

You Are Here, pt.11 – Ecclesiastes Chapter 9 “The Enormous Exception”

1. I borrowed the title of this lesson from a classic book on the Sermon on the Mount. Earl Palmer wrote “The Enormous Exception” as a way to say “this is the way the world has always worked...but not for us, not now.” When we read Ecclesiastes Chapter 9, it is way too easy to become depressed and despair of life, value, and hope...but there is an exception out there.
2. The first sermon I preached here 6.5yrs ago went through scripture from Genesis to Maps looking at every story, every era through a lens of “action/counteraction or move/countermove.” It may be time to consider bringing that lesson back to remind us that we are not alone in the universe and not everything out there likes us.
3. For every good thing that becomes an option, our enemies will offer us something else. They will impede us, entice us, and promise us anything to get us off track. Just as Satan tempted Jesus with very nice offers, he will tempt us at every decision point, at every moment where we make a choice.
4. The good news is that, when Satan and our enemies offer us an attitude or an action, God counter moves. When we look at chapter 9, we need to understand where we are: these people living 930 years before Jesus didn’t know the whole story (frankly, neither do we). They had an idea of a future life but their main hope was that their people, their family, would continue to live. The destruction and loss of a family line was the greatest evil, the whispered horror, in those times.
5. The Teacher is not being an absolute downer in this chapter although it certainly looks like that to us. To his people, in his time, he was being Mr. Realism. He was letting them know not to expect to see their labors rewarded, and that their righteousness didn’t guarantee them long life or a good life. We do good and live a righteous life, he will tell them, because that is who we are and what we do, NOT because we have an agreement with the universe to reward us for being good.

6. (Eccl. 9:1-6) Everything which is desperately important to us right now will be gone and forgotten in future years. Does that make them nothing? Should we shrug and give up? Absolutely not! The Teacher is not telling his students to give up; he is telling them to step up and live their lives knowing that this is their chance to contribute, their chance to help their children and community to survive. Jesus echoes this in John 9:4.
7. (Eccl. 9:7-10) I love this passage. This is our “countermove” strategy. When we are reminded that our time on earth is limited, we respond by saying “Then we shall enjoy this moment. If this is what we have, we will love this and work with this.” I think of Leonidas, the leader of the Spartans, who held the pass at Thermopylae when the Persian warlord told him that their arrows would blot out the sun. “Then we shall fight in the shade.”
8. Verses 7-10 backs up the advice we heard from our mothers and from recent books by admirals: make your bed. Do your hair. Don’t talk about it not meaning anything for it does; it means something to you and to those who will remember you. Take pride in your work (John sweeping streets in Inverness).
9. Do what is right because it is right. Do what is good because it is good. Offer grace and mercy to those around you because we are the people who offer grace and mercy to those around us! We don’t do this to save our lives, gain extra years, or get a better house; we do these things because this is who we are.
10. We are not the people of God because we do what we do. We do what we do because we are the people of God. And if everything goes sideways? We remain the people of God.
11. And it can and does go sideways sometimes. (Eccl. 9:11,12)
Here is where we have to go back to that first sermon – very briefly.
12. Why did the people of God continue to fail? Why did they consistently forget the miracles, the lessons of God’s action in history, the teachings of their prophets? Because the devil had a weapon to use against them that no one had been able to take away. The weapons he uses against us (sex, power, lust, jealousy, fear) would

not be very effective if they weren't backed up by his ultimate weapon: death. No one had been able to go into that cave and take the dragon's greatest weapon out of his hands.

13. Why is the threat of death so powerful? Because it panics us into making very bad decisions. A woman looks in the mirror and decides she must quit waiting for Mister Right and just try to get a guy. A man looks in the mirror and panics. He isn't strong enough, rich enough, he isn't...enough. People dump their spouses, leave their kids, or spend weekend screaming at their kids and referees. They bribe universities to let their kids in.
14. Time and death hover over us, influencing us in countless ways every day. And then Jesus came, the Enormous Exception. He, alone among us, was able to take on death. He came to us, taught us, loved us, told us stories to help us on our own journey, and then walked into death, eyes wide open, very well aware of the task before him.
15. And, three days later, he walked out. He was wounded, scarred. It cost him so very much, but he walked into the devil's lair and disarmed the dragon. He tossed death to the side and said, "see? This isn't anything. Fear not."
16. If the Teacher in Ecclesiastes knew about Jesus and what he would do, his book would have been a very different one. I've said more than once that Ecclesiastes is the only book that squarely speaks to atheists and says "Okay, then this is your life. This is all you've got." When we read it, we keep thinking "but, there is more!" And we are right.
17. Jesus pulled the greatest countermove of all. We now do good because it is good – yes. And we live righteous lives because that is what we do – yes. But we have been given inside information and promises unknown to the Teacher: we know that death is nothing and this life is training ground for something coming next.
18. So – "eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what do you." Great dressed. Do your hair. Make your bed. LOVE your wife and husband

and friends and community. And whatever you can do, do it with all your heart. And Satan won't know what hit him.