



Expect the Unexpected

Pursuing Wisdom...Under the Sun Part 6
Ecclesiastes 9:11-18

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Daisy Alexander put a handwritten note inside a whiskey bottle and put into the Thames River in London in 1937. Two years later, she died.

Experts would later calculate the voyage of that bottle, having floated into the Strait of Dover and then into the North Sea and past the Netherlands, voyaging into Scotland and Denmark in the North Sea. That sealed bottle would have traveled between the Shetland Islands and the coast of Norway and into the icy waters of the Barents Sea; after several years of floating along these desolate waters it would have turned eastward in the current through the East Siberian Sea. From there it would have been pulled into the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska and then after even more years, it would have begun its southbound journey and then it would finally reach the waves of the Pacific Ocean where it was carried along the west coast of the United States.

That bottle finally came to rest on a stretch of sand on the coast of San Francisco Bay.

It had traveled nearly 13,000 miles over a span of 12 years.

A man by the name of Jack Wurm was walking along that sandy stretch of beach, lost in his thoughts about what to do with his life. He was 55 years old. His restaurant business had gone bankrupt; he was destitute and now penniless.

But then Jack spotted that bottle, half-buried in the sand. It was still watertight, and he noticed the note inside. The cork wouldn't come out, so he broke the bottle open and pulled out that handwritten note which read – and I quote – “To avoid all confusion, I leave my entire estate to the person who finds this bottle.” The note was dated – June 20, 1937, signed by a woman who used to live in London whom Jack had never heard of.

Though heavily contested, that note was finally and officially determined in court to be the legitimate last will and testament of Daisy Alexander, the daughter of Isaac Singer; the heiress to the Singer Sewing Machine fortune.

So, Jack Wurm was awarded her portion of that fortune – which in today’s economy would have been worth \$10.6 million dollars.

Almost makes you want to go to the beach and look for bottles!

The moral of the story could be, “You never know what’s going to sail into your life.” Or maybe, “Life is full of surprises.”

Or perhaps we could put it this way, “Expect the Unexpected Events of Life.”

Solomon evidently has this Spirit-inspired thought on his mind and heart.

Life is filled with the unexpected. So, what can you cling to as life unveils one surprise after another?



When life gets turbulent, and unexpected surprises come your way, what is your natural inclination? Who do you normally run to? What do you normally cling to?

Solomon rattles off a list of surprises here in Ecclesiastes chapter 9. Turn there with me today for some inspired truth that might be hard to swallow, but it’s the truth upon which you can securely plant your feet — and your heart.

We’re now in Ecclesiastes chapter 9 and verse 11.

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the

swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

Ecclesiastes 9:11

It’s as if Solomon says – let me show you five unexpected surprises that I didn’t see coming over the course of my lifetime:

First, the race isn’t always won by the fastest runner

Sometimes, strange things happen – a shoe falls off; or they get tripped up going around a corner. And 4 runners behind the lead trip over him and suddenly, the guy in 5th place wins the race.

I read recently of several runners who were running to qualify for the Boston Marathon — they ended up being stopped by a train passing by. All the trains were supposed to have been suspended for a certain time period, but somehow this one got through — and those runners lost 11 minutes of time and didn’t qualify. One of those runners might have been faster than all the others, but that surprising train changed everything.

Solomon adds in verse 11:

The battle isn't always won by the strongest army

Read your history books which are filled with unexpected victories by smaller, less equipped military forces.

Solomon says, "Here's another surprising event in life that I've seen:

The necessities of life aren't guaranteed for the wisest person

Solomon writes in verse 11: nor bread to the wise. In other words, the wisest people aren't guaranteed even the basic food; wise people can go hungry and maybe even homeless too, given some unexpected events in life.

Number 4:

Wealth isn't the automatic result for the careful investor

Solomon writes — nor riches to the intelligent (you could translate that: nor riches to the discerning or to the shrewd).

You hear the phrase: they are shrewd investors; that automatically makes you assume that they're making money.

But that's one of those surprising things about life — shrewd experience isn't an automatic return.

Haddon Robinson, who preached here a few years ago and is now with the Lord, wrote in an article that he was having dinner in Cincinnati with a man who was a renowned investment advisor. Robinson writes, "Close to dessert time I thought I might get a little free advice. So, I said,

'You've been at this job of investment for over 20 years. What's one the most important things you've learned?'" He leaned in, lowered his voice and said, "I've learned that some of the dumbest people in this city are among the wealthiest, and some of the smartest have gone bankrupt."

You can have your career all planned out, your investments all buttoned down and then what? An accident occurs. A virus hits. An illness strikes.

And everything turns upside down.

Solomon adds a 5th surprise that he's seen take place under the sun:

The promotion isn't always awarded to the best employee

Solomon writes again in verse 11: nor favor to those with knowledge.

The word for knowledge refers to having the know-how, the skillset to do the job.

The person who deserves the promotion, Solomon writes, are not always the ones given what they deserve: the promotion and adulation they merit.

So why do these five events take place so unexpectedly?

- why does the fastest runner not win?
- and the bigger army get defeated?
- and the wise person go hungry?
- and the careful investor lose his shirt?

- and the smartest employee get passed over?

Why?

Solomon answers at the end of verse 11:

[Because] time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

Ecclesiastes 9:11b-

12

He's not talking about death; he's talking about the unexpected seasons of life. And they occur because of time and chance.

There are only two times this word "chance" appears; the other time is in 1 Kings 5:4 where it can be translated, "events". Both times this word appears it's in a negative context — Old Testament language scholars believe it could be best translated "accidents."

He's not talking about time and luck — he's talking about untimely accidents; they suddenly fall upon them.

It comes out of nowhere; you aren't expecting the unexpected to happen, that why we call them unexpected.

Trouble never warns you ahead of time and it never comes along at a good time.



Describe a time in your life when trouble came your way unexpectedly. What was it? What did you do? How did this situation turn out for you?

Like a fish that's just swimming along minding his own business or a bird flying around singing a little song, suddenly and without warning, they are caught in a net.

Unexpected, unwanted — and we are unprepared.

Now with that, Solomon, the Preacher, gives us a rather discouraging illustration — a case study to prove his point — verse 13:

I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-14

So, there is this little city with only a few men in it; likely referring to the few men who were able to bear arms and fight.

And against this *little city* comes a *great king* — you get the impossibility of this contrast — a *little city* against a *great king*. And he essentially comes out of

nowhere and builds siegeworks to scale the walls.

The word for siegeworks represents the same Hebrew word Solomon used earlier for the *net* that caught the birds.

These people are about to be caught unexpectedly in the net of this King.

Now verse 15:

But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

Ecclesiastes 9:15-16

Solomon says, “I’ve seen this poor commoner — this peasant — utilize his wisdom to save that city and instead of marking that day with a parade in his honor, he gets shoved aside.

And if Solomon’s context is maintained here, somebody more popular or more powerful walked away with all the credit.

So, this guy’s forgotten; life includes the fact that fame is fleeting, and people are fickle.

To this day we talk about somebody having 15 seconds of fame. Not 15 days, or 15 years; 15 seconds.

This guy didn’t even get 15 seconds. He goes unrewarded and, to top it all off, he is quickly forgotten.

You might look at a text like this, filled with unfortunate surprises in life and a discouraging case study from life, and say, “Why bother pursuing wisdom under the sun?”

Solomon anticipates that potential response and so he shifts into an inspired advertising campaign for wisdom.

He’s going to deliver 3 principles of clarification and encouragement regarding wisdom.

Here’s the first one:

Wisdom might not win the most applause, but it’s still right.

Notice verse 16 again:

But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised.

Ecclesiastes 9:16b

You might circle the appearance of the word *better* – it will show up three times in these three clarifications.

The word “*better*” can be understood simply as, “right”. This is the right way, the right path, the right choice.

I will add this thought here: there is the gospel in these words. The Lord is the peasant man — a poor man but a wise man, disregarded by the crowd, humbled unto death in order to save the city of our

lost souls from destruction. The God-man who made the right choice and then went unrewarded and forgotten except for those of us who were rescued by Him.

Today, you might be rejected because of your biblically sound perspective and opinion and lifestyle, but it's far better to follow Christ and be rejected by earth.

Wisdom might not win the most applause, but it's still right.

Secondly,

Wisdom might not gain the largest audience, but it's still right.

Notice verse 17.

*The words of the wise
heard in quiet are better
than the shouting of a ruler
among fools.*

Ecclesiastes 9:17

In other words, the loudest voice isn't always the wisest voice.

Solomon is effectively describing a loud-mouthed leader. In fact, this loud-mouth leader is encouraged because here he's surrounded by a world of fools – Solomon writes, *“he is a ruler among fools.”*

This loud-mouthed leader can be in the home, where shouting replaces quiet wisdom; this can happen in the church, where communication is replaced by arguing; this can happen in the governments of the world where yelling replaces leading.

Solomon says here that a few quiet words of wisdom are still better, even if you get drowned out by the shouting of all the fools around you.



When you feel like your wise words are being drowned out by the shouting of fools, what do you do? Do you get discouraged? Do you remain committed to your mission?

Remember, in the Bible, a fool isn't someone who dropped out of college, it's a person who defies and denies the authority of God.

And sometimes those people have the microphone — they get the larger audience. But Solomon says, “Wisdom might not have the largest audience, but it's still right.”

Thirdly,

Wisdom might not win the biggest argument, but it's still right.

Notice verse 18,

*Wisdom is better than
weapons of war, but one
sinner destroys much good.*

Ecclesiastes 9:18

Fools tear down and deconstruct and destroy. In fact, Solomon points out the disheartening reality that one person can

destroy so much that is good. Just look at Hitler and all who believed what he said. Just look at Darwin and all who believe what he wrote.

They defy God and aim their weapons at His truth. Solomon says, "But even though one rebellious sinner seems to destroy things faster than wisdom can build them, wisdom is still the right way to live.

So, what exactly is wisdom? From passages of scripture, the Hebrew word for wisdom (chokmah) is described as a way of life. Let me give you a concise definition here:

Wisdom is the God-given ability to make the right decision, for the right reason, at the right time and with the right motive.

Now get this: apart from the Spirit of God, you can't do this; you can't live wisely. In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God. That is, He is the personification of divine wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24).

The person who rejects Jesus Christ loses out on wisdom.



How can you make sure today that you are right with God? That Jesus has filled you with the wisdom only he can provide?

Yes, they can make a right decision, but it might be for a selfish reason; they might make the right decision but with the wrong motive, or at the wrong time, or for the wrong reason.

But the ability to make the right decision, for the right reason, at the right time and with the right motive is an act of wisdom and that comes from God.

If you lack wisdom, James writes, whom do you ask? Where do you go for it?

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

James 1:5

The unbelieving world has tried over the centuries to determine the origin of wisdom apart from Creator God.

The Celtic religion and the Hindu religion believe the origin of wisdom was from one of their many goddesses.

The Greeks believed that wisdom came from Zeus. They believed that Zeus swallowed whole his expectant wife out of jealousy and then delivered the child through an opening in his head. And since she was born from his head or mind, she became the goddess of wisdom. She was named Athena. Athens, Greece, the seat of intellectual achievement, would be named after her. She was physically represented by an owl, which gave rise to the superstition

that persists to this day that an owl is a wise bird.

The unbelieving world is right in that they understand wisdom is indeed beyond human origin.

The Bible says that it comes from Creator God. In fact, He is the sum and substance of wisdom. *He is the all-wise God (Jude 25)*

And God communicates His wisdom to us through His word.

Paul reminded Timothy when he wrote, *but you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you wisdom – not only for salvation, but to equip you for every area of life. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)*

Here's why you saturate your mind and heart with the word of God: King David wrote, *the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7).*

In other words, the written word of God imparts the ability to the believer to make the right decision for the right reason at the right time and with the right motive.

What that means then is that you cannot live a wise life and be a distant companion of this Book.

The wisdom of God and the Word of God go hand in hand.

Listen, wise people aren't the smartest people on the SAT scores; wise people are submissive people to the scriptures.

Wisdom might not win the most applause, but it's still right.

Wisdom might not gain the largest audience, but it's still right.

Wisdom might not win the biggest argument, but it's still right.

Wisdom will mark your life and change your life as you walk with God who is all-wise.

You will not likely find a bottle half-buried in the sand, carrying a note that changes your life.

But you have been given an inspired note, signed, as it were, by God; follow this letter, walk through life with the Author and Finisher of our faith — that poor Peasant who humbled Himself unto death, even death on a cross. He didn't look like much then, but now He's ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father in glorious splendor.

So, let's walk with Him; let's not forget Him during a lifetime of surprising events.

Let's learn to expect the unexpected, leaning on Him, and loving Him, and trusting Him, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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