



## ECCLESIASTES 9:5-9

The author of the book of wisdom known as Ecclesiastes was seeking to show that life apart from God was futile, vain and meaningless – ‘vanity of vanities’ is the great refrain of the book. According to tradition, the author was Solomon, the magnificent king of Israel. Who but Solomon would be in a position to try out all that life has to offer, and then conclude that all of it was essentially unsatisfying? Who else but Solomon had everything, yet ended his life urging people to seek God above all?

- 5 *For the living know that they will die,  
but the dead know nothing;  
they have no further reward,  
and even their name is forgotten.*
- 6 *Their love, their hate  
and their jealousy have long since vanished;  
never again will they have a part  
in anything that happens under the sun.*
- 7 *Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart,  
for God has already approved what you do. 8 Always be clothed in white,  
and always anoint your head with oil. 9 Enjoy life with your wife,  
whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given  
you under the sun—all your meaningless days.  
For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labour under the sun.*

*(Ecclesiastes 9:5-9, NIV).*

Solomon’s initial approach to life seems gloomy and pessimistic. Death is the end and life is purposeless. We stare at death and wonder what life is for. Then he seems to change his outlook. When we live with the divine perspective, with an awareness of God and of meaning, then we can eat and drink with joy and enthusiasm, and delight in relationships of men and women. The ironic tone of the final sentence – that this is our toilsome labour – reminds us that our attitude to events is what defines how worthwhile life is, not the events themselves.

Ultimately, if God lives, my living in the present can be worthwhile. If God lives, my having lived in the past can have real meaning.