# SERMON SERIES: DOG DAYS

# “I Double Dog Dare You!”

## Ecclesiastes 9:1-10

 Today brings us to the conclusion of our August sermon series “Dog Days.” We’ve been looking at Scripture verses that make reference to dogs, and we’ve tied those in with some common metaphors or phrases related to our canine friends. So far we’ve discussed being “in the doghouse,” what it means to be “sad as a hound dog’s eye,” and last Sunday our phrase was “every dog has its day.”

I invite you to turn to our Scripture reading, Ecclesiastes 9:1-10, as we turn our attention to one final phrase that we’re all familiar with--although for the majority of us it’s one we probably haven’t used since we were children. It’s the phrase “I double dog dare you!” ***The phrase has been popularized in our culture due the influence of the film A CHRISTMAS STORY, in which 9-year-old Ralph Parker has to convince his parents that a Red Ryder BB Gun would make a perfect gift—even if there is a danger of shooting his eye out!*** ***One of the film’s many famous scenes has a group of boys gathered around the school flagpole on a frosty morning during recess. The topic of discussion is whether or not a tongue will stick to a frozen piece of metal. One boy, Flick, has been challenged to give it a try and states, “Are you kidding? Stick my tongue to that stupid pole? That's dumb!”***

***His friend,*** [***Schwartz***](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0730222/)***, replies, “That's 'cause you know it'll stick!”***

***“You're full of it!” Flick fires back.***

***“Oh yeah?***

***“Yeah!” Flick says, even more defiantly.***

***“Well I double-DOG-dare ya!” Schwartz responds. We then hear the narrator: “NOW it was serious. A double-dog-dare. What else was there but a "triple dare you"? And then, the* coup de grace *of all dares, the sinister triple-dog-dare.”*** The double-dog dare simply means to double down or to up the ante in response to a challenge. It means taking things to the next level of intensity. There’s a lesson here for us as human beings—a lesson as old as the Old Testament itself. And there’s a lesson here for us as followers of Jesus Christ.

*This, too, I carefully explored: Even though the actions of godly and wise people are in God’s hands, no one knows whether God will show them favor. 2The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don’t.*

*3It seems so wrong that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate. Already twisted by evil, people choose their own mad course, for they have no hope. There is nothing ahead but death anyway. 4There is hope only for the living. As they say, “It’s better to be a live dog than a dead lion!”*

*5The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered. 6Whatever they did in their lifetime—loving, hating, envying—is all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth. 7So go ahead. Eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God approves of this! 8Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne!*

*9Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil. 10Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom.*

 Ecclesiastes is a book that, if we’re just skimming through it, appears to contain a lot of whining and complaining. We encounter the phrase *“Meaningless! Meaningless! All is meaningless!”* repeatedly. And since the author is speaking about many things in life, it seems to carry a negative and depressing tone. However, upon closer examination Ecclesiastes isn’t saying that life itself is meaningless. It tells us that the things we chase after as human beings—possessions, wealth, fame, longevity—all these things are ultimately meaningless in the grand scheme of things.

 Our Scripture reading begins, *This, too, I carefully explored: Even though the actions of godly and wise people are in God’s hands, no one knows whether God will show them favor. The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don’t.* The author of Ecclesiastes--whom most scholars believe was King Solomon—wasn’t saying that everyone gets saved or everything gets damned. Rather, as a human being he couldn’t see beyond the veil of death; therefore, he didn’t know what our ultimate destiny really is. The wicked all die in the end; the good all die in the end. No one escapes this grim reality. To Solomon’s finite human mind there was no way of truly knowing what happens after death.

Solomon continued his observation: *It seems so tragic that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate. That is why people are not more careful to be good. Instead, they choose their own mad course, for they have no hope. There is nothing ahead but death anyway.* If death is all we have to look forward to, then what difference does it make how one lives, Solomon argued? If all we get are 65—75--85 years of life, why not waste them doing whatever we want? This, Solomon said, is how people tend to live: filling their lives with thousands of distractions, squandering what precious time they do have.

*There is hope only for the living. As they say, “It’s better to be a live dog than a dead lion!” The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered. Whatever they did in their lifetime—loving, hating, envying—is all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth.*

 The raw, unvarnished reality is that all life eventually ends in death, and the wise person recognizes that it’s better to be a dog who’s alive than a mighty lion who lies dead! And the reason for this perspective? Solomon says it’s because those who are still alive know they will die. Doesn’t sound too cheery, but what he’s getting at is this: the living still have time to change their focus; to do something different; to embrace the joy that life holds. The dead don’t have this opportunity. *They no longer play a part in anything here on earth.*

 This raises the question for us: what does it mean to really and truly *live*? Ecclesiastes—indeed, all the wisdom books of the Bible—tell us that life is not about material goods, popularity or power. These are things which tempt and distract us from fully enjoying life. They create unimaginable burdens, stress, selfishness and greed. We may need money for commerce, food for our bodies, homes in which to live—but they should never be our driving focus or our purpose in life.

A biblical understanding of life involves wholeness—the Jewish *shalom*—in every part of our existence. *Shalom* isn’t just the absence of conflict. It’s about bringing every aspect of life under the lordship of God in Jesus Christ. As human beings, the lesson of Ecclesiastes is to live life to its fullest, to enjoy all the goodness God has blessed us with, to live and breathe and love in the fullness of every moment! *So go ahead,* Solomon says. *Eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God approves of this! Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne! Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil. Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom.*

To live in God’s *shalom*—in wholeness—is to allow God’s presence to touch, transform and renew every aspect of our lives: our relationships, our finances, our words, our attitudes, our consumption, our service to others. Solomon reminds us to make the decision to live in that fullness, that *shalom*. It’s as if he is saying, “I double dog dare you to live!”

 The lesson for us as followers of Jesus is to embrace the life of Christ and make it our own. We’re called to live and behave and rejoice and enjoy the glories that a regenerated life brings! Jesus said in John 10:10, *“I have come that they may have life,and have it more abundantly.”* I love that verse! One of the translations of the original Greek words literally means that Jesus gives us “the kind of life not normally seen among people.” That’s what it means for us to live: to reveal to the world a kind of life—a kingdom life—unlike anything they’ve encountered before in this world.

 ***How many times have we heard someone say something like “She always has a glow about her”? Or maybe we’ve heard someone say “He’s always got a smile on his face no matter what.” How many times, especially at a funeral, have we heard (or perhaps said), “I only hope I can be half the man he was” or “She was so full of life that people just loved being around her”?*** People who live in the fullness of Christ—in *shalom*--look different. They talk different. They walk different. Let’s face it: nobody says “I wish I could be as sour-looking as that woman is.” Nobody aspires to be the most negative person anyone knows. I’ve never been at a funeral where anyone has said “I hope one day I can be as miserly as he was.” No, we seek out and want to emulate the life-affirming, joyful, blessed qualities of others.

 As Christians, we should be the happiest and liveliest people on the planet! Not only do we know our eternal destiny is secure in Christ; we also know that this life is bursting with God’s goodness, blessing, promise and opportunity! Solomon tells us to enjoy what God has given, whether that’s good food, a fine wine, or a loving spouse. He doesn’t encourage us to indulge our every consumer whim, but to be content with what we have and be thankful for it.

Jesus didn’t die so that we could fill our lives with material goodies, sit in a comfortable pew, and watch the world go by. He didn’t wear a crown of thorns so we could go through life scowling at everything. He didn’t have his hands pierced so we could keep our hands in our pockets, clutched around our money. He died to give us a wild, unbelievable, and deeply meaningful life that should stand out from all others.

 ***In 1989, comedian Robin Williams starred in a film entitled DEAD POETS SOCIETY. It tells the story of John Keating, an English Literature professor at a conservative and aristocratic boys prep school. Keating inspires his students not only to appreciate and love poetry, but to embrace all of life as a rich, beautiful, amazing and never-ending adventure. As his young charges begin to explore their own repressed talents and interests, they learn to “seize the day” and live to the fullest.*** It’s a story that King Solomon would very likely have approved of.

 Where can you “seize the day” when you walk from this place? Will you go for a walk this afternoon somewhere you’ve never been? Will you drive a different route to work tomorrow? Would you take time to watch the stars or sit in a different place next Sunday? Would you step out of your comfort zone for just a moment to let God show you something new?

 Belonging to Jesus is a double-dog kind of dare. He doubles down on us, calling and challenging us to live higher, freer, closer to his heart. He ups the ante so that our lives can stand out, be different, count for something, and make an impact. Are you willing to accept the adventure? Are you willing to take one step in a new direction? Allow the Holy Spirit to show you one step—one place—one thing—you can do. Open your hearts to hear him speak; let him point you toward the best, brightest, and most wonderful life ever imagined.

Seize the day!

I double-dog dare you!

Amen.