



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Destiny of Us All (Ecclesiastes 3:16-22)

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Former president John Quincy Adams suffered a stroke in 1846. He returned to Congress the next year, but the illness had taken its toll.

Daniel Webster remembered this about his last meeting with Adams: "Someone, a friend of his, came in and made particular inquiry of his health. Adams answered, 'I inhabit a weak, frail, decayed tenement; battered by the winds and broken in upon by the storms, and from all I can learn, the landlord does not intend to repair.'"

Solomon knew this as well. He surveyed his surroundings and saw an unjust world in which people of every class and level of importance eventually passed away. What are we to make of this truth that is completely out of our control? In our text in this study, the wisdom of Solomon again gives us some direction in how to look at this world with its inevitabilities.

I. JUDGMENT OF MAN (3:16, 17)

Ecclesiastes 3:16, 17 - Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

Injustice is all around us and will always be, to some degree. In a fallen world consisting of fallen human beings, true justice to every person or group of people will not always exist. This does not mean we give up trying to bring about justice where we can, but the reality of injustice will never fully be extinguished in this current world system.

This brings up an interesting application of these verses for those in political office. For leaders who make, interpret and enforce law, the stakes are very high. For leaders on the state level in America, decisions that are passed into law affect millions of people, sometimes creating justice, sometimes injustice. What a responsibility is on your shoulders! For this reason, you should pray for wisdom to make laws that are just. I am constantly trying to remind your constituents to pray for you for that same reason.

But the final arbiter is God. Someday, according to the Bible, this world will end and God will create the only society that is truly equitable, with good rewarded and evil judged.

Revelation 22: 11, 12 "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my

recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."

May God give us leaders who understand this truth. Nineteenth-century Supreme Court Justice Horace Gray once said to a man who had appeared before him in a lower court and had been acquitted on a technicality, "I know that you are guilty and you know it, and I wish you to remember that one day you will stand before a better and wiser Judge, and that there you will be dealt with according to justice and not according to law."¹

II. JOURNEY OF MAN (3:18-21)

Ecclesiastes 3:18-21 - I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

The story has been told of Alexander the Great who, seeing Diogenes looking attentively at a parcel of human bones, asked the philosopher what he was looking for. Diogenes' reply: "That which I cannot find--the difference between your father's bones and those of his slaves."

Regardless of who we are, our background, social status, economic strata, skills and talents, power or charisma, we are all destined for the same place – the grave. Solomon refers here to generic equality of a future journey for the living, known as “the dust”. Genesis tells us God created the first man from the ground and to the same ground all sons and daughters of Adam will return.

But as we consider the Bible systematically and consider all the Scriptures have to say, it is clear that although we all die, or return to dust, our spirits do not cease to exist and do not all have the same destiny. Two, and only two, possibilities are available to humans who die – eternity with Christ or eternity apart from Christ.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

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Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 John 5:12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

The two choices could not be more clear and the options are only open to the living. Once you and I die, our future spiritual destiny is fixed and cannot be undone.

III. JOY OF MAN (3:22)

Ecclesiastes 3:22 - So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

Here's some wise advice. As a matter of fact, Solomon makes this statement, or something very like it, no less than seven times in the twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes. The advice is simply this: enjoy yourself and the situation in which you have been placed.

There is much to be said for satisfaction. Not complacency, but true acceptance of our lives while not letting the root of bitterness destroy our enjoyment of life. Maybe you have had a rough hand dealt to you in life. Maybe things aren't fair or haven't gone the way you wanted. Solomon would look you in the eye and say, "Work to change what you can, but for the other things beyond your control, be content. Enjoy life. It's a gift." That is our lot.

1 Timothy 6:6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

What is your story? Everybody has a story. Sure it's got some injustice in it. You think it's the thing that has caused you to become a failure? No, that is not true. Your attitude, perhaps, but not your struggle. The message of this chapter is simply this: Disadvantages need not disqualify. You can become significantly used by God if you refuse to let your disadvantages turn you into a cynic.²

This comes as a great encouragement after some sobering verses about the stark nature of life. Yes, life is unfair. Yes, it is short and no matter who you are, you will return to dust. But there is also a gift. It's a gift called life that was meant to be enjoyed. The phone

may ring tomorrow with catastrophic news that will turn your life upside-down. But that shouldn't take away the ability to see beauty in the world today. Slowing down, relaxing a little, finding a hobby, spending quality time with those most important to us – these are the gifts we enjoy while we can.

But there is also a danger in the decision to enjoy life. Are we enjoying life as we really ought? It's an important question, for shallow enjoyment can be found in pursuits that are actually trivial and mundane. One of my favorite quotes about this crucial decision was made by C.S. Lewis:

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.³

The deepest, most lasting joy is found in Christ Himself. All the other "joys" of this world can't substitute for that relationship. It's a lifelong pursuit to find true joy, so may we each find the path that leads us to the best, not simply the good.

¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/j/justice.htm>

² Swindoll, Chuck. *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Word Books: Waco, TX, 1985), p. 110.

³ Lewis, C.S. *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*.