

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## ENJOY UNSPIRITUAL THINGS

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Have you ever heard the famous quip describing the Puritans? "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." True or not, it reflects a common belief in 'dour' Christianity – that God finds inventive ways to spoil our fun, make us boring and give us an overly moralistic view of life. It might come as a shock, therefore, to look at Ecclesiastes 9 and its view on life, starting with verse 7:

"7 Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do."

Perhaps it feels strange to hear this coming out of the Bible. Ecclesiastes is a weird book. To put it bluntly, it is very 'earth centred'. If you've ever heard someone say that Christianity is a 'pie in the sky' religion that only cares about stuff that happens after you die, then Ecclesiastes busts the myth. This chapter considers a range of earth based enjoyments and counsels us to enjoy them to the fullest. We're going to look at all 4 of them briefly and then explore what it means for us today.

To kick us off, we see the enjoyment of two basic needs (food and drink) encouraged in verse 7. Bear in mind, it doesn't say eat your dry oatmeal washed down with stale water and a grimace on your face. God wants us to make the most of what we have.

Verse 8 moves on to clothing and accessories – "8 Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head" These things would ease the discomfort of a hot climate. They were not necessary, but they would be a great deal more comfortable to have. Obviously clothing is a necessity. But God doesn't say wear a converted bin bag and get a shoddy bowl cut for your hair at home (though many of us are subjected to that at the moment!). Nor does he say wear nice clothes but don't you dare enjoy it. Instead, we are actively encouraged to go beyond necessity.

Verse 9 switches over to relational enjoyment: "9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun."

Marriage and the family unit is a basic building block of society, and once again, the writer counsels us to make the most of it and enjoy it! God doesn't say grit your teeth and bear it, or say do this solemn task for the propagation of the human species – he says, once again, enjoy your relationship with your spouse.

Verse 10 brings us the last piece of the jigsaw: work. "10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going." Same section, same pattern. We are to make the most of our work here on earth whatever it is. Not slack off, never think, don't care – but rather, make the most of it.

Now it's time to answer three questions that may arise in your mind:

What if I am struggling to get even the basic things, what am I doing wrong?

God promises to meet our needs . We may not have what we want, but our attitude to what we do have is more important. As much as we can, let's enjoy the good things God has given to us in everyday life. It's not about having more, but about making the most of what we do have.

Are we just being told to be wasteful?

No. A clue is the fact that we're told to take joy in things that are fairly basic to life, not opulent extras. Secondly, while excess can be sinful, so can stinginess or clinging onto wealth without using it for good during your time on earth. Wastefulness is wrong and stinginess is a form of wastefulness.

What about heaven and obedience to God?

You may be unsettled by the earthiness of this passage. After all, the Bible elsewhere tells us that we are like exiles on earth looking for a heavenly homeland. Like pilgrims using earth as a temporary pit stop. Finally, we have Jesus' words which tell us "36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Mark 8:36). Surely spiritual realities are important and we should be focused on life after death? Yes, but let's also consider Ecclesiastes a bit more carefully first.

Death isn't the end for people who follow Jesus, but it is a cut-off point. The immediate aftermath of death was referred to as 'Sheol' or the grave, which came before a full understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. You cannot

evangelise when you are dead. In the immediate sense, you can't work, or help people out, or do good on earth, or anything at all for that matter. Death means that that chapter is closed, though one day, a new chapter will begin with the resurrection and a new heavens and a renewed earth. Rather than skipping pages ahead, Ecclesiastes gets us to focus on the here and now – which is full of uncertainties from a human perspective.

What can we do here on earth? Amongst many things, we can enjoy pleasures like food, drink, clothes, a spouse and work. These aren't the only important things we do, nor are they the most important things that we can do, however, we are free to enjoy them simply because they are part of God's good creation.

I chose this passage because often, as a Christian, when I'm having fun playing Frisbee, going for a walk with my girlfriend or doing some artwork – I often wonder if there isn't something more 'spiritual' that I should be doing. I had anxiety about doing lots of everyday things like focusing on work because I felt that they weren't very spiritual. I was becoming a pie-in-the-sky Christian who thought that God disapproved somehow, or for some reason when I wasn't praying or reading my Bible explicitly. However, here is the solution I found in Ecclesiastes 9:

To enjoy the life and gifts God has given, can become an act of faith and worship. Many times in scripture we are told to be thankful towards God and to rejoice, and enjoying the small things in life is part of this.

What enables our enjoyment of the small things to become an act of worship?

Remembering God is sovereign – we have the courage to enjoy the little things in life when we know that even though things go wrong, God is always in control and is working all things together for the good of those who follow him.

Remembering we are free – We are free to enjoy God's good creation and don't need to get bogged down adhering to man-made regulations about what is and isn't holy (Colossians 2:20-23 helps us with this)

Remembering we will die – Ecclesiastes frames our enjoyment of earthly things on the basis that they are limited and will come to an end. Let's make the most that we have while we have it to share or possessions and blessings with each other to the fullest, because one day, we won't be able to.

Remembering our hope – Because of Jesus, we have unstoppable hope. We can enjoy and make the most of life because we know that as we follow him, he is always for us, always working for our good, and one day we will be resurrected with him to enjoy a renewed creation.

Following Jesus enables us to enjoy the little things because he's taken care of the biggest things, and puts everything in the right perspective.



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