

“YOUR PORTION IN LIFE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

Introduction.

We have heard these words before from the lips of the preacher in Ecclesiastes, but they are always a welcome breath of fresh air because in between each of those times there has been a fair bit of handwringing over the vanity of life under the sun and the brevity of life and the swift approaching leveler of all life, when we all die and go the way of all men.

Solomon is calling us to a joyful religion, and of all religions, Christianity is the only one with true reason for joy. Melancholy is a false statement about our God and our faith.

A gloomy Christian is an oxymoron. The Christian in the most dire of circumstances still and always has reason for joy. Consider for one minute who Jesus and what He has done, it is enough to dispel the darkest cloud. Is not the Gospel good news of great joy?

A Christian who is heir to the greatest possible riches of the most glorious inheritance with God's strength, wisdom, and favor, having a deep sense of the Father's most undeserved love in the light his own unworthiness, has no justifiable reason to complain.

In this life under the sun, here is some real sunshine, a bright remedy in a gloomy book. Solomons recommendation is to live more like Tigger than like Eeyore and he gives us four ways to do it.

I. Enjoy your food and drink (9:7).

The first word in v.7 is 'go!' No time to waste in this matter. Get on with it. Come now, get up and get going, rather than sit there and brood over the vexations of the vanity of all things, the temporalness of all things, the swiftly approaching death and end of all things.

Enjoy all God's good gifts to you. Enjoy the simple, ordinary pleasures of live. Notice the two parts of the two phrases.

Eat your bread and drink your wine.
In joy and with a merry heart.

The possessives tell us the bread and wine are gifts from God graciously given and graciously to be received. What do we have that we have not received? Everything is Gods and from God.

Apart from Him we have nothing. There but for the grace of God we have nothing, and are homeless and destitute.

Our joy is doubled, first we have the gift itself, and then we have the giver who gave it to us.

What is the purpose of food and drink? To keep our bodies alive? Is it just utilitarian? If that was the only purpose, then why did God bother with senses, with taste buds to savor flavors and smell to savor aromas? God gives food and drink for our joy, our pleasure, our delight, and to see His glory and goodness. They are part of enjoying God.

It is God's will that we enjoy what He has given us to enjoy.

Those of us who are used to having more than enough find reasons to complain about what we have or don't have.

Proverbs 27:7 One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet.

The sad reality is abundance often steals our joy rather than increases it. One must guard his heart, prosperity is as great a curse as poverty, feast as much as famine.

Don't wonder about your lot in life, or God's will for your life. The life you have is God's lot, it is *approved* by God.

Clearly God has already approved, after all His is the one who has already given what we have and given us what to do.

II. Enjoy beauty, getting dressed up, being festive (9:8).

Ecclesiastes 9:8 NLT Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne!

Ecclesiastes 9:8 MSG Dress festively every morning. Don't skimp on colors and scarves.

Enjoy the gift of beauty, all that is lovely in this life.

Again, our God is not a utilitarian God. As God gave us taste buds to savor flavors, God gave us eyes to drink in beauty. God in creating us in His image created us with the ability and capacity to know and experience and enjoy beauty. We glorify Him when we enjoy Him and His gifts.

I love the way those telescopes in space are enlarging our view of the beauty of God's creation.

He is a God of beauty, of the finer things. Don't live a life that is dreary and drab in this vain world.

What are clothes and oil, but outward signs of joy. Both were signs and symbols of joy associated with happy occasions. Enjoy festive dress and occasions, enjoy perfumes and lotions. These are God's gifts.

White is a sign of cheerfulness and joy. White is an emblem of festivity, joy, purity. Think wedding.

Oil is certainly a symbol of joy. Grief was expressed with unkempt hair and unwashed hair. Joy was expressed with shining countenance, anointing oil on the head and face.

Oil is meant for improving your appearance.

Psalm 45:7-8 Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; 8 your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

Isaiah 61:3 To grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.

John 12:3 Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

(iii) Enjoy your marriage (9:9).

Solomon is heaping up phrases of possibilities for how to enjoy life in our otherwise vain existence under the sun. God is the God of our callings in marriage and work.

Life is hard, marriage and family are hard, so make an effort to not let them be joyless. Enjoy the life God has given you through the gift of marriage, home, family. Enjoy your relationships. Enjoy the fruits of married love, this is meant to be God's gift.

Jesus loves His Bride with an exceedingly great and unreserved love. Go thou and do likewise and imitate Jesus.

Some spouses co-exist in homes more like roommates who are never really present to each other. They miss out on what gift God has given in the ordinary covenant of love and marriage. They miss the joy of human love, care, companionship that is a gift given by God for joy.

As the wisdom of Proverbs repeats, a good wife is a rare jewel, a true treasure, one of God's choicest gifts that is meant to help us make this toilsome and vain life more bearable.

Solomon's words may be a bit short on romanticism. Imagine the anniversary card that reads:

“Dear wife, I truly enjoy you in all the vain, short little days we share together in this miserable toil that is our lot under the sun.”

That is not very romantic, but it is wise. Yes, wise. Why do I say wise? How is this wise? How is it possible to enjoy our silly, little, fleeting lives on earth?

By the grace of God. We cannot begin to rejoice in our fragile, fleeting lives until we truly and fully understand that our portion in this life has been given to us by God, it is His grace, His gift. It has been assigned to us by His infinite wisdom.

We can't fully understand this portion given to us until we by faith believe it is God who has apportioned it. All these things given to us to enjoy are from His hand.

Life, marriage, work, pleasure are all appointed by God and apportioned according to His pleasure, will and grace, decided from before the fall. God has even given us the gift of being able to enjoy what He gives to be enjoyed.

Yes, the humdrum routine of daily life and our own laziness take their toll. Home life can become dull along the way. Add to that all the trials, troubles and heartache, maybe more than you ever imagine. Maybe you have had more than your fair share of poorer rather than richer, or sickness rather than health, or worse rather than better.

Pray daily for the refreshing of the Holy Spirit to see your marriage is not about your goodness, but about God's goodness, to see His gracious provision and rejoice again in God and in the spouse He gave you to be your companion in the life He has apportioned to you.

I wonder if Solomon wrote this through the stinging pain of how grievously he violated this wisdom and truth? Did he feel that pain of his unrestrained lust and disobedience?

Perhaps this is Solomon's best and most sober wisdom. A man with a thousand wives and concubines has come to see the light, and the pleasure of one wife with whom to experience life.

(iv) Enjoy whatever your hand finds you to do, and do it with all your might (9:10).

Enjoy the gift of work, God's grace of provision
Enjoy your work as from the Lord, and do your work as unto the Lord.

Work is God's gift, and the strength to do it is God's gift.

Work is not a curse. Pleasure and leisure are not to replace work, they give a break in the midst of it. Work is not a curse, but a gift of God's provision. Don't treat it as something just to endure or get through.

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Now, despite everything Solomon has said about this fleeting, soon forgotten life under the sun before the fast-approaching death, despite the futility, the vanity, the hardship and heartache, work hard at the work He has given you.

He nowhere advocates sloth, laziness, apathy, what's point anyway. No defeatist attitude.

The results are not up to us, they are completely in God's control. There are people out there who are smarter than us, better than us, working harder than us, and not being blessed with the same results. The results can only be explained by grace, and that cause for humble worship and gratitude.

Have the good sense to think like Paul.

I Corinthians 15:10 By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

The dream of doing nothing is a lie, it leads to sloth, misery and laziness, to uselessness.

We are created and called to work, to work hard, to do good work, to make a contribution to life, community, world.

And of course the most important work of all is the work of working out your own salvation.

Put all you have into building your faith, growing your knowledge of God, increasing in love and devotion, working on righteousness, fighting the good fight, running the race, endeavoring to preserve. Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow is unknown.

Joy.

Perhaps more than any other voice in the Old Testament, the speaker in Ecclesiastes was a Preacher of Joy. Seven times in Ecclesiastes the Preacher calls his reader to pursue joy (Ecclesiastes 2:24–25; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20; 7:14; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:7–12:1).

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. 19 Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart. . . . Enjoy life with the wife whom you love.

In a book that strives so earnestly to find wisdom, why does he keep hammering this particular piece of wisdom?

Because of who God is and what God has done in giving to us all we have. This is a call to savor the sweetness to God's goodness in life. This is a call to find God-given, God-approved pleasure in God and His gifts. This is all a foretaste of the eternal pleasure that await us in glory.

Furthermore, Jesus sanctifies all our gifts.

Jesus was born like us in the flesh, He was born in a stable, had parents and brothers and sisters, lived in a small town, grew up with the simple pleasures of life, food, drink, shelter, relatives. He learned to work with wood and worked his trade for the good of the community He lived in.

Even in His ministry He blessed and sanctified all our gifts. He provided food for the hungry, drink for a wedding feast, restored bodies to the sick, relationships to those broken. He moved among the people in the streets, homes, synagogues and markets. He was always working to do the Father's work.

Conclusion and application.

If you want to find significance in your life, if you want to find deep meaning, peace, and contentment, if you want to know God's will for your life this is it: Believe what God has given you already, this is your approved portion. Now, go, live your life to the full.

Your lot is God's gift, and the ability to enjoy it is also God's gift. So get busy enjoying it.

Psalm 16:5-6, 11 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.
6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.
11 You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Take time this evening and this week for reflect on all God's good and gracious blessings and benefits and abundant provision. Consider how your boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places. Give thanks not for all you have, but for all you have been given.

Now as I like to say at every holiday, I also say today.

Now go, eat your bread in joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for this is the will of God for you while you live your life toiling under the sun.