

Teach Us, *Qohelet* (Part 16)

Ecclesiastes 9:1-10

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In Ecclesiastes, *Qohelet* has been talking about the frustrations we experience in life, and how the world doesn't operate the way we think it should. We would like what we get to be directly correlated with what we do. At Costco, the person who checks out items the fastest gets ranked highest on the board that is posted near the office. Likewise, our pedometer count directly reflects the number of steps we walked each day. Our strength increases the more we work out. Our golf scores improve the more we practice. These all are things that work the way we think they ought to. But when it comes to spirituality we are frustrated because the results we get are not correlated with how faithful we are. The wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. The world isn't fair, and the resulting frustration is what *Qohelet* emphasizes once again in chapter 9, as he nears the end of his life.

Specifically, *Qohelet* focuses on the fact that both the wicked and righteous face the same destiny. They all die. As irritating as it is that the righteous suffer in life, vv. 4-6 state that life is still better than death. The ultimate frustration is not suffering, but that the righteous have the same end as the wicked, that they both must die. *Qohelet* expressed this frustration earlier in 2:14-15; 3:19; 7:2; and 8:8. Our death is a fact that we must accept and that should drive us to a certain degree. After my mother died, my father became less frugal because he realized that saving money until one's death does no good. Death changes our perspective and causes us to focus on what is important.

Qohelet tells us to pursue righteousness, wisdom, and faithfulness, which are almost synonymous here. However, he makes it clear that pursuing righteousness will not necessarily benefit us in this life, and will not prevent our death. So what good does it do? In 9:1, we see that the righteous and wise and what they do are in God's hands. This is the result of righteousness. *Qohelet* doesn't elaborate, so we must extrapolate from what he has already said. We know first from chapters 7-8 that being in God's hands doesn't mean that things will be better for us. The righteous suffer just as much if not more than the wicked. This leads to the second conclusion, that our circumstances are not an indicator of whether we are in God's hands. People who assume that being in God's hands must lead to better circumstances often abandon the church after their circumstances take a turn for the worse. However, the third point is that being in

God's hands gives us the assurance that nothing is haphazard. Everything happens for a reason, within God's control and wisdom. Those who are suffering may be comforted by the knowledge that their suffering is not by chance, and that everything is a part of God's plan, though we may not understand it. I would suggest that God doesn't necessarily cause the hardship though. Hurricanes happen because the world and Creation is fallen. Cancer happens because our bodies are fallen and broken. God doesn't have to make these things happen. These things happen naturally because nature has fallen. But they are all still under God's control, and nothing is so difficult that God cannot support us through it. We may not be able to control our situations, but we know we are in God's hands and that we are not alone. Finally, being in God's hands is completely in our hands. We too have a role to play in this. If we have faith in Him and follow Him, we are guaranteed to be in His hands. So let us assess ourselves. How much do we dedicate ourselves to righteousness and wisdom, to spiritual things? These are the things we should prioritize. Jesus agrees with *Qohelet* when He tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We will not receive material benefit or prosperity from it, but we will have the assurance that we are in God's hands.

Finally in vv. 7-10, we learn that the response to the bleak reality of death is that we should learn to find contentment wherever we are. *Qohelet* has made this point a few times before. He says we should learn to enjoy our toil, food, drink, and family. My sister sent us a video of her two sons driving her crazy to remind us that as bad as things may seem, we will miss it after they have grown up. So we should learn to enjoy it before it goes away. Be content with your life now, because it won't last. In Philippians 4:10-13 Paul also tells us to be content, and in v. 12 he says that he found the secret to contentment. This secret is being in the hands of God, and it is found in seeking God's righteousness, His word, and His wisdom, which are manifest in Jesus Christ. So let us pray that God, who holds us in His hands, may grant us contentment in every circumstance.