

The Dangers of Life

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Date: 04 February 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help, the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Ecclesiastes chapter 7, Ecclesiastes chapter 7, and if we just read again at verse 27, Ecclesiastes 7 at verse 27, Behold, this is what I found, says the preacher, while adding one thing to another to find out the scheme of things, which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. The other day I stumbled across a debate over whether or not selfishness is a virtue. Selfishness, this is what they claim, selfishness is a virtue. And you know, it seemed like a strange debate, but that's why it intrigued me. And what I discovered was that the man in the debate, he was arguing that selfishness is something that should be promoted and something that we should all possess. In fact, he went on to say that the Christian morality of sacrifice and selflessness is completely wrong. And yes, the man was an atheist, but he held to this position because he said, I have one shot at life. I have one world in which to live. So why not make the most of life in this world? Why should I not live the best, the happiest, the most flourishing, the most successful, the most engaging life that I can possibly live? Selfishness, he said, it's a virtue because it leads to living a good life. In fact, he said, selfishness is the purpose of life. It's the meaning to life. It's about living for yourself and making yourself the priority. Now, while many of us might not agree with the statement that selfishness is a virtue that we should all possess, the sad reality is that selfishness is a vice that we already possess. We already possess it and we possess it without even trying because our hearts, as the

Bible says, they're so deceitful that we want to live the best, the happiest, the most flourishing, the most successful, the most engaging life that we can possibly live. And sometimes we want to do that without God. We want to do it without God stopping us. We want to live for ourselves and make ourselves happy and make ourselves the priority in our lives because by nature we're selfish. We might not come across as someone who's selfish, but our heart deceives us. And the truth is, we don't want anyone to tell us what to do or how to live or how to think. And we especially don't want God to tell us. We want to do things our own way. But you know, as Solomon affirms to us in this passage, selfishness is not a virtue.

He says it's one of the dangers of life. Selfishness is one of the dangers of life. And you know, having reflected upon some of the dangers of life in this passage, Solomon states at the end of the passage what he has discovered. He says in verse 27, which we just read, Behold, this is what I found, says the preacher, Solomon. He's preaching this sermon, Ecclesiastes.

He says, while adding one thing to another to find out the scheme of things, which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among these I have not found. See, this alone I found. This is it. He says, God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. Solomon is reflecting upon the dangers of life. And he says that what he has found out is that God has made man upright, perfect, and holy. That's how God made Adam. But because of the fall, because of our sin, because of our selfishness, we have sought out many schemes. And you know, having taught us last week at the beginning of the chapter, having taught us about all these, about how to live a better life, he had, Solomon emphasized in verses 1 to 12 that we will live a better life when we have an eternal perspective for the day of our death. But now in the second half of the chapter, Solomon is telling us about how to avoid the dangers of life. Because the dangers of life, they actually all revolve around self. And you know, in this passage, Solomon teaches us about the danger of being self-satisfied, self-righteous, and self-centered. The danger of self. The dangers of being self-satisfied, self-righteous, and self-centered. So we look first of all at the danger of being self-satisfied. The danger of being self-satisfied. Look at verse 13. Solomon says there,

Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider. God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. So Solomon, he begins this section by asking us to consider the dangers of life in the hope that by doing so, we will come to the same conclusion that he came to. Solomon wants us to think about the way in which the Lord works in this world and in our lives. And his hope is that when we look at life and live our lives, he says that we should do it with an eternal perspective. And you know, every time we listen to what Solomon is saying from this sermon, Ecclesiastes, we have to remember that Solomon is preaching to us from experience.

[6 : 37] He's preaching to us from his own experience. Solomon was someone who had been drawn in by the selfishness and the vanity of the world. And he regrets that he swallowed the lie that this world can satisfy all the pleasures that our heart desires. But now as this old man looking back over his life, Solomon humbly admits that even though it may have seemed good at the time, it was all vanity. It was selfishly striving after the things that will never satisfy.

And so as we consider what Solomon found out and what he discovered, Solomon is always wanting us to possess this eternal perspective on life and come to the same conclusion that he came to. Because Solomon's conclusion is that God made mankind upright.

That's the way God made Adam. But because of the fall, because of our sin, because of our selfishness, we have sought out many schemes. We want to go our own way. We want to do our own thing. We want to live our own lives. And if need be, we want to do it without God. But you know, Solomon's request at the beginning of verse 13 is that he wants us to consider the work of God. He wants us to reflect upon the way in which God works in the world and the way in which he works in our lives. He says in verse 13, consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked?

And without doubt, Solomon is highlighting a huge subject. A subject in which I'm sure that we all think about from time to time. Because when things happen in our lives, either publicly or privately, we often wonder, well, what is God doing in it all? Whether it's illness or it's a breakup or a breakdown or death breaks into our home. When these things come upon us and they come upon us so unexpectedly, we're left wondering, where is God in all this? Why has God allowed this to happen?

Why has God allowed this to happen to me? Why is this illness in my life? Why did this accident happen? Why did I lose my job? Why did these circumstances have to change? Why has this person that I love so deeply, why has he been taken from me? And you know, my friend, it's not wrong to ask why.

[9 : 13] It's not wrong to question what the Lord is doing in our lives when we're experiencing the darkest of circumstances. Jesus even asked why. He asked why during his hours of darkness. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And so it's not wrong to ask why. So long as our asking why isn't a complaint against God and his will. My friend, in the darkest of circumstances, it's good to ask why. It's good to ask God why. But it's also good to ask why in humble obedience to the providence of God. Because if our questioning of God, if it's a complaint against God, or against what has happened in our lives, then that's wrong. Because that complaint, it's overshadowed by selfish desire. And the thought, I deserve better. And you know, this is one of the dangers of life that

Solomon is teaching us to avoid. That we think we deserve better from God. But my friend, as hard as it is for me to speak into these circumstances, the moment we think we deserve better, Solomon is saying to us, you are not living with an eternal perspective. Because you're actually harboring and entertaining a selfish desire. Because we can be tempted to think that we deserve better. Or God owes us something.

Or that this should never happen to me. I know that that's not easy to take. But what Solomon is calling us to do here is consider the works of God. Solomon wants us to consider that every work of God in our lives and in this world, it's wise, just, and good. Solomon wants us to see that God is sovereign.

He's ruling over and overruling in every aspect and in every area in our lives. And you know, that's what we mean by the providence of God. That God is sovereign in every detail. He's king over all the earth. And he's king over our lives. That doesn't mean that God is the author of sin. And doesn't mean that he's, he is responsible for all the atrocities and calamities in this world and in our lives. But it does mean that he has appointed all things. And he's in control of all things. And he knows all things that will happen.

And that's what providence means. It means seen beforehand. Meaning that God has seen every potential and every actual event take place in this world before it happens. He's seen everything in our lives.

[12 : 08] The Lord has seen it all. And you know, I love the shorter catechism because it just puts together so succinctly the wonderful teaching of scripture. The catechism, what it says about God's providence, God's works of providence, are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving of, and governing of all their creatures, all his creatures, and all their actions. And that doesn't mean that we're robots.

But it does mean that nothing in this world happens by chance. And from God's perspective, from an eternal perspective, there's no such thing as an accident or a mistake. Because everything is working according to God's plan and God's purpose.

And because of that, as Solomon says, no one can make straight what God has made crooked. No one can change or alter what the Lord has appointed in our lives.

As someone once said, our disappointments, they are all still God's appointments. My friend, every detail in our lives is appointed by the Lord. Every meeting, every parting, every encounter, every illness, every joy, and every sorrow, it's all appointed by the Lord. And this is what Solomon is saying in verse 14. In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. Solomon is saying, God allows the good times in our life as well as the bad.

He allows the ups and the downs, the peaks and the troughs. He allows the darkness and the light. The Lord appoints it all. And what Solomon is saying is that in the good times, we're to rejoice in the Lord. But in the bad times, we are to reflect upon what the Lord is saying to us.

[14 : 13] Because, you know, the Lord brings these things into our lives, not out of hatred for us, not out of a judgment towards us. That's such a wrong view of God.

Because the Lord brings these things into our lives in order to bring us closer to himself. He brings these things that are so hard and so difficult to deal with. He brings them into our experience so that we will rely less upon self and more upon him.

And, you know, sometimes the Lord even brings things into our lives to stop us. To stop us in our tracks and to wake us up and to make us look at ourselves and to look at life with an eternal perspective. Because the danger of life is that when everything is going well and when everything is going good, the danger is that we don't think of the Lord.

We don't thank him for his goodness. The danger is we ignore God during the good times. But we only turn to him when times of adversity come. We turn to him when things go wrong. And that's when we pray. And that's when we turn to God. And that's when we seek God's help.

And the danger is, is when things are good, we can become selfish and self-satisfied. Where we praise ourselves and we take the credit to ourselves. But when things don't go according to our hopes and dreams, God gets the blame. God gets the blame. And sadly, sometimes we treat God like a genie in a bottle who's just there when we need him. We take him out of the cupboard when we need him. We take him out of the cupboard when we need him the most. Instead of seeing that the Lord is putting all these things into our lives. Not to drive us away from him, but to drive us to our knees. And to drive us to seeking him with all our heart. Because the Lord wants us. That's what the Bible emphasizes. He wants us to come to him. And you know, the greatest example of this in the Bible is in the life of Job. Job lost everything. He lost his home, his family, his business, his health, his wife. His wife told him, curse God and die. And yet Job, he didn't blame God for all that happened. And he looked to God for his help and his strength.

[16 : 50] In fact, when you come to chapter 3 of Job, Job is confessing about the Lord. He knows the way that I take. And when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. For he performs the thing that is appointed for me. And many such things are with him. What Job was saying is that the Lord puts things into my life, not to drive me away from him, but to drive me to him. And you know, Job's life, it always reminds me of that poem, The Divine Weaver, where the author says, my life is but a weaving between my Lord and me. I cannot choose the colors he weaves steadily.

Sometimes he weaves sorrow and I in foolish pride. Forget that he sees the upper and I the underside. And not till the loom is silent and the shuttle cease to fly, shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why. The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned. And you know, that poem, it's a beautiful reminder that the Lord is sovereign. He is sovereign in every area and in every aspect of our lives.

But Solomon is telling us about the danger of being self-satisfied. In which we praise self in the good times. And we blame God in the bad times.

What Solomon is reminding us is that God is sovereign. And that we need to look to him. So we see the danger of being self-satisfied. But secondly, Solomon teaches us about the danger of being self-righteous. The danger of being self-righteous. Look at verse 15.

In my vain life, I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness. And there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil doing. And in this verse, Solomon, he just sets the contrast that is clearly seen in life. The person who does right lives a good and upright life. And yet they suffer and die before their time, he says. But there is the wicked person who lives a reckless and irresponsible life. And yet they live for many years in that state.

[19 : 25] And Solomon's comparison between the righteous and the wicked, it should make us want to say to this verse, that's unfair. Why does God allow the wicked to prosper?

Why does he allow the righteous to perish? That's not very fair, is it? And you know, as we were saying about Psalm 73, that's what Psalm 73 is all about.

So he said, Psalm 73, it was written by a man called Asaph. Asaph was struggling with life. And he was asking God, why are the wicked prospering? Why are they developing? Why are they advancing in life? And yet Asaph, as this righteous man who loved God and sought to please God all his life, he was suffering.

And in Psalm 73, Asaph confesses that he was envious of the wicked. He was suffering and they were at ease in their riches and their sin.

And Asaph, he's even questioning why he's bothering being a Christian. Why is he bothering to keep God's law and be this righteous person? He wondered that if it's just, is it just a futile exercise?

[20 : 36] Because the wicked, they seem to be fine in life. They seem to be getting on in life. Nothing bothers them. They're happy without God. But Asaph, he was struggling with all these things that were going on in his life and in his heart.

And because of this, Asaph thought that he had wasted his time trying to be a Christian and trying to please God. And that he had wasted his time trying to live a holy life.

But then as we were singing, Asaph says, when I thought how to understand this, it seemed just this wearisome task until I went into the sanctuary of God.

Then I discerned the end. Asaph thought that the wicked were prospering and he was failing. But when he came into God's house, when he was confronted with the God of all eternity, when he came to worship the God who was sovereign over his life and everyone else's life, Asaph was given an eternal perspective.

And he could see that what the wicked had was only temporary. It was only for this life. They weren't prepared for eternity. They didn't have an eternal perspective.

[21 : 50] And you know, it's no wonder Asaph goes on to say in Psalm 73, Nevertheless, continually, O Lord, I am with thee. Thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me.

When Asaph came into the house of God, he was given an eternal perspective on life. And with an eternal perspective, he saw that the danger of life is that he could have been self-righteous.

He could have complained against God for all that the wicked had. He wondered why they had it. But he didn't complain. He could have demanded that God deal with the wicked as they deserve, as their sin deserved.

And that God give to him all the blessings of life as he thought he deserved. He could have done all these things. He could have said all these things. But that's not what happened. Asaph realized that living an immoral life or living a self-righteous life, it is of no eternal value.

It's of no eternal value. And you know, that's what Solomon is emphasizing here. That being self-righteous and thinking that we have any claim on God, it's utter foolishness.

[23 : 09] Because if we think that being a good person or doing works of righteousness, if we think that these things will save us, then we're wasting our life. We're just destroying ourselves.

Because all we're doing is trying to please God by our own works and our own efforts. But here Solomon is warning us against the danger of being self-righteous.

He's warning us against religious conceit and the truth. We're just doing it. Where we just attend church to be seen and just do things for the approval of others. We are like the Pharisees where we come to God with our lip service, but our hearts are far from Him.

Solomon is warning us here against religious conceit and legalism. Where we can be so upright and think that God will accept us because of who we are.

That God will accept us because of our background or the place we live or our upbringing or because our parents were Christians or because we went to Sunday school when we were a little child or that we read our Bible now and again or we just attend church on the Lord's Day.

[24 : 19] And we don't do this and we don't do that, but we do do this and we do do that that makes us look so good and in all our self-righteousness we think that we're better than other people.

We're not as bad as them. We have all these self-righteous thoughts before God in the hope that these righteous deeds will outweigh all our sins that we have done and that one day God will accept us and He will just welcome us into heaven with open arms when we die.

Well, my friend, God forbid if that is your view of salvation. God forbid that you ever think that you can please God by your self-righteousness because in the Bible it says that our righteousness it's an abomination to the Lord.

Our righteousness is as filthy rags in His sight. God forbid that we ever think that we can please God by our self-righteousness.

because as Solomon reminds us there is not a righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins. We've all sinned.

[25 : 35] We've all come short of God's glory. There is no one righteous, no, not one. And so the only way to be acceptable to God is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Because as the Bible says, Jesus Christ is our righteousness. He is our Jehovah Sidkenu the Lord our righteousness. righteousness. And as the Bible repeatedly reminds us we are made righteous not by anything we've done but only through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Because at the cross the Bible tells us Jesus became sin for us. He took our sin even though He knew no sin. He took it all so that we could be made the righteousness of God in Him.

My friend, the gospel gives to us a great hope. A hope that is sure and steadfast. It's the hope of being made righteous in God's sight by nothing that we have done but by trusting in everything that Jesus has done on our behalf.

And you know that's why the hymn writer could say as it's quoted in your intimations my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name on Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.

[27 : 17] And so Solomon he's teaching us about the dangers of life and the danger of self selfishness. Teacher, he's taught us about the danger of being self-satisfied and the danger of being self-righteous.

But lastly Solomon teaches us about the danger of being self-centered. The danger of being self-centered. Look at verse 21.

Do not take to heart all the things that people say lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

You know in these verses Solomon addresses something that we all struggle with and something that we're all guilty of. Because we all struggle with the idea that people might be talking about us.

Even talking bad about us. But at the same time we're all guilty of doing it ourselves. We're all guilty of speaking about someone. Whether they're in our family or our community or our workplace or our church.

[28 : 28] We're all guilty. And yet it's something we struggle with when it's about us. We don't like it when people are talking about us. But we're happy to engage in it when it's about others.

And you know Solomon the wisdom of Solomon he's just showing us how self-centered and how hypocritical we really are. Because we don't like it when we're being slandered but we will slander others.

And yet the Bible reminds us so solemnly that the Lord hears our conversations. He's sovereign. He knows what we're saying about others. And more than that James in his letter in the New Testament he talks about our tongue.

He says that our tongue is a fire a world of iniquity staining the whole body and setting on fire the entire course of our life because it's all set on fire he says by hell.

And James goes on to say that no human being can tame that little muscle in our mouth. No one can tame the tongue because it's an unruly evil full of deadly poison.

[29 : 35] He says that we're so self-centered and hypocritical that we're able to praise God in church and yet curse people who are made in the image and likeness of God.

And James he highlights to us this contradiction this hypocrisy in our lives when he says from the same mouth. the same tongue comes curing and blessing.

And James says my brothers these things ought not to be. And it's true these things shouldn't happen. We shouldn't speak ill of anyone because we're to love one another.

But you know when I read verse 21 the opening words of it I couldn't help but think of some of you here. Do not take to heart all the things that people say.

And I thought of you not because you're speaking ill of people. That's not why I thought of you. Or that people are speaking ill of you. That's not why I've thought of you. I thought of you because I sometimes think that that's what holds you back.

[30 : 42] That's what holds you back from taking that step and making that commitment to Jesus Christ. Do not take to heart all the things that people say.

What holds you back is that you worry about what other people say. You take to heart what people will think of you if they knew that you're a Christian.

Or what they will think of you or say about you if you went to church both ends on the Lord's Day. Or if you came to church during the week. You take to heart what people will think of you or say about you if you were to commit your life to Jesus Christ and make it known to other people.

You worry, you fret, it maybe even eats you up inside. But you know the truth is those thoughts are self centred thoughts.

They're not Christ centred thoughts. Now don't get me wrong, they're genuine concerns. concerns. But the question is, are they necessary concerns?

[31 : 50] Are you just thinking about it too much? And making becoming a Christian or a disciple of Jesus, are you making it something more than it actually is? Yes, committing your life to Jesus Christ, don't get me wrong, becoming a Christian, it's the biggest and the best decision you'll ever make and you won't regret it.

Believe me, you will not regret it. But what's maybe holding you back is yourself. What's holding you back is yourself, your self centred thoughts about what other people will think and what other people will say about me.

What your spouse will say, what your children might say, what your family will say, what your friends will say, what your work colleagues will say, what your neighbours will say, what will they say about me, what will they think of me, if I became a Christian.

And you know, if this is what's holding you back, then it's really sad. This shouldn't hold you back. Because what do you actually think people will say, apart from rejoice and be glad?

What do you worry they will think of you if you became a Christian or if you actually started following the Lord publicly? what would they say? That you're a sinner? That's true, isn't it?

[33 : 14] What would they say? That you love Jesus now? That's a good thing, isn't it? What would they say? That you want to follow Jesus, you want to trust in him, you want to live for him, you want to know him more and more, you want to have an eternal perspective, you want to go to heaven when you die.

My friend, is that not what you want? Is that not why you're here? Is that not your heart's desire? Is that not your longing to be a Christian?

Then Solomon's advice to us is, ignore what people think and say. Ignore what the devil tells you. He will tell you plenty. Ignore your own worries, your own thoughts, your own self-centered desires, what they're telling you.

Ignore it all. Leave self-behind and come to Christ. Come and confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Because that's the call of discipleship. That's what Jesus said. You want to be a Christian, he says. If you want to come after me, he says, you must deny self.

[34 : 29] Take up your cross and follow me. If you want to be a disciple of Jesus, we must leave self behind and come to Jesus Christ for salvation.

Because as Solomon affirms here in this chapter, that's true wisdom. That's living your life with an eternal perspective. That's how you avoid the dangers of life. You put away self.

You put away selfish desire. You put away the danger of self-satisfaction. You put away the danger of self-righteousness. You put away self-centeredness. You put it all away and you avoid the dangers of life by looking away from self and looking to Jesus as the author and the finisher of your faith.

So my friend, the call to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, it's being issued to you again today. Jesus is saying to you in the gospel, do you want to be a Christian?

Do you want to follow me? Do you want to be saved? Then here's what you have to do.

[35 : 43] If you want to come after me, you must deny self. You must take up your cross and follow me.

follow me. Don't leave it till next week. Because as we were reminded this week, we don't know when our time will come when we are called from the scene of time into eternity.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, forgive us for always putting ourselves first.

Forgive us, Lord, we pray, for being self-satisfied in life and not giving thee the glory. Forgive us, Lord, for being self-righteous and not trusting in the righteousness of Christ.

Forgive us, Lord, for being self-centered and not putting Jesus at the center. O help us, Lord, we pray, to deny self daily, to take up our cross daily, to keep following after Jesus, because he is the one who is going before us, that he is the shepherd, and that he promises to us that when we claim him as our shepherd, we shall not be in want.

[37 : 18] We shall have the promise that goodness and mercy will follow behind us all the days of our life, and that in God's house forevermore our dwelling place shall be.

Bless us, Lord, we ask thee, keep us, we pray, and go before us and do us good, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We shall conclude this morning by singing to God's praise in Psalm 73.

Psalm 73, we're singing from, that's page 316 in the blue book, we're singing from verse 23 down to the verse 26.

Psalm 73 from verse 23, Nevertheless continually, O Lord, I am with thee, thou dost me hold by my right hand, and still upholdest me. Thou with thy counsel while I live, wilt me conduct and guide, and to thy glory afterward, receive me to abide.

Down to the verse 26 of Psalm 73, to God's praise. Him let us know. Nevertheless, continue période, O Lord, I am with thee, thou dost me hold by my I can't and still upholdest me.

[39 : 08] Now with thy counsel while I have with me contact and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide and abide in the heavens and side.

But thee, O Lord, alone, and in the earth whom I desire, besides thee there there is none.

My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but thought doth fail thee never or of my heart thought is the strength and portion forever.

forever. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen.