

Remember your Creator. And Rejoice!

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Date: 03 September 2023

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] So if you have a Bible, perhaps you can turn with me to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 11. It's on page 678 of the church Bibles. We've got two more weeks in the book of Ecclesiastes, and then we're going to think together for a number of weeks about the really important topic of Christian identity. So that's beginning the 17th of September. But here we are in God's Word in Ecclesiastes 11 from verse 7 into chapter 12. So let's hear God's Word together.

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. 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. 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.

So then, banish anxiety from your heart, and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless. 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. Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain. 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. 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. 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. 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, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the Spirit returns to God who gave it.

Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher. Everything is meaningless. Amen. Okay, so this evening, remember your Creator, and rejoice. That's our theme for today. This is wisdom, the preacher says, for young people. In a sense, it's quite like the book of Proverbs. Wise advice to a young son. So who is it for? It can always be a tricky one, can't it? Who counts as young? Well, what I'm going to do, I'm going to be really generous. No, I'm not going to be generous, but I'm going to take the widest view possible. Because here it seems like you can consider yourself young if you don't yet experience all the troubles that come with old age.

[3 : 24] So if you haven't been called young for a while, you're welcome. You can be in this bracket at least for this evening. So we're going to find that for the young, and hopefully for all of us, there are these two pieces of advice. The first, remember your Creator. One of the great problems that you find as you go through the Old Testament is that Israel would keep forgetting their God, the God who saved them, the God who had saved them for relationship. They would keep forgetting, especially when they were settled in the land, when things were going well. That would be the time when they would typically forget their God. Maybe we too can find it easy to forget God as we go through life. We miss all the goodness, all the everyday good gifts that He gives. And so we're encouraged to remember our Creator. But more than that, we're also encouraged to rejoice. And we've heard this again and again in the book of Ecclesiastes. We are called to enjoy each day, to live in this good world that has been created by a good God. In the midst of all the kind of hard reality of the book

Ecclesiastes, the preacher never loses this sense of joy. It really chimes with our hearts. In the midst of all the troubles that we find, we still want, we still look for, and by God's grace, we still know joy and happiness. And our preacher is going to say to us, rejoice. And as we remember our Creator, we'll understand that we know true and full joy when we know and enjoy the God who

made us.

It's very simple this evening. Wisdom for the youth. First advice, verses 7 and 8, rejoice in the goodness of life. Chapter 11, verse 7, light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. Live like an Australian magpie. I'm telling you that because I discovered my favorite fact of this week by the Australian magpie, my favorite fact about anything. You will find if you go to Australia, these magpies are a bit more aggressive than our magpies. But the one thing that they do that's really helpful for our purpose is that as the sun comes up, you will find them clustering together in little flocks to make a little choir. And so you'll find them for minutes singing together to welcome the sun.

We should live like an Australian magpie. It's what the preacher is saying to us. We should enjoy the fact that we have life every day. We should allow a sense of wonder to enter in from the beginning of the day. So whether we are the sunrise people or not, whether we are the sit down and enjoy a wonderful breakfast people, whether we're the morning exercise people, we should recognize that there are so many gifts that come to us that should be enjoyed from the hand of our God.

[6 : 55] He says to us in verse 8, remember the days of darkness for there will be many. He says, remember you won't be young forever. And that's supposed to positively motivate to don't sit around wasting life today.

It's really interesting that the preacher is going to keep going back to trouble, and ultimately to death. But he's not doing that to rain on our parade. He's not like, here's some joy and let me take it away from you. Rather, he's saying, be sure to live in the moment to pursue joy today while we have life. He says, there will be many days of darkness, and everything to come is meaningless or vanity. Life is short. And in this short life that we enjoy, we are to trust and to obey God, we are to enjoy His good gifts. Of course, all the while understanding that those gifts are not ultimate. In a sense, we can see Paul in the book of Acts chapter 17 saying something similar to the group that was gathered in Athens. He reminded them that there is a God who gives us all life, who gives us all life, who makes us who we are, gives us the situations and the opportunities that we find ourselves in. And in that setting, we all have our own individual life settings. We are called to enjoy God, to enjoy the particular gifts that we receive from Him.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins said that the earth is charged with the grandeur of God. There is glory to be seen. We need to train our eyes to see it. We need to train ourselves to rejoice in it. So whether that's a good meal, whether that's a walk in the sunshine, whether that's enjoying sport or the design of a butterfly, there are so many gifts to enjoy. And if we allow them, each one of them can take us up to enjoy God, our Creator. So we are to rejoice in the goodness of life. But he's not done with rejoicing. The second piece of related advice in verses 9 and 10 is that we are called to rejoice in the days of your youth. Hear the strength of this language, 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. Some ways this corrects a wrong stereotype that people can have about God. God is a mean God. God is out to spoil our fun. To be a Christian will mean missing out on joy in life. Well, here the preacher reminds us God doesn't just care about our happiness. God positively commands us to find joy, to pursue joy, to enjoy youth. It may not seem like it, but this is the time when you will have the least responsibility you'll ever have. You have as much time to play as as much time you do to work.

Your bodies are as fit and healthy as they're going to be. And so the preacher says, don't waste it. Follow your heart as it seeks for joy. But hear his note of caution. As you're pursuing joy, know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. What's he saying to us there? He's not saying, don't live for joy. He's saying, be careful to find joy in the right places. He introduces God's judgment as a reminder to us that there are harmful pleasures. There are things that our hearts can seek after. There are lifestyles that we can pursue that would not be good for us. Again, God is not aiming to kill joy here. Rather, he is sounding a loving warning. Like a loving parent will warn a child about the dangers of addiction. So there are people who live with the guilt that they have because of bad mistakes made while choosing the wrong joy. And so God wants to save us from that. And so he does say, pursue joy, but be wise in how we do it.

[11 : 38] Ultimately, choose our joy in our God. Remember our Creator. That's what the preacher says. God is Creator. And part of that means that he knows how our lives are meant to work. He is our designer. And so as we think about the joy that we are to pursue, we need to be looking to

God's Word for wisdom. We need to be looking to God in prayer for help to make sure that we're finding joy in the right places in the right way. Because God has given us this world to enjoy. And he commands us to enjoy it.

Strikes me that this is something that our world needs to hear. It's actually something that our church needs to hear. We need to hear the words of Jesus. I have come that you might have life to the full. I wonder, do we really deep down believe that? Sometimes when we hear all these other messages, we might feel that life with Jesus is a little bit less.

Jesus spoke to his disciples, telling them that his desire was that your joy may be complete. Do we trust our Savior Jesus that following him is the path to true joy? So here is our Creator, and he is commanding us to joy. If you've ever given someone a present, and you've had that sense of disappointment when that present is put to one side and is never used, perhaps that gives us some way of thinking about how God feels. He wants us to enjoy this world as a gift, to live with that sense of wonder at his goodness, and especially to be thankful for the gift of his own Son, Jesus. He has given us salvation. He has given us eternal life. He has given us the way to know for all eternity communion, fellowship with our God. And so the preacher would say to us, if you have the New Testament, enjoy your youth with Jesus. Trust him today, live for him. This is never meaningless, to use the words of Ecclesiastes. Verse 10 says, so then, as you're pursuing joy, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body.

It's challenging. We live in a time when people have never had more comfort and wealth, but never had more struggles with anxiety. This instruction is so easy to say, you know, banish anxiety. It's really hard to do. But we're called to pursue joy and not give in to anxiety. It's why we read from the book of Philippians. We need to hear Jesus' reminder, do not worry, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear?

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. And so he's inviting us. Life is short. Youth is short. So enjoy life. Don't waste it. Enjoy life with God. Third piece of advice, remember your creator while you are young. Chapter 12, verse 1, 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. Maybe one way to measure whether we're youth or not is when I talk about the British TV show, One Foot in the Grave. Yeah, that's a sure way to differentiate. Okay, then the main character in the TV show, One Foot in the Grave, was a man called Victor Meldrew, classic, stereotypical, grumpy old man, irritated by everything and everyone, forgotten how to enjoy life, consumed by the troubles of old age. Our preacher says, yes, the troubles of old age will likely come, but don't just give in to bitterness and despair. Rather, before this, remember your creator. Remember who God is. He is our creator, full of goodness, gives us gifts.

[16 : 38] Remember who we are. We are creatures and life is short. Remember how we should live before our creator. And what's he called us to? He's called us to aim for joy, the joy found in knowing him.

Hear his wisdom. Remember our creator. Whatever age we are, that we would be thinking about our God each and every day. That we'd be talking to him each and every day in prayer. That we'd be worshiping him and saying thank you to him for all his kindness to us. That we would make him our number one priority. That we would live like God is watching. We'd live like God cares about our life because he is and he does. There's also that note of urgency. Remember your creator in the days of your youth before the days of trouble come. See, do it before it's too late, before the realities of pain and suffering and hardship can mean that's all that we can focus on. Choose to know and enjoy Jesus in the best years of your life, in your youth. And to help to drive home that sense of urgency, our preacher then uses two different pictures. Why should we choose to remember our creator in the days of our youth?

Now, and in verse 2, there's the picture of a storm that comes. And in verses 3 to 5, there's the picture of a ruined house. And they're both intended to be a reflection on the reality of old age. Now, he's not trying to insult older people. But what he is doing, we've seen him do this before, he's encouraging us to live life backwards. Okay, so if we know this point is coming, how should I live wisely knowing that old age and death is coming? And again, if our preacher had the New Testament, he would say, wisdom chooses Jesus today. But let's look at these pictures of old age and its troubles.

Because he says, first, it's like being caught in a storm. These days of trouble, it's like before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain. It's a picture of a storm. The storm of frequent illnesses. Maybe the storm of many losses.

The storm of troubles that come, perhaps particularly in older age. I still remember, we used to live just a couple of doors down from my grandpa. And pension day used to be one of the highlights of the week because him and his cronies would go and collect their money and then they would go for a drink. Well, over the years, all my grandpa's friends died and he was left alone.

[20 : 02] This is reality, the storms and the troubles of life. Remember our Creator while we have time. And then in verses 3 to 5, he compares old age and aging bodies with a house that is beginning to fall apart. And again, what we need to do is we need to put ourselves into the mindset of somebody writing long, long before the NHS or any kind of health care. So, let's just have a quick look at these pictures and see if we recognize what's going on. So, in verse 3, he talks about when the keepers of the house tremble. And most likely, this is a reference to those strong arms of youth that perhaps worked hard. Now, they find themselves weak and trembling. When the strong men stoop, that's likely a reference to a person's legs. Again, worked hard, walked miles, but now bent and aching. When the grinders cease because they are few. It's a way of speaking about our teeth. And maybe you've known some of that already. We can have false teeth, but in those days, of course, decay would make your teeth fall out. And those looking through the windows grow dim.

It's a reminder. It's a reminder. If we don't already have glasses, old age typically brings dim vision. We don't see things as well. When the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades is a reminder that our hearing typically fades as we get older and we miss a lot and we perhaps don't always realize it. Verse 4, when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint. Maybe we recognize how difficult it can be as we get older to get a good night's sleep. We find that our sleep is much more fitful and the slightest noise can wake us up.

Verse 5, when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets. Old age can do that. Maybe people that once climbed mountains now climbing the stairs. It is a really tough proposition. Whereas before people would go through life without a care in the world, now there's any fall, any mishap could lead to terrible consequences. The imagery continues when the almond tree blossoms, when our hair begins to turn white as a sign of wisdom, and the grasshopper drags itself along.

No longer as agile and as spry as we used to be. It's more hobbling than hopping. And desire no longer is stirred. Maybe the loss of appetite. Maybe the loss of interest in discovering new things in new places. Maybe the loss of joy. And then there's the reminder at the end, then people go to their eternal home and mourners. And mourners go about the streets. There is that sense of here is a person who is living with one foot in the grave. Now again, why is the preacher painting this picture for us?

[23 : 54] He's encouraging us to remember our Creator today. To be right with God today. To use our time wisely today. And that advice becomes even more pressing as we get to his fourth piece of advice. Remember your Creator. Because death is coming. The book of Ecclesiastes is never far away from the reality of death. Remember he's speaking to the young? When you're young, it's easy to imagine that we'll live forever. Growing old seems a million miles away. Death seems even further. I had a conversation with a man who was cutting a hedge this week. He was cutting the local Bowling Green hedge. I was walking past it again today. Did a very fine job. Must have been about 15 meters long, this hedge. I was chatting to him. He was keen for a break. I was asking him how long it took him to cut this hedge. And he became somewhat nostalgic and wistful. He said, well, I used to. Back in the day, I used to do it really quickly. Now it seems to take forever. Where did life go? That's what our preacher is saying to us and reminding us of. And ultimately in verses 6 to 8, he's reminding us of the reality of death.

But again, he's doing that not to make us miserable. He's doing that so that we will enjoy the gift of life while we have it. Because life will end one day. Verse 6, remember him before the silver cord is severed and the golden rule is broken. So picture a precious lamp hanging on a silver thread. If that thread breaks, the lamp falls and smashes. What happens? The light goes out. Before the picture is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well. Picture a smashed jar that can't hold water.

The life pours out. And the dust returns to the ground it came from. And the Spirit returns to God who gave it. Life is a gift, but we won't have it forever. One day the Spirit will return to the God who

made us. So again, he says to us, your life is short. So remember your Creator and be ready. Are you and I ready for that day? Are we ready to meet with our God? How do we be ready? We get ready by trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior today? Because Jesus is the one who guarantees for us eternal joy and eternal life beyond death because of his death and resurrection, and he gives real joy while we live. Because he comes to be present with us. So our preacher says to us, if you want to live well, you need to remember your Creator, the one who gives us every good thing, and the one who gave us Jesus as the way back to life with him. And we need to learn to rejoice in the good gift of life, making the most of each day, making the most of each day that God gives to us. Let's pray that this wisdom would be ours. Let's pray.