

Remember Your Creator

Well, this morning we finish up our journey through the book of Ecclesiastes! The closing verses of this book speak to all of us, but they are particularly aimed at the young. So if you are young (and I'll let you decide if you are or not), I want to ask you to pay special attention because Solomon has two important messages for you this morning. We find the first message in chapter 11:7-10.

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. ⁸ However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.

⁹ *You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. ¹⁰ So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless. Eccles. 11:7-10*

For those of you who are young, the first message God has for you is this: enjoy your life! That's a pretty good message, right? Enjoy summer days and sunshine, enjoy eating good food and laughing with friends. Enjoy doing adventurous things and look forward to the good things that life has in store for you.

This blows to smithereens the idea that to be a Christian and to follow Jesus means living a miserable, unhappy life to the glory of God. The Bible tells us that joy, not misery, is to be the hallmark of the Christian life, and Solomon is telling us here that it's basically our duty to enjoy life and be happy! In fact, he advises us to banish vexation from our hearts (the NIV says anxiety, but vexation is a better translation). Vexation is a state of the heart where you are worried or annoyed or frustrated. We can't always get rid of the things that vex us, but we can decide not to be vexed by so many things! And then he says, do what you can to avoid things that hurt your body and cause pain. There's nothing wrong with trying to avoid or minimize things that bother us physically or emotionally, within moral and ethical bounds. Follow your heart as long as you can do it with a clear conscience knowing that one day God will judge you for what you do. There are clear moral and biblical boundaries, but within those boundaries, have fun! Enjoy your life!

But while you do, remember this (young people): darker days are coming and they will be many. In the end the fun and good times will be like a vapor - a smoke - that's here one day and gone the next. That's your life. Remember that. You are not immortal, and we've already seen from this book that lasting meaning cannot be found in any activity under the sun. So remember that. Don't forget it. And Solomon says remember something else, and this is the second message for young people. Let's read chapter **12:1-6**

12 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"— ² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; ³ when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; ⁴ when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; ⁵ when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper

drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

The band Mercy Me has a song called "Dear Younger Me" where older me talks to younger me about the future. If we could go back to our younger us knowing what we know now, we could avoid some of the mistakes we've made. But unless you happen to own a DeLorean with a flux capacitor, there's no way to go backward for the younger me to learn anything from the older me. Time only moves in one direction so there's no way to prepare for our youth in our old age, but we can prepare for our old age in our youth, and that's what Solomon is advising us to do. So his first message was, "enjoy your life while you're young!" and his second message is "remember your Creator while you're young!" Those two things aren't mutually exclusive - they're actually dependent on each other. The only way to enjoy our life to the fullest is to keep God first all the time.

There is a temptation to forget God when we're young. Young people think they'll live forever. And there are so many things in the world that they want to try and do, and because God says "no" to some of those things young people can think it might be better to forget God so they can live their life without His putting restraints and boundaries on what we do. But that would be a very foolish thing to do.

Notice that Solomon doesn't say *remember your God in the days of your youth*, he says, *remember your Creator*. He makes it more personal and intimate by saying remember the One who created you. Remember the One who knit you together in your mother's womb. Remember the One who created everything in this world that you enjoy. He created your parents and siblings and family. He created your friends, He created that young woman or young man you are interested in. He created the nature you love to explore; He created the good things in life you want to enjoy, He created the world you want to fight to preserve. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

And here's why: remember your Creator in the days of your youth because days of trouble are coming. Old age is coming. There's no way to avoid it. Your younger you will give way slowly over time to your older you. And Solomon, using poetic metaphors, paints a vivid and somewhat discouraging picture of growing old. Before we look at it, I want to ask those of us who are younger to pay special attention even though you may feel like this is so far away. It's not. It's what I call the vacation principle: let's say you have a two week vacation coming up and you're going to Florida or the Bahamas or something really special and you're really excited about it. And you go and you have two whole weeks ahead of you, and that seems like such a long time. And one day in, you're having an amazing time and you still have most of the two weeks ahead of you and it seems like so much fun ahead of you that the last thing you're thinking about is it coming to an end. Even three and four and five days in, you still have a good chunk of time ahead of you. But before you know it, a week and a half have gone by, and now the vacation feels different. Most of it is behind you. And while you want to enjoy the last three days, you also can't shake the knowledge that the vacation is almost over. You spent months looking forward to this getaway and now it's almost over. And those last three days...two days...one day speeds by much quicker than the first three days. That's how life is. Right now it seems you have so much time ahead of you, but it will go by faster than you think - ask anyone who is older - and at some point you will realize that you have less time ahead of you than you have behind you, and on top of that things start to happen to your body. It's called old age. Used to be, you could run a mile without warming up and you didn't pull a muscle or anything. Now, you can pull a hamstring walking out to the mailbox if you don't warm up for a half hour

first. Youth gives way to old age. And if all your hope is invested in what you enjoy in youth, as you get older those hopes will be stripped away from you one by one. Listen to how Solomon describes it, and remember, this is inevitable for anyone who lives long enough to grow old:

- *The years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them." (vs. 1)* Your ability to enjoy the things you once enjoyed diminishes and eventually departs because your body grows old.
- *the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; (vs. 2).* Life will grow gloomier and storms will hit one after another. One setback follows another. Doctors find a spot in your lungs. You fall and break your hip. Your children have marital problems and it breaks your heart. Your spouse or a close friend dies and your world suddenly seems to spin out of orbit. A storm hits, and as soon as it's over, another storm comes.

Then stuff starts to happen to your body:

- *The keepers of the house tremble* - your hands that you used a million times a day without thinking about it and that protected you now tremble.
- *The strong men stoop* - the legs that carried you now stoop and it hurts just to walk up a flight of stairs.
- *When the grinders cease because they are few* - you start to lose your teeth and can't eat what you once ate
- *And those looking through the windows grow dim* - your eyes aren't as sharp as they once were.
- *when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades;* once you bounded out your door to do things, to go to work, to get groceries, to do whatever - you didn't think twice about it. You heard the sound of people doing their daily work like grinding grain or working in the fields or at the bank or offices or wherever, but now the doors are closed and it's much harder to go anywhere. You are isolated more and more from the life and activity that you once took for granted.
- *when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; ⁵ when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets...* You don't sleep well, and the songs of youth fade away. Jared, Matthew, and I went to a Switchfoot/Reliant K concert a couple months ago and stood for over four hours during the concert (the only seats were bleacher seats way in the back of the auditorium and there was no way we were going to be that far from the action!). Loud music and loud crowd and standing for hours. I loved it! But the day will come when we can't do that - the joyful, song-filled throng is too much for us.
- *when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred.* The almond tree when it blossomed had white flowers and looked a little like a head. Our hair turns white (if we still have hair) and we are no longer agile and our appetite for pretty much everything leaves us. Think about it: if you're are living for your appetites, what will your life be when you don't have those appetites anymore?

And then, finally, we are faced with our mortality: *Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about in the streets.* Death isn't something that may happen to you, it will happen to you - except for the one generation alive when Jesus returns, every other person in every other generation dies. It is actually good to live our lives remembering that we are mortal, that one day we will die. One British pastor and poet actually kept a coffin in his bedroom and would occasionally sleep in it just to remind

himself where he was going. OK, that's kinda weird, but remembering our mortality is good for us. I read recently that some seminaries have their students write their own funeral services in order to come to grips with their own mortality. That reminded me of the time when my daughter Jennifer was in 8th grade and was given the assignment of writing her last words to be read at her funeral (kind of a morbid assignment for an 8th grader). She chose a unique perspective:

Dear family,

I'm afraid I will not be able to write a long emotional, heart-felt letter to you. You see, sometime in 8th grade I was asked to write a letter to my family as if I was about to die...That has ruined all sentimentality this otherwise heart-wrenching letter would have had...But I understand that mom, especially might be very sad that these were my last words...If [that] is the case, [and] this is not the way you want your last thoughts of me to always be, I would encourage you to go to the basement storage room, dig up my 8th grade English portfolio...and...read the letter I wrote then...

When we're young we can be lighthearted about it, but the truth is, when we go to funerals, it may not be a bad thing to remember, one day people will be coming to our funeral and mourning our death.

And so Solomon once again urges the young person in verse 6: *Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well 7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.* ⁸ *“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”*

Two beautiful pictures depicting life and death are given here: the first is a golden bowl or lamp attached to a silver chain. Gold and silver, representing the preciousness of life. One day, the silver cord holding the golden lamp will be severed, and the lamp will fall, the precious oil spill out, and the light of life will be extinguished.

The other picture is of the life giving water drawn from a well by a pitcher lowered into the well by a pulley. The pitcher shatters, the pulley breaks, and the life-giving water cannot be retrieved anymore. Our frame, made by our Creator from dust, returns to dust, but our spirit returns to God who gave our spirits to us.

Life may feel long when you're young, and you may feel like you have forever ahead of you, but the reality is life is short, like a vapor, like smoke, so remember your Creator while you're young so that you can fully enjoy life because your hope is anchored to Someone who is not a vapor, anchored to Him who is above and beyond the sun, who lives eternally, who gave you your life, and to Whom you will return on that inevitable day. He will on that day judge you and your life. For the person trusting in Christ, we don't need to fear that day, because Christ has taken our judgment upon himself so we need never face God's wrath for our sin.

With the expanded revelation of the NT, we know that remembering our Creator means believing in the One He sent, Jesus Christ His own Son. It means following Jesus and living for him rather than our own selfish pursuits. In the light of the NT, Solomon's advice would be, "don't think you are going to wait until you get older to follow Christ, don't think you'll live your life the way you want to now and later, when you've sown all your wild oats, then you'll trust in Jesus as your Savior. That is foolish. It may well not be

possible then. For one, none of us know how long we have on this earth. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed for any of us. And secondly, when a life is lived in one direction it becomes increasingly difficult to change that direction. The heart gets harder and harder and more and more set in its ways and your older you may be set in a godless, foolish direction like cement. Let's read the last few verses in order to hear the end of the matter:

⁹ Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd ¹² Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body. ¹³ Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

These words are meant to be like goads and nails. Goads were basically ancient cattle prods used to direct livestock in the direction they were to go in. They worked because they caused pain. God's word, when faithfully proclaimed, is meant to guide us, sometimes by causing pain, but it's a healing and healthy pain. And his words are like nails, holding down the tent, anchoring our lives with truth and God.

Young or old, here is the end of the matter: fear God and keep His commandments. Jesus said, "if you love me you will keep my commandments". God's commandments are not burdensome. They aren't a list of do's and don'ts. God's commandments draw us into relationship with Him and we derive life from that relationship. John 6:29 Jesus says, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*" And John 1:12 says that to as many as did believe, God have the power to become sons and daughters of God. God's commandments draw us into relationship with Him and we derive life from that relationship. Fearing God and keeping His commandments means living our lives in the sight of God, knowing He is awesome and great and glorious and loving and forgiving and merciful, and it means trusting in the finished work of Christ to save us, depending on Him for our daily needs, and obeying Him by His grace at work in us, not in our own strength.

As the band comes back up, let's hear these words of wisdom. Especially for the younger ones among us, remember your Creator. That is the only way to enjoy the youthful years to their fullest and to navigate the older years without a sense of despair or gloom. Billy Graham was once one of the most dynamic, sought after evangelists in the world. Young, good-looking, and famous, he had the world by the tail. But as a young man he walked with God and never forgot him, even when some of his close friends did. Now, as an old man, with this earthly life behind him, he is not gloomy or depressed. James Dobson asked him not long ago if he was at all apprehensive about dying, and he replied, "Oh, Jim, I can't wait to see Jesus!" No gloom there! No sadness or emptiness or fear. Just anticipation for what lies ahead.

Remember your Creator while you are young, and you won't forget Him when you're old, and He will never, never forget you and never leave you. In communion we remember Jesus. And just before Jesus

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ascended, he told us, "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" Remember, remember, remember.