

Your Best Life in Glory

A sermon preached by Dr. John Clayton at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Fort Smith, Arkansas on August 18, 2019.

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

We live in a world of births and deaths, health and sickness, happiness and heartache. We need only open our favorite medium of daily news to hear of tragedy, destruction, and death. For those who have lived long enough, we have known joy and sadness, laughter and weeping, life and death. Experiencing both is a characteristic of the life we know now, and if we are honest, the seeming vanity of life can leave us discouraged.

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes confesses candidly, "I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been born and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun" (Eccles. 4:2-3). Sometimes life makes us long for death or wish we had never been born, or as Job asks in his anguish, "Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?" (Job 3:11). The trials of this life can feel so heavy at times that even the minister may ask himself: Should I weep at a birth and rejoice at a funeral?

To the rescue of our honesty, a uniquely American so-called theology has arisen. We are told that the problem exists not with the human condition but with our lack of faith and resolve. Ignore Job's pity party and instead "Start calling yourself healed, happy, whole, blessed, and prosperous" (Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now*). Forget that the "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9), instead "You have to learn to follow your heart" (Osteen). Disregard the Apostle Paul's confession, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh," crying out, "Wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:18, 24), instead believe that

“there is also a lot right with you” (Osteen). While God’s Word says that it is God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9), instead believe that “It’s our faith that activates the power of God” (Osteen).

We are told that if we try hard enough and believe sincerely enough, we can experience our best life right here, right now. Yet, Cain murdered faithful Abel. Job suffered not for his disobedience but his obedience. The father of Israel died far from home. Moses shepherded Israel to the Promised Land but never entered it. King David was a man after God’s own heart and died a helpless, shivering old man. Solomon responded to God’s favor with pagan worship. Elijah ran for his life, Jeremiah wept constantly, and Hosea was called to marry a prostitute. John the Baptist was decapitated as a party favor, and the apostles were persecuted and many martyred. If this life is my best life now, I’ll pass.

There is however an admirable hopefulness in the heresy hucksterism of our day. So, I will agree with one key distinction: Apart from Christ, your best life is now.

Apart from Christ, Your Best Life Is Now

There are only two kinds of people in this world: children of God and children of the devil, the good seed and the weeds of the parable. In God’s sovereign-yet-hidden purpose, the weeds are not pulled immediately from the field of this world but allowed to grow amidst the wheat. By virtue of this, the children of the devil receive the blessings of God’s common grace. Indeed, “[God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45b). It is exactly as God promised Noah: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). Until “the close of the age,” children of God and children of the devil, wheat and weeds together, enjoy the blessings of God’s common grace.

It is of course grace whether acknowledged or not, not a special grace, not God’s saving grace, but a common favor of God upon the underserving, which includes all of us. The children of God pray to our heavenly Father, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and so He does for us and for the children of the devil too. Fertile soil is tilled and sown; wheat grows and is harvested; it is milled and packaged for the baker, who bakes our bread. Bread is broken and enjoyed by the devil’s child for the sake of God’s children. The weeds are not pulled now but enjoy God’s sunshine and rain.

We can think of a myriad of examples that every man, woman, and child receive from creation, whether acknowledged or not. The undeserving receiving the blessings of our Creator. So, to the one who does not believe in Christ, to the one who has rejected the Son of God, to the one who has not nor ever will trust in Jesus as Savior, live it up! This is your best life...now. It doesn’t get any better than this.

Rest assured, the sun will come up in the morning; count on it. The rain will fall from the sky. With precision you can rely on the seed to germinate and sprout, for harvest to come as it did last year, for cold to be cold, for heat to be hot, for the perfect timing of the seasons, for the light of every day and the darkness of every night; count on the perfect precision of planet earth. So, love your life, and love this world and everything in it, for it is all you know and love.

Your Best Life in Glory

But, know that this life you know, this common grace that you enjoy, serves not only as sufficient evidence of your Creator, rendering you without excuse, but also serves as your condemnation: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:19-22). So, know that in your worldly wisdom your best life is right here and now. Enjoy every minute of it, because what is to come is significantly different.

While the child of the devil denies it, or ignores it, now is not all there is. There will be a close of the age, where everything that you have known in this age will appear as it is, temporal. The weeds will be separated from the wheat, likely surprising many. Jesus who first came in love will stand in judgment over all, and by the word of His command every child of the devil will be thrown into the fiery furnace of hell and their best life will be a fleeting memory of the now amidst the weeping and gnashing of teeth. In that moment, of course, no one will deny the Creator, everyone will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but only the children of God will be saved.

This may lead you to ask: How do I know if I am a child of God? Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved: “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Rom. 10:9-10). Just as you have enjoyed the blessing of God’s common grace, if He has revealed Himself to you, as Jesus Christ your Savior this too is by His grace. The difference between the wheat and weeds of this world is according to God’s Word alone salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. And, if by God’s grace you have savingly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, know this: In Christ, your best life is *not* now.

In Christ, Your Best Life Is Not Now

The child of God, like good seed, is born into this world, a world into which the devil has planted his own. To grow up in the field of this world is to live in a world surrounded by, what Jesus refers to as, “all causes of sin and all law-breakers.” You share the same soil, receive the same rain, and enjoy the same sunshine. Because this is now and not the close of the age, the temptation is to think that this is the best it gets. There is a temptation to seek your best life now, but it is not. We were made for more.

This is not to say that there are delights to be enjoyed on this side of glory. We do well to listen to the Preacher of Ecclesiastes who, in summary, prescribes the following: First, find delight in doing good for others (Eccles. 3:12). I heard someone refer to a man as “too heavenly-minded to be any earthly good.” May this never be said of a child of God! Rather, may we be so heavenly-minded that we do much earthly good.

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Second, enjoy the simple pleasures of this life, the gifts of God's common grace (Eccles. 3:13). What a blessing good food and drink are, time with your family, vacations, the holidays, (the list goes on and on) these are rich blessings from the hand of God.

Third, enjoy work (Eccles. 2:24b), because we were created to work (Gen. 2:15): "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Eccles. 9:10a). The child of God should be the hardest worker and the most thankful, for work is God's gift to us.

Fourth, enjoy life with the ones you love (Eccles. 9:9). Enjoy time with your husband or wife, if you're married. Enjoy your parents, your children, and enjoy good friends. Be a friend to many and enjoy the friendship of others.

Fifth, enjoy today, because you don't know what will happen tomorrow (Eccles. 7:14). Or, as Jesus put it, "do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious about itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matt. 6:34). So, enjoy today; it won't be here tomorrow.

But, this is not all the Preacher of Ecclesiastes teaches us about this life. If we begin to think that our best life is now, we will be discouraged when it is not. Is it your best life now when you do good to others and in return receive evil? Is it your best life now when you are too sick to enjoy even life's simple pleasures? Is it your best life now when you are without a job and have no work or are too sick to work? Is it your best life now when those you love reject you, hurt you, or leave you? Is it your best life now if you are hurting so much today that you hope for a better tomorrow?

Christian, do not put your hope in a field infiltrated by the enemy and sown full of weeds destined for the furnace. Hold the balance described of Ecclesiastes: Enjoy what God has given by His common grace in this life while knowing this: "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccles. 1:2b).

This is not a Christian version of fatalistic permissive. It is the reality of a life with sin. Since the Fall of Adam, no one has known a world without sin, but creation yearns for it (Rom. 8:22-24) and so should the child of God. In our parable, notice what our Lord's angels gather out of His kingdom: "all causes of sin and all law-breakers" (13:41). There can be no eternal heavenly kingdom on earth with sin present. Try as you might, you cannot have heaven on earth with sin. Therefore, for those who are judged righteous not in their own merit but in the perfect righteousness of Christ, your best life is not now but in glory.

In Christ, your best life is in glory

While it may seem unimaginable now, this life that we know will pass away. Our Lord will return, and weeds will be pulled revealing the children of the devil. The wheat will be harvested, and the children of God will be revealed. There will be judgment, and on that day our hope will be built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Your Best Life in Glory

The children of the devil will join him in the Lake of Fire, and then, when evil is removed, when sin no longer reigns, we “will shine like the sun in the kingdom of [our] Father.” Our best life will be in the eternal presence of our God. Our best life will be in shining the reflection of His glory. Our best life will be in glorifying and enjoying Him forever. Our best life will be reigning with our Lord Jesus Christ in the heavenly kingdom and new earth. There will be not vanity but only glory.

Until that day, God is working all things together for our good, and that “good” is not your health, wealth, or happiness; it’s not your best life now. It is the refining fire of our sanctification, conforming us to the image of Christ, and that is good, because your best life is in glory. He who has ears, let him hear.