

Reflections on Ecclesiastes: Day Seven

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Ecclesiastes 10

“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. 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. 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. 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. Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me” (Ecclesiastes 9:9-13).

We often have hurricane alerts here in Florida, in either the Spring or the Fall. Perhaps some of you have read or seen reports on The Weather Channel during these times of year. As current residents of Central Florida, we do not necessarily find ourselves in the direct path of a storm, but we certainly must prepare ourselves for the worst. In recent memory (2004), we weathered three hurricanes that ravaged our neighborhood and community. While this was a statistically rare occurrence, the expanded media attention that has followed in years since has made our awareness much more acute.

In preparing to write, I contemplated these Scriptures listening to the howling wind, under rain filled clouds—so the concept of “under the sun” impressed me more than usual. Perhaps the lack of sun and the unpredictability of weather patterns, punctuated by the strength of a storm hundreds of miles away, was a gentle reminder of my frailty. We have learned, as residents of Florida, that trying to determine the absolute path and intensity of a hurricane, even given all of the technological advances of the Twenty-First Century, is still just educated guessing at best.

As I turned once again to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, I was reminded of the Hebrew clause *tachat ha'shemesh* (תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ) or “under the sun,” which addresses the universality of certain aspects of humanity. In this selection, in five verses, the term “under the sun” is used four times to describe things familiar to the great majority of mankind.

Enjoying life with the person you love, laboring hard in your work, accepting your destiny in life, and preparing yourself for inevitable death, are all things that wisdom dictates that one should do. Providentially, considering these aspects of life during the capriciousness of natural disasters adds another dimension that is beneficial to the soul. Let us take a look at these four aspects of life under the sun:

“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” (Ecclesiastes 9:9a).

This is an interesting statement coming from a man who is purported to have in excess of one thousand wives and concubines. While it might sound a bit contradictory, Solomon states that a man's reward in a fleeting life is a spouse who he truly loves and with whom he has become one flesh. The Biblical concept of becoming one flesh goes back to the very beginning of time when God created Adam, and out of him, fashioned Eve:

“So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:21-24).

From these accounts, the ancients understood that monogamy was God's preferred way to be fruitful and multiply. Yeshua confirms this in His teachings:

"Some Pharisees came to Yeshua, testing Him and asking, 'Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?' And He answered and said, 'Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH"? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?' He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way'" (Matthew 19:3-8).

Obviously, one man and one woman united was the best way for humankind to populate the Earth. In spite of Solomon's deviation from following these instructions, he does conclude that enjoying life with the one you love is your reward. If we are married, we should be thankful for the spouses that the Father has given to us.

Secondly, work is another aspect of our lives that goes right back to the Garden of Eden. Part of the very first instructions of the Creator to Adam included the aspect of working, or subduing the Earth:

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Genesis 1:27-28).

Here in today's reflection, we are told to toil or labor with all of our might while we are spending our time under the sun:

"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 where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:9b-10).

Solomon understood this one aspect of reality. While we are still alive, then we should use our time wisely to work on the things we have been given to perform or accomplish. In some respects, Yeshua Himself echoed this concept when He was about the Father's work during His ministry:

"We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).

The fact remains, whether you are viewing life from Solomon's or Yeshua's perspective, that eventually, when you pass on, your ability to accomplish the work you have been called to do will no longer be there. The simple, yet direct conclusion of the Scriptures is to work while there is still time.

The third aspect of our time under the sun comes with the providence of God in all of the affairs of human beings. Solomon points out that the "winners" in life are not necessarily the swiftest, the strongest, the wisest, the wealthiest, or the ablest:

"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" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

This statement is reminiscent of some other important words in the Bible. In His Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua reminds his audience of the opulence of Solomon. He teaches us to not be anxious for anything in life:

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they

spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:25-34).

The reality that worry will not add a single cubit to one's stature or an hour to one's life, should bring us back to the essence of what Solomon communicates. No matter what one's qualifications—eventually time and chance will overtake a person.

Finally, Solomon makes us consider the reality of our eventual deaths:

"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. Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me" (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

Solomon should remind us of the fact that a person does not know the day or hour of his death. We need to be aware that death can come at any time and not take our life for granted. In times of great storms that lack absolute forecasts, we do not know if it is our time to come to the end of our lives. As Yeshua summarizes,

"For He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

Yeshua makes it very clear when it comes to the natural order of the Creation that not only will the sun rise on the evil and the good, but it will also rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. God does not discriminate. What we are required to do with the sun or the rain is trust in Him no matter what happens.

There is much wisdom in the words of Solomon to consider. But what is also encouraging is that our Messiah Yeshua echoes and amplifies many of the same sentiments throughout His teachings, bringing them greater dimension.

In this season of joy, we need to be reminded to be thankful for the things that we have been given. These may include: a good spouse, work we have been called to do, our current station in life, and the reality that our days are numbered according to the Father's perfect will for our lives. Thus, let us enjoy our lives, and be thankful for what God is doing for us.

We can meditate on some words attributed to Moses, who gives each of us a pattern for dealing with our life on a faithful basis:

"Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:11-12).

Let us do this daily while we spend our days under the sun.

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