

Living Under a Curse

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Preacher: Sam Bunnell

[0:00] How many of you watched the Summer Olympics in 1972 in Munich, Germany?

! Does anybody remember that? You were there. Stop it.! Linda Sears, our pianist, was there.! Unbelievable.

Did you attend the gold medal basketball game? Oh! She's kicking herself ever since then. Well, listen, that was one of the all-time great moments in the history of sports competition.

It was more than just a game. The Americans walked into the gold medal basketball game in Munich, Germany, 1972, Summer Olympics, with what felt like one hand tied behind their back. There was all kinds of socioeconomic, political powers and all kinds of extracurricular things going on behind the scenes.

[1:00] You're looking at the Cold War type situation. And that bled over into competition and sports. And so Olympic rules barred professional players from competing at that time.

Of course, nowadays, they allow the professionals to compete. But back then, they couldn't. So Team USA was made up of college stars, amateurs. While the Soviets and many of the other Eastern Bloc countries, well, they found ways around the rules.

They stacked their team, their amateur squads, so to speak, with veteran state-supported players who function like full-time professional basketball players. So that's what the United States had been dealing with throughout the competition.

And now they were in the gold medal game against the Soviet Union. The gold medal game itself only deepened the sense that the deck was stacked.

As they began to play, they sensed this. It was bruising, physical, controversial. The Americans realized that hard contact and rough play were being tolerated in ways that were unusual.

[2:12] Referees were not going to call these things in their favor at all. American star Doug Collins went on to become a famous NBA coach. Was famously hammered to the floor near the end of the game.

He still got up. They actually called a foul for once. He still got up and hit the go-ahead free throws, put the United States up in position to win the game with three seconds left.

The United States was leading 50-49. Now, if you know anything about basketball, you know that's a very low-scoring game, 50-49. And that tells you what kind of game it was.

It was brutal. Survival of the fittest, I guess. Three seconds left. The United States stopped the Soviets from scoring and they won the gold medal.

Yay! Except they didn't. The officials cut their celebration short. You can see a little bit on the picture on the right. And they found a reason to give the Soviets another chance.

[3:17] The Americans stopped them again and won the gold medal again. Happy ending to the story. Except they didn't.

Because the officials found another reason to put the three seconds back on the clock. And this time, the Soviets threw the ball the length of the court. One of the Soviet players seemingly might have knocked one of the American players down.

Scored a last-second layup. And then they said, yep, Soviets won the gold medal this time. Giving the Soviets three chances.

Three seconds. Three chances to win. The United States protested with the Olympic Committee.

They lost their appeal. And to this day, that U.S. Olympic basketball team has never accepted their silver medals.

They stayed off the medal stand. They didn't participate in the ceremony. Because they walked away from the game that day feeling and realizing one thing. The game was rigged.

[4:23] They never stood a chance. They fought valiantly. Won it twice. But it still went the other way. Sometimes your life feels like that basketball game.

Sometimes it feels like the deck is stacked against you. Life is rigged. The good guys don't win. You can do everything right. You should come out on top. And you don't. The hardest worker gets laid off.

Meanwhile, the dishonest person gets promoted. The kindest person gets sick. The cruelest person seems to prosper. Every time it happens, we ask the same question.

Why does life work this way? Would you turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 9? We have been in our study.

Ecclesiastes chapter 9. By the way, as you're turning, here's a little peek at that basketball game I was talking to you about. See the last second? The U.S. guy laying on the floor. The Russian guy making the layup.

[5:25] It was crazy. All right. Moving on. Ecclesiastes chapter 9. They haven't moved on, but we can. All right? We can get in the Word of God.

We have been in our study of Ecclesiastes for several weeks. We've got a couple of weeks left. And this has been called catching smoke. You saw the little video beforehand. Ecclesiastes gives this vibe that life is meaningless sometimes.

You can give it your best shot and you still lose. It's like chasing the wind. You're never going to catch it. It's like trying to catch smoke in your hand. You can't hold it.

So Ecclesiastes chapter 9. And let's look at verse 1 together. Ecclesiastes chapter 9 and verse 1. I'm reading from the New Living Translation.

This too I carefully explored. Who is I there? Who's talking? It's the teacher. We've identified him as King Solomon. And so the teacher, the author of Ecclesiastes, compares living this life under the sun to something as pointless as chasing the wind or trying to catch smoke.

[6:31] And he's brutally honest about the truth that we just talked about and remembered through this crazy moment in the history of sports, even bigger than sports, that sometimes the wicked prosper, the good guys lose, the righteous suffer.

And in the end, death comes for everyone. Ecclesiastes digs into this. Why? Because it's not just bad luck.

The world is under a curse. It's cursed. Say, what are you talking about? Are we like watching a pirate movie or something?

No, this is a real curse. Ecclesiastes chapter 1. He said, I carefully explored this. Even though the actions of godly...

Did I say chapter 1? Chapter 9, verse 1. The actions of godly and wise people are in God's hands. No one knows whether God will show them favor. The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether you're righteous or you're wicked, you're good or you're bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious.

[7:42] He says we do all these things to try to be the best, and at the end, it doesn't matter. The same fate awaits everyone. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners.

People who make promises to God are treated like people who don't. It seems so wrong that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate, already twisted by evil.

People choose their own mad course, for they have no hope. There's nothing ahead but death anyway. Man, this is crazy, isn't it? What an outlook on life.

Ah, what does it matter? There's nothing ahead but death anyway. Where's he going with this? Let's keep reading. Verse four, there's hope only for the living. As they say, it's better to be a live dog than a dead lion.

It's probably true. In life, a dog wouldn't stand a chance against a lion, but if the dog's alive and the lion's not, better off to be the dog, right? Verse five, the living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing.

[8:41] They have no further reward, nor are they remembered. Whatever they did in their lifetime, loving, hating, envying, it's all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth.

So go ahead. Eat your food with joy. Drink your wine with a happy heart, for God approves of this. Wear fine clothes with a splash of cologne. Whatever the ancient version of cologne was. Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. Now in Solomon's case, live happy with the thousands of women he seemed to love.

Remember that? How many wives and how many concubines? 900 wives, 700 concubines. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil.

Whatever you do, do it well. When you go to the grave, there will be no more work, no more planning, no knowledge, no wisdom. He says, I've observed everything under the sun. In verse 11, the fastest runner doesn't always win the race.

[9:41] The strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry. The skillful are not necessarily wealthy. How many of you say, yeah, I'm skillful, but I ain't wealthy. You can connect with that verse.

Those who are educated don't always lead successful lives. I've seen news reports about people who have gotten their PhDs and there just aren't enough teaching gigs out there for them. They're having to take menial labor jobs or whatever they can get their hands on because there aren't enough positions for them to actually go teach in their field that they're well qualified to teach in.

It's all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time. Isn't that an interesting perspective here? In the Bible? What's he talking about? Verse 12, people can never predict when hard times might come.

Like fish in a net or birds in a trap, people are caught by sudden tragedy. Here's another bit of wisdom. It's impressed me as I've watched the way our world works.

[10:42] He gives a little parable here, a little story. It might have been something he actually encountered in his life. We're not sure. He doesn't exactly tell us. He says, there was a small town with only a few people, Henrietta, Texas.

Just kidding. And a great king came with his army and besieged it. Oh no. A poor wise man knew how to save the town and so it was rescued. I want to see the movie.

I want to read the book. What happened here, Solomon? You're kind of teasing us here. But the point wasn't how the poor wise man saved the town. He says, afterward, no one thought to thank him.

You ever been that guy? Came through for somebody in the clutch and they just didn't seem all that grateful? So even though our wisdom is better than strength, those who are wise will be despised if they are poor.

What they say will not be appreciated for long. So it's better to hear the quiet words of a wise person than the shouts of a foolish king.

[11:44] A lot of times foolish kings will shout. They won't be quiet. Verse 18, he elaborates on that. He compounds on it. Better to have wisdom than weapons of war.

But one sinner can destroy much that is good. Okay, that was a lot. We just read 18 verses. And it was a lot of doom and gloom.

But it was a lot of reality check too. It was a lot of the facts of life. Some of you maybe who haven't dug into Ecclesiastes very much are surprised to read this kind of thing in the book we call the Holy Bible, God's Word.

So where is he going with all this? Let's go back to verse 2. The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone. Death comes for the righteous. Death comes for the wicked.

Death comes for the wise. It comes for the foolish. The teacher looks at life under the sun and tells the truth that life is unpredictable. It's unfair.

[12:48] Something has gone terribly wrong with the world. What Solomon didn't have when he wrote these words was the whole story. he didn't have

the full perspective.

He had wisdom for his life given to him from God but he didn't have the coming of Jesus yet. He didn't have the full understanding of the fall of man and the curse that this world is under.

This leads us to our first main truth. We were in Ecclesiastes chapter 1 in verse chapter 9. I keep saying chapter 1. Y'all forgive me for that. Chapter 9 verse 1 through 18.

First main truth is this. Two truths that I want us to draw from these 18 verses. First, life under the sun is under the curse of sin. This explains everything he just said.

Yes, all those things are true. The good guy doesn't always come out on top. The guy who does right doesn't always finish first.

[13:54] sometimes evil seems to win. Why? Because this world is broken. This world is warped. This world is under a curse.

So that's the bad news. Look down at verse 11 of chapter 9. The race is not to the swift. The battle is not to the strong. Time and chance happen to them all.

The fastest runner doesn't always win, right? The smartest person doesn't always succeed. The strongest army doesn't always find the victory in battle. Then the teacher gives an image that explains the frustration of life in the next verse.

Verse 12. People are trapped in an evil time as fish are caught in a net. That's the picture. That's the illustration. Human beings moving through life made in the image of God but moving through this cursed world and suddenly the net drops around them.

They experience loss, tragedy, serious illness, even death. So life under the sun is not functioning the way it was meant to.

[15:03] Solomon recognized this. He knew it was true. He'd experienced it. He'd seen it and in all his wisdom he'd seen the injustice of it but he didn't know why.

The apostle Paul in Romans the letter to the church in Rome chapter 8 verse 20 sheds light on the why. He says all creation was subjected to God's curse.

Why? Because of sin. We are in a cursed world. We were talking about this in our starting point course this morning a little bit that we are living in the domain of darkness.

darkness. Remember the battle the cosmic battle in the heavens long ago before any of this existed and Satan and Lucifer and his angels fought against God and of course they couldn't win and so God cast them out of heaven down to this earth.

This is the domain. And then God came down and created things perfectly. He created man and woman perfectly but he didn't make them robots. He gave them choice.

[16:16] He gave them free will knowing that they would choose the opposite of him. They would choose darkness over light and the curse set in. Satan instead of man was given dominion over the earth.

God created mankind to have dominion over the earth but then we surrendered that authority over to the devil. So now we live in his domain and it's not perfect as God intended for it to be.

It's under the curse of sin. So all creation all the beautiful that we see all around us in nature all the majesty of God's creation the intricacy of the human body everything that we marvel at and admire in God's creation it's all cursed.

It's all under God's curse. Creation itself has been pulled into futility like all your efforts are futile worthless destined to fail because of this curse.

The world is bent justice is often incorrect or at least delayed outcomes are unpredictable! Death shadows everything the Bible doesn't deny that it explains it the world is living under the curse of sin so yes the world is stacked against you but here's the good news that Solomon didn't have Jesus overcame the world Jesus overcame this cursed world yes the deck is stacked against you yes the world the flesh and the devil are trying to stop you they're trying to trip you up you're living in the domain of darkness but Jesus overcomes it that leads us to truth number two Christ broke the curse yes this world is cursed but Christ broke it yes life under the sun is under the curse of sin but Christ breaks that curse so Ecclesiastes looks at the world and sees the reality of the shadow of death

[18:28] Jesus says I can walk through the valley of the shadow of death and I can get you to the other side the gospel tells us what happened next Jesus the son of God stepped into the very curse that breaks this world and his death on the cross looks like he lost it looks like he was

defeated by the curse that evil won but his death on the cross was a result of the death that this cursed world leads to death he had to die because sin and destruction leads to death sin and darkness leads to death and destruction so Jesus took that on himself he said I will take your best shot and I'll come up swinging I'll come up the victor you can do your worst to me sin death hell darkness

Satan take your best shot kill me and I still win the victory because the curse has no power over the son of God it's got power over you it had power over Solomon it has power over me but it has no curse over God so we literally read in Deuteronomy and then again in Galatians that anyone who is hung on a tree is under a curse you realize what Jesus died as a result of the curse he spelled out the problem for us then the resurrection reveals that his death was actually the means to victory because then the resurrection happened Jesus didn't stay dead he didn't stay under the curse he broke it the tyrant behind the curse had been conquered the cursed one did his worst and he couldn't defeat the son of God so Paul gives us a beautiful picture of this a beautiful expression of this in 1 Corinthians would you turn there with me real quick we've got a few verses to read in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 for sake of time I'm going to go ahead and read while you turn but 1 Corinthians chapter 15 look all the way down it's a very long chapter unusual for the New Testament you see more of those in Psalms but 1 death is swallowed up in victory oh death where is your sting oh death where is your victory the sting of death is sin the sting is the sting that results in death and then verse 56 the law gives sin its power but thank God he gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ you see what this is doing he's painting this poetic expression of Christ's victory over sin yes death is still real but it no longer rules our lives it no longer rules the story the sting has been taken out the curse that entered the world through sin was broken through the resurrection of the victorious

Christ in Latin that's known as Christus victor it means that it wasn't so much that Jesus took our place to bear the wrath of God's punishment instead that by his death and his resurrection Christ defeated the enemy he broke the curse of sin and death that's the gospel what is the gospel it's a word we hear around church it's a word you might read in the Bible it's a word you might hear if you hang around church people sometimes occasionally outside of that but what does that mean the gospel is a word that we hear but sometimes we'll struggle to put it into words I think there's one of my favorite authors Brian Zahn he says the gospel is the beautiful story of how God is bringing the world out of bondage to sin and death through the triumph of Jesus Christ that's a really nice definition of what the gospel is it's the story of God rescuing us freeing us from this curse of sin that's what the gospel is that's

Christus victor victorious Christ it's the best news you'll ever hear it's what gives meaning to our lives so our takeaway from this when death lost its power life gained its purpose what's the purpose of life what's the meaning of life ultimately it's all meaningless ultimately there is no purpose and that's what you see from Solomon all throughout Ecclesiastes he keeps hammering home this idea that man you can try you can get in the rat race and you can win it but at the end of the day you're still a rat Walter Brueggemann said that I didn't say that but I repeated it I love that quote you know yeah at the end of the day you can do everything right you're still not going to come out ahead you're still not going to ultimately win because the world is cursed but God is the X factor Jesus is the

[24:06] X factor he's the one who came down and broke the curse there was no hope there was only hope of him coming but then he came and now we get hope that is alive hope that is real hope that happened hope that took place now hope turns into faith now we have faith in the one who did come the one who did win the one who did break the curse so let's bring that down to Henry out of Texas now let's bring that down to Clay County and our guests from out West this morning my family my wife's family is here in town my wife's mom and her sister and brother in law and they're beautiful little girls so I don't want to exclude them Henrietta Texas Clay County and all the way out to out West let's bring it home to our lives what is the direction that we can take from Ecclesiastes chapter 9 how do we live with courage in a cursed world this week number one do the next right thing even facing uncertain outcomes you don't know if your

week is going to look like the gold medal game from the 1972

Olympics and the deck is going to be stacked against you and life is rigged and it's just you're going to come up empty do the next right thing anyway because you know that no matter what life the world the flesh the devil throws against you you know that that curse has been broken yes we're still surrounded by sin yes we still participate in sin sometimes because God is in the process of changing us we're not totally changed yet so our job is to do the next right thing even facing uncertain outcomes secondly it's to refuse to remeasure your life by immediate results we let this trip us up so many times we are prisoners of the moment well if it didn't help me right now then what good is it Jesus was never a prisoner of the moment he was never in a hurry his best friends were his best friend

Lazarus had died and he wasn't in a hurry to get there and fix the situation because he wasn't bound by immediate results he knew that the outcome was under God's control we should know that too in our heads we know that but we still judge our lives by immediate results so resist that temptation remember remember that the curse is broken nothing can ultimately defeat you nothing can ultimately harm you and so refuse to measure your life by immediate results this is a marathon with Jesus not a sprint and then finally enjoy sorry enjoy the life that God gives you look back at Ecclesiastes 9 and verse 7 go eat your bread with pleasure drink your wine with a cheerful heart! enjoy the journey now because you are no longer under the curse you're surrounded by the curse you're dealing with cursed people that's why it's silly for God's people to get so angry against those who are still under the curse well of course they're going to act that way of course they're going to take the wrong view on things why are you getting angry at them they're just behaving as part of the cursed world that you used to be under you used to think the same way you used to be wired the same way God's changing you now make sure you don't show the same anger the same selfishness that they do enjoy the life God gives you now enjoy the good things don't so much long for heaven that you don't enjoy what God's giving you now what

God's doing in you now enjoy every step with Jesus now life is a gift from God for us it gets to be eternal death has no more hold over us Christ defeated death the shadow hanging over this life of the fear of death no longer holds us captive so the world under the sun is broken it's cursed but the God above the sun came down to our world under the sun and he broke that curse Jesus is our rescuer Jesus brings the joy he brings the freedom to this life under the sun so we've been asking this question every week and we've been answering!

[29:14] it let's! do it again how let's pray God that's what we want to do right now is fix our eyes above the sun we recognize that this world is broken it is cursed sometimes we see glimpses of light sometimes we see you alive and acting in the world and we love that but we're surrounded by so much death we're surrounded by so much destruction we see it in relationships we see it in politics we see it in business we see it in pleasure we see it all around us the brokenness the curse of sin thank you for coming to bring hope into that world thank you for not just sitting up in heaven and looking down at our mess and destroying it and saying well that was an experiment gone wrong instead you loved us you came to us you freed us from the curse I pray that we would walk in that victory walk with that victorious

Christ do the next right thing refuse to measure our life by immediate results enjoy the days that you give us teach us God fix our eyes above the sun we'll give you all the glory for it all the gratitude for it church let me ask you this if there's someone here today who says I need to Jesus today maybe I've been in church for a while maybe I haven't but regardless today's the day I need to choose Jesus I need to choose the victory that he offers I need to turn from sin and turn to Jesus would you slip your hand up and I'd love to talk with you about that in a few moments slip your hand up now if that's you thank you for the rest of us let me ask this question is there something in your life that the Holy Spirit of God is saying I need to surrender this over to God I need to remember that this world is cursed

I need to stop holding myself to unrealistic expectations remember that God's changing me it's a slow process say maybe God's working on me about something and I need to get my eyes you slip your hand up I would love to pray for you as well thank you thank you thank you God you see these hands you know exactly what's going on in every one of our hearts you know what we need I pray

that you would tailor the guidance of your Holy Spirit to our exact lives as you do so well reveal to us what we need to change reveal to us what we need to stop what we need to start to not live like the curse still holds us thank you for the victory we have in you it's in Jesus name we pray amen church thank you for worshiping with us this morning if I haven't gotten a chance to meet you yet love to do that my wife and I will be in the! before you leave! but how many of y'all enjoyed spring break anybody go anywhere anybody go out of the country for spring break no we're not that exotic around here that's alright anybody go to the foreign country of Dallas Fort Worth I did it was fun alright well thank y'all for being here with us in worship and you are dismissed