

A Fierce Joy in Your Portion – *Eccles 8:16 – 9:9*

Introduction – In this fourth and final section, Solomon doesn't really wait until the end to hit on the conclusion again. Rather, he starts out with both guns ablazin'. This is a book about living with a fierce joy in the midst of our inscrutable portion from God.

God is the Inscrutable God (8:16-17) – Once again Solomon sums up his efforts. He had sought to understand all of God's works, and all this resulted in was sleepless nights (v16). All he could discover was that everything he saw was the work of God and that no one can know the purpose of what God is doing (v17). This is not just a general summary, but a very personal summary about the very personal events in one's own personal life. The more a wise man learns, the more he realizes he does not know. The wise man learns this is the work of God (7:13, 11:5).

God is the Sovereign God – All of the things going on around you right now are the "business" of God, "the work of God." While we acknowledge the exhaustive sovereignty of God over the smallest aspect of our lives, we cannot explain any of the mechanics of this sovereignty. We know *that* God controls all things; but we emphatically deny that we know *how* or *why*. This is the basis of the warning of James (4:13-16). Solomon will apply the same idea in the verses ahead.

The Same externals (9:1-3a) – Both the righteous and the wicked are in the hand of God. We cannot tell what is happening, whether it is out of the love or hatred of God, by what is occurring (v1). Does God love me or hate me? The answer cannot be found through one's external circumstances (vv2-3a).

Twin Evils (v3) – First of all, this lack of clarity is an evil, Solomon says. It is a burdensome evil that is twisted by the fall (1:13). "Truly the sons of men are full of evil" – the fall is an evil which is our own responsibility. And this evil, this sin, is madness. Sin is not only evil; it is insanity. It is madness not to acknowledge nor give thanks to God (Rom 1). It is madness for us not to walk by faith. This is why it is so hard to explain why we have done the wrongs we have done. Oftentimes, there is no good reason.

Living Dogs/Dead Lions (vv4-6) – In the context (for it is not an absolute), Solomon is showing that while the living may find themselves in a terrible situation, there is always hope – and that is always better than having any number of external "blessings" but now find yourself under the wrath of God without hope (Heb 9:27, Matt 10:39). When a man dies, every opportunity to learn wisdom vanishes. Today, while you hear His voice, this is the day to learn wisdom – to call upon the grace of God (Psalm 95).

Fierce Joy (vv7-9) – And so we come to the conclusion of the matter – again. Where does the ability to have such fierce joy in the face of vanity come from? Where can I find such joy, merriment, and celebration in life? Why is bread so tasty? Why is wine so wonderful? Why are festive dress and fragrant oils so joyous? Why is the marriage bed so delightful? On the other hand, why is it that so many times, these things are given and yet there is no delight, no joy, no satisfaction?

The Gift of Joy – We are commended to enjoy these things and of course, we cannot unless God gives the gift of enjoyment – which He freely does to those who are in Christ, for Jesus is Wisdom. It all begins with our justification – "for God has already accepted your works" (v7). If you know the satisfaction of Christ's righteousness given to you, you are on the path to a fierce joy.

Protecting That Joy – What is your portion in life (v9, Psalm 16:5-6)? Whatever it is, acknowledge that it is from the hand of God and give thanks for it. Remember, He makes all things beautiful in His time. Whether or not you understand it (and you don't – see the first half of Chapter 9), you can receive it by faith with thanksgiving. The Bible has these hard words (no promises of an easy life), but they are words that protect your joy.

Proverbial Bombshells –

- You cannot thank God for your portion unless you acknowledge the One who apportions.
- You know whether or not God is pleased with you by whether or not you are pleased with God.
- Grumbling and complaining remove the assurance of God's blessing; you still had it while you were giving thanks regardless of the circumstances.
- Discipline yourself in the spiritual discipline of gratitude – thank Him for everything.
- God has approved your obedience in Christ; the more you understand what this means, the more you will act like it.

Only then will we be able to "eat your bread with joy, drink your wine with a merry heart, let your garments be white and your head lack no oil, while you live joyfully with the wife whom you love..." – all the days of our vain little lives.