

10. “Whatever Your Hand Finds to Do”

Biblical material: Ecclesiastes 9.

Quotes:

- Life is rather like a tin of sardines—we’re all of us looking for the key. *Alan Bennett*
- True religion is real living; living with all one’s soul, with all one’s goodness and righteousness. *Albert Einstein*
- Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live. *Dorothy Thompson*
- I could not, at any age, be content to take my place by the fireside and simply look on. Life was meant to be lived. Curiosity must be kept alive. One must never, for whatever reason, turn his back on life. *Eleanor Roosevelt*

Questions

Does the title of this lesson encourage us to enthusiastically sin? How do we react to our universal fate—death? What role does thought play in the way we should live? Despite our mortality, or maybe because of it, how do we see life? How do we deal with the irrational things we see in this world? And how should we handle anything that is explosive?

Discussion/ Comment

The lesson contains a story of an Italian man who was killed when a WWI bomb he was showing a friend exploded. The comment is made: “How do we make sense of things like this, crazy things that just defy rational explanation? The fact is, as we saw last week, we just can’t. What we have to do is simply learn to trust in the goodness of God, despite what’s for now inexplicable.”

One wonders what is inexplicable about a bomb exploding! Maybe we also need to learn other lessons about acting sensibly and wisely, like not playing with ancient explosives. There’s enough in this world of evil that’s hard to explain without acting irrationally ourselves...

In fact the story really illustrates the opposite of what seems intended. We need to think, and not simply do whatever we may feel like. When we are told to do “whatever your hand finds to do,” this is not a license to foolishness. Rather, we are encouraged by Solomon to put effort into good now, for we are very mortal and life is uncertain.

In fact the idea of destiny is Solomon’s theme here. The fact that we all share the same destiny (9:2) should not lead us to conclude that it does not matter how we live our lives. At least Solomon admits that the fact that death awaits everyone is an evil—and that a living dog is better than a dead lion!

The fact is that because of sin, there is no assurance in this life of right and justice. In fact the randomness of evil is another aspect of the lesson to be learned—that the innocent suffer and the guilty escape is the repeated observation. “Time and chance happen to them all” (9:11 NIV), and so we speak of luck and fortune and fate—all of which point to the fact that right does not here equate to benefit, and wrong does not seem to be correlated with problems. That we would wish it otherwise is illustrated by those in Jesus’ time who thought that material blessings must mean God’s approval, and suffering a punishment for sin. But as Jesus so clearly said and showed, this is not so. Bad things happen to good people, and vice versa, because of the warped situation and the brokenness of sin—the true evil in the Devil’s mistaken challenges to God.

Solomon is clearly struggling with the meaning of life and the anomalies we all face. How is it that right does not triumph? Why do the wicked do so well? Why does God not intervene? How do we respond to such a contradictory situation? The answer is always in God and his best intentions to all of his created beings. While the present situation is not comfortable, to say the least, it is God allowing demonstration and process so we can all see where the Devil's program leads. But let's not forget that this is not how things were supposed to be, nor how they will be once this "time of transition" is over. God will finally bring this to a glorious end...

Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6 is often used to "prove" the state of the dead—but how wise it to appeal to Solomon, who says some other things we may not totally agree with? Certainly we need to look more widely than this one text, since those we seek to persuade about the non-conscious nature of the dead may not be too impressed by Solomon's verdict. The fact that Ecclesiastes is indeed in the Bible speaks to God's desire for all the evidence, rather than endorsement of everything Solomon writes. Texts always need to be viewed in the context of the whole...

Enjoy life, and live it to the full, is Solomon's conclusion. Surely this is good advice, as long as we keep God at the center of our lives. This is not simply eat, drink and be merry—rather it is a delight in the God's gift of life, and the desire to make sure our lives make a positive difference. The worst is to live a meaningless life that has no point or purpose.

Jesus himself said "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10 NIV). We are supposed to have this abundant life here and now. As Jesus reveals the Father to us, as we come to understand the truth about God and his character, his love and care for us, his plans for our eternal future, then we can truly have life to the full now, and anticipate an eternal life with our loving Lord to come.

Ellen White Comments

All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are recipients of the life of the Son of God. However able and talented, however large their capacities, they are replenished with life from the source of all life. He is the spring, the fountain, of life. Only He who alone hath immortality, dwelling in light and life, could say, "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again." . . .

Christ was invested with the right to give immortality. The life which He had laid down in humanity, He again took up and gave to humanity. "I am come," He says, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." . . .

All who are one with Christ through faith in Him gain an experience which is life unto eternal life. . . . "Because I live, ye shall live also." {ML 295}

Bring a new meaning into your life and work. Represent Jesus in character. You both need this transformation before you are fitted for the work of God. If you will make the most of your God-given capabilities, and walk and work in the spirit of the Master, your life may even now be made a glorious success. The Lord would have you and your family, if you work with a purpose now, and you may receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for all those that love His appearing.--Letter 23, 1890, pp. 19,20. (January 6, 1890.) {9MR 127}

In knowledge and understanding we are nothing but babes. Christ volunteered to teach us in a language so simple that all can understand. No one needs to use a dictionary in order to comprehend the meaning of the simple words He uses in telling us how to gain eternal life. {2SAT 222}

Prepared November 13, 2006

© Jonathan Gallagher 2006