



Dancing Before the Grim Reaper

Ecclesiastes 9:1-10

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The headline of a newspaper articles around the country reported the news that Colman Mockler Jr. died unexpectedly at the age of 61.

Even though he was a household name when he died, just 30 years ago, you have likely never heard of him.



Have you ever heard of Colman Mockler Jr. before?

He was a graduate of Harvard and, in 1965, became the treasurer for a company that had been founded in 1901 making razor blades. It was called The Gillette Company.

Mockler's rise in this company was amazing. Within two years he was vice president, then senior vice president, then executive vice president and then, all

within 9 years of being hired, he was the chairman of the board and the CEO.

He would make this company a global presence under his leadership. The stock value of Gillette increased 50-fold.

He would be celebrated in the business world; quoted as a guru of business management. He would go on to earn millions in salary and millions more on Wall Street.

Then, at the age of 61, he announced his early retirement — he was going to step down while he was ahead, so to speak. He had the rest of his life to bask in the glow of business and financial success.

Forbes Magazine put him, and his picture, on the cover of their latest issue at the time. I've seen a copy of that magazine cover where he's shown holding a razor in his hand, confidence written all over his face.

That magazine edition was going to hit the newsstands in one week, but Forbes

decided to send him an advance copy to enjoy.

When it was delivered, his office staff and all the executives stood and clapped and whistled as he carried the magazine back to his office to read. In many ways, this was the best day of his life.

He had no idea it would be his last.

With his staff applauding, he stepped into his office, shut the door, had a massive heart attack and crumpled to the floor. He was gone.

When the medics arrived to carry him out, he was still clutching that Forbes magazine in his hand.

A magazine issue that now seemed, terribly and ironically, one week too late.

Since Solomon is now an old man, some of his most powerful, Spirit controlled advice has come at the end of his life. His retirement, so to speak, is now in view.

And in chapter 9 of Ecclesiastes, Solomon begins reminiscing on two of his favorite subjects: life and death.

Solomon essentially says;

Let's talk about your deeds – they are a reminder of God's authority.

Notice, Ecclesiastes 9:1:

*But all this I laid to heart,
examining it all, how the
righteous and the wise and
their deeds are in the hand
of God. Whether it is love or
hate, man does not know;*

both are before him.

Ecclesiastes 9:1

In other words, Solomon is going to leave it to God to judge his deeds and determine what was commendable and what was worthless; what was worth loving and what was worth discarding.

Now what Solomon wants to do here is remind us that all our deeds are ***in the hand of God.***

That does not mean we are puppets — we choose our actions and our deeds — but God has woven every action into His purpose so that everything works out according to His divine plan.

In other words, God really does have the whole world in His hands.

And keep in mind that His hands are now nail scarred. The world He created crucified Him. They washed their hands of Him.

But make no mistake, the Sovereign Lord, who created the world and loves the world and was rejected by the world, is still in charge of world.

This is good news for the believer. The Savior who called you and redeemed you is capable of taking care of you; He will never wash His hands of *you*; He will never walk out on you.

Solomon says,

Let's talk about your deeds — they are a reminder of God's authority.

Secondly,

Let talk about your death – it’s a reminder of God’s appointment.

Notice verse 2;

It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all.

Ecclesiastes 9:2-3a

And just in case you don’t think you really deserve to die, **Solomon adds in verse 3b**;

The hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Ecclesiastes 9:3b

This corresponds to the biblical doctrine of total depravity: we are utterly fallen and corrupt; we are not basically good; we are sinful and in need of a Savior.

The Bible says:

- **“There is none righteous no not one” (Romans 3:10).**

- **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).**

And just in case you are not convinced that you are a sinner, keep in mind that the penalty for sin is an appointment with death.

The Bible announces, **“It is appointed unto man, once to die – and after that the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).**

Why? The Bible answers, **“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).**

Death is the paycheck, the wages, that definitively prove that you are a sinner.



When you think about your death, what feelings does that evoke in you?

Solomon writes here in his journal: I’ve laid this to heart; I’ve meditated on it and examined it; I’m admitting the truth of it: there’s this **one event** that’s deserved by us all:

- the good person experiences it and the evil person;
- the religious person and the atheist;
- the guy who never curses and the man who can’t stop swearing.

Morality does not protect you from mortality.

People don't want to talk about death because they want to believe it will never happen. Death is unthinkable.

Beloved, death is not unthinkable, it is inevitable!

Now, Solomon adds two elements that reveal why the unbeliever doesn't want to think about it.

First;

They know (deep down – they know) they aren't truly confident about life beyond the grave.

Solomon writes in verse 4;

But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Ecclesiastes 9:4

The word here for hope can be translated confidence.

If you are alive, and you only thinking about living and you never let your mind wander into the subject of dying, then you have this false sense of confidence.

In fact, everyone knows that it's better to be a living dog than a dead lion.

Now a dog in ancient days wasn't a household pet like we have today – it was a mangy scavenger.

In fact, throughout the Bible, dogs are used symbolically of sinful people and evildoers, all the way to Revelation 22

where John writes that dogs will not be allowed in Heaven.

Dogs, throughout scripture are a metaphor for wicked people.

But the lion was considered a noble beast – even today he's called the king of the jungle.

The lion will be linked to the royal line of the house of Judah in Genesis 49 and the lion becomes the emblem of the Messiah, the lion of the tribe of Judah.

So what Solomon is saying here is that it's better to be a wicked sinner who's alive than a noble king who's dead.

As far as the world is concerned, it's better to be anything but dead.

Because no matter how brave they sound about the hereafter, they are troubled in their hearts about the fact that they really have no confidence about life beyond the grave.

They will do anything they can to avoid thinking about the Grim Reaper and all the while they deny and suppress the truth God implanted in their hearts that there is a Creator (**Romans 1:21**).

Not only do unbelievers realize that they are not confident about life beyond the grave, secondly;

They realize they will not be remembered *after* they go to the grave.

Notice what he writes here in verse 5.

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know

nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.

Ecclesiastes 9:5

Generally speaking, this is absolutely true. Out of sight, out of mind.

Your family certainly will remember you. But the community at large? The world at large? Solomon is the richest, most famous, wisest man on the planet, and he says, “Don’t count on it.”

Look, I had to introduce you to a man who 25 years ago was a guru of management skill. He took his company global, he raised their stock price 50-fold, his face was on the cover of Forbes Magazine.

In the future, some other preacher will need to introduce his congregation to Forbes Magazine itself!

They’re gone. What they did was forgotten.

I went on Gillette Company’s website, because I had this suspicion, which I found it to be true. I searched for this man’s name; nothing showed up. I scoured their website and found not one entry or even one mention of their former CEO. And it’s only been 25 years.

Gone.

I’ve read one survey that concluded that the average person will be remembered, not just by family members, but by the community or country or world at large —

depending on what they did — somewhere between 5 years to 30 years, maximum.



How much can you remember about your grandparents? Great grandparents? How far back does your family’s memory go?

For the average person, the memory of you won’t even extend beyond your generation: 30 years

Now you might expect Solomon to follow all of this by telling us to go find some quiet place to live and just do as little as we have to and maybe even just sit there until you die.

He doesn’t. Instead, he tells us to get ready to live.

Let’s talk about your deeds – they are under God’s authority.

Let’s talk about your death – it is according to God’s appointment.

Now:

Let’s talk about your direction – it is a reminder of God’s approval.

The next verse begins a series of imperative verbs. And it begins with the word, **Go!** You could translate it: Come On! Get going! Let’s go!

And here’s what Solomon’s first imperative means, in principle form:

Go on and enjoy the simple things in life!

Notice verse 7;

*Go, eat your bread with joy,
and drink your wine with a
merry heart, for God has
already approved what you
do.*

Ecclesiastes 9:7

For the believer, you're not living under condemnation. You're free to live and enjoy the simplest gifts of life.

And I love the fact that Solomon doesn't say here that what you need to really enjoy life is a palace and a lot of gold and really fast horses and lots of building projects. He says here, "what you need to do to get on with living is start with a good meal."

Just bread and wine — that's as simple as it gets.



Do you take time in your life to pause and enjoy the simple things?

He adds to the simple things in life a comment about your wardrobe in **verse 8**.

*Let your garments be
always white. Let not oil be
lacking on your head.*

Ecclesiastes 9:8

White garments were the garments of weddings and festivals and reunions, representing joy.

In fact, we're told that one day we will be dressed in heaven in white garments (**Revelation 19:8**).

That doesn't mean you're not going to have a variety of royal clothing with colors of blue and red and yellow and purple and gold — it's simply a reminder that the believer will live in perpetual, never-ending joy.

In the meantime, go on! And that's a command — Go on and enjoy the simple things in life!

Secondly;

Go on and enjoy your relationships in life!

Notice verse 9.

*Enjoy life with the wife
whom you love all the days
of your vain life that he has
given you under the sun,
because that is your portion
in life and in your toil at
which you toil under the
sun.*

Ecclesiastes 9:9

I don't know about you, but this pandemic has given me a lot more time at home. Especially in the early months. I was able to spend more time with my wife than she ever wanted!

Solomon doesn't write here, *Live with your wife; put up with your wife.* He actually is saying something much more profound, "**Enjoy life with your wife.**"

You are not using her in life, you are enjoying life with her.

But isn't it interesting that the man who had 700 wives comes to the end of his life and changes everything with the stroke of his inspired pen from the plural to the singular?

He had forfeited a loving, faithful relationship with a wife for multiple wives and concubines.

But now as an old man, Solomon is as much as admitting here that he finally knows better.

This advice can be broadened in application to include children, parents, grandparents, extended family.

This is how to enjoy life: by making the most of relationships.

You are not ignoring the reality of the Grim Reaper. You are not trying to avoid the reality of the Grim Reaper. You are effectively dancing before the Grim Reaper, defying the Grim Reaper.

You're in festival mood; seizing life as God unfolds it with an attitude that the New Testament also encourages, **to rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice (Philippians 4:4).**

You do not deny the difficulties of life, but rather choose to put on your festival garments and make the most of life.

Go on and enjoy the simple things in life.

Go on and enjoy the relationships you have in life.

One more:

Go on and enjoy every facet of life!

Now in case you think Solomon is leaving something out, he writes in **verse 10**;

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Ecclesiastes 9:10

He's not denying the afterlife; he's emphasizing that you maximize the potential of this life.

And I love that first word, **whatever!**

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all you've got!

When God made all that is creative and lovely and imaginative and glorious, He said in Genesis 1:31, "Behold it is very good."

So long as "**whatever your hand finds to do**" doesn't violate some character or command of God, enjoy **whatever your hand finds to do! Go on!**

One of my commentators said, "You know what that can mean? It can mean:

“Ride a bike; go see the Grand Canyon, learn a musical instrument; visit the sick; cook a meal for the hungry; read a book; laugh with friends; run a marathon; call your parents; write a letter; play with your kids; travel to somewhere you’ve never been before – and more.”

D. L. Moody, writing more than a hundred years ago got the sense of Solomon’s command correctly when he wrote, “I believe the religion of Christ [engages] the whole person. Why shouldn’t a Christian play baseball or tennis? Don’t imagine you have to go live in a cave to be consecrated. Whatever you take up, take it up with all your heart.”



What pleasures, joys, and activities can you do today to remind you of the goodness of God and prepare your heart for eternal joy in heaven?

So here is what you do in life: with that simple meal and the joy of your spouse

and home and family and the excellence with which you take up a task; you’re actually getting a glimpse of life beyond the curse of sin, life beyond the grave:

- where you will feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb;
- where relationships with the entire family of the redeemed will be enjoyed to their fullest;
- where we will serve with everything we have our Redeemer;
- where we will live with uninhibited dancing and unimaginable triumph and unspeakable glory and grace.

This is how you get a taste of it down here. Learn how to dance before the Grim Reaper.

Start practicing your future life by savoring and loving and serving.

And then — at God’s appointed time — you will wing your way to that Celestial City: where the dancing, feasting, singing, serving, loving, thanking and worshipping will go on and on with uninterrupted, eternal joy.

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