

Your Life: Make It Count

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- [0 : 0 0] We are in the book of Ecclesiastes together. Returning to what feels like home once again.
- Title of my message, Your Life, Make It Count. Now, for those of you who have been with us, you'll know that we've been working our way through chapter 9, verse by verse, rather slowly, more slowly than previous chapters.
- But that's okay as we've put the brakes on to try to really get at some of the marrow, the meat of what's going on here in this passage because it's so instructive, as I mentioned to you a few weeks ago.
- When we come to the end of chapter 8 in Ecclesiastes, we make a big turn. It's like the big hinge for the book of Ecclesiastes. And everything that he says at the end of chapter 8 bleeds into and kind of sets the tone for the rest or the remainder of the book.
- So what I'd like to do is read Ecclesiastes 8, verses 16 and 17 for you so that we can kind of get a little bit of a heartbeat here for what Solomon wants to then tell us in chapter 9.
- [1 : 3 1] Chapter 8, verse 16 reads, When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to seek the task which has been done on the earth, even though one should never sleep day or night, that just simply means that he went at this so hard, so heavy, and with such earnestness that he lost sleep over it.
- He wasn't even allowing sleep to get in the way of this search. And this is what happened. I saw every work of God. And this is what I concluded.
- That man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. That is, the work of God in the lives of people as it concerns adversities and prosperity.
- When you look at different people's lives, whether they're people who are trying to follow God or people who hate God and don't want to have anything to do with them, you see similarities because you see people from both camps that are dealing with troubles in their life.
- You see people from both camps who are enjoying life. So that Solomon looks at this and says, even the people who hate God and don't want to have anything to do with him have things that they enjoy, like their families and their jobs and vacations and all these kinds.
- [2 : 5 5] How does that make sense? And then you look over here in the other camp, with the people who follow the Lord. And a lot of the times they're suffering. And they're doing without.
- And they're being dealt with in just ways. And what's. So he comes to this place and he said, you know what, I looked at all of that and I just came to the conclusion, man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun.
- That is on this earth. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover. And though the wise man should say, oh, well, yeah, well, I know.
- You know, I've got it figured out. He cannot discover. There are mysteries about living this life, whether you're living this life in the Lord with faith in Jesus Christ or not.

There are things about this life, many things that we just can't figure out. That's what Solomon is trying to remind us about as we go deeper into our study in chapter nine.

[4 : 03] He makes it clear that try as you might, you cannot know the full meaning of every difficult, painful, challenging event of your life. You just can't. Now, I want you to hear this next part very, very, very carefully because it can go by you.

And I don't want it to escape you. I want you to hold on to this, friends, that go through this together. Now, hear this carefully. If you allow your mind, your heart to become fixed on all of the whys and the wherefores of these daily events that you experience, then what happens is that you kind of put your place, put yourself in the place God.

And you try to use your own insights and your own understandings to guide you in life so that you're not living by faith. At least not in God.

And this you can do this even as a Christian. When you set your mind in your heart to try to analyze and figure out because here's what you're doing. You're trying to manipulate and control outcomes.

And what you're doing when you do that, when you fixate on these different realities in your life, whether it's because of pain or somebody did you wrong or something's not going the way you think it ought to go.

[5 : 28] And so as a Christian, you're trying to put a God thing on that. And you kind of insert yourself in and you try to just figure it out and work it all out. And the harder you do that and the deeper you go, the more you realize you're not going to figure it out, the harder it is to control.

What you've basically done is put yourself in the position where you're no longer living by faith in God. You're trying to live by your own limited sight. Now we have a problem, right?

All right. Take all of that now and bring that into what we're going to talk about. Solomon puts this right at our feet. If you want a couple of references for everything that I just said, you could go to Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5 through 7.

Be not wise in your own eyes. Do not live by your own understanding. And then you can also go to 2 Corinthians 5, 7. We walk by faith, not by human sight.

That's right. So Solomon here is writing to help us live a life that counts. Now hear this. In the eyes of God.

[6 : 41] Now what you want to ask yourself and evaluate as we go through this together is, is my life counting for God? Does God say my life is counting for something beyond me?

Is it all about me? Is there anything eternal? Is there anything heavenly? About my focus in life?

About what I do with my time? About how I treat the people around me? About how I take a look at or perceive life?

The goals that I have? The way that I go about my job? Does any of that at all have anything to do with heaven? This morning we're going to look at Ecclesiastes 9, 4 through 10.

It's the third of five important matters of life. The third of five important matters of life showing God's wisdom for what makes life worthwhile.

[7 : 48] Now you and I have lived long enough as I look out. I see young faces. That's okay. Look at your mommy and daddy and ask them. And they'll tell you. We've lived long enough to know what it's like to live by our own devices and where that takes us.

Right? We can do that in the drop of a hat in a moment. We can get right back into that self thing. So Solomon says, I want to show you how to live a life that is worthwhile in the eyes of God.

Because at the end of the day when you stand before God that's what he's going to judge you by. Did you live a life worthwhile to me? And there's only one way to do that and it's through a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Period. You can't do it in a plan. You can't do it through your company. You can't do it on your own. You can't do it through religion. It comes through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What makes life worthwhile in the eyes of Almighty God? Well, in previous messages we've seen this. Let me put this up on the screen for you. There is one God worth knowing.

[8 : 59] That was the first of these five important matters of life. That was verse one. And then there is one fate worth studying in verses two and three.

So this left off when we were in this passage together two Sundays ago. And I want you to draw. I want to draw your attention to how verse three ends.

If you would look at verse three with me. In fact, let's just read from verse one down so you'll get the context here. For I have taken all this to my heart. Here he is again. Solomon is saying, look, I've done everything I know to do to use every ounce of who I am taking all of this in and try to explain what's going on.

And here's what I here's what I see. Righteous men, that is wise men, people who are living. This could be men or women, people who are living in the fear of the Lord, in a reverence for God.

Their deeds are in the hands of God. Those people are in the hand of God, a great place to be. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred.

[10 : 08] Anything awaits him. We just don't know. It is the same then in verse two for everyone. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked. He's talking about death.

For the good and the clean and the unclean. For the man who offers a sacrifice and the one who doesn't. As the good man is, so is the sinner. As the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.

We've covered all this. And then into verse three. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun here on the earth, that there is one fate for all men.

And that is we're all headed to the grave. Furthermore, he's noticed the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. That is his definition of the nature of evil in the world.

Where does wickedness come from? Where does it come from when people kill each other and rape each other and take advantage of each other and do terrible things and say things that tear each other down and neglect each other and ignore each other and abuse each other?

[11 : 11] Where does all that? Where does evil? See, this is the dilemma of people in the world. People who are not following God are in a really weird place because they've got to find a category to explain all of the wrong that they see in the world.

The wrong coming at them and the wrong that they do. Right? Well, the Bible tells us and Solomon encapsulates all that right here. He puts it all in a nutshell for us. He says, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts.

That's it. But now notice how he ends verse three. Afterwards, they go to the dead. Boy, that's ending on a high note, isn't it? Afterwards, they go to the dead.

Literally, the Hebrew here reads and afterwards, to the dead they go. So I ask you these questions as I closed out my message last time we were in this section.

Here's what I asked. How do you want to face the end of your life? Do you want to die with God or without him?

[12 : 19] Do you want to die under the mercies of God or under the wrath of God? On one, you get mercy and much forgiveness.

On the other, you get his holy anger spent out on you. On one side, you end up in heaven with him. And on the other side, you end up punished in a devil's hell.

And either one of those finds you alive forever. There's no end. You don't die and then it's over.

You die and stand before the judge of the universe. Now, I'm asking you, when you die, do you want to die in the hand of God? I do too.

And friend, I hope you do. If you say to me, Jeff, I just don't know how to do that. Stay tuned. Hang on just a little longer. We're going to talk about that. Do you want to die in the hand of God?

[13 : 21] For those who die in the hand of God, they belong to him. God owns them. And so for those who belong to God, who are in the hand of God, are kept by God, they're loved by God.

They're mercy by God. And God will take them to heaven. Now, when I ended last time, I made this little quip and just kind of left you hanging.

I said, yeah, but we're not dead yet. So, what about now? I see, I know, I could walk out of here today and it could all be over in a heartbeat. That's right.

That's right. But I'm not dead yet. So these reflections that we're talking about are not useful to dead people.

Everything that Solomon's talking about has no bearing on the people who have already gone to the grave. And that's his point. So where he takes us next is very logical.

[14 : 23] Where he goes next is where are all of these counsels, wisdom, and instruction, where are they apt?

To whom they're useful. And there's only one answer. To the living. To people who are still breathing. And that's where we're going.

So I'll throw this up here for you. It's one life worth living. One God worth knowing. One fate worth studying. That's the fate where you die in the hands of God.

Boy, that's worth some time to think about. Because when you die, it's the beginning of something wonderful and brand new. It's not the end. And it's not worse. It's much better. And one life worth living.

We'll look at verses four through ten. For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope. Yay! Finally. Surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.

[15 : 22] Whatever that means. It's funny because the people who read this originally, they knew what that meant. Or he wouldn't have said it.

So we need to figure out what did that mean to the people who read this for the first time. For the living know they will die. But the dead do not know anything.

Is he stating the obvious? No, he's making a point. Nor have they any longer a reward for their memory is forgotten. Indeed, their love, their hate, their zeal have already perished.

And they will no longer have a share in all that is done here on the earth under the sun. So he says this. Go then. Eat your bread in happiness. Drink your wine with a cheerful heart for God has already approved your works.

Let your clothes be white all the time. See the people who originally read this, they understood what that meant. Let not oil be lacking on your head. There you go. All you oily heads.

[16 : 26] It's all good. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life, which God 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 or the grave where you are going. Solomon's overall emphasis in this passage is that only the living can make good on the opportunities to live life to the fullest.

So he's saying what we already intuitively know. But a lot of times we try to push away because we just want to do our own thing and it's this. You get one shot at this.

You're only going to get one life. Just one. And then you stand before the judge and you either get life with him or life with the devil.

[17 : 32] Your choice. But that is what's coming. While you're here, you have one shot. Make it count. Make it count for God.

So we need to come to terms with the certainty of our impending death and let that bear on the life that we live now. Let death be your teacher for living life now.

Now, I said that and you're looking at me and I think when I was like, that's brilliant. The word of God is brilliant. That's deep stuff. Who would have ever thought that?

That's why way back in the text that we read months ago or whatever it was, weeks ago, when he said it's better to go to a funeral than it is to a party. Now, how many people in the world would take that to heart and say, yeah, that's right.

let's go to a funeral. No, we all want to party. But he said, no, the funeral is better because the funeral is where you're going to take stock of your life.

[18 : 42] It's going to sober you. Whereas the party, it just kind of helps give you the impression, the false illusion. Things are just going to go on like this all the time. And then you go back to work on Monday with a hangover and you think, man, why did I do this?

I watch these movies with people hugging the toilet and I go, I don't get that. But then I think back to times in my life before the Lord and I go, oh yeah, well, I do.

I didn't drink, but there were lots of things I did and woke up and went, what? Are you nuts? Yes. I'm going to read it again. The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts.

Is there any better explanation for your sin than it's insane? This is good stuff. Okay, well, there's a certainty and that certainty is our impending death.

But here, here, there is another certainty that Solomon wants to grip our hearts. Okay, here it is. It's in verse four. Look at it with me again. Whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope.

[19 : 55] Hope. Now, hope in this context doesn't mean wish for. It can, not here. Hope, here, is a word that translates certainty.

It means to trust or to have confidence in something that will happen. You with me? So the proverb about the lion and the dog would have been readily apparent and clear to the original hearers.

No lions where we live that I know of. We have to go to the zoo to see them and they're in a cage. Not so with these people. In their time, princes and kings and royalty would hunt lions and it was a prowess thing, you know, if you could bring down a lion.

But here's something that we can relate to. We look at lions in our culture, the lion king. Oh, that thing. We look at those and what do we think about lions? They're noble creatures.

Right? We typically cast lions as courageous and noble and confident. And then there's dogs. Now here's where it starts to crumble a little bit and we've got a difference between our culture and their culture.

[21 : 12] We love our puppies. Yes, we do. Jack. I'm looking at a couple in our church right now and precious Jack. Right.

In that culture at that time, dogs were nothing more than just scoundrels and scavengers. So, better to be a noble dead lion?

No. Better to be a scavenger dog than a noble dead lion. Why? Because the lion's dead and the dog's alive. Give me the dog any day.

Because the dog still has a chance to live. Whereas the lion, he's gone. A lot of good his nobility did him. He's dead. And that's where all of us are going.

It doesn't matter who you are, what socioeconomic status you have, how much money in the bank or not enough money, what color your skin is, where you were born. It doesn't matter. We're all headed to the grave.

[22 : 11] While we live now, we need to hang on to the certainty that this hope he's speaking about here brings. So, you have a confident lion and you have a cowardly dog.

What is the certainty or the hope in that proverb? What is he talking about? Even a cowardly dog still has life to live. So, better to be that dog than something, someone noble and mighty but altogether dead.

And I'm telling you, in this life, you may be thinking, yeah, but I'm I'm not a lion. You may not be a lion in this life. But while you're still alive, look to the lion and take full advantage of your knowledge that you will one day end up like the lion.

And so, let the lion teach you. Right now, we'll all be scampy dogs and live life together. Alright? And we won't worry about the lion thing right now.

That's what he's talking about. Once again, let death be your teacher. Now, according to one of the commentators that I consult often in this study, Dr. Barak, Dr. Barak is a professor at the Master's Seminary.

[23 : 29] He was there when I was there back 20 years ago. I don't know if he's still teaching, but he wrote a commentary that I have to help me with some of this. We can understand the sense of verse 4 to have made at least three things to Solomon's original hearers.

And that's what we're after in our understanding. What did this mean to the people it was written to? Because that's the meaning. We need to pull that out. Given the reality that you're still alive, that you're joined with, you're still among the living, you can be certain or you can trust in these three things.

Here they are up on the screen. You will meet God. It matters to God how you live. God's glory is the most important pursuit in your life.

Now, only people who love God and who are that is trusting Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and living as a Christian, only those people care about these three things.

People who don't know God and who don't have a relationship with Jesus, they don't care about these three things. They don't think about or care about that they'll meet God. They push that, suppress that out of their life.

[24 : 49] All right? They don't care that it matters to God how they're living. They think, I'll just do my thing. I've got plenty of time to square that with the guy upstairs when I get there.

Boy, that's bad news. And then they don't care about God's glory being the most important issue in their life. That they need to live their lives so that they reflect the goodness and the character and the wonder of God in the life that they live.

So that people look at them and not go, wow, what a cool guy. Whoa, what a great woman. They look at you and they think, how do I explain the difference in you?

I've been watching you. I don't get you. Really? What have you, well, I don't get how you're just like everybody else but there's this peace about you.

I mean, I know you probably struggle with stuff but you just seem to have a peace about life and a calm and a steadiness. You seem to know where you're going. Now you can go, yeah, yeah, that's right, man.

[25 : 52] I got it together. I know that. Or you can say, let me tell you what that is. It's really not a what. It's a who. Jesus is making that difference in my life because he is my life.

He is my peace. He is my steadiness. He's my rock. He's my hope. He's everything. That's my life. Hear about that in just a minute.

You see the difference? Solomon is guiding us to that reality. In verse 5 and 6, we'll just do this real quickly.

The living know they'll die but the dead don't know anything because they're dead nor have they any longer a reward. In other words, what he's saying in verses 5 and 6 is very straightforward.

It further emphasizes the fact dead people have spent their opportunities and they will quote unquote in the text no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

[26 : 52] You see that in the text? They will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun. That's how verse 6 ends. So what's the point then of verses 4 through 6?

Here it is. It's very clear. Living is a precious gift from God. Make it count for God. As I look out and survey you guys I see you and I know you and I know your occupations and what most of you do for a living.

We have such a variety in our congregation. Hallelujah. Right? That our commonness in this variety of people and personalities is love for Jesus.

That's exactly what the church should be. So as I look out and I survey all of this and I think about the things that you guys do for a living I think boy what must it be like for you every day of your life?

And I read this text with you and I say to you living is a precious gift from God. Make it count for God and I realize it doesn't matter what you do or where you come from or who you are or if you're male or female.

[28 : 00] That applies to every one of you. You have a gift from God. It's called life. The question is are you living that life for God?

That's Solomon's question. If you want a couple of verses that will help you with that chapter 3 verse 13 and chapter 5 verse 19 speak to this issue of life being a gift from God.

Now the question comes how do I make my life count for God? How do I make my life count for God? Read on. Go then eat your bread in happiness drink your wine with a cheerful heart for God has already approved your work.

Let your clothes be white put oil on your head enjoy life with the woman or the man if you're a woman with the man you understand what I mean whom you love all the days of your fleeting life.

Why? Because God has given you all of this as a reward a reward in your life for all the toil and the labor that you're doing under the sun.

[29 : 14] So look whatever your hand finds to do then do it with all your might. There is no activity and there's no more planning and there's no more knowledge and there's no more wisdom and there's no more anything when you go to the grave.

Yeah. People hear this and say uh oh he's about to tell us to just go for it shed all your inhibitions embrace it whatever.

No I'm not. You know me better than that. This is one of the things people are scared of when they read stuff like this in the Christian life.

Now I'm about to help you do a little bit of a where Christians often come down on these things. They often come down on one side worrying about oh yes go eat drink enjoy do license too much freedom.

We don't want Christians to have too much fun. That's taboo. Right. You have too much fun something's wrong with you. That's one side.

[30 : 25] Those are the people who respond to that's license. That's too much liberty. And so they take it to the other extreme and they say rules regulations do's don'ts.

so in one one sense I didn't write this down. I'll do this more with you another time. It just came to my mind.

On one side we have people that read things like this and they take an approach to life known as antinomianism. I know big old word antinomianism. It basically means antinomas anti-law.

So these are people who don't want anything going on in their life that sets boundaries. They want to push the boundaries way out there so far you can't even see them.

Anti-law. No law. I don't want to live by that. They have an adverse reaction to rules and regulations that kind of thing. Okay. And then we have people over on the other side who want to express but if you've got an anti-law then what do you have on the other extreme?

[31 : 39] Too much law. And what do we call that? Legalism. So we have legalism we have anti-legalism antinomianism right?

And so over on the legalism side you have what is bred into the lifestyle that people then live when you are living under legalism what you are living under is lording it over.

That's the outcome of legalism lording it over. This is the Pharisees and Jesus remember Jim and I talked this week remember brother when I shared with you about how Jesus scathed the Pharisees for that.

You give me lip service but your heart's far from me. That's legalism. You put all these rules and regulations down on my people and burdens they can't manage because you want to control everything and it's all about you and you want to appear as smart and wise that's lording it over.

But then on the other side you have not legalism antinomianism too much freedom too much liberty I don't want anything to do with that. See how their reactions to each other.

[32 : 49] And so what does antinomianism breed? License. License. Don't tell me what to do. I'll do whatever I want to do. I'll think whatever I want to think. I'll go wherever I want to go.

I'll live however I want to live. You say well is there somewhere in the middle? Yeah it's called the life in Christ. That's what's in the middle. And both of those extremes have missed the point of the Christian life.

It's Jesus. It's living in the gentleness and sobriety and love for Jesus. So in these verses 7 through 10 believers and experience these great blessings of God's grace in their life.

Both believers and unbelievers. Look believers and unbelievers they go about their lives. They eat they drink they enjoy their life with their spouse. Right? That happens on both sides of the camp.

Now here is where the great contrast between views and lifestyles become very clear. Hear me carefully. The unbeliever the unrighteous unwise to use categories from Ecclesiastes who have no fear of God take these realities as justifications for pursuing their own pleasures to the full.

[34 : 05] Yes? They see this and they just intuitively know because evil is in their hearts and insanity is in their heart and sin is in their heart. They take these things and run with them for their own advantage and glory.

Yes? That's what happens. I only get one shot at this so I'm making it count but here's how they end the sentence for me.

I'm making it count but baby I'm going to make it count for moi not for God. The natural bent of the human heart apart from God is loyalty to self and self glory at all costs.

You books I've been sharing with you from some secular literature over the last few weeks. A believer a Christian someone who's looking to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins that person is righteous wise according to Ecclesiastes those people who truly reverence God these people experience many of these same benefits and opportunities in life just like the unbeliever but here's the difference.

it's in the matter of the loyalty of the heart. Who are they loyal to? And the answer is a believer is loyal to God and concerned for God's glory at all costs.

[35 : 33] Now that is not something natural to human beings. That is a gift of the Holy Spirit. if we could live pleasing to God care about God be God conscious in a way that allowed us to please him in the manner of how we live our lives.

We would never have had to have had Jesus go to the cross if we could just do that on our own. Never. We would have saved Jesus all of that suffering. But Jesus had to die because the life I'm describing to you now where it counts for God cannot be lived by the natural person man or woman.

In and of your own heart left to yourself you won't care two hoots about living for the Lord like this. I won't either. I didn't. So as New Testament believers we understand the reality of the cross of Jesus in daily living.

Let me put this up on the slide for you. Jesus said it this way. If anyone wishes to come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily.

Three. Now notice zero in. If you're going to follow Jesus if you're going to be a Christian then that means self-denial and that means taking up your cross daily Luke said and follow me.

[37 : 02] All of the Gospels record this statement from Jesus the synoptics the Matthew Mark and Luke. So as a follower of Jesus you self-deny.

You no longer make your own interest and desires the supreme concern of your life. Now I'm going to say that again because I want you to really capture what are you talking about when you talk about self-denial.

When Jesus says deny self what does that mean? I can't be true to myself mean the whole world preaches that. Be true to yourself. Follow your desires.

Do what seems best to you and don't let anybody get in the way of that. You only get one shot at this. If you don't go out and grab it then it'll get wasted and somebody else will grab it.

Might as well be you. Go get it. And then we read this in the scriptures. Is there any wonder why people hate Jesus? Then we read this.

[38 : 02] If anyone wishes to come after me. He's saying if you want heaven it's going to cost you your life. And people say no thank you.

Now you say that's insane. Then you're getting Solomon's point. It's insane to turn down heaven. It's insane to turn your back on Jesus.

Why would anybody do that? Why did you do it? You did it until you got saved. I did too. It says self-denial.

The world doesn't understand that. You no longer make your own interests and desires the supreme concern of your life. I can't go quite as far as to say you just don't matter.

You obviously matter to God. If he gave his son's life for you, you matter. But can I say it this way? It just ain't all about you.

[39 : 10] It's all about God. It's not about me either. You turn away from the idol of self-centeredness.

Self-denial means that you turn away from the idol of self-centeredness. I'm in the center of everything about my life. I do what I want to do, when I want to do it, how I want to do it, where I want to do it, as much as I want to do it.

It's just that simple. And Jesus says, yeah, that's not a ticket to heaven right there. That's not a pathway to heaven. If you want to follow me, you've got to deny that.

And then you've got to do this. If that's not bad enough, hard enough, weird enough, counter-cultural enough, then he says this, and take up your cross.

Oh, man, what? Take up my cross? That doesn't sound good. Right.

[40 : 12] What does that mean? Listen to this. You willingly lay your self-centered self on the cross each day.

cross. Isn't that what Luke said? Didn't he say? And take up his cross daily. You willingly lay your self-centered self on the cross each day you are alive.

In other words, you annihilate your ambitions. You put to death your pet plans and your personal preferences. You kill off any residue of your comfortable conformity to this world and its values.

Wow, that's a lot. That's a high price. Yeah. The only people crazy enough to pay a price like that are people that God is giving the gift of faith to because it's totally counterintuitive.

What did Jesus say? Anyone who wants to save his life will do what with it? Lose it. This spiritual thing is counterintuitive.

[41 : 33] It takes man's wisdom and pride and slams it to the mat and keeps it there. And you'll never figure it out. Never figure it out.

People look at the cross. God's not calling them to that cross. They look at it and say, that's crazy. I'll never go there. Why would I ever put myself up on the cross every day denying the very things that I crave and I want most?

That's nuts. I agree. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, it doesn't make any sense. The apostle Paul was a great example for us.

He learned self-crucifixion directly from the resurrected Jesus. And Paul, in order to live his life fully to God, to live a life that counted for God in God's eyes, here's what the apostle Paul, the greatest missionary we've ever known, here's what he said.

I'm going to put it up here for you. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.

[42 : 53] Wow. You willingly suffer for others. Because you are living a crucified life.

now let me ask you, let me ask you, how do we reconcile Jesus, Solomon, and Paul in what we've been saying?

Stay with me. How does the instruction from Jesus and Paul square with what Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes 9, 7 through 10?

Because after all, listen now, I want to ask you, does this sound like the crucified life? Go then, eat your bread in happiness, drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God's already approved your works.

Let your clothes be white, put oil on your head, enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. Doesn't that sound like, eat, drink, be merry?

[43 : 59] This is the only shot you get. Does that sound like the crucified life to you? How do we reconcile this with Paul?

I have been crucified with Christ and it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.

In one instance, we're being told, live a crucified life. And in the other, enjoy your life to the fullest. How do we do both?

Do you even care about that? Do you want me to tell you? I only know because I read ahead. It's not because I'm smart or better than you or anything like that.

I just read ahead because I like to know the end. I'm one of the guys that goes to the end of the book and reads the end and goes, the main guy survived. I can't stand to watch these movies where I get attached to the hero or the heroine and the whole way I'm going, oh, please don't die.

[45 : 05] Please don't get dismembered and put in a hole or whatever it is. I say, what does the pastor watch or whatever? It's the same reason I want to watch the Braves after they play the game so that I know if they won or not.

I'm just that kind of fan. I'm sorry. Oh, it's terrible. So I read ahead and I know there's good news here at the end. You know, some people look at this kind of thing and they get really frustrated with it and they say things like this.

I have actually heard this. Maybe this entire Christian enterprise is just one big frustrating thing in wasting the one chance that I have at life because I just can't live it and I don't get it.

I'm frustrated. I'm angry. I'm bitter at God. I'm tired of suffering. I thought if I became a Christian everything would sort it out. And I'm kind of worse off than I was because I feel like people just they just don't want to have anything to do with me.

As soon as I try to start talking about God or Jesus or anything like that, they're out of here. I've lost all my friends. I thought this was going to be. Don't ever witness to people and tell them that coming to Jesus is going to make everything great.

[46 : 19] Tell them to come to Jesus and make everything great in their relationship with God and that's all that matters and then start praying that Jesus will come back soon. Well, let's make it even a little more challenging.

OK, what Solomon gives us in the verses here before us is nothing short than a series of what we would call imperatives or commands.

An imperative is a command. command. So we have commands here. Look up here on the screen with me and look at these. Go is a command. Eat is a command.

Drink is a command. Enjoy is a command. These are biblical obligations binding on you as a God fearer. You must do these things.

This is your duty. And now we go to Paul. It's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me in the life that I live. I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and died for me.

[47 : 26] What are we going to do with that? You're a God fearer and you're trying to do both. Well, here's a New Testament clue. I think that will help us blend these instructions.

Let me see if I can get there and read it to you and then I'll tell you where it is. OK, that'd be all right. This is a New Testament clue that might help us a little bit with bringing these ideas together.

Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. live your life.

Make it count. For God. One more that might be helpful, Greg, it's in Colossians. And it's going to be a memory part when we get there.

We're not there yet. It's in Colossians chapter three. Oh, that was first Corinthians 1031. First Corinthians 1031. And then in Colossians 317, this kind of clenches it for us.

[48 : 39] Paul says, whatever you do in word or deed. Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God, the father.

Does that start help help clearing it up? You see how what we're seeing in Solomon is being brought over into the New Testament. And who's at the center? Jesus.

Who is at the center of the crucified life? Jesus. Jesus. So that all that you're doing. So do it. So go eat, drink, enjoy all to the glory of God.

All to the glory of God. And here's a helpful truth from the text itself back in Ecclesiastes 9 7. Go then.

Go then. Look at the end of the verse. For God has already approved your works. What does that mean? Well, the Hebrew word, look up here on the screen.

[49 : 46] The Hebrew word for approved, raza, carries the sense of divine approval, acceptance, divine favor. Now let's bring that together.

Look at look at the text again for God has already approved your works. There's an already element to this. Right. There's a there's a fixed element in the mind of God about you going, eating and drinking and enjoying.

There's something in the mind of God about you doing all of that that's fixed in his mind. And it's an approval. And what does that approval have to do with it? It's a favor.

It's an acceptance. It's the divine will of almighty God. He's already willed that. It's in motion in the mind and heart of the Lord.

So what does that translate into in all of this? Well, those who are commanded to enjoy life are the God fearers. He's not commanding unbelievers to enjoy life because he's already told us for nine chapters, you don't live life apart from God.

[51 : 00] You're just the walking dead. You may think you do, but you don't. Those who are commanded to enjoy life are the God fearers, the righteous wise people who are living under hear it.

God's approval. The righteous wise are righteous. They're made right with God. They're living under the approval of God. Folks, listen, as you live under the approval of God, go eat, drink, live because living under the approval of God will you will want to live to him.

You'll want to. This is the difference between you and an unbeliever. You want to live for God. God has changed your want to.

He's given you a desire to please him through Christ. How can you be unioned with Jesus and have Jesus living in you and not want to live for God?

If you don't want to live for God, friend, you need to think about the reality. You might not be safe. You might not be born again in Christ. And I don't want you to be fooled.

[52 : 13] God forbid that you would go through your life thinking that you're born again. You're a Christian and get to heaven only to have Jesus say depart from me. I never knew you. this is where we are.

Let me offer you this quote. No one receives unrestricted power to pursue any fleshly enjoyment he or she desires. No one.

The imperatives, the commands in these verses direct the believer to pursue only those things that God identifies as having received his stamp of approval. Amen.

So eat, drink, work, wear comfortable clothes. That's white clothes, white clothes in that environment. Let's think about where we are in the Middle East.

Rob, you've been in the Middle East. Is it hot? Is it dry? Is it dusty? He said, yeah, you've been there, too, brother. I know. And they had to wear a bunch of gear. So whatever that's all about.

[53 : 16] Yeah. Wear white clothes. Thin, light, reflect the sun, cool, easy. It's just a it's just a way of saying be comfortable in your life. Be comfortable in your life.

Did you hear me say pursue comfort? Be comfortable. I'm going to clarify that the oil on the head. That was another way of saying enjoy the blessing of God.

People who had the ability to use oil on. This is a dry climate. So oil was refreshing. It was something that was balming and comforting.

They also used it to perfume themselves. Right. Much the way we would put on cologne or deodorant or whatever that kind of thing. So that's what he's saying.

Eat, drink, work, wear comfortable clothes. Enjoy the comforts God's built into this life. Enjoy companionship in your marriage. Enjoy what God gives by all means.

[54 : 16] By all means. Does that sound like self denial? Does that sound like taking up the cross of the crucified life to you? Here's another one.

Look at this one up on the slide. The crucified life is the life of fearing God. So that you live in thankfulness to him. His gift of life to you in Jesus Christ.

In other words, you live his gift to you as your gift to him. Do you want to know the key to the Christian life? Do you want to know the secret to the Christian life?

It ain't no secret. It's this right here. You live God's gift to you. We're gift to him. You live Jesus back to God.

Why? Because Jesus is your life. What other life are you going to live for him? You just have one. It's life in his son.

[55 : 23] Live that life that he gave to you at great cost back to him. You will spend the rest of your breathing life under the sun learning how to do that well.

And that's why you need the people sitting around you right now. That's why we've been praying for three solid years. That man back there and myself along with many other people here.

For three years, we've asked God to help us hang on here so that we could root this ministry in this community in the Lord Jesus Christ so that we could bring that message to this community.

The only life worth living is the life living with God. And once you have God, live that God life back to him. It's the only life worth living back to him. Anything less than living Jesus back to him isn't worth anything.

You there? You say, that's Solomon? Solomon? All except for the Jesus part. That's New Testament. But Solomon was directing us to the Messiah who was Jesus.

[56 : 37] And as I close, go, go. One comment, I just want to clear this up. One commentator said that go is a wake up call. It's written in the Hebrew in such a way where it's just arresting.

It just jumps out of go like that. It means there's no time for you to waste. You're running out of time to offer this kind of life to God from a thankful heart.

So go get at it. Now, this is going to come strong, but I want I want to I'm paraphrasing. I want you to hear this. He says, go. So stop complaining.

Friends, please stop nursing your anger and your unforgiveness. Stop brooding about your problems and your past and get over your anxiety.

In other words, don't allow the adversities and the perplexities of life to steal your one opportunity to live this life to the fullest in thankfulness to God.

[57 : 45] Don't let Satan do that to you and don't let the insanity of your heart do that to you. Take all of that to Jesus. And then verse 10 caps it off.

We don't even have to say much about it. I think you're going to get the point by this time. Whatever your hand finds to do, then do it with all your might. What's he talking about? He's talking about living a life that counts for God.

Set your hand and your heart to that and do it with everything that you have. Does God deserve anything less from you? No. Friend, this is the coach saying, get out there and get up, man.

This is the coach saying, win at all costs. Sacrifice yourself. Break your bones. Dive in front of him. Take him out. I played football and I got creamed.

You see me. Yeah. Live. Friends, live. Fear God.

[58 : 53] Follow Jesus with all your heart. Take these six blessings that he that he offers to us here in the text. Take them from the hand of God and take them, he says, look in happiness and with a cheerful heart.

Isn't that good? I'm so glad he included that. In happiness and with a cheerful heart. I say to you again, my friends, Christians ought to be the happiest, most cheerful people on the planet.

Not because we don't have our problems or issues, but we we know who's sovereign in all of that. And we know where we're going. Enjoy your life in Jesus Christ as God's good and precious gift.

Maybe I just could have said that and just at the beginning and closed it all up and. Prayed and. And. Yeah. This was fun. And I hope you're blessed in the Lord.

And I hope you're challenged and convicted. Anything that's standing between you and living your life to Jesus as a gift back to him. Deal with it.

[60 : 05] And if you're not sure how. Seek out Greg and myself. We'd be happy to talk with you and sit down with you. We don't know everything, but we do know where to direct you. Know where to direct.

Now, friends, we do not take the Lord's table as an add on.