

## **Eat Your Bread in Happiness and Drink Your Wine with a Cheerful Heart**

Ecclesiastes 9

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, November 14, 2021

I was going to preach on Noah's Ark this morning, but I wasn't prepared. So I think I'll just stick with the plan. But I do want to give you one more announcement today before we begin our sermon. And that is to remind you that this is not the only time we meet together as a church. Because we do it all throughout the week as well. We really enjoy our time together on Sunday mornings, it's really a privilege to do this, and don't ever want to take away from that. But the work of the church doesn't stop here because it continues once we leave this place. For example, today, several of our people are getting together in what are known as Care Groups. They are small group Bible studies that meet every other week for fellowship and accountability. I just found out the home that we're meeting in the driveway is not finished yet and so that'll be an adventure. But each group is led by an elder and its purpose is to discuss the sermon and just answer any questions you have about that and interact with you on that level. Also, on Saturday mornings, we have a men's Bible study that meets at the home of David Scott to go through the Bible, one book at a time. The way it works is we'll read the book of Genesis one week and talk about that and then the next week we do the book of Exodus and talk about that and it goes all the way through the Scriptures from beginning to end. We just did Joshua yesterday, very fascinating book. Also our women are studying the book of Proverbs. They're looking at Solomon's Great Book of Wisdom on weeknights and weekday mornings. But all this is to say the church doesn't meet just once a week. We do it far more often than that, because the Bible is that important to us. You know, I looked it up the other day. And I found that there are more than 1000 pages in my Bible, and they're double columned, which means there's no way you can get through all that on a Sunday. It's just impossible. And so you have to find other opportunities for study. And that's what these groups are all about. So please join one of those if you can. A lot of our people in our church would tell you that they have been a real blessing in their lives. We would love to have you be a part of that with us.

To begin the sermon, please open your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes. While we're talking about the Bible as a whole, we could add that this is a very odd book because much of what it says is wrong. If you remember Solomon is writing about the mistakes he's made in life. He's telling you about his sins and so a lot of stuff he says in here is from a negative angle. He's telling you not to repeat his mistakes. And if you look in chapter one verse one with me, just to show you, this starts off this way: Solomon says, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher, 'Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.' Then if you would look in chapter nine, this is our text for today. In chapter nine, he writes:

For I've 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.

It's the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and 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's afraid to swear. 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. For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely alive dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know they will die; but the dead do not do anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. 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.

Go then, eat your bread and happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. 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.

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. 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. 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.

And I will stop the reading there before your head explodes. As you can tell, just by reading Ecclesiastes that it is a hard book to study. It's not easy to understand because Solomon says things like this. And he begins it by saying all is vanity as we just read. He doesn't mean that literally, he's not saying life is vain in its entirety. He's just saying it's vain if you live it like he did. Because he lived in in sin. Just explain why this is a difficult book to read. The Book of Ecclesiastes falls into a section of the Old Testament that's known as the poetic section because that's what it is. It's just a long poem in the Bible. It's a piece of writing written in an artistic manner that it portrays a deeper lesson. And the lesson is that everything is meaningless if you do it without God. Everything is vain if you take God out of the picture. So many people today are wondering why their life seems so empty. Well, it's empty because you turn your back on the Lord. That's why.

And that's what Solomon did. He pursued several sins in this book, like lust and greed, because his appetite was insatiable in here. If you've followed with us in this series, he consumed everything you would find. In fact, at one point even says, "All that my eyes desired, I did not refuse them." That reminds me of taking my kids to the cereal aisle at Shoppers Drug Mart and they want to pull them all down off the shelf. That's how we live. And when that didn't work, he said he turned to other sins like selfishness and pride because he lived entirely for himself. He just looked out for number one. This is a problem in our world today, too. They've done studies on this and found that nearly half of all adults in North America feel lonely right now. It's not hard to understand why because they're selfish, living entirely for themselves. So everyone's treating them that way. It's what Solomon did. And he said that it left him feeling miserable.

Solomon says this in 9:7...this is one of the conclusions he draws in the book. He says this: "Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works." I'll say a few words about that in a moment. But the key word in the passage is the word happiness. It's the Hebrew word *simchah*, which refers to happiness, or joy, or anything that makes you smile. Because Solomon says that this is the conclusion he's come to at the end of all his sin: none of that stuff can make you happy. None of that stuff can make you smile. Not eternally, because only God can do that. Why? Because God has already approved of your works. That means God has accepted them. He's received you if you come to Him, and faith in the thought of it should make you glad. It should make you put all that sin on the shelf for a moment and stop living for things that don't really matter. Because if you look in verse one of chapter nine, he says this, "Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him." And that means since anything awaits you, since the future is not certain you shouldn't sit around wallowing about it. You need to go out and live your life. You need to go enjoy things because God is on your side, he's for you, not against you. God is your friend, not your enemy. So you need

to act like it now. Verse two says it is the same for all. And that means whether you're white or black, rich or poor life is the same for everybody. It's just as unstable for the person next door as it is for you. So you need to make the most of it while you had the chance. Because you are saved, you are a child of God. The interesting thing about Ecclesiastes is that he was a believer all throughout the book, but he just goes back and forth between his commitment to God and his commitment to sin. And at the end of it, he says, "Sin has nothing to offer you that God doesn't have something better, Amen? And so you need to live for that. It may surprise you to hear Solomon say something so positive here, because Ecclesiastes is not a positive book, and it's a very gloomy thing. In fact, some have called it the most depressing book in the Bible. But he is making a transition from talking about the problem of vanity to talking about the solution. And the solution is that yes, life is vain. And yes, it's gloomy. And yes, it's bad at times, but you can get through it if you remember that God is in control. He's sovereign over this crazy life. And you can find joy in that.

You know, this is something we don't talk about a lot as a church, but the Bible says over and over again, that you should be happy because you have a God like this. Other people don't have this but you do. Other religions don't have a God who loves them, you have that. And it should bring a smile to your face. I've told you guys before about the frozen chosen baptize and vinegar, you know, they go around miserable all the time. That's not how God wants you to live, as it says in the book of Ecclesiastes of all places. In fact, just to put this in perspective, according to some scholars, there are more than 2000 references to joy in the Bible. More than 2000 in the Hebrew language has 18 different words to describe the concept which makes Hebrew the happiest language in the world. And it makes the Bible the happiest book. It's a concept that's found so often that the authors had to literally create new words to describe it because one wasn't enough.

Just to give a few examples of this from the Old Testament, because the Old Testament is not a place we often go to for joy. But just to show you what Solomon's describing here. The Jews were commanded to be happy during several of their feast days, like the Feast of Tabernacles. So there it says, "You shall perform this holy day, by rejoicing before the Lord seven days." That's interesting, because apparently a few minutes weren't enough to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. You know, a few hours on a Sunday morning weren't enough to do it. They had to take an entire week. And rejoice and celebrate from one Sabbath to the other be like a parent telling their kids next week, I don't want you to do anything but celebrate. Take the whole time off. The Book of Deuteronomy also says they were commanded to rejoice when they entered the promised land. There it says you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat them in the Promised Land. And while you do so, you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. In other words, the sacrifices were not supposed to be a drag to them, they weren't supposed to be boring. They were supposed to be exciting because it reminded you that your sins were gone. When you kill that animal, it reminded you that they were forgiven, that's a happy thing. We often look at the Old Testament sacrifices as if they were very solemn. And they were very solemn because something is dying over there. But they were supposed to radiate hope as well. Psalm five says that the Jews were to do the same thing when they sang. They weren't supposed to mouth the words and sing in a sullen manner. They were supposed to do that with joy. Isaiah 52 says they were supposed to have joy as they remembered their history. Look back on what God had done for them and rejoice. Psalm 119 says that about God's Word, the book of Zephaniah says they were to do this as they thought of the Messiah. But the point is that the Jews were not supposed to be a gloomy people. They weren't supposed to be miserable, because God had called them to so much more. And it's the same way for us. I mean, if that was that way before the Messiah, how much more after him. If you're in Christ, God has done wondrous things for you. He's cast your sins as far as east is from the west. And the thought of that should keep you from being so depressed.

This one is so important because people forget this today. Don't worry, let's be honest, we're often not very joyful in the Christian life. We're so depressed. We're sad, not happy. Because you ask people throughout the week, you know, how was your week and they say bad. And you ask them how was your job and they say bad. You ask them How are your kids? They say bad. Real bad. Real, real, real bad. You ask them How is your health? Bad. How is your stamp collection? Bad. How is your pet frog? Bad. It's all bad. Bad, bad, bad, bad, bad. Because of the news, right? Because the Coronavirus is throwing us all out of whack or, or it's bad because of their sin. They feel bad because they messed up this weekend and gave into temptation. It's bad because they can't find any hope. But they say that because they forget what the Bible is saying. The Bible says yes, you have sinned. It says yes, the world is bad. Matter of fact, the Bible says it's worse than you think it is. But if you're in Christ, it's been nailed to the cross. The badness has been taken away from you, and you need to respond to that with joy. He should change your perspective on things. It always amazes me how you can take two people and put them in the same set of circumstances and one is so happy. The other one is so sad. It's a perspective issue. It's not an issue of the circumstances. Some people like the rain outside. They're sitting in this side of the room so you can go talk to him, a handful of them about your perspective and his book on happiness. Randy Alcorn says this: He says, "It is a fact that those who know they're favored by God are joyful about it. And those who know that God's favor is eternal can rest in Him when every outward circumstance argues against it. Nowhere in Scripture is happiness or joy reserved for when life goes our way. Life's dramas constantly rob us of joy, but the circumstances are not as big as God is. For while we still live in a foreign world, we can enjoy it to the best of our ability, if we trust in Christ, and we can praise Him for it and enjoy it. And he's right. Your salvation was not given to you. So you would despair. He was given to you so you would enjoy life. So you can praise God for it, no matter the circumstances. You know, if you think about it, it's so interesting that Solomon puts this in here in the book, because Ecclesiastes does not have a very good outlook on the world does it? It's a pretty ugly thing. Solomon doesn't pull any punches in this book. But he puts it in here to remind you that even in a world like this, the light of the gospel can shine through. Even in a world that's as bad as the book of Ecclesiastes paints it to be. You can get through it if you put your faith in God. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

We have four reasons to be joyful in this passage. That's our sermon for today. It's very fitting, because it's really cloudy outside, but you're in here. We can have joy in the Lord even when the weather's bad. If it's anything a Christian should be able to do, it's this: we should be able to enjoy life. We should be able to appreciate it in light of what all God has done for us. This is so important because I meet people all the time who say they just want things to go back to normal again, because then they would be happy. They just want them to return to the way they were before the Coronavirus started because then their problems would go away. But that's not true, because you had problems before that. You weren't happy before that either, right? Happiness is not found in circumstances it can only be found in the Lord. And that's what Solomon tells us in this passage...to be joyful in here.

The first reason you need to be joyful is because you're in the hands of God. Something we just talked about, but we're going to say a little more. Because the first reason to be joyful in here is you need to do it because you're in the hands of God, which means your life is under His control. Isn't that a blessed thought and a wonderful thing? We are not in the control of things outside in the world. It's under His control. If you read on in verse one, he says "For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it, that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hands of God. Man does not know where there will be love or hatred, anything awaits them. It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous, and one for the wicked.

We'll stop the reading there. You can tell by looking just at this first part of the chapter that Solomon begins this with a phrase that's very familiar to us because he says, "I have taken all of this to my heart." That means I've looked into all this. I've given it a thorough examination, all these issues in the world, all the badness that's out there and this is the conclusion I've come to and that is that the righteous men and wicked, wise men and their deeds are in the hands of God. That means you don't know what's going to happen to you in this life. You have no idea but that's okay because God does. You don't know how things are going to turn out for you. You don't know if it's gonna be good or bad, happy or sad. But God knows all those things. And that's where your joy is found. Verse two says it's the same for all, that there's one fate for the righteous, and one for the wicked; their fates are the same are the same. And that means that whatever category you fall into here, whether you're righteous or bad, clean or unclean, you all end up in the grave. Everybody dies. But our faith is placed in Him.

Ecclesiastes nine has some interpretational difficulties. There's some challenges as you read this, because when he says there's one fate for the righteous and the wicked, he doesn't mean after death, he just means in this life. It doesn't mean that you're going to go to the same place after you die you won't you'll go to want to go to heaven want to go to hell. Solomon just means that both suffer the same fate down here. And he goes on to say this in verse three: "This is an evil in all that's 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. For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. 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."

Now, obviously, there's a lot in that section and we can't get to everything. But let me just say that this has been misinterpreted by some to teach the doctrine of soul sleep, or the idea that your souls don't go to heaven after you die. Instead, it goes to sleep or in an incubation period, until it's woken up by God. 1000 years later Jehovah's Witness teaches that. So do several other cults. But that's not what this is referring to because Solomon is just giving you a basic principle that the time to live is now because tomorrow you'll be dead. And then it'll be too late for a live dog is better than a dead lion. That proverb means it's better to be a living nobody than a dead somebody because you can still do something for God; dead people can't; living people can. He says for the living know they'll die. But the dead do not know anything. For the living, they have a chance to believe, chance to trust in Christ. The dead cannot do that. But his point in all of this, what he's saying, is that this is all okay because it's in the hands of the Lord. As bad as it seems, you don't have to be afraid of death, you don't have to worry about it, because he's the one looking over it, which should bring you joy. What sounds like a gloomy passage, Solomon's message is as positive here, and that is that God is sovereign over the grave. So you don't have to let it bother you so much. You can face it with confidence knowing that God is on the throne. And just to say a little bit about this, again, this is poetry, so there's a little bit of interpretation and work as you're understanding this. But if you take this one statement that there's one fate for the righteous and one for the wicked, in one sense, that's true, right? Because they both die. I have to tell you that you can go to the cemetery here in Chilliwack, you'll see godly people and ungodly people buried there; it doesn't change that. But on the other hand, just look at the difference in their lives because a wicked man is vain, right? His life is meaningless, but a righteous man lives for Christ.

I read a statistic this week that about 31% of all giving in Canada is done by Christians. Which means if you took the church out of Canada, the country would lose about \$127 billion per year in donations, crippling the humanitarian aid. Why do they do that? Why do Christians give and give and give and give? It's because of the

Lord, right? It's because of what he's done for them. That's the difference, or take the statement that as the good man is, so is the sinner in verse two. In one sense, that's true. Nobody can deny that a good man and the sinner both die. But in another sense, their lives are so different because God has saved him. The Lord has defeated death on his behalf and it changes everything for him. But the idea here is it all goes back to God, all this joy and change and peace and hope flows from Him. That's the point of the passage. I've met Christians who were so afraid today because they forget this. They think that the moment they step outside the sky is going to fall in and something terrible is going to happen to them. And Solomon says it won't. Nothing's going to happen to you that's outside the hand of God. The sky is not falling. Sky is not greater than God. If He can defeat death, and He's bigger than any problem you'll ever face.

You know, I read this week, that our English word, "strength," comes from an old word that means "to bind something or twist it together." And when you put into a Christian setting, it means that when my life is bound with Gods, this is what I have. It gives me strength, gives me power. In fact, if you're struggling with joy today, the first thing you need to ask yourself is: "How is my relationship with God? How's my prayer life? How's my Bible study? That's where your hope is found.

The story is told at the time of float ran out of gas at a New Year's Eve parade in Pasadena, California. And the ironic thing about it is that the float had a sign on it that said "Standard Oil Company" because it represented an organization that contain billions of gallons of gas, but they forgot to use them. In France, I'm afraid a lot of Christians are living that way today because you have all that you need in Christ. You have billions of gallons of resources in him. You just need to use it in drive up to the pump and fill up the tank.

Which brings us to another reason to be joy fill in this passage, and that is you need to be joyful because you have bread to eat and work to do. So the first one is you need to be joyful because you're in the hands of God. And I appreciate you guys working through that part of the passage with me because it is a little hard to get through. But what this means is you're ultimately under His control, life and death and all that happens in between them. It's all up to God. That can be easy to forget, because the world is so crazy nowadays, in a lot of people think the devil is in control, not God, but the devil is not in control. One of the Reformers used to say the devil is on a chain, and at the end of the chain is God. He sovereign oversight and because he's the one ruling the world, you need to remember that and it brings us to a second and a third reason why you need to be joyful. And that is because you have bread to eat, and work to do, which means you have plenty to keep you busy in life. You have lots of things to keep you occupied as you go through this crazy world. And if you look in verse seven, this is what he says. He says, "Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved of your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward."

Just to say a few words about this, verse seven of this passage has been called the Book of Ecclesiastes in a nutshell. So if you take the whole book's message and boil it down to one verse, it would be this verse right here: "Go then Eat your bread and happiness, drink your wine with a cheerful heart." The whole message of the book is that your life is a gift from God, it's a present given to you by Him. So don't let it slip away. Don't get to the end of your life and look back like Solomon did and say "I wasted it." When he says "go," then he means don't sit around and stew over all this stuff. Don't sit in your room and say my life is vain. Oh, no, what do I do? Instead, you need to get out of your chair and live. Let the vanity of this life push you in the right direction. Don't let it

push you in the wrong direction. If you notice the word happiness or joy, it's repeated three times in this passage. Because that's the theme of it. Solomon says you need to be happy; you need to enjoy your life because that's why God gave it to you. That's what you're here on this earth to do.

And in order to do that, you can tell Solomon doesn't ask you to do something extravagant here, he doesn't tell you to do something crazy, like go skydiving or go run with the bulls in Barcelona. Although you can do that if you want to just let me pray for you first. But instead, he just says go then eat your bread and happiness. How simple is that? How many of you don't have bread? The idea of eating and drinking here means just enjoy your meals. Don't rush it all the time. Don't throw your food in your face while you head out the door. Give yourself time to slow down every once in a while. To give you some background on this, historians tell us that the Jewish family typically began the day with an early snack. And then they had a light meal somewhere around noon between their chores. But they didn't all sit down together as a family until after sunset when their work was done for the day. I remember when we were there they the same thing for lunch and dinner that they ate for breakfast. You sit down for breakfast and they'd have a salad bar there. I didn't know what to do with that. But in the early days, they broke the good stuff out later in the day. And they would pull out the bread and the wine and the milk and the cheese and the fruits and the vegetables. Sometimes they would put meat in there if the occasion called for it. And Solomon says when you do that, you have to remember that the most important thing on the menu is love, not food. When you sit down with your family, sit down with your friends, you got to remember the most crucial thing is not what you eat but who you eat it with. Because that's what matters to God. Which is something he repeats again in verse eight. When he says let your clothes be white all the time and let not oil be lacking on your head. When you first read that, that sounds very odd. But what Solomon meant is letting your clothes be white. He's referring to the ancient Jewish custom of wearing white clothes on a day of celebration. As we do today, the Jews would wear black clothes to funerals because it symbolizes sadness. They would wear white clothes and put oil and expensive perfume on their head at a wedding or a family reunion to symbolize joy and Solomon says that you need to take time to have joy. You need to take time for events like that in life because if you don't, you're going to go through life and forget it. It'll go by in a flash.

Then he says in verse nine, "Enjoy life with the woman you love all the days of your fleeting life," and that means you need to enjoy your wife to appreciate her. Not just some of your days, but all of your days. Not just every once in a while, but every chance you have, don't just tolerate your wife, but love her, don't live with her or put up with her. Treat her like some guys do, where she's a glorified roommate. You need to really savor the time you have together. Because it says that is your reward. She's God's gift to you.

So is your job. Verse 10 says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." But the idea in this whole section is that you need to be grateful for the simple things in life. You need to appreciate the small things because that's where your joy is found. If you're waiting to have joy in some extravagant thing, if you're waiting for the time, when you get to go skydiving or go run with the bulls or whatever the thing is, it may never happen. But you get to eat every day, you get to go to work every day, you get to celebrate something every day and you have a wife.

You can say it like this, you know, yes, God is sovereign over the big things in life like death, but He's also sovereign over the little things too. He's sovereign over the day by day events of life like your food and your drink and your job. So you need to remember that as well. If you think about it, this would have been a big deal to

Solomon because he had everything you wanted. He had the best job in Israel. He was the king and he had the best wives or the best looking wives because he was a lustful guy. He had the best bread and wine; his table was always full. But he says here it all means nothing if you don't enjoy it. All that food and all that fanfare...there's no point at all. If you don't learn how to appreciate it, so you need to make sure you don't repeat his mistake. This is another issue for us today. But we're all so busy nowadays, right? It's hard to enjoy anything.

I catch myself sometimes responding to people who say, "How was your week, Pastor?" "Busy" is first thing out of my mouth. You guys say it too! You rubbed off on me. I wasn't busy before I came here. You made me busy. And it gets to the point. You just can't enjoy life, can you? I mean, you're running 100 miles an hour all the time; pedal to the metal all day long, which is why I think we buy so much stuff around here. You know, we're heading into the Christmas season in Canada and I looked it up this week and saw last year, Canadians were the third highest spender in the world on Christmas presents. Congratulations, right behind the US and the UK. We spent more money on Christmas than we did on the military last year. So you can fight your invading armies with your Christmas presents, I guess. Because they think it'll make them happy. They think if I just get one more thing, one more present, one more toy. One more, one more, one more, then everything will be fine. And it won't. Solomon says life doesn't work that way. If you think about it, most of these people didn't like the gifts they got last year because you have to look at these things a different way in order to have joy.

If you notice, Solomon tells you to enjoy the woman that you have. He doesn't tell you to enjoy the woman you don't have. He doesn't tell you to enjoy the wife of someone else. Why? Because she is God's gift to you. She's right here in front of you. She's not a figment of your imagination. She's not something in the future. She's in the present. Now, right now.

The same way with your food...we've all gone to the restaurant and ordered something and then looked at the person next to us and say, "Why didn't I get that?" Well, the reality is, you didn't get that, you got this and you need to enjoy it or wait till they go to the washroom and steal their food. Same thing with your job. So many people complain about work. They whine and gripe about it but aren't you grateful that you have a job?

Listen, friends, life is not about the things you don't have. It's about the things you have. It's not about learning to enjoy the gifts that you might get one day if you're lucky. It's about enjoying the gifts that are staring you right in the face. Because if you don't do that, before you know it, life is going to pass by, it's going to be gone and you're going to regret it. If you're always looking, looking, looking for something better, you will never find it. It's not there. The best thing that you have is right here in front of you. In his commentary in the book of Ecclesiastes, David Gibson said this, he said, "If we were to summarize Solomon's argument here, we would do it like this: God wants you to ride a bike, see the Grand Canyon, go to the theater, learn music, visit the sick, care for the dying, cook a meal, feed the hungry, watch a film, read a book, laugh, have friends, play football, run a marathon, snorkel in the ocean, listen to Mozart, call your parents, write a letter, play with your kids, spend some extra money, learn a new language, plant a church, start a new school, speak about Christ, travel to somewhere you've never been before. But whatever you do, don't waste your life on things you can't do. Whatever you do, don't throw it away on the things that aren't there. Learn how to spend your life on the things that are available now. And as you do that, sit back and watch as the Lord brings you joy."

We often tell people in counseling that when you have a problem, count your blessings. In fact, if somebody comes in, sometimes one of the assignments I give them is to go home and write out 20 Blessings in a notebook before you come back to see me and it never fails, it always gives them hope. They have this problem in front of them and they can't see anything else in life. But there are so many other things going on. You have to have that perspective. And it brings us to one more reason why you need to be joyful. Just to review these other ones, the first reason why you need to be joyful is because you are in the hands of God. And secondly, because you have bread to eat and work to do. You have plenty to keep you busy. More than enough blessings to be occupied with. This can be so easy to lose sight of because our world is so materialistic today, but Solomon says you don't need material things to make you happy. You don't need \$100 billion worth of Christmas presents. You just need the simple things.

And it brings us to one more reason to be joyful. You need to be joyful because life is unpredictable at times. This one really ties it all together. But a fourth reason you need to be joyful is because life is so unpredictable, which means you don't know how it's going to turn out. You don't know where it's going to take you, so you need to have joy in it while you still have the chance. And if you look in verse 11, this is what he says, "I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift in 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. 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."

Now, to be honest, like a lot of things that we've read so far, this doesn't sound too joyful either, but it actually is. And when Solomon says the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, he's saying that the best man doesn't always win. You would think if you're in a race, you want to get behind the swift guy, he's going to win or the if you're in a battle, you want to get behind a warrior, but he says life doesn't always pan out that way. It's also what he means when he says, "Neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability." He's just giving you three examples there to say life can be random at times. And the reason is that for time and chance overtake them all. This phrase "time and chance" sums up what he's saying here, because he says that there are two factors that upset all our endeavors in life and that is time because sometimes you don't have enough of it. Any man in work or any any mom staying home or grandparents spending time with grandkids will tell you that you try and try and try but the clock always runs out on you. You work and work and work and there's just never enough time.

And there's also chance which refers to unforeseen circumstances because sometimes life throws you a curveball. Things come at you that you didn't see coming. And so Solomon says in the remainder of the verse, he says, "Moreover, man does not know his time, like fish caught in a snare so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time," which means that since that's the case, you don't know what you're going to be ensnared by in life. You have no idea. You think life is going to turn out this way but it turns out that way. You think it's going to be fun and exciting and you're going to retire at 62 and live the rest of your life on an island somewhere in Bermuda and you don't, so the solution he comes to is that you need to be happy now and just move on with your life. Don't try to change everything. Don't try to figure it all out, because you can't just leave it up to God. Let him deal with it and move forward. And I was talking to someone about this the other day, he said, "Life is pretty simple at the end of the day, because it goes from tragedy to tragedy; life kind of goes from heartache to heartache. But the heartache doesn't happen all the time. Tragedies don't happen every day. There are long gaps in between them. And that's where life occurs."

Life is lived out in the moments, it goes on when you're going to the grocery store or taking your kids to the mall or sitting in your chair at the office. And your coworker comes up and says, "Hey, Bob, would you like to go to lunch?" That's when life happens. And Solomon is telling you, if you don't remember that, you're going to miss it. The whole thing. If you don't keep that in mind, then life is going to pass you by. And to give you an illustration of this, he tells a story in verse 12 of a small city that was taken over by a great king so that it was in trouble. The city was about to be destroyed and so verse 15 says, "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." In other words, this guy found a way to save the city. He knew a way to deliver it and get the people out, but nobody paid attention to him. And the point is that you shouldn't go through life expecting anything better. As horrible as it sounds, you don't go through your days expecting people to treat you better than this guy. Instead, you just need to enjoy the moments that you have.

This is something if the Coronavirus has taught us anything, it has taught us this, you just go day by day, don't you? Anybody tried to make plans right now and want to pull your hair out? You know, staring into the future is like staring into an empty page on a sheet. Right now we've seen that as a church, we tried this plan, that plan had changed it live day by day, Sunday to Sunday. I'll give you an illustration of this. My wife and I've had the privilege over the past few years to become parents for the first time. Both our kids are in school, ones in second grade the other is in kindergarten. And it's interesting to watch how other parents interact with their kids when they pick them up from school. That's just a fascinating study. Because you see two types of people who do that: and one is always interested in their kids. They can't wait to see him and hug them and talk to them about their day. And then the other ones couldn't care less. They're just so distracted. They have their mind on their phone or on their friends. So when the kid comes out of class, they don't even notice they're there. Solomon says you don't want to go through life like that. You don't want to be a person who ignores their children, because life is about capturing the times like that. It's about learning how to savor them.

Your kids are more important than your job and your phone or anything else going on. And the time to remember that is now. The Westminster catechism, some of you are familiar with it, says, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." And that may one way you enjoy Him is by enjoying His gifts to you. You glorify God and give Him glory forever by having a good time with the world that He's made. And that includes doing it with your children and doing it with your friends and church family and all these things. You can relax and laugh and smile with him, if you remember that they've been given to you by God.

You know, as I was preparing for this sermon, it really struck me how often the people of old talked about this subject. Because they had a lot to say about the joy we should have. As believers, for example, Jonathan Edwards, he's not known as being a man who said a lot about joy, but he mentioned the word joy or happiness more than 4000 times in his sermons. We often think of the Puritans as being a very boring people who went around in black clothes mourning all the time about their sin, but they were consumed with joy. They love to talk about it. John Wesley wrote more than 36 sermons on the topic and Charles Spurgeon preached on it more than 2000 times, which is incredible because Spurgeon had a hard life. He was constantly suffering over things like gout and depression. Yet he said in the midst of it all that this is what his mind always went back to. And that is joy. Because that's what the Christian life is about.

Friends, you've been saved from sin. You've been redeemed, your debt has been paid, the chains are gone, the guilty has been set free. The prodigal has come home. And there's no way to respond to that but with happiness,

joy, bliss, thankfulness to God. Yes, this world is bad. It's terrible at times. But in the midst of that you can still smile if you remember that your God is on the throne. Amen? You know, I was really fascinated by this topic this week. And I came across a story the time a group of missionaries show the Jesus film to some tribesmen in Africa for the first time, and the response was startling is the first movie they had ever seen. So that was interesting. But it was always first time they'd also heard the gospel or seen it on a film. And they cried when Jesus died, they wept over it. In fact, when Judas betrayed Him, they blew blow darts at the screen, the missionaries had to get all the blow darts off the screen in order to keep the movie going. But when he came back from the dead, they began to dance. When he resurrected, they broke out in celebration because they couldn't help themselves. And I tell you that story, friends, because that's the only logical response you should have to salvation. Whether you're in Africa or Canada or somewhere else, it doesn't matter. When you see Jesus rise from the grave, you have to celebrate. You have no other choice. So will you do that today? Will you let the Gospel give you a joyful response? Let me pray that you would.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do come to you this morning, with hearts that are filled with joy, joy, joy over what you have done; joy over what you have given us; joy over how you walk with us through the day by day in life. It's such a pleasant surprise to read something like this in the Old Testament. There's not a person in this room, Lord, that doesn't probably struggle with negative thoughts at times or depressed feelings. And we're in a season in the world where it just feels that way. But as Christians, we have something that can transcend all of that, but it's because of your gift to us. Thank you for being such a God. Thank you for giving us such a Savior that can save us through a time like this. What I pray for those who were here this morning, I don't know where everyone's at on the subject today, but I'm sure there are some who are really struggling with hope. They're really struggling with having a positive outlook on life. And I pray that if they're in Christ, He would draw them back to the cross. And remind them that the cross is a happy message from a joyful God. Lord, if there's any who are lost, and maybe they're depressed because they have no reason to be happy, I pray that you would draw them to Jesus for the first time. But in all these things, Lord, we do want You to be glorified. I pray that you would help us to enjoy the life you've given us. We don't want to miss it. We don't want it to pass by. So we pray for your grace in these things and we pray for your wisdom. And we pray it all in Jesus' name. Amen.