

The Certainty of Uncertainty

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April 26, 2026

I. Uncertainty

In this fallen world, or ‘under the sun’, a favorable outcome is uncertain despite the circumstances favoring a person. Usually, we expect things to go well with people with outstanding capabilities. But what our author is saying here is that having the speed or strength or smarts does not guarantee success. The next phrase Solomon says ‘for time and chance overtake them all. ‘Whatever the odds are, even if they apparently are in your favor, there is uncertainty. For there will surely come a time that someone will outsmart you or chances are, the odds of you losing will catch up. From man’s or even more specific, a Christian’s perspective, it poses a problem: we do not necessarily know what God is doing. No matter how strong we are, or how smart, many bad things happen to us in life, and there is no way for us to predict when they will happen. God gave us our abilities — our swiftness, our strength, our intelligence and so He can take them back also or play the odds in favor of another (Job 1:21b). In CH3 we learned that there is a time for everything. Here in CH9 he tells us that we do not know when that time will be. They are both true.

Furthermore, in this verse, Solomon uses illustrations from nature. The fish and the birds get caught by surprise. If they had known they were swimming into a net or flying into a trap, they would have gone the opposite direction. But by the time they were trapped, it was too late to escape. That’s the same analogy given to us human beings. “Time” and “chance” happen to us all. The time will come when events overtake us. Before we know it, we will get trapped in a bad situation at work and we lose our job, or caught in a financial disaster and we lose our life’s investments, or afflicted with a disease and we lose our life. At the very end, of course, the time will come for us to die and go to judgment, a time that only God knows, but we do not.

If “time” does not overtake us, then “chance” will. From the rest of verse 12, which talks about “an evil net” and “an evil time,” it is clear that when the Preacher talks about “chance,” he is not talking about something good that happens but something bad. In a fallen world, many unhappy things happen every day. Also, when life is going well, we can’t be sure that our own natural abilities will spare us from having hard times. No matter how gifted we are or how well prepared or how many advantages we have in life, we too may suffer the consequences of “time and chance”. Bad things are inescapable and this is all because of the sin of Adam. But we have the Scriptures that tell us to expect the unexpected. When hardship comes, we should not be surprised, but ‘surrendered ’to what the Lord’s will is.

Since God owns all life (Acts 17:24-25), as its Creator and Sustainer, He may give it and take it at any time and in any way He pleases, as He does in all His goodness and wisdom. This includes all tragedies, unexpected and sudden claims of life, gone too soon stories. God’s ownership over our lives (Deut 32:39, 1 Samuel 2:6), should be at the forefront of our thinking. Brothers and sisters, most people feel our life is ours to live freely



and that it does not belong to anyone else. And we feel not even God has the right to take our lives when we are doing well. And if God took my life or brought me something awful or if He allowed a tragedy to hit and affect me, He has done me wrong. But that is not God's view. It is not the view of the Bible. He can do what He wills. God is not obliged to do what He can to preserve our lives.

I want us to deal with this uncertainty that Solomon is presenting in these verses side by side with the soft pillow of the sovereignty and authority of God over death. Having established that all life belongs to God, and we really don't know when the Lord 'takes it away', and that He may take it at any time and in any way He pleases, we seriously have to think about the work we have on this Earth. What is the lesson? Verse 10. And the capacities and the gifts given to us must be used against a background of anticipation and a sense of uncertainty. We are NOT to be lazy with our hands. And I can say this aspect of working with our hands spills over to the field of our daily work and excellence. (John 9:4).

II. Unappreciated

Solomon gives another interesting observation, perhaps from his own experience. 'Time and chance 'struck a weaker city when a king came against it. He observed that the battle was not won by the strong (v11) but by a poor man who happened to have a wiser plan than anyone else in the city. But the people just forgot him. It was all part of the vanity and frustration of a self-centered world.

We see here that 'good works 'or merit is not always rewarded, and the world can be unfair when it comes to acknowledging accolades. Because in this life there will be many times your work will be unappreciated. This is very practical for today's climate. Everyone is begging for attention and those who are supposed to be acknowledged for doing something good oftentimes aren't highlighted because he or she is poor and unpopular.

What are we to conclude from this illustration? Do we shrug off doing good because there was a lack of acknowledgement and eventually our works will be forgotten in no time? Heaven's no! Same reminder in verse 10! It was correct and righteous for the poor man to use his wisdom to thwart the king; even if he had known that his fellow citizens would forget him and not ask his advice in the future. Even if our work or our contributions are unrecognized, unremembered and unappreciated, our calling is still to use our talents and gifts to the best of our ability.

A housewife whose housework is unappreciated; continue to do the work with excellence. A student who does more in their group work than the rest; do not lose heart! A nurse or health worker who goes the extra mile; remember that the work is essentially for the Lord. An adviser whose advice is never acknowledged but repeated by their boss and embraces the idea to make their own. A Christian who keeps sharing the word of God to her friend but doesn't get the credit because the timing of the friend's conversion was with another person's time. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Colossians 3:23.



Then we have 2 verses in 17-18. We know that the loudest voice is usually not the wisest voice. This ruler got his own way by shouting everyone else and he was surrounded by “fools”. This is the easiest way for a proud man to wreck a family or even a church. What Solomon is recommending is using wise words, not loud words. The loud will only get physical attention for a little while, the wise words will penetrate deep as the wisdom of what one says speaks for itself, and is always worth hearing even if it is not always followed. Wisdom is always better than shouting a lot of nothing.

I’m not here to speak about death again and again because we want a healthy balance, I want to admonish you on the few years we have here on Earth. Let’s think of both our eternity and our temporary, but for today think of **life**, or the remainder of it. Solomon wants us to do so.

This portion of scripture tells us that whatever comes to your hand to do with the best of your abilities, do it because you can’t do it in the place of the dead to which you are going. Do it because of the uncertainty we have, and do it despite the fact that you are unappreciated and will be ‘unremembered’. Do it because we have the assurance of all those who fear God have a promise.

To the young, “Don’t be a Solomon.” As early as now, let’s focus on fearing God and trusting God and doing what’s right. Because we are owned by the One that holds up that standard of right and wrong. We are his. He owns us and can take what we have without being questioned about His motives that are good, pleasing and perfect, albeit mysterious sometimes. The bible says in 1 Corinthians 6 that ‘we are not our own, for we were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.’

Remember the revelation to Solomon is nothing compared to the revelation we have in the New Covenant. Christ is fully revealed in the flesh testified by many witnesses. And it is written in the bible that we hold in our hands. We have a better perspective on salvation, more knowledge on eternity, than many OT saints. Ecclesiastes mainly looks at things from the perspective of human wisdom, which is valuable as far as it goes. But apart from the wisdom of that saving knowledge from our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, who alone can save us, sayang lang ang lesson ng Ecclesiastes.