

Ecclesiastes 9:1–10 | “Your Circumstances Don’t Tell the Full Story”

Preached on August 23, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to Ecclesiastes 9:1–10. *[pauseeee]*

We have been slowly chipping away at this book, while this book has been chipping away at our false ideas about the world. *[pause]*

This is because Ecclesiastes gives us a picture of the world, as it is, not as we dream it or expect it to be.

And this is important because you can only live rightly when you see the world rightly. *[pauseee]*

So let’s let Ecclesiastes once again ‘chip away’ our false ideas, so that what remains is what’s true. *[pause]*

Let’s begin this morning by **READING** the passage. *[READ 1–10]*

We hate not knowing everything. *[pauseee]*

In school, maybe you took a test, and now you want to know so badly what grade you got.

The unknown of how you did feels unbearable. *[pauseeee]*

When I was in high school, I had this breathing issue that would suddenly come upon me at times...

And it would cause me to have such horrible episodes of breathing difficulty that I thought that I was going to die. *[pause]*

I went to doctor after doctor, and they couldn’t figure out why this suddenly started to happen to me, and at random times. *[pause]*

It was frustrating not knowing what was going on with my body. *[pauseeeee]*

We want everything tied up in a nice little bow. *[pause]*

We want all of our questions answered, all of the unknowns known, all of the mysteries solved.

And it’s this ‘uncertainty’ that Solomon continues to talk about because if you remember how chapter 8 ended, Solomon just told us that we cannot fathom everything that God is up to. *[pauseee]*

Well now, he continues that idea in our passage today. *[pause]*

First, he will show us that though we may not know and be able to discern all of what God is doing, there is something known...

I. You are in God’s hand.

Verse 1 says, “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.” *[pauseeee]*

Though we can’t know everything, *this* we can know: we are in God’s hand. *[pause]*

That’s what Solomon found out after laying everything to heart: the righteous are truly in God’s hand.

And this is why, as we found out last week, that it will be well with them because God’s hand encompasses their lives. *[pauseeee]*

Now God doesn’t have a literal, physical hand, but the image of the “hand of God” is a way to communicate something about Him in a way that we can understand. *[pause]*

To have something in your hand is an image that shows that you have possession, power, and authority over something.

So if I’m holding my phone in my hand, it shows that I have possession, power, and authority over it. *[pauseeee]*

Something else that the hand communicates is that you are caring and protecting something valuable. *[pause]*

When we want to protect something, we hold it tightly, so that it doesn’t drop and break. *[pauseeeee]*

All throughout the Bible, this image is shown...

We are told that in God’s hand is “the life of every living thing,”¹ and even “the king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord.”² *[pause]*

God’s the One whose hand it is that can give riches, honor, power, and might.³

And when it comes to His people, we are told that “all his holy ones [are] in his hand,”⁴ and no matter where we go, there his hand shall lead us and hold us.⁵ *[pause]*

So the fact that the righteous and wise are in the hand of God shows us that God has possession, power, and authority over them—they are *His*. *[pauseeee]*

What an important thing to always remember: if you trust in Christ, you are in the hand of God: you belong to Him! *[pause]*

You are His to do with, and what a comfort because He always does what is right and good.

¹ Job 12:10. (See also the end of Daniel 5:23).

² Proverbs 21:1.

³ 1 Chronicles 29:12.

⁴ Deuteronomy 33:3.

⁵ Psalm 139:9–10.

Your life is in *His* hands, not your own. *[pauseeee]*

We are also in the *care* of God's hand. *[pause]*

You are not living life on your own in a chaotic world, but you are held tightly in the Almighty's hand.

He guides, protects, and cares for you every single day. *[pauseeee]*

Since you are in His hand, then there's nothing that's going to happen to you that He does not see nor allow. *[pause]*

So I may not know what tomorrow will bring, but I know who will hold me when tomorrow comes. *[pauseeee]*

When you are facing a fearful situation, remember, "I am in the hand of God." *[pause]*

When you step out in faith, not knowing what's going to happen, think, "God's got me in His hand." *[pauseeee]*

His hand is the strongest, yet gentlest hand there is.

He can protect us from the fiercest enemy, yet tenderly hold us, so as to not squash us with His might. *[pauseeee]*

Do you rest in the hand of God? *[pause]*

Stop only looking by sight and quaking at the trials and tribulations, but instead, look by faith to see God's hand surrounding you. *[pauseeee]*

So Solomon tells us that we are in God's hand, but this doesn't mean that we will always understand what He's doing, for he shows us next that...

II. You cannot always interpret God's purposes from your life circumstances.

Imagine that I handed you a single puzzle piece that had nothing but light blue on it, and asked you, "What do you think the finished picture is?" *[pause]*

You might say that it's the ocean, or a landscape. *[pause]*

Some might even guess a swimming pool, or something like that, but could you really guess with complete accuracy, though? *[pauseeee]*

No way, for a light blue puzzle piece could easily be a part of a lot of different puzzles...

It could be in a railroad scene, where the blue puzzle piece is just a little bit of the sky in the corner. *[pause]*

It could be a part of a picture of a church building, where the light blue is the sky at the top.

[pause]

Likewise, the light blue could be a part of someone's shirt, and the picture could have absolutely no sky, ocean, or pool in it. *[pauseeee]*

That puzzle piece doesn't show you the whole picture, and so also, Solomon shows us that your life circumstances don't tell you the full story, either. *[pause]*

Like the light blue puzzle piece, we try our hardest to make a guess about our lives from the circumstances that we are in.

And sometimes we are even overly confident that we have the right answer, but we are often wrong. *[pauseeee]*

Solomon just said that the righteous and wise are in the hand of God, but then he says in verse 1, "Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him." *[pauseeee]*

His point is that though we are in God's hand, we don't know what the future holds for us in this earthly life.

We could experience awesome, amazing situations, or we could experience hard, dark trials. *[pause]*

You can't determine God's favor based on the circumstances of life. *[pauseeee]*

Think of Joseph in the Old Testament...

He was treated badly by others throughout his life, and especially when he was thrown into a pit and sold into slavery. *[pause]*

If someone looked at his circumstances, they could have assumed that God was displeased with him, yet what do we find?...

God's favor rested upon Him, and He was in the hand of God the whole time.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Think also of how Job experienced so much loss, so much pain, and so much misery. *[pause]*

His friends looked at his circumstances and concluded that he must have done something wrong, yet we know that it wasn't because of anything that Job did.

He was in the hand of God, from prosperity to loss to prosperity again. *[pauseeee]*

Those are the kinds of situations that Solomon is talking about...

Sometimes wise and righteous people go through horrific situations, but this doesn't mean that God is displeased with them. *[pauseeee]*

⁶ See Genesis 50:20.

It's not like every righteous person goes through an earthly life that is easy, comfortable, and prosperous, while every wicked person goes through a life that is hard, difficult, and miserable...

That's not how the world works. *[pauseeee]*

You can't always discern whether your circumstances are an expression of God's favor or not—God's providential workings are hard to decipher. *[pauseeeee]*

Haven't you experienced this, too?...

There's some godly person who gets cancer or goes through a tragedy, and you wonder, "How can this be? They were living for the Lord, doing great things for Him." *[pause]*

Or maybe *you* have been in the Word, praying, serving God, and all of a sudden some trial enters your life.

And now you start thinking, "What did I do to deserve this? Is this a sign that God is displeased with me?" *[pauseeee]*

Solomon wants to ground us in the truth that if we are His, we are in the hand of God, no matter what! *[pauseeeee]*

Don't let life's changing circumstances throw you around, causing you to question God and His ways. *[pause]*

If my standing with God is "in His hand" then the situations of life can't change that.

So I can't continually gauge God's love by what I go through. *[pauseeee]*

If you do that—if you continually try to discern God's love through what you go through...

Then you are going to be in turmoil because life is *filled* with ups and downs, hardships and ease, waves and smooth sailing. *[pauseeeee]*

You don't know what is before you in the future. *[pause]*

Some of you may experience great hardship, others are you, not so much. *[pause]*

I'm not sure what you will experience, or what I will, but we can't let those circumstances wreck us. *[pauseee]*

We also don't know what we as a church have ahead of us, either...

Maybe there will be times of growth that we never imagined, or there may be unseen hardships to come.

But let's not use our circumstances as the standard by which we interpret our standing with God. *[pause]*

Let's use *Scripture* as the standard, for it says that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.⁷

And listen to Jesus' words in John 10...

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will *snatch them out of my hand*."⁸ [pauseee]

Don't let your circumstances topple your trust in God's providential working, no matter how strange it may look. [pauseeeee]

A prime example of how we can't use life's circumstances to interpret God's view towards people is *death*. [pause]

In verse 2 he says, "The same event happens to the righteous and the wicked." [pause]

All you have to do is look at how everyone physically dies, and it doesn't matter if you are the most godly person there is, or if you are the most wicked sinner...

The same thing happens to both. [pauseee]

The hearts of men can be so "full of evil" and they can pursue great folly, yet they still die, just like the righteous person. [pauseeeee]

Some people trip over this very thing...

They lose a godly loved one, and they get mad at God, as if He did something wrong.

But Solomon reminds us that it's not like this is something new, for it's a consistent characteristic of our fallen world. [pause]

You certainly can't figure out God's love for someone based on if they die, *for we all do!*

And Solomon calls this "an evil in all that is done under the sun"—it's a distressing feature of the world. [pauseee]

When you die, there's no second chances.

And this is why he says in verse 4, "But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion." [pauseee]

The living still have hope in that they know that they will die, and can live in light of it, but the dead are no more. [pause]

There are no more chances for those who pass away.

⁷ A reference to Romans 8:38–39.

⁸ John 10:27–28 (Italics added by me.)

There's no memory of them years after they have gone. *[pause]*

Their loves, hates, envies, and all other passions are no more.

They don't play a part here anymore—death removes a person from everything in this earthly life. *[pauseeee]*

This is a wake-up call for those who have never been made right with God through Jesus Christ. *[pause]*

If you have never trusted in Jesus, then you are NOT in God's saving, protecting hand, but you are in His hands for judgment, due to your sin.

And as Scripture says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."⁹ *[pauseeeee]*

Right now, you have an opportunity to turn in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ, and be saved. *[pause]*

You won't always have this possibility, for those who die "have no more share in all that is done under the sun." *[pauseeee]*

Know that Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, was sent to die for the sins of mankind, and all those who trust in Him are graciously and mercifully saved from God's wrath.

So trust that Jesus died for you and that in Him you can be forgiven and given eternal life, and you will find a refuge in His hands. *[pauseeeee]*

This reminder of the finality of physical death is also a wake-up call for all of us. *[pause]*

Today, right now, you have an opportunity to live for the Lord and enjoy the earthly life that He has given to you.

And that's why he goes on into verses 7–10 to show us that...

III. You should enjoy life as a gift and take advantage of today!

Sometimes people view Christians as pleasure-hating people, who aren't allowed to enjoy life. *[pause]*

We are often characterized by what we *don't* do, so we are viewed as those who don't have fun, but who are always serious and austere.

But what's interesting is that right here in the Bible we are being instructed to have joy! *[pauseeeee]*

God wants us to enjoy the blessings of life, not walk around with dour, glum faces, as though living for the Lord was miserable. *[pauseeee]*

⁹ Hebrews 10:31.

Solomon is battling the approach to life whereby you let your circumstances destroy your faith and joy.

Whereby you're constantly evaluating whether God is pleased or not, and you despair and are depressed by life's circumstances. *[pause]*

But someone who trusts God, and knows that God's providence is mysterious, can enjoy the blessings, and work hard today. *[pauseeee]*

In verse 7, he calls us to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, like food and drink, and he tells us to do this, "for God has already approved what you do." *[pauseee]*

Now this doesn't mean that you are allowed to go wild because God approves of it.

Rather, it means that finding joy in the gifts of food and drink have been approved by God for us to do. *[pause]*

We *should* enjoy these things! *[pauseeee]*

Some people feel guilty for eating a hearty meal, but God doesn't look down on those times when you enjoy a good meal *in gratitude to Him*. *[pauseeee]*

Verse 8 speaks of your garments being white and not lacking oil on your head.

And this is once again an instruction to have joy because it's the opposite of wearing sackcloth and having ashes on your head, which were a sign of mourning.¹⁰ *[pause]*

His point is that you shouldn't walk around everyday sullen and downcast, instead, be joyous! *[pauseeee]*

You are also to enjoy life with the wife who you love. *[pauseeee]*

You only have so many days, so do you enjoy them with your spouse? *[pause]*

Many of us need to remember that God has given us our spouse as a gift.

And our days are fleeting, so will we take advantage of the days that we have with the one we love? *[pauseeee]*

Spend time together, go on dates, be close, laugh, have fun.

Don't waste the days that you have with your husband or wife, but be thankful to God for them and enjoy them. *[pauseeee]*

Lastly, we should do all of our tasks with all of our might.

¹⁰ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 331.

So work hard, work diligently, put energy into it. [pause]

Don't do half-hearted jobs, don't be lazy, don't keep procrastinating. [pauseeee]

This relates to what Paul says in Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." [pauseeee]

Once you die, you won't have these opportunities anymore, so take advantage of the time that God has given to you in this earthly life. [pauseeeee]

The truth is that we don't know everything, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't *do* anything. [pause]

You should enjoy life and take part in what God has given to you. [pauseeeeeee]

In the book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, by J.R.R. Tolkien, Frodo is struggling with the hard, dark days that he's in and he says, "I wish it need not have happened in my time." [pause]

Gandalf says in response, "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." [pauseeee]

It does no good complaining or wishing that you lived in different times, had different things, or were in different circumstances.

Trust God, enjoy what He's given, and work heartily doing what He's given you to do. [pauseeee]

Solomon knows that you could become so obsessed with the question of "Why is this happening to me?" that you wouldn't enjoy what you have right in front of you. [pause]

He doesn't want us to go down the path of gloom and frustration, but to go down the path of joy and activity, that's grounded in seeing life as a gift from God. [pauseeeee]

And so...

Don't stumble over life's circumstances, but trust God, enjoy His gifts, and take advantage of today.

The truth is that life's confusing situations, whereby trials come upon us, even if we are seeking to live for the Lord, could cause us to give up. [pause]

They could lead us to think, "What's the point?! I'm seeking to live for the Lord, but *this* happens to me. Does God hate me or something?" [pauseee]

You let that go on, and now your life is affected, as your joy is sapped.

And now you want to just hunker down, or walk around sullenly, or become idle.

But Solomon is calling you to trust God, knowing that you are in His hand. [pause]

Realize that you are in God's hand, even though you don't understand what His hands are up to. *[pauseeee]*

Enjoy the precious gifts of life, like food and drink, your spouse, and so many other things.

Take advantage of the moments, and work hard at what's in front of you. *[pauseeee]*

A person can do this when they remember that life is *God-controlled*, so I can trust Him, even if it looks bleak. *[pause]*

They can do this when they remember that their life is *God-cared-for*—I am in His hand, and in that, I can rest. *[pause]*

And a person can enjoy life and take advantage of today when they remember that life and its blessings are *God-given*...

My days, my time, my spouse, my work, my tasks, and even my food and drink are all precious gifts from God.

May I enjoy them, and not waste them. *[pauseeee]*

God's control, care, and gifts have all been most clearly displayed in Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. *[pause]*

In God's sovereign *control*, He sent Christ at just the right time to redeem us from our sins. *[pause]*

In God's *care*, He lovingly did this, so that we could be made right with Him, and adopted as His children.

And this was all God's *gift* to us, for we were undeserving of anything, but judgment. *[pause]*

Yet He has given us the gift of His Son, and through Him, the gift of forgiveness, eternal life, and hope that is sure. *[pauseeee]*

If God's control, care, and grace were shown in that way, how could we think that He doesn't still have control of life, care for us, or give us grace today? *[pauseeee]*

Don't stumble over life's circumstances, but trust the One who gave His Son, so that we could have joy forevermore.