract from the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross as he declared victory over death and sin.

And he has provided forgiveness and reconciliation with God. That is the hope that you cling to.
[21 : 32] That is the perspective which helps you go through the fog of life. And if you're not a Christian, and you want that same hope, speak to and pray with somebody today because it is available for you too.

It is finished, Jesus said. That is where our hope is. Death has no hold on us because Jesus made it possible for us to be made right with God.

God. This life is the journey to that final destination. That's the perspective that gets us through the thick fog of life.

So how is your perspective this morning? Think back with me to Florence Chadwick. As she made that second attempt at her 26 mile swim.

If she didn't know what was awaiting her and she didn't picture the shoreline as she swam through that fog, she would have been beaten again. But her perspective changed because she knew what was coming.

[22 : 45] Death is coming our way. But take an eternal perspective and listen to Jesus and put your trust in him and he gives you hope because his work is completed on the cross.

Are you putting your trust and hope in him? Or are you burying your head in the sand and wishing that death wasn't true? The teacher says death is coming.

Jesus says you do not need to worry about that because I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Do you believe this? If we put our trust in Jesus this morning then the cry of our hearts even in the difficulties of life and it is tough is Jesus paid it all.

All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain but he washed it white as snow. That is where we build our hope.

[23 : 56] Upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Let's pray together. Just in the quietness of your heart I would like you to think and respond to God in your own way and ask that very important question where is my hope this morning?

Father many of us live and are currently in those Ecclesiastes moments. as we are surrounded by difficult situations which break our heart Father help us run to you and cling to the only hope which can carry us through to that death that day where we breathe our last in this life.

And help us know that for those who put their trust in you that death is just the beginning and a glorious glorious future awaits us because you paid it all.

Jesus we thank you so much and God we thank you that you are gracious to send your son and spirit we thank you that you are in us and helping us understand that truth every single day more and more.

we ask that we would live out this hope for your glory and in the power and precious name of your son Jesus Christ we pray Amen.

[25 : 41] Amen. Amen.