

CHASING THE WIND
“Forever Free” Ecclesiastes 9
July 2, 2023

INTRO.: This coming Tuesday we celebrate freedom in the United States, which we don't take for granted. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress approved the wording of the Declaration of Independence. The thirteen original colonies declared their independence from England and we read this in the document, *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”* We celebrate with parades, display of the flag, picnics, and fireworks. This is an important date in the history of the United States. We are grateful for the freedoms we have and for those who sacrificed greatly to make and keep these freedoms. The theme of our message this morning from Ecclesiastes 9 is *Forever Free*. What is the *freedom* that communion celebrates? As much as we value the freedoms we have in the United States, the freedom which Jesus brings is far greater. Let me share an interchange that Jesus has with some Jews who had believed Him.

John 8:31–36 (NKJV) — **31** Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. **32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” **33** They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’” **34** Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. **35** And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. **36** Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

Every one of us was born with a sin nature (a natural bent towards sinning) and we also sin by choice. The consequence of our sin is separation from God with no hope of changing that on our own.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What did it take to have freedom from eternal separation from God in a place called hell? It took Jesus going to the cross, a perfect sacrifice who by His death and resurrection paid the price of your sin and my sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The flag is the symbol of the freedom of United States citizens, but the cross is the symbol of freedom for every single follower of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2:13–15 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, **14** having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. **15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

This communion time is meant to be a celebration: we remember, reflect, and rejoice. Yet, it is also a serious time. Do you know Jesus and are you walking with Him? Let's take some time in prayer.

TRANSITION TO THE MESSAGE:

Through Jesus, not only do we have freedom from the penalty and power of sin, but we also have the blessing of having joy in our lives.

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

As we look at Ecclesiastes 9 we can see how God brings joy to the life of the believer. He begins by pointing out what we all will experience and what we have through God. We are just looking at the first ten verses in Ecclesiastes 9. As we read in unison what does he say we will all experience in verses 1-6 and what we are able to do because of God in verses 7-10.

Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun— all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

The first thing we see is:

TO ALL COMES DEATH

“all share a common destiny:”

the righteous and the wicked

the good and the bad

the clean and the unclean

those who offer sacrifices and those who don't

“as it is with:”

the good so with the sinful

those who take oaths and so with those who are afraid to take them

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all.

Please note this phrase that we have reviewed in the past: *“under the sun.”* That is, what happens here on earth. At this point Solomon is not sharing anything that happens beyond here on earth. So, what is the *destiny* that will overtake every one of us?

The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.

The good and the bad, the righteous and the wicked, the clean and the unclean: they all die!! Nobody makes it out of here alive.

I was reminded of this a few years ago while struggling with some arrhythmia. My cardiologist told me that people who are tall, thin, and in fairly good cardiovascular shape have a greater propensity to have atrial fibrillation. So, I asked him, “Is it better if I sit on the couch and just eat chips?” Of course, it isn't.

BUMPER STICKER: “Eat well, stay fit, and die anyway.”

I'm certainly not advocating an unhealthy lifestyle but I am reminding every person, including myself, that death is coming and it is the great equalizer.

The next few verses emphasize this point even further. If we are looking at just the here and now (without eternity in view):

Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

To understand what he is saying you need a little background with dogs and lions. Dogs of that day were considered wild and filthy animals because they roamed the streets as scavengers. Lions, on the other hand, were considered noble beasts.

Proverbs 30:30 a lion, mighty among beasts, who retreats before nothing;

1 Samuel 17:43 He (Goliath) said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

Solomon concludes that it’s better to be alive than dead.

What benefit is there to the living over the dead according to this passage?

“the living know they will die”

“the dead know nothing”

The dead: “never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun”

It is passages like these that remind us apart from God not only is there no answer to death, but there is also no answer to life. The last four verses in this section show how God gives meaning and purpose to the life we’re living now. I would say that to have true meaning and purpose to this life we need to know what happens after this physical life.

Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”

1 Peter 1:3–4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”—

Through Jesus Christ we have freedom from the penalty and power of sin, and someday, when we are with the Lord, freedom from the presence of sin. Through Jesus we also have the freedom to have an abundant life. The life with Jesus does not mean we will be free from difficulties, hurts, and heartaches of life. It doesn’t mean that every follower of Jesus will be rich and have no problems. It does mean that God will be with you always and that He will never lose track of you. God does bless His children with a fulfilling life. He alone provides meaning and purpose to this life. In verses 7-10 Solomon lists how we can see God’s blessings on our lives. As we began this study I shared three sayings that Solomon speaks of many times:

“*meaningless (vanity):*” smoke, vapor

“*chasing the wind:*” can’t catch it

“*under the sun:*” the here and now

Life here is confusing and none of us can totally figure it out. The only times Solomon talks about enjoying life is when God is in the picture.

Ecclesiastes 2:24–26 A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, **25** for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? **26** To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. **13** That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:18–20 Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. **19** Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. **20** He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

God brings joy and blessing to life in the midst of difficulty, trials, and struggles. I also believe that He brings fun into our lives. Some Christians think that if it is fun, it can’t be from God. We are going to look at three ways that we can

see and experience God's blessing in our lives. Solomon, who said, "All is vanity" also came to believe that there is joy to life. What he is about to share are all commands; they're imperatives.

GOD'S BLESSING THROUGH:

PROVISION

v. 7-8

Ecclesiastes 9:7-8 Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.

Through God providing with food and drink we are reminded of His goodness and kindness.

Daniel L. Akin, "Food is a wonderful gift from God meant to bring us nourishment but also pleasure, taste, variety, and an opportunity for relationships. God gives us the gift of food for us to enjoy it as a means to worship Him with grateful hearts for His provision and creativity."

Food is a great way to have fellowship. Join us this evening as we have a dessert night and hear from our home-grown missionaries. They will also be in the foyer after the service.

Wine was simply the drink of choice in ancient Israel, but the Bible strictly forbids drunkenness of any kind. Some need to stay away from it altogether, which is what I choose to do. That doesn't make me any better than anyone, but I have seen the damage alcohol can do in people's lives.

Do you and I realize that every meal we have is a gift from God? When we say a blessing before we eat, is it just a habit or does it come from the heart?

Why does he talk about being *clothed in white*? This symbolizes joy, they were "dress-up clothes" of the ancient Near East. They were worn by war heroes in the victory parade, by slaves on the day they gained their freedom, by priests on the high holy days of Israel. (Philip Graham Ryken)

"anoint your head with oil:" pour out something richly scented. It was an important part of getting ready for a celebration: looking good and smelling good. (Philip Graham Ryken)

Recognize God as the Great Provider!! God favors what we do!! I believe that there needs to be more celebrations as believers, for everything we have and are come as a gift from God!!!

God's blessing is seen through provision,

PEOPLE

v. 9

Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.

Solomon speaks here of enjoying life with your wife (singular) whom you love. He is lifting up marriage and family life. Don't assume that relationship. Husband and wife, you need to pour energy, creativity, love, and prayer into your relationship. God gives meaning and purpose to marriage. Marriage is meant to be a picture of Christ's relationship to the church.

*Set time aside to do things together (find common interests and celebrate different interests as well)

*Seek her input and listen to what she says

*Thank her and look for ways to encourage her

*Be gracious & forgiving (you'll need it!)

*Laugh together, cry together

*Value her as a person

*Pray together

"all the days of this meaningless life:" remember that *meaningless* and *vanity* are the same word. He is instructing the reader to enjoy life with your wife because our days are like vapor, smoke, or fog. They are quickly gone, don't waste time you have with loved ones.

PUT DOWN THE PHONES!!!

Solomon speaks of the wife, but we also need to appreciate and value our children. Friendships are to be valued and appreciated. Others are a gift from God that He will work through to encourage, challenge, and mold us further into the image of God.

God's blessing through provision, people, and

PURPOSE

v. 10

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

God has given all of us a work to do, something to do with His purpose in mind. We are to do it with everything we have for our time is short, as is the opportunity to make an impact. The end is coming so we are to live with purpose and through our lives make an impact.

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Colossians 3:23–24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, **24** since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

You may work at a job, in your home, at school, or whatever but do it all out. Make a difference where you're at and look for opportunities to make a difference for the Lord. Here at church there are great opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus. It has been so encouraging to see this body reach out to people who are hurting and show Christ's love in so many tangible ways. There are so many ways you have shown up in these last months: too many to count.

We just had a Christian book drive, collecting literature to be used in other places. I have a picture of 148 bins of Christian literature collected for Experience Missions: 40 bins from you.

In a week from tomorrow we will be having Vacation Bible School and there are still many ways that you can help.

Are you seeing God's blessing through provision, people, and purpose? One bit of warning: any one of these could take the place of God in your life, so beware.

Tim Keller: "Sin is not just the doing of and things, but the making of good things into *ultimate things*. It is seeking to establish a sense of self by making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship to God."

SO WHAT???

Because there is more to life than the here and now. Because there is eternity in view. Because Jesus Christ provided freedom from the penalty and power of sin, and ultimately, in glory, from the presence of sin we can live in freedom.

Am I truly free?

In what ways do I see God's hand in my life?

As I think of that what can I celebrate that this week?

What is one thing I can do differently because of the message today?