

Time and Chance

“I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, not the battle to the strong, not bread to the wise, not riches to men of understanding, not favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time.” Ecclesiastes 9:11-12.

In Ecclesiastes Chapter 9, the wise man Solomon offers one of the most honest and liberating reflections in all of scripture. Solomon looks squarely at the realities of life “under the sun” and reminds us that, in this world, even the righteous and the wise experience the same uncertainties as everyone else. Death comes to all, opportunities are limited, and the outcomes of our efforts are never fully in our control. Yet rather than leading us to despair, these truths invite us into a life of humility, diligence, and trust in God.

In verse 10, Solomon urges us to give our best effort to the work God places before us. *“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is not work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.”*

Solomon counsels that whatever our hands find to do, we are to do it wholeheartedly, recognizing that our time on earth is brief and that the opportunities of this life will not continue beyond the grave. This is not a call to frantic desperation, but to purposeful, faithful living. Since we cannot control the results, we should focus on what we can control, our integrity, our effort, and our obedience to God.

This then flows naturally into verse 11, where Solomon observes that *“the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,”* because *“time and chance happen to them all.”* Human ability, as valuable as it is, does not guarantee success. The fastest runner sometimes loses. The strongest warrior sometimes falls. The wisest planner sometimes fails. Life contains variables beyond our foresight and beyond our power to manage. Solomon’s phrase *“time and chance”* acknowledges that from our limited human perspective, life included unexpected turns that we cannot predict or prevent. God sees that full picture, but we see only a snapshot.

Solomon deepens this truth when he adds that *“man also does not know his time.”* in verse 11. None of us knows the day of our death. None of us knows when opportunity will arise or when adversity will strike. Like a fish suddenly caught in a net or a bird unexpectedly trapped, people are often surprised by events that shape their lives. This is not meant to frighten us but to humble us. It reminds us that our confidence must rest not in our strength, wisdom, or skill, but in the God who holds all seasons in His hands. Ecc. 3:1.

These verses teach us to live wisely and enjoy life. Since life is unpredictable and our time is limited, we should embrace each day as a gift from God. Work diligently, enjoy God’s blessings with gratitude, walk humbly before Him, and trust Him with the outcomes we cannot control.

~Ron Josselet (Assisted by CoPilot)