

The Wisdom of Life in View of Death

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In the hit movie from 1991, *What About Bob?*, there is a scene in which the 12 year old boy named Siggy is talking to the 40 something year old Bob. Throughout the movie, Siggy displays a fixation on the inevitability of death, and the conversation he has with Bob is on this topic:

Siggy: “Bob?”

Bob: “Yeah?”

Siggy: “Are you afraid of death?”

Bob: “Yeah.”

Siggy: “Me too. There’s no way out of it. You’re going to die. I’m going to die. It’s *going* to happen. And what difference does it make if it’s tomorrow or 80 years? Much sooner in your case. Do you know how fast time goes? I was 6 like yesterday.”

Bob: “Me too.”

Siggy: “I’m going to die. *You’re* going to die. What else is there to be afraid of?”

When you boil Ecclesiastes down, it has pretty much the same sentiments that Siggy expressed. It’s a morbid look at life and death. We’re all going to die, and it doesn’t make any difference if it’s tomorrow or 80 years from now. There’s nothing you can do about it; it’s going to happen. It’s a fact of life. Solomon does not view life as completely hopeless, however, for he makes the point that when God is placed into the equation, life and death take on completely new meanings.

In his wisdom, he tells us that since death is assured, there are certain things we need to consider while living our life on this earth. There is a wise way of viewing and living life, and there is a foolish way of viewing and living life. As the conclusion to Ecclesiastes states, our life must include fearing God and keeping His commandments (12:13). But there are also some practical observations he gives to help in our daily life. Such is the case with Ecclesiastes 8:10 – 9:10.

First, in 8:10-14, Solomon makes the observation that there are inequities and apparent contradictions in life. There are events that happen that we do not understand, that do not seem fair. Verse 10 is somewhat of an enigma to translators. It is rendered in various ways, with some seemingly very different from others. Are the wicked rulers praised or forgotten? Or is it the righteous that are forgotten? I am no scholar, but it seems to me that given the context, Solomon is saying that the wicked rulers are praised (either in their life or at their death), and that is vanity. It shouldn’t be that way.

He proceeds to comment about the apparent success of the sinner. There are times when the sinner’s life is prolonged; and there are times when bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. This doesn’t make sense either. It’s not fair. It’s vanity.

Appearances can be deceiving, however. It may *seem* that the evil man prolongs his life in spite of his wickedness, but Solomon assures us that it will not always be so. Though there may be times where the sinner lives a long, successful life under the sun, his day is coming (cf. Psalm 37:13). As a general rule

though, he will not live long and have success. And though there are times when the righteous receive what the wicked should receive, ultimately it will be well with those who fear God.

If Solomon couldn't figure out life's inequities with all his wisdom, we certainly are not able to either (vs. 16-17). God sees the big picture. We don't. We don't fully understand all that happens. Try as we may, it can't be done.

The application? Considering death comes to all, whether evil or righteous, wisdom demands that our life should be one that trusts and fears God, that lets Him work out the inequities in life, and that enjoys what He has given us.

In 9:1-6, Solomon addresses an axiom of life: *"Everything occurs alike to all"* (vs. 2). We can't necessarily know by life's events whether we are receiving a blessing or a condemnation from God. Prosperity is not necessarily a sign of God's favor. Poverty is not necessarily a sign of God's displeasure. A life of ease is not necessarily a sign of God's blessings. Difficult and trying times are not necessarily a sign of God's chastisement. *"People know neither love nor hatred by anything that is before them"* (vs. 1). Once again, it matters not whether the person is righteous or wicked. The nuances of life occur to all men, and eventually, death is the one main event that happens to all.

The application? Hope belongs to those who are still alive (vs. 4). Those who are dead have no more chances to correct their life, no more opportunities to fear God, no more opportunities to do the right thing. The living, however, if they are wise, will take this to heart and use their life as opportunity to be righteous and fear God. They will not fret over the inequities of life, but rather enjoy life to the fullest. Whatever God grants them, they will enjoy. They will eat, drink, and be merry. They will live joyfully with their wives. They will work mightily while they still have time and opportunity (vs. 9-10). This, according to Solomon, is the wise way to live life in view of death.