

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

July 26, 2020

SPEAKER

Daniel Savage

SERIES

Meaning(Less)

PART

10

TITLE

Enjoying Life In The Shadows

SCRIPTURE

Ecclesiastes 9:1-18



© 2020 Providence Baptist Church (Raleigh, NC)

Sermon transcripts may be used for preaching and teaching purposes, but may not be published or sold. While generally accurate, parts of this transcript may contain errors.

Providence reserves the right to correct and/or remove a transcript at any time.

Yeah, can I get a tow?

Sure. What's your location?

Where did my money go? Nevermind.

So you don't need her?

Good morning Church Family. How are you?

Good.

Good. It's good to see you all here. I'm glad that you're here. My name is Daniel Savage and I am going to share with you this morning. It's a privilege for me to open the Bible and to study it with you together. We're continuing our series through Ecclesiastes and this morning, we're in chapter nine. Been working through the book. We come to chapter nine and it's an interesting chapter. Solomon here in this chapter is going to lay before us some observations about the cruelties of life. And the title of the sermon is Enjoying Life in the Shadows. And the shadows are referring to these cruelties that he is observing, these harsh realities of life that we have to recognize and reckon with. And the question that we are left asking is, is it possible to enjoy life in the midst of these shadows, in these shadows? And ultimately the answer will be yes, but we'll do some work to get there.

As he's been working through the book, Solomon has been exposing one false hope after another. That's sort of what he's been doing chapter after chapter. He's been talking about wealth or power or success or achievements. And he's been looking at each one of these things and how they present to us a false hope. And he's been systematically sort of tearing those things down and saying, "That is not a real hope. That is a false hope. There's nothing meaningful ultimately to find there." And so we've been on this journey with him and now in chapter nine, he's going to set before us, these cruel realities of life that we just have to deal with and we have to consider, and we have to reckon with in our own soul. So let me pray. And then we'll jump into Ecclesiastes nine together.

Heavenly Father, I pray that you would be with us this morning. God, that you would open our eyes to see. God, that you would give us ears to hear. Lord, we need to see you revealed in your word. So God, would you reveal yourself? I pray that Jesus would be exalted, that it would be clear that he is the hero of this story and that we would look to him. And as we do, he would draw us to himself. God, give us faith to believe that you exist and you reward those who seek you. And it's a gift that comes from you. And so we ask for it now and I pray in Jesus name, amen.

As we get into this chapter, we're going to work through it starting in the very beginning of the chapter in verse one. Solomon starts this chapter by telling us one thing that he has observed. He's saved some of these cruelest realities of life for this chapter. And the first observation that he's going to make is that death is inevitable. Death is inevitable, and I'll just warn you now, this isn't the most encouraging sermon outline I've ever come up with, but it's just right here out of the text. And it does get encouraging at the end, so you just have to hang with me.

The cruelty that he's observing here with death is that it comes to all. That's what he's getting at here in these first few verses. It comes to the righteous and to the unrighteous. In verse two it says, "To the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner. And he who swears is as he who shuns an oath." Verse three, he says, "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun. That the same event happens to all." So he's saying no one escapes death. It doesn't matter how good or evil you might be, everyone dies.

And this reality has him questioning God. He says in verse one that we can't know how God feels about us based on this common end. He says, "The righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know." Both are before him. He's saying, I can look at the life of the righteous and the life of the unrighteous and I cannot tell with my physical eye, which one God approves. Because calamity seems to come to everyone. And in the end, death comes to all. He's saying, you can't observe the life of a person and know what God thinks of him. Again, as Brian has said throughout this series, he's writing this from the perspective of someone who is under the sun. He uses that phrase over and over again. And so what he's saying is that as I observe life under the sun, with what my physical eyes can see, I cannot distinguish between the outcomes of the righteous and the unrighteous. It's a mystery to me, what God thinks of them.

He continues on. He says also in verse three, that the hearts of the children of men are full of evil and madness is in their hearts while they live. And after that, they go to the dead. That's another way of saying that everyone dies, but here he's acknowledging our collective guilt. Instead of creating these two categories of the righteous and the unrighteous, he says, in reality, evil fills all of our hearts. And again, all of us go to the dead. Verse four, "But he who is joined with the living has hope. For a living dog is better than a dead lion, for the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. And they have no more reward for the memory of them is forgotten."

In other words, if life only consists of what can be seen and observed under the sun, then living in this cruel world is better than death, because anything is better than nothing. A dog at this time was a dirty scavenger. So don't think about an American dog that gets its hair cut and we take really good care of. This is a dog that they saw as a scavenger or a pest. It was like a rat. The goal with a dog was to keep it away from your house. And he's saying it's better to be a dirty dog, a scavenger than to be a dead lion. And if you were to ignore the existence of God and eternity, then this is true. Something is better than nothing. Even if that something is

life in this cruel, unfair world. At least there is some enjoyment to be had here.

This is obviously coming from that perspective. If someone is only observing what is under the sun, but God tells us there is more than that. There's a real eternal reality. There's a real heaven and a real hell. And to go to heaven is to be with God forever. Paul said in Philippians 1:23, "I'm hard-pressed between the two." He's talking about whether he's going to stay alive or he's going to die. He's hard-pressed. He doesn't know which one to choose. "My desire," he says, "is to depart and be with Christ." He says, "I would rather die." Why? He says, "For that is far better." That's a different way to look at death and to think about it, to depart and be with Christ is what death holds for those who put their faith in Jesus.

As a final note on death, he talks about the finality of death in verse six. He says their love and their hate and their envy have already perished in forever. They have no more share in all that is done under the sun. Death is final and it comes to all. There's no way to avoid it. There's no way to minimize its effects. And so if this is true, what should we do? Well, if you only have this perspective of one who is under the sun, then you do what he says in verse seven, "Go eat your bread with joy, drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already approved what you do. Go enjoy your life. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head." And he's saying pursue comfort. White garments and oil on your skin made life more comfortable in a dry and arid climate.

"First night, enjoy life with the wife, with whom you love all the days of your vein life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol." Sheol is the place of the dead to which you are going. "Enjoy life, take every opportunity and do your best because death comes as an end for all." Over and over again in these first 10 verses, he's just saying everyone is going to die. Everyone is going to die. He repeats it. And that is an uncomfortable thought for us.

Solomon's first observation here about life that it comes to an inevitable end cause us to stop and think about how we consider death. Those who do not believe in God, do everything they can to deny a delay or postpone death. Because for them, what Solomon says is true, to be a living dog is better than to be a dead lion. It's better to be alive than dead. It's better to have something than nothing. This is why there are billions of dollars spent every year in this country on products and treatments and information to help us defy the aging process. I mean, just watch TV for an hour and you'll see systems, programs, products, all designed to help you lose weight, feel younger, get your energy back, reduce joint pain, get your hair to grow back in. All of these products are attempting the impossible. They're promising to keep you young, but you can't stay young. That's what Solomon is saying. Our bodies are aging and you can't stop it.

Solomon is reminding us that death is coming to us all. As we get older, the signs only increase. I'm relatively new to this aging process, but I am beginning to experience it. My back has started to hurt sometimes. My knees hurt when I walk too long or go too far. I have to be careful what I'm doing. I have to evaluate activities

now with great wisdom and concern. Am I going to get injured if I try to do that? Will I be able to recover? I tried to wake board last summer for the first time in years. And that was a huge mistake. I pulled a muscle so bad in my back. It took me six months to recover and feel normal again. My hairline is moving. It's changing. I'm aging.

If you're a Christian here this morning, don't buy what the world is selling. Eternal youth is not the secret to happiness and contentment. Let your aging body instead remind you that you're one day closer each day to seeing your savior face to face. Let each ache of joint pain and each new wrinkle remind you that you have a little less time to advance his eternal kingdom in this world.

If you're not a Christian, then Solomon is inviting you to consider what happens after you die. Death is coming to us all. So what will happen to your soul when you die? Death is the first cruelty in life that Solomon observes. And then he lets us know that he's starting a new one in verse seven when he says, "Again, I saw." He's going to do that again in verse 13. He's shifting to another observation. His second observation is this, that life is uncertain. This is just as encouraging as the first. Life is uncertainty. He says, "That under the sun, the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happened to them all." Or as my mom used to say, life is not fair. And now I find myself saying it to my kids, "But Dad, that's not fair." Life is not fair.

What he's saying is that this cruel world doesn't always reward your efforts. You can work hard in school and still not succeed. You can work harder than your coworkers and not get the promotion. You can train harder than your opponent and not win the race. Why? Verse 12, "Because man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of men are snared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them." He's saying that you can be doing everything right, and then calamity can strike unexpectedly. You can be the fastest runner and train the hardest and on the way to the race, you could roll your ankle and not be able to compete. Time and chance happen to us all. This is what he's saying.

And just like the fish that gets caught in the net, you don't see it coming. When a fish starts out in the morning out for a swim, he doesn't say, "Today's the day I'm going up in the net." The net comes out of nowhere. It surprises him. He doesn't see it coming. And Solomon's point is that life is uncertain and you are not in control. And for some of us in the room, this is more uncomfortable than the fact that death is inevitable. Many of us, even believers spend so much time trying to control our environment, trying to work out every outcome, trying to work and scheme and maneuver and make sure everything turns out the way that we wanted. And Solomon is reminding us that that sort of control is an illusion.

Now this doesn't mean stop training for the race. It doesn't mean stop working hard. It doesn't mean drop out of school. It simply means you shouldn't put your hope in your ability to control life circumstances. You shouldn't put your hope in your preparation or your level of education or your resume. Those are false hopes

and they can, and they will fail you. Our hope must rest on the goodness and power of God's hand. And we often live in life in this fog of deception that we create for ourselves, that we have some control in life. And we create that deception and we try to sustain it because it's so much more comfortable. We want so badly to believe that we can control our environment. But life has a way of reminding us that that is not true.

Everyone in the room has been alive long enough, has gotten a phone call that you were not expecting, some kind of radical news that you could've never seen coming like a net that falls on a fish. You're just caught up in it. This pandemic is a great example. None of us last fall when we were starting school thought that we would be looking at these options for our coming school year, because time and chance happens to us all. We are not in control as much as we would like to think we are. This is what Solomon is pointing out. And so for those who are in school, does that mean you should quit? Of course not. For those who are preparing, for those who are working hard, it just means don't put your hope in those things. Work hard, study, do your best. Why? Because God has given you gifts and ability, and he's called you to steward those things. Not because it's going to create a life of security and comfort for you, but so you can glorify Him with them.

And parents, I think this is even harder for us. It is so easy to push our kids towards things that we think are going to make them safe and teach them to trust in their achievement and their hard work and putting themselves in the right position. But we have to teach them to pursue academics, to pursue training, to pursue hard work. Not because it's going to make their life easy or better, but because it glorifies God. And we teach them not to trust in those achievements, but to do them for the glory of God, knowing that it's God who will sustain us.

So far, Solomon has observed these two cruel realities of life, that death comes to all and that life is uncertain. And finally, he shares his last observation through a parable. He observes that wisdom is best, but it is no guarantee. In other words, wisdom is good. He's going to tell us that. He's going to make it clear, but it does not guarantee things in life are going to go well. So he tells a story of a wise man and his wisdom. He says there was a little city with a few men in it and a great king came against it and besieged it. He's trying to create this contrast. A little city with a few men and a great king and he built great siege works against it. But there was found in it, a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city yet no one remembered that poor man.

Again, this is a cruelty in life and it's not right or fair. It's a cruelty of the world. Wisdom delivered the little city with a few men from a great king and great siege works and yet wisdom wasn't recognized. It wasn't honored. Then he explains, "But I say that wisdom is better than might. Though the poor man's wisdom was despised," in his words, "not heard." He gives us a better picture of what's going on in verse 17. When he says, "The words of the wise heard and quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools." So you get the picture of what happened. This ruler goes to this wise man, and he gets advice. And the advice was so good that it delivered this small city, but then the ruler goes out and shouts among his friends, how wise he is and how he delivered the city. And no one ever knew that it was this poor old wise man who had really given the

ruler great advice.

It is often the fools who are shouting and they often surround themselves with people who flatter them. And those who are wise, don't shout to have their voices heard. Wisdom is clearly better. And he reiterates that in verse 18, but he gives a warning with it. He says, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good." In other words, wisdom is better. Wisdom is good. Wisdom benefits us greatly, but even living in wisdom, can't protect you from calamity. It may be the foolishness of some other sinner, some other fool that brings calamity into your life. One sinner destroys much good. So he's saying ultimately, wisdom can't even be relied on. It's no place for our hope, even though wisdom is good. Wisdom is not ultimately something that we can put our hope and trust in.

So if we can't hope in avoiding death and we can't hope in our ability to control our circumstances and outcomes, and if we can't even ultimately hope in wisdom, what can we hope in? The secret to a hope-filled contented life is found earlier in the chapter in one little phrase, verse seven. He says, "Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already approved what you do." The secret to living in peace, knowing that death is coming and knowing that calamity can strike anyone at any time, and knowing that you can do everything right with all wisdom and some other fool could ruin things for you. The secret to living in peace in the shadow of all these cruel realities is knowing that God has already approved of what you do. It's knowing that you are accepted by God. It's to know that your sins are forgiven. And when you die, you will be accepted. It's to know that He will look at you and say, "Well done my good and faithful servant."

How can we know that? How could we possibly know that God approves of us when our hearts are filled with evil and folly? We make so many mistakes. We've sinned against God. How could we possibly know that He approves of us? Is that even possible? Yes, it is possible. It is possible through the Gospel. The Gospel is good news. That's what the word means. Gospel means good news. You and I were created to know and love God, but we sinned against God. Because of our sin, we were separated from God and we deserve death. But the good news is this, that God sent a rescuer. Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to live on earth and he lived the life that you and I failed to live. He obeyed the Father and lived a perfect righteous life.

Then he died the death of a sinner in your place. And he did this so that your sins could be taken away, that they could be lifted off of you, removed from you as far as the East is from the West and placed on him, the perfect sacrifice. And then his righteousness and the favor that he had earned with God is placed on you. And then God, the Father raised him from the dead. And now God says anyone who puts their faith in the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us will be saved. We will be restored to God, accepted, forgiven, adopted into his family forever. We will be approved forever. So can you know what God thinks of you? Yes. And can you live every day of your life knowing that God has already approved of you? Yes.

But this is where I believe questions begin to come up in many minds. “What about me? He doesn’t know my story.” Maybe you are a Christian. You believe in the Gospel, but you have been pursuing other things. And in your mind, you’re this huge disappointment to God. And there’s no way He could approve of you. Or maybe you’ve experienced a lot of rejection in life, a lot of hurt, a lot of pain. And you think, “There’s no way someone could approve of me.” Or maybe you’re not a Christian and you have been running from God and rebelling against Him for so long that you think, “Well, surely not me. Surely He could not approve of me. He could not accept me.”

But this is the power of the Gospel, that you are not approved because of what you do. You are approved based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is placed on you. You’re clothed in it. You’re wrapped in it. And when God sees you, He sees the Son. This is where we get the doctrine of adoption, that we are adopted into the family of God. It says in the book of John that, “Whoever believes in Him, He gives the right to be called children of God.” We’re adopted into the family of God by faith. J.I. Packer was a great theologian, probably one of the most influential theologians of the past 100 years. And he died this past week. He wrote probably his most well read book, widely read book is called *Knowing God*. If you haven’t read it, I think you should read it. You should buy it, read it. It’s significantly shaped my life.

And J.I. Packer, J.I., the letters J and I, Packer P-A-C-K-E-R. The book is called *Knowing God*. In that book, there’s a chapter on adoption, on the idea that we become sons of God. And in that chapter, he says that we cannot understand God apart from understanding Him as a father. And I remember reading that how much it helped me because I lived so much of my early Christian life just always consumed with what God must be thinking about me, afraid that He was disappointed in me. I had failed in this way or that way. And I would sometimes think He probably thought a lot of me and loved me and wanted me near to Him. And then there were other times when I thought I’ve failed too much. He probably doesn’t want anything to do with me.

And I remember reading J.I. Packer and thinking about the fatherhood of God and His eternal acceptance and how we’ve been clothed in favor. And then I remember that this truth took on new meaning for me when I became a dad myself. And I started to understand the unconditional love of a father for a son. We had our first son 11 and a half years ago. His name is Wyatt. He’s our oldest. And you get ready to have a baby. And then you have, there’s all this joy and excitement. You’re in the hospital and everything’s easy because everybody else is doing everything.

And then they send you home and it’s joy-filled and stressful all at the same time. You’ve got this new baby, it’s wonderful. And at the same time, you are solely responsible for keeping this baby alive. And you don’t have a clue what you’re doing. You don’t know why he’s crying like that at this moment, versus that moment. You don’t know what is that rash, is that normal? Why is he never sleeping when he’s supposed to sleep? And you’d have to figure all this out and you do it while you’re sleep deprived, which is something I had never experienced to that degree before.

And so we're navigating this, but I remember we'd had Wyatt at home for about a week. And it was in the middle of the night. I was in his room. I was trying to get him to go back to sleep, which is pretty much the name of the game those first few weeks. How can we get him to go back to sleep? This is the middle of the night and it was dark in his room. And I'm sitting in this rocking chair and I was rocking him and he begins to fall asleep and he gets quiet. And I had this moment to just sit and think. And I'm rocking Wyatt and I'm looking at him. And I'm struck by the fact that I love him so much.

And I had a minute to just sit and think about that and just ponder. And it struck me that there was really no reason for me to love him at all. He hadn't done anything to earn my love. He hadn't hugged me or kissed me and said that he loved me. He hadn't shown me any kind of affection at all. In fact, he couldn't really even respond to me yet. All he had really done is cause me a lot of pain up to this point. He was ruining my sleep. He had taken away all my freedom. He had cost me a whole lot of money already. And yet I looked at him and I just loved him.

And I thought about what J.I. Packer said, "Understanding God, understanding him as a father." And I realized that God had stamped that on my heart so that I would understand how He loves me, that I didn't do anything to earn it. I don't deserve it. No one in this room deserves to be loved by God. But this is the instinct of a father to love his children. And when we are in Christ, not only does He love us, He has this perfect favor for us. We know what God thinks of Christ. Matthew 3:17, when Jesus is coming out of the waters of baptism, God, the Father booms from Heaven, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Did you know that when God sees you, this is what He thinks?

"This is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased." Why? Because your sins have been taken from you and His righteousness has been given to you. And when He sees you, He sees the perfect righteousness of his son. And He says, "My daughter, my son in whom I am well pleased." This is the secret to living a contented life in the shadows. A joy-filled life in these harsh realities, knowing that God approves of you. God loves you. He accepts you. Yes, death is coming. Yes, life is uncertain. Yes, ultimately even wisdom cannot promise us a good and happy life, but we can be joy-filled and contented knowing that God approves of us. And we can know that only because of what Jesus has done for us. It is not your performance. It is the work of Christ alone.

If you are a Christian consider today where your hope is planted. Is it planted in the idea that we could deny death or that we could control our circumstances or that if we live with enough wisdom, things will work out? Let's examine our hearts. And if our hope is rooted in those faulty things, then let's pull those hopes up and plant them in our relationship with God. Let's remember that God approves of us and let's rejoice in that approval. If you're not a Christian, then I invite you today to turn from false hope and meaningless pursuits and turn to God by believing in Jesus Christ. Put your trust in Jesus Christ alone and you will be saved, you will be accepted by God. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, would you give us faith to believe that your promises are true? God, would you help us to live in these truths, enjoying the reality that you approve of us? God, would you help us to live joy-filled contented lives, knowing that you approve of us? And God, may we rejoice that that approval is not rooted in anything we do. It's not rooted in who we are, but it's rooted in who we have trusted in, the perfect work of your son Jesus. God, may we rejoice in those realities and may we share that good news with everyone we need. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.



© 2020 Providence Baptist Church (Raleigh, NC)
Sermon transcripts may be used for preaching and teaching purposes, but may not be published or sold. While generally accurate, parts of this transcript may contain errors.
Providence reserves the right to correct and/or remove a transcript at any time.