

# Ecclesiastes 9:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

## Analysis

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**For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope**—the Hebrew 'yechubbar' (רֶכֶבֶר, joined/attached) indicates connection to living humanity. The key term 'bittachon' (בִּתְחָנוֹן, hope/confidence) suggests possibility and potential. While life continues, opportunity for repentance, faith, and change remains. Death ends earthly opportunity—Hebrews 9:27 states, 'it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.'

**For a living dog is better than a dead lion**—this vivid proverb employs cultural values for shocking effect. In ancient Near East, dogs were despised scavengers (1 Samuel 17:43; 2 Kings 8:13), while lions symbolized strength and nobility (Proverbs 30:30; Revelation 5:5). Yet the lowliest living creature surpasses the noblest dead one—because life offers possibilities that death forecloses. The verse doesn't advocate mere survival but emphasizes that earthly life provides opportunity for eternal preparation. Christians read this through resurrection hope: physical life offers time to receive Christ, while death without faith means eternal separation from God (Luke 16:26).

## Historical Context

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Ancient cultures revered lions as symbols of royalty and power—Judah's tribal symbol was a lion (Genesis 49:9), and Solomon's throne featured lion imagery (1 Kings 10:19-20). Dogs, conversely, were unclean scavengers provoking disgust. The proverb's shocking reversal emphasizes life's value regardless of status or

condition. For Israel, this meant that continued existence—even in exile or hardship—offered hope for restoration and covenant renewal. Post-exilic Judaism clung to this: though politically subjugated, living communities could rebuild and await Messiah. Jesus embodied this truth: he welcomed outcasts and sinners ('dogs' by Pharisaic standards) while condemning self-righteous religious leaders. Early Christians facing martyrdom understood that physical life's value lay in proclaiming Christ—yet death itself wasn't tragedy but 'gain' (Philippians 1:21) for believers already joined to Christ.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. How does recognizing that life offers hope while death ends earthly opportunity affect your urgency about spiritual matters?
2. In what ways does this proverb challenge worldly standards of status, success, and worth?

## Interlinear Text

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וְאֶל יְבָטֵחַ רַאשֵּׁר מִכִּי  
H3588      For      H834      H977      H413      H3605      for a living      to him that is  
H4310

בְּטָחֵה וְלֹא לְבָטֵחַ כִּי הַאֲרֵה מִן טְבַדֵּן  
there is hope      H3588      dog      for a living      H1931      is better      H4480      lion  
H986      H3611      H2416      H2896      H738

בְּמַתָּה  
than a dead  
H4191

## Additional Cross-References

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**Isaiah 38:18** (Hope): For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

**Job 27:8** (Hope): For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?

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