

Ecclesiastes 12:9–14

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[0 : 00] Again, that is Ecclesiastes 12, 9-14. Please stand as you are able for the reading of God's word.

Besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with one great care. The preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings they are given by one shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, as you're being seated, let me just give my own personal greetings to you.

[1 : 11] So glad that you're here, and what a week we have in front of us. Today, as we consider the closing of our weeks in Ecclesiastes, and then moving toward the sacrifice of Christ on Friday for us and for our sins, and the celebration of Easter, and I hope you can be present at all the things that are planned for you.

It was act one, scene one, of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, that Prince Aeschylus enters the stage and delivers a 30-line monologue that solidified his role in the play as the interpreter of Shakespeare's meaning.

This character who enters at the opening also got the last word in the play, the very last word. He enters again and provides the epilogue of Romeo and Juliet so that Shakespeare's sense of what he wanted to accomplish would be made known.

The epilogue was six lines. They went like this. A glooming peace this morning with it brings. The sun for sorrow will not show his head.

Go hence to have more talk of these sad things. Some shall be pardoned and some punished. For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

[2 : 56] In similar fashion, I discovered in our weeks in Ecclesiastes that it opens and closes with a person taking the stage at both the beginning and the end to make sure that we get what the preacher was on about in all of the intervening chapters.

This narrator, this character in Ecclesiastes enters into our text now and provides the epilogue.

It's a six-verse-long epilogue. It all comes down to this very point in verse 13 and 14.

Here it is. So as not to miss the point of the book, the end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments.

For this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil. Allow me to be the paraphraser of the person who stands as the interpreter of the book.

[4 : 21] I've got my own six lines. Here they are. On Ecclesiastes, a fearful peace, this book with it brings. Life under the sun now bows its head.

Go hence and have more talk of these true things. Some shall be pardoned and some punished. For never was there a speech of greater weight than Ecclesiastes and the judgment which for us awaits. Now I have to ask Milton to put that to a wrap.

Maybe one day that'll happen. Put your eyes on the epilogue as the end of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments.

Two reasons for which are given. Fear God and keep his commandments. For that is your whole duty under the sun. And secondly, God will bring every one of our deeds into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

[5 : 42] It's kind of a weighty epilogue, isn't it? But that's consistent with the writer. He always seems to end on the note of sobriety in his book.

Our own Westminster Confession of Faith would agree with the thrust of the epilogue. Let me read it to you. God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father.

In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise, all persons that have lived upon the earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

Jesus himself affirms this very day of judgment. In Matthew, the 11th chapter, he says, it'll be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you, those to whom he was speaking, those who didn't think the judgment was coming.

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.

[7 : 28] Or over in chapter 12, again, Jesus, who we all turn to for his teachings, says, for just as Jonah was descended three days in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, and the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.

For they repented at the preaching of Jonah and beheld something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

I tell you, something greater than Solomon is here. What am I trying to say by way of interpretation today on the book of Ecclesiastes?

Simply this, we fear God and keep his commandments because we will one day stand before him.

Think of it, today we celebrate Jesus entering in through the gates of Jerusalem to be king.

One day, you and I will enter into the gates of heaven and stand before that king to give an account.

This is the clear teaching of scripture from beginning to end.

[8 : 49] teaching of Ecclesiastes, the teaching of our confession, teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet, let me concede, from the outset of human history, this epilogue by way of emphasis as the end of the matter has been questioned and dismissed largely, even in our own day, rejected.

Just think of the very first time there was a question in the Bible that actually dealt with this consideration. Satan comes to Adam and Eve and says, did God really say that if you ate that, there would be judgment upon you and that you would die?

And then he says, that's not actually the case. the sense in the garden that we were accountable to God as a king was called into question on this day of judgment.

In the New Testament, it's the same as the Apostle Peter is concluding his life. He's talking about those who are in his own context who are continually saying, but where is the promise of his coming?

[10 : 11] all things continue to go on under the sun as they always have. There is no God. There is no final day. There is no final reckoning. And yet, and yet the teaching of Ecclesiastes is simply this, fear God, keep his commandments because that day is fixed.

So how did the preacher in this book go about trying to convince you to buck the trend of our own day and say we need to live our life under the sun in preparation before standing before Jesus who is God's son?

what did he do? Two things I want you to see in the epilogue. He put down these words that move us to truth and then he laid out these metaphors that provided meaning for truth.

Words that move and metaphors for meaning. I won't spend the most time on this but you need to see it.

Verses 9 and 10 he accomplishes his aim in his long extended speech of words and proverbial wisdom through words that move.

[11 : 44] Look at 9 and 10. Besides being wise the preacher taught the people knowledge weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care he sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

Just three things there I want you to see. He instructed the reader concerning life as it really was. There's teaching there's things he wanted to lay out but he did so not like a poor lecturer he did so pleasing the reader delighting the reader arranging words it says in order to delight he not only wanted to teach you he wanted to pleasantly engage your mind and then finally the third opportunity there in accomplishing his goal it says he wrote words of truth he actually wanted to lay down for you and for me the way it really was instruction that pleases that moves to action now those three things if you've been a student of rhetoric you're you're now wondering did the writer to Ecclesiastes predate everything that Aristotle thought or if you or that Cicero put down or that

Augustine laid before the world these men who taught the world how to speak words of wisdom persuasively they agree with these three in fact it found it is foundational to rhetoric or persuasion as a whole the approach of trying to persuade here in the book of Ecclesiastes mirrors the orators of Aristotle Cicero and Saint Augustine when Augustine was writing about Cicero he said that the Christian orator should not only teach his listeners so as to impart instruction but he must delight them so as to hold their attention but also move them so as to conquer their minds the writer to the Ecclesiastes is saying I want you to know you gotta fear God because you're gonna stand before him how am I gonna prove it how am I gonna persuade it

I'm gonna teach you I'm gonna delight you I'm gonna move you understand that life under the sun is preparation before standing before God's own son now I don't know if you're a lover of words I tend to like dense writers who take their time with words Thomas Mann for instance Joseph and his brothers Amos Oz if you're familiar with him tales of love and darkness Amos Oz was amazing he thought about writing as sculpting in solid rock or crusted sand in other words he paid attention to words and phrases and the harmonization so that it would actually hold the attention of the listener he actually talked about writing along the line of just taking a teaspoon to alter your arrangement just ever so slightly so that it would actually fit work be held things like words of truth and metaphors of meaning moves on the mind in a way that captures the essence of one's thought but more than words are needed to convince us to fear

God and keep his commandments it seems that the writer in the epilogue here the one who took the stage and said let's get it all straight before you leave and move on to another series added to these words both metaphors that were pregnant with meaning take a look at 11 and 12 the words of the wise are like goads and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings they are given by one shepherd my son beware of anything beyond these these these biblical goads and nails because there's all kinds of material you can read and books you can write but this is the real thing when you read the scriptures you're reading truth in the metaphor of goads and nails oh I've I've felt the goad of ecclesiastes and I'm sure you have the nails of the book have fixed truths in us as a congregation what is a goad well a goad is like a cattle prod it's an electric today it's electric in the old days it wasn't it's a farmer's stick it drives the herd in a particular place

[17:07] I remember being in Haruma Nairobi years ago and watching all the goats being led down to the slaughterhouse and they run them through the middle of the town and the men who were running them who had raised them had these long pointy sticks and they could reach out and they could draw a strained goat back into line that's what he's saying by way of metaphor I'm telling you to fear God because you're going to stand before him and every time you thought maybe you could get out of line underneath the sun I have brought you back I have felt the nails and the goads of this book I've been down the road as it were in this book and been prodded back into line I'm not free to do whatever I want with my life nor are you I've been down the road of delusion the delusion of pleasure chapter one

I've been down the road of knowledge chapter two I've been down the road of work and realized none of it's ultimately fulfilling I've been down the road of delusion on wealth in chapter five and wisdom and all of it being incapable of giving to me life's ultimate ends and not only that the book has penetrated my heart with nails it's pierced my flesh it's gotten hold of my mind not just with bringing me back into line but with things which are fixed like a nail in a wall hanging a picture and it can never move well unless of course you didn't put in the proper anchor in your apartment nails nails fix truths in the bible some of them were iron they were used for the construction of the temple god's house was held together with nails in second chronicle some of them were gold they were precious they put divine truths in place i've heard and i hope you have over these weeks the nails of the book i've heard of the nail of god's seasons and that for everything there's a season and it's fixed and i know that that truth holds i've heard the nail of the pattern of life and doing what's right

regardless of the outcome it's better to be unstained and do what's right than to do the wrong thing even if i get away with it in chapter five and four and seven i've heard the nail that death comes to all regardless of our position or standing in life in chapter nine i've heard the nail repeatedly driven in that i'm to take joy in the little things of life in all things of life that nail has been the melodic punch of the book has it not and therefore you and i are going to be held accountable one day not merely for all the bad things we did along the way according to this book we're going to be held accountable for the things we could have enjoyed should have enjoyed but failed to do so he's going to say did you rejoice every day i brought the sun up did you give thanks at the dinner table for my provision for you under the sun all of these things are in play both the good and the bad the secret and the public the private and that which is known yes this book has been like a goad and like a nail and it has taught me to rejoice while remembering god this is the way he tried to get about his persuasive appeal and so then the appeal comes verses 13 and 14 the words that he gave in 10 and 11 the metaphors that he fixed in 11 and 12 give way to the conclusion and against the central tenet of the sermon fear god because one day you're going to stand before him notice how he brings together both the present ethical and the future eschatological oh those are big words I know I didn't come up with them myself fear god and keep his commandments that's ethical that's now that's what you do when you leave here but it's in light of the eschatological the day that you and I will stand before him all of that is in the concluding notion that this epilogue puts forward well let me put it by way of a lengthy quote by a 19th century preacher as he thought about the conclusion of this book he said and I quote there is a truth which scripture refuses to soften and conscience cannot silence there is a judge over the whole earth and there will be a final judgment in which perfect justice

will be administered the judge is jesus he's the moral governor over his creation he who once stood silent before earthly courts will sit enthroned before all nations the hands that were pierced will open the books the eyes that once wept will blaze like fire this judgment will be universal all mankind without exception the living and the dead will stand before him kings and peasants persecutors and sufferers the moral and the immoral the godly and the wicked the rich and the poor the small and the great the young and the old all will be judged every mask will be torn off no hiding place will avail no soul will escape his summons not only is the judge Jesus is the judgment universal but he goes on and says the judgment will be searching searching deeds will be examined words will be weighed secrets will be exposed not only what was done but why it was done not only public actions but private thoughts and then he says the judgment will be exact and just nothing will be overlooked exaggerated or mistaken every sentence will be so righteous that even those condemned to hell will be compelled to agree with their doom the damned soul will say amen to its own condemnation and this judgment will be final when Jesus pronounces his verdict it will never be reversed there will be no second court there is no later appeal there is no change of sentence end quote end commanding for each of us given the brevity of our lives under the sun the king who once came is coming again and while there is no end to the writing of books

God intends to publish a book that details our own personal life story now I've thought about this when I stand before him I'm hoping for a private audience but I don't know when it says here that every secret thing will come into judgment whether good or evil will he bring each one of us in and let me tell you about your life oh and not only what I saw you do but let me tell you what you were thinking and then let me tell you what you did after you thought and told someone else this the whole thing the whole thing opened before him or will it be public

I do not know but it motivates my ethics this eschatological conviction should keep us from sins of the mind and the mouth and the heart and the feet now for those who are in Christ the Bible says there's no condemnation but that doesn't mean you're going to stand before that seat first in fact when all of that book is read Jesus who's at the right hand of the father for those who have come to him in faith and ask for the forgiveness of their sins he's going to stand when you have no arbiter you have no defense attorney you have no argument to make other than to say yes it's all true it's all true though every man be called a liar

[26 : 39] God is true oh then for you and for me may Jesus get up from the right hand of the father and say excuse me I died for that whole book and I've got another book the lamb's book of life and I know it's hard to believe but it reads here David Richard Helm and he's going to show the father his wounds and say by my obedience I make provision for his life and for the Christian think of this when we finally walk away from the judgment bar and then on into life eternal in his presence what's the one thing we're all going to say can you believe how much he loved us there will be no vertical

integration no distinction of people from every tribe tongue language saying worthy is the lamb and we will embrace an eternity of displaying the greater graces of his love

I'm going to hold that out to you at the end of the series I want to tell you that that's available to you today how do you fear God and keep his commandments to fear God is to honor him to give thanks to him it is to repent and believe in the gospel is to say before God I am unworthy standing in your presence and I plead the blood of Christ for my sins known and unknown spoken and quiet done and undone and I pray that his perfect sacrifice will be sufficient for how I lived my life under the sun it takes faith repentance please do that today

I mean afterward I'll have just a couple of elders I've got Pastor Pace he'll just stand down there on the front by that door Pastor knee and maybe Doug Rothschild in the middle if you want to know how do I enter into this relationship with God before I see him face to face they'd be glad to explain it more thoroughly to you and pray with you because when Christ shall come and he will with shout of acclamation and when he takes me home fearful joy will fill my heart because then I shall bow in humble adoration and there on that day proclaim my

God how great thou heart our heavenly father thank you for this epilogue on the end of the matter be merciful to many today to all of us be merciful now that we might meet you with gratitude then in Jesus name amen