

“Expect the Unexpected”
Ecclesiastes 9:11-12
(Preached at Trinity, November 26, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've gone through Ecclesiastes we've seen two perspectives on life upon the earth. One sees the overarching plan and purpose of God. We live under God's Divine direction and authority for His glory.
The other is the life lived apart from God. It is a life lived as if God did not exist. A life without design or purpose. This is the life that Solomon concluded:
Ecclesiastes 1:2 NAU - "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity"
2. In **Chapter 9** Solomon has expressed the difficulty of comprehending God's actions upon the earth. There is both good and evil upon the earth. The wicked and righteous exist side by side. One would expect God's hand to be harsh upon the wicked but gentle upon the righteous. But upon observation, it would seem that the conditions are the same for both.
Ecclesiastes 9:2 NAU - "It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean"
Ecclesiastes 9:3 NAU - "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men."
3. And in the end all will die.
Ecclesiastes 9:3 NAU - "Afterwards they *go* to the dead."
4. As we view God's work upon the earth, we witness His mercy and forbearance even in the midst of sin.
Matthew 5:45 NAU - "He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous."
Life is a gift from God. God has equipped us to enjoy the riches of His creation.
Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 NAU - "Go *then*, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. ⁸ Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹ 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."
5. Moving on to **Verse 11** Solomon continues to express the difficulty in comprehending God's Providence. Life is often unexpected and unpredictable.
Ecclesiastes 9:11 NAU - "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."

The swift runner loses the race.

The strongest warrior dies in battle.

The wise and educated man ends up poor and hungry. Some living in homeless shelters are actually very intelligent. Knowledge does not equate to financial gain.

Human ability is no guarantee of success.

6. The day of our death can also be unpredictable.

A fish swimming freely is suddenly caught in a fisherman's net and killed.

Likewise, a bird seeking food is suddenly ensnared to its death.

Ecclesiastes 9:12 NAU - "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."

- a. The moment of our death can come at a most unexpected time.
We hear of the fatal car wreck. The individual had no idea it would be his last day, his last car ride. That his lunch was his last meal.
- b. We read about a mass shooting at a shopping center. None of the victims expected as they parked their car and walked towards the entrance that the final minutes of their life were ticking away.
- c. I often say, life is full of last things. You will do everything in your life for the last time. And most often will not know it's the last time.
This is true regarding everything from brushing your teeth to your final hamburger.
This is particularly stirring as we consider the moments we spend with loved ones. I can recount many friends and family members that I saw for the last time and did not know it at the time.

7. We don't always know what God is doing. Who can know what tomorrow will bring? As we move through this world it is important that we expect the unexpected. Solomon refers to the unexpected working of Divine Providence by the expression, "Time and chance" –

Ecclesiastes 9:11 NAU - "for time and chance overtake them all."

It refers to bad luck. Of course, we don't believe in chance or luck – things that occur at random. More properly Solomon is referring to bitter providence. In **Verse 12** he calls it an "evil time."

Ecclesiastes 9:12 NAU - "men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them."

- a. This was the way Naomi described it.
Ruth 1:20 NAU - "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."
 - b. In William Cowper's hymn – "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" he speaks of "frowning providence."
8. Of course, all of this is looking at God's Providence from human perspective. God does not categorize His actions as hard versus easy. All of God's actions are good. Yet, all of us know the difference between well-being and calamity.

- a. God is sovereign over it all.
Isaiah 45:5-7 NAU - "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷ The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these."
- b. God is in control and we are not. Live your life with contentment under God's hand of grace and give yourself to His service. There is no labor in Sheol. Sheol is the abode of the dead. It refers to the grave.
Ecclesiastes 9:10 NAU - "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."
- c. Solomon isn't making a statement on life-after-death. He is simply saying that death ends our earthly labors.
John 9:4 NAU - "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work."
9. So how are we to live in this world that is so full of the unexpected?
- I. We must live out our days in service to our Master.
- A. Jesus is Lord of this world. Nothing happens outside His control.
1. The charge of our Savior is, "Come follow me." It is a lifetime commitment.
 2. We are continually tempted to set our sights on the pleasures of this life. It's ok to take times of leisure. We must enjoy life, but never to the exclusion of our service to Christ.
 3. Our service to Christ never ends. It is vile to go into retirement from service to Christ. We are not allowed to set aside our labor. Our retirement doesn't come during this season.
Luke 9:61-62 NAU - "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." ⁶² But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."
- B. Our work will soon be over, but not yet.
1. The fields are rich and full of a bountiful crop of souls. We must labor until all have been brought in
John 4:35-36 NAU - "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest '? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. ³⁶ "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together."
 2. Today is the day of salvation. This is the season of God's mercy. Do you understand the time in which we are living?
- C. These are also days of preparation - We are the chaste bride of Christ.
1. The bride spent time preparing herself for her bridegroom. She lived in constant watchfulness for his arrival. We can see this in the parable of the 10 virgins.

2. We are to strive to become more and more adorned with the beauty of holiness.
3. This is a season of seeking to know Jesus more and more. We should be seeking richer and more glorious communion with Christ. This age is filled with things that hinder that communion. We should see our life as a great time of drawing nearer and nearer to Christ.

II. We should expect the unexpected.

A. God's Providence will always amaze us.

1. We should face each day with a sense of awe and wonder, and with a sense of expectation—the expectation that God is working His purpose.
2. We murmur and complain because we are fixed in our expectations for life. We have our feeble maps for our life and become impatient when there is a deviation from our expected course.
3. God doesn't have to work according to our expectations.
Isaiah 55:8-9 NAU - "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts."

B. We need to spend our days wisely.

1. Our days are passing quickly. This season is rapidly drawing to a close.
2. Paul says the end is nearer today than ever before.
Romans 13:11 NAU - "Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed."
3. This is the season for wisely spending our time. It is not the season for wasting time. It demands from us great vigilance and great discernment. How are we using our time?
4. It was a danger in Paul's day:
1 Timothy 5:13 NAU - "At the same time they also learn *to be* idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper *to mention*."
Ephesians 5:15-16 NAU - "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil."
5. It is a greater danger today.
God has ordained a finite amount of time on this earth. Each human being has been assigned a finite number of days. They are easily lost in this world of darkness. We are to redeem them and savor the richness of God's Divine Providence.

6. The internet has opened up a whole new way of killing and destroying time. Young men spend hours playing video games. Social media can captivate. It can be a form of addiction.
As of January of 2023 the parent company of Zynga games boasted that 10% of the world's population plays Zynga games each month. In an article in World Magazine titled "Cracks of Boredom" the author described women using the internet to counteract their boredom. Quote: "But here's a little secret that's gone unnoticed by most. It's *women* . . . Especially when it comes to social networking and shopping, women rule the internet. Sixty million users each day play Zynga games like Farmville, Cityville, and Frontierville. They are particularly popular with women, especially those between the ages of 25 and 44. Women are the majority of users of social networking sites and spend 30 percent more time on these than men; mobile social network usage is 55 percent female. Women have more friends on Facebook, and spend more time on the site. They post more messages, pictures, and updates."¹
7. Does our use of time reflect the wonder of God's Providence?

Conclusion:

1. Life in the presence of God is never boring. His ways amaze and surprise us. Our expectations are often different from what God brings, but His ways are always perfect.
2. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. We don't know the number of days we have remaining.
Ecclesiastes 9:12 NAU - "Moreover, man does not know his time"
3. How do we live in a world of the unexpected, a world when adversity can happen at any moment? We live wisely. We live trusting that God always does that which is good and right.
This may not always give us immediate comfort but we must never forget that in whatever we face we have a Good Shepherd to lead and provide for us.
Psalms 23:4-6 KJV - "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. ⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."
Jeremiah 29:11-12 NAU - "For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. ¹² 'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you."

¹ World Magazine, *Cracks of Boredom*, April 23, 2011 - <https://wng.org/articles/cracks-of-boredom-1617331227>