

Wickedness will not release.

How do you break free?

Only with the aid of a higher power.

The higher power can give you power.

Power over the wind to contain it?

Maybe.

Power over the day of your death?

Absolutely.

Not to change anything,

but to have serenity.

Power to be in the presence of peace.

Peace doesn't release you, either.

God, hold me in your peace.

Let me always remember you're

tougher than wickedness.

8.9-10

All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. ¹⁰Then too, I saw the wicked buried – those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.^(NIV)

“When in the course of human events
it becomes necessary....”*

Tough times bring out the best —
and the worst —
in us.

But wait a minute. Go back to the first,
to “When.” To the Teacher’s “a time.”

Simple words?

No. Not simple, not here.

When’s it when? Who told the
scared patriots in Philadelphia heat?

“With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine
Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our
Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”*

I’m scared now like they were then.

God, I feel like Isaiah.** Woe is me.

But if you say so, here I am.

Send me.

* US Declaration of Independence

** Isaiah Chapter 6

8.11-13

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. ¹²Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. ¹³Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.^(NIV)

It's not FAIR!

Do you hear me? It's not FAIR!

A defendant before the bench with five cases
pleads to one or two with dismissals

for the rest. What?

Commit one and get two free?

A bargain!

One judge gives twenty years,
another, ten probated for the

same

crime.

It's not fair.

Me? I deserve three days

in an electric

chair.

It's not fair any of us get lenience.

I get relief from fear,

freedom from guilt,

joie de vivre.

Unrepentents feel that three days

every day.

Grace. Such a great gift, God.

I'm so glad you don't give me justice.

8.14-15

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. ¹⁵So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.^(NIV)

What, me worry?
Sometimes it feels like
simple people have it easy,
they don't understand
the nuances. Or the themes.
They just live lives, not of quiet desperation,
but of simple joy.
The adoration of a dog,
warmth of the sun,
gentle soaking rain.
Would that I didn't understand
what's happening some days.
Yet the dog loves me, the sun's warm,
rains still fall.
Intellect doesn't stop the good stuff.
It just diverts my attention.

God, thanks for small joys.
Help me to enjoy the joy.

8.16-17

When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth – his eyes not seeing sleep day or night – ¹⁷then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it. (NIV)

We cannot really comprehend it
but that doesn't stop our trying,
does it?

So the Bible supports
punishment as deterrence?
Slap the other guy's hand and I'll behave.
Actual innocence bugged the Teacher
long before DNA testing.
Eat, drink, be glad,
even if innocent and imprisoned.
Be glad, and have joy,
no matter what.
What doesn't matter.
Where's unimportant.

You and me, God.
Together. In Sync.
That matters.

Chapter Nine

A Common Destiny for All

9.1-2

So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. ²All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

As it is with the good man,
so with the sinner;
as it is with those who take oaths,
so with those who are afraid to take them.^(NIV)

No man knows whether love or hate awaits?

Hey, did he never try loving somebody
who hates him?

Yeah. Tough to do. But worth it?

You betcha.

Love your enemy because it drives him crazy.

Nope. Just do it.

Be good for nothing.

Love your enemy. Pray for who persecutes you.

Be the child of your Father in heaven.

Did Jesus really mean that stuff?

God, forgive me AS I have already
forgiven people who hurt me.

Help me to be freed
from resentment and hate.

9.3-4

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. ⁴Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!^(NIV)

Madness in their hearts.
Despair. Separation. Insanity.
He felt it, the Teacher.
He felt alone.
Alone like me
Alone like thousands.
Desperation. Hopelessness.
The same destiny overtakes all,
all join the dead.
Together.
Hopeless but together.
He knew, though, or sensed
another way.
Hope. A live dog.
Without the insanity. With hope.

Oh Lord, my hope and my redeemer,
thanks for the company here and now,
for the hope.

9.5 For the living know that they will die,
but the dead know nothing;
they have no further reward,
and even the memory of them is forgotten.^(NIV)

He knows better now, doesn't he?
That Sheol, the mindless sleep of the dead,
was seeing through a glass darkly?
“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,
nor things present,
nor things to come,
nor height, nor depth,
nor any other creature,
shall be able to separate us from the
love of God, which is in
Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
Nope. Nothing. Hell included.
Seeing through a glass darkly.

God, thanks for remembering me.
Thanks for clear glass sometimes
and faith all the time.

* Romans 8:38-39(KJV)

9.6 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.^(NIV)

You know how I imagine Hell?
Sitting around,
nothing to do,
floating on a cloud
strumming a four-string harp
all day
every day
forever
and
ever.

And ever.

For me and lots of folk eternity with God
is bliss.

For some folk eternity with God —
and themselves —
is Hell.

God, I have heaven on earth.
Hold me close, let it last forever.
And ever.
And EVER.

- 9.7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy works.
- 9.8 Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack oil.
- 9.9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life of vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all thy days of vanity: for that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun.
- 9.10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest.^(ASV)

Eat, drink with gladness
clothed in white
with the love of your life.
The head anointed with oil
suited David in the 23rd Psalm.
It can't be all that bad.
Aromatic oil, I guess.
Early aromatherapy.
Somehow the meaningless
life in the sunshine
sounds pretty neat.

One day at a time, God.
Let me live day by day by day.
I'll not worry about tomorrow
or distant tomorrows. That's your job.

- 9.11 I have seen something else under the sun:
The race is not to the swift
or the battle to the strong,
nor does food come to the wise
or wealth to the brilliant
or favor to the learned;
but time and chance happen to them all.
- 9.12 Moreover, no man knows when his hour will
come:
As fish are caught in a cruel net,
or birds are taken in a snare,
so men are trapped by evil times
that fall unexpectedly upon them.^(NIV)