



KIAMA ANGLICAN  
CHURCHES

Ecclesiastes 9

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## Introduction

A wrong view of death and judgment?

It kicks off in verse 1, which says that, for the wise and the righteous, *everything is in God's hands*. It might sound pious, but it's actually fatalistic. Because look at what follows... Verse 1, Everything's *in* God's hands, but people don't know what to expect ('cause God doesn't give us the details we *want*, does he?). We'd love to prepare for the future, but we won't *know it* until it hits us. Then verse 2 talks about the ugliest thing that's going to hit us; and it says that everything is the same for everyone.

There is one fate for the righteous and the wicked, for the good and the bad.

Verse 3, There is one fate for everyone. Evil, madness, and death. In verse 5 and 6 we're

told that the dead don't know anything, there's no reward for them, and nothing left for them.

So, what does the Teacher tell us about death and judgement? [1] The dead don't know anything, [2] there's no reward for them, [3] and nothing left for them—and that goes for the good and the bad, the righteous and the sinful.

I mean. If a friend asked you, “*What happens when you die?*”, is that what you'd tell them?

Ecclesiastes 9:2-10 is a *biblical* view, isn't it? I mean... it came *from* the Bible. And you could argue that it's actually there right at the start. In Genesis 3:19, God warns Adam: *You are dust, and to dust you will return.* Not ‘your body’, you.

Now... Once you see what Ecclesiastes is saying, I can think of at least one massive

difference that ought to make in our theology and the way we view Jesus.

People will say things like, “everyone is immortal”. “*Everyone* lives forever.” “There’s life beyond death for everyone—it just depends how you spend it.” And that’s taken for granted out there in Christian culture. The idea that humanity is *intrinsically* immortal. But is that *really* so obvious? Because if it is, it certainly doesn’t seem obvious to the Teacher.

Because he’s a wise person, right? He knows God is God of heaven and earth, but he also knows how to read the physical signs of this world. The Teacher pays close attention to the people around him, and how they live this life. And the one thing he knows for **sure** is that when people **stop** living, they don’t **start** again. When the silver cord snaps...we dig a hole, we put ‘em in a pine box, we bury it, and that’s where it

stays. You can check for yourself if you've got a shovel.

And to the person who really grasps that...who's paid careful attention to the world around them...a verse like John 3:16 is earth-shattering. Life-changing. It puts the lie to *everything* they thought they knew, and turns the universe on its head.

Because in John 3:16, Jesus says: For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who trusts in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Do you take that for granted? You *shouldn't!* You can walk 20 steps from the door of our church to a yard that will teach you that death is a full-stop. The genius mind of the Teacher assures us that death is a full-stop. **So, the fact that the death and resurrection of Jesus *changes* that, changes *everything*.** Jesus changes

everything. His death and resurrection up-ends everything we thought we knew about life and worth and wealth and meaning and justice and *death*—no longer the end of all ending.

So, although it seems so patently obviously true, Ecclesiastes 9:2-10 is proven *wrong* by the resurrection of Jesus. In him we have a hope that goes beyond death! How good is that?! Praise God!

A wrong view of scripture?

So, what does that mean for us reading our Bible? Because in Sydney Anglican churches, our church, our denomination, our Bible colleges are 'evangelical'. Not *politically* like in America, but theologically. And that means we believe the Bible is God's word to us.

In Ecclesiastes 3:19-20, the Teacher says that there's no difference between us and

animals: both go to the same place. He says that maybe our 'breath' goes back to God, but that's not 'you'; that's the breath of God that made you alive in Genesis 2. Without it, you're dead. In Ecclesiastes 9, the Teacher says that death is a full stop.

In the end, though they seem so obvious, these ideas are proven wrong by the Resurrection. It even contradicts the Creed! So how do we deal with that as evangelicals? Why has God given us part of the Bible which seems (at first look) to teach something which is at odds with what we know is ultimately true?

Well I think you have to ask the question, **how** is God speaking to us through this? And...that may not be as simple as, "God said this, and I believe it."

***Of course, often it is!*** When God says, "I am the Lord your God, there is no other



besides me;<sup>2</sup> and my glory I will not give to another,”<sup>3</sup> God said it, I believe it. But sometimes it’s a bit trickier. You have to ask, *how is God speaking to me through this?* Because there are times when God speaks to us through cultural stories, or poems, or apocalyptic visions; or even Job’s friends (who we are told were wrong) or through what the Teacher says here in Ecclesiastes. You have to ask, **how** is God speaking to me through this?

And that can be difficult; you can get the wrong end of the stick; but we work on it together, as Jesus’ church, prayerfully listening to him. And I like what Thomas Cranmer, the godfather of Anglicanism said in his *sermon on why we should read scripture*: there’s some hard bits. But the important stuff will be said clearly somewhere. So don’t be afraid, just keep

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 45:5.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 42:8.

reading. And keep asking that question, *how is God speaking to me through this?*

In Ecclesiastes 9, I'm confident that a key part of how God speaks to us is through our push-back. The Teacher says that 'whether you're righteous or wicked, life has no meaning, you're just gonna die' and we say *No! That can't be right! That isn't right—Jesus proves that!* The yellow ribbons in our towns say the Teacher *has to be* wrong, don't they?

And I think *that feeling* of upset and reassurance is how God speaks to us through these verses. Being confronted with the sheer hopelessness of death teaches us just how precious Jesus is, and what a gift he's given us in a hope that *does* go beyond death.

Jesus changes *everything*. He gives us hope beyond death. And that's earth shattering. It changes everything.



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