

# Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8

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[0:00] We'll be able to get that to you. This morning's scripture reading comes from Ecclesiastes 11, verses 7 through 12, 8.! Join me as we read.

Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all.

But let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.

Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. Remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body.

For youth and the dawn of life are vanity. Remember also your creator in the days of your youth.

[1:11] Before the evil days come and the years draw near, of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain, and the days when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the streets are shut.

When the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low, they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way.

The almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.

Before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[2:49] You may be seated. Well, I just got to tell you, I'm excited for you this morning. I mean, I'm really ready to preach this text.

So I've come, and I've come to stand to tell you it's time to get glad. Time to get glad while giving God his due. I'm standing today to tell you to rejoice, which is where Milton opened up our service, the command, the call of the book of Ecclesiastes, to rejoice, to rejoice while remembering God all along the way.

I'm happy for you and sad for the literally other half of our congregation who is away on spring break, because they're going to miss what you're going to get from this text this morning.

You know, last Friday, just a couple days ago, 9.46 a.m., those of us who live in the northern hemisphere, experience something that our opening verse calls sweet, something that our opening verse calls pleasant.

Take a look at it there, verse 7. Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. What I'm talking about is the vernal equinox.

[4:16] Now, if you don't know what that is, it's simply an understanding that our earth has kind of an elliptical orbit that on March 20th tips enough toward the sun that we get more sun than less sun.

We get more light than less light. And it's going to be that way for the next six months until that autumnal equinox steals our glory. But you and I are now standing on the first Sunday when more light is coming, more sun is coming.

Spring and summer are irreversibly on the way. Light is sweet, and it is pleasant to see the sun.

This is the day that the metaphor of the book of Ecclesiastes meets the meaning of our heart. The metaphor throughout has been, What is life like under the sun?

What do we get? What can we expect? What are the advantages? The answer is, Oh, it's sweet to wake up and see the light.

[5:22] Oh, it's pleasant. They feel the sun. Life under the sun calls us. Verse 8 and onwards.

To rejoice. Rejoice. Now, you may come here today and go, I got no reason to rejoice. But the call of the book of Ecclesiastes is to rejoice.

It's to get glad. Now, the grammarians among us, and I'm sure we have a few, will tell me that the word rejoice, which you see there in verse 8 and verse 9, this command, this call of the book, comes with an intensive prefix.

That's the re. That's an intensifier. That's something before the word joy. You're going to have to re-joyce.

The root for joy with an intensive prefix. It means to feel something deeply. It means that joy is actually taken hold, not just talked about.

[6:33] To rejoice, to take joy, is to do it on steroids. It's to re-do something. There's another prefix of sorts.

It's to re-run something again. It's to re-do it, to re-boot it. It's to, let's go see it again. That's rejoice.

And what the book of Ecclesiastes is asking, what are we doing under the sun? The answer is, we're going to be rejoicing. Now, you may say, and these are the eors among us, the melancholy, and don't get me wrong, I'm not ignorant of mental health issues, which are very real.

And I'm not lacking cognizance on the fact that many people need a lot of other things to move themselves along, to be able to see the sun, feel the sun.

But the command is here. We're called to rejoice. We're called to get glad. We're called to say, this is a good day.

[7:41] Now, didn't you feel it yesterday? You might not have felt it this morning, but yesterday, did you not feel sweetness and pleasantness?

Because life under the sun, even in a fallen and broken world, is God's good gift to us.

And so when we rise, we say, even in the church, don't you have something to be grateful about this morning? Aren't you glad that God woke you up? You got anything that he's done for you today? Because even your breath is in his hands and he's allowed you to see the sun?

Today's the day. Rejoice and be glad in it. There's enough other things that'll take place that will displace the central call of the book.

We are to be a people of joy. This is the melodic note that continued throughout the whole book. I could retrace the steps, but I'll let you do it for yourself later today.

Chapter 2, verse 24, told us to be a people who rejoice. In other words, the note of this rejoicing emerged in the morning light of this book, and it carried all the way up to the sunrise until its height of the day.

[9:00] Chapter 3, verse 12, told you to take joy in the things that he's given you today. Chapter 8, verse 15, the note is repeated.

Take joy in the things that he's given you today. Chapter 9, verse 7 to 10, take joy in the things that you have been given today. And so it's like David Hackley on the keyboard telling you from the opening dawn of the book to rejoice to its rising in the middle to the setting of the same.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Life under the sun, what's it like? Oh, it's filled with many things, both good and bad. But the call for those who trust in God is to take joy and to rejoice.

How you doing this morning? And are you rejoicing as God would have you do so? Why? Why rejoice, you say, preacher?

Have you not looked at the two contrasts and the because in the opening verses? Oh, yes, I have. Let me point them out to you in case you missed it.

[10:11] Verse 8, we got a contrast. Contrast, it opened nicely. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all. But, contrast, let him remember that the days of darkness will be many.

All that comes is vanity. Fleeting, 75 degree days will give way to 33 degree snow. Say the melancholy among us.

There's another contrast, verse 9. We're supposed to rejoice, oh young man, in your youth. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. This is the majestic melody of the book. But, there it is, second contrast. But know for all these things, God will bring you into judgment.

And then the because. Two contrasts in the because. There it is in verse 10. Remove vexation from your heart. I like that. I'm just going to put anxiety aside.

[11:18] Don't worry. Be happy. I'm going to tell myself in the face of it all. And he says, put away pain or evil from your body. I mean, work out, but don't work out too much. Don't cause yourself hurt.

Ah, but here's the because. For youth and the dawn of life are vanity. Yes, they're all there. The realism of life under the sun is there.

But the command is on the front side. Rejoice, rejoice, remove. The condition of life is on the back side. But we can rejoice.

We can rejoice even though the days of darkness will be many. Let me put it to you this way, in the practice of my own life. I know we're going to have bad days.

I know I'm going to be at funerals. I know there's going to be disease that sets in. I know the difficulties are coming. You don't have to tell me that. I've lived long enough to see it and be a part of it.

[12:21] But because I know the days of darkness are many, I'm going to rejoice in every day because I've got breath and I'm able to do it. The sun comes and I'm able to enjoy it.

I have relationships that are meaningful and I'm going to hold them. Rejoice, rejoice in the Lord. When? Always, always rejoice.

Even though dark days come. Rejoice, even though I know I'm going to stand before God who's going to call everything into account.

Now that'll put the fear of God in you just to know that. In other words, the verse is saying rejoice, get glad, enjoy life, get after it, go accomplish something.

But don't just eat, drink, and be merry without a recognition. Some constraints on what you give yourself to.

[13:18] There are certain things we don't do because I know I'm going to stand before him. But that doesn't decrease my joy. That just increases my joy in learning what pleases him.

And what gifts has he given me to do so? Even the because at the end. Verse 10. While I'm removing things that are causing me anxiety.

While I'm putting away the evil that breaks me down. Because I'm aware that youth and the dawn of life are vanity. It doesn't mean it's meaningless.

Your youth isn't meaningless. Everything's meaningful. It means it's fleeting. I'm rejoicing because the days of youth are few. Let me talk now just for a moment to those of you who are young.

That would be anybody 65 or under. Because I'm turning 65 in just a few weeks. I'm carrying my own Medicare card.

[14:17] I'm carrying my Medicare card and I'm still rejoicing. Because I'm going to be young at heart until he takes me home. Now look at it here.

It says to those of you who are young in particular. Your life. The dawn of life. It equates youth with the dawn of life. Is vanity. And by vanity he means it's going to be here and then gone.

You're not going to be able to grab hold of it. You're five years old. You're going to be 25 by the time you blink. And you look at your parents and say, yeah, sure, right. But it's true. Youth is fleeting.

Don't waste it by not rejoicing. Don't let it pass you by without getting glad. Don't let it escape that you're supposed to enjoy today.

Enjoy childhood. You know, yesterday I was speaking at a youth retreat. This is now my fifth talk in the last 36 hours. So if my voice fails, my heart isn't.

[15:20] 120 kids out there on the lawn running, playing, relaxing. I asked the youth director, you know, how come you give them so much free time? He says, I got to give them free time because they got no free time.

They get home. They got this thing they got to be at. That thing they got to be at. They got this event they got to go to. This practice. This event. And they're like, their lives are filled. So I give them four hours on a Saturday afternoon to be kids.

And what did I see yesterday? 120 some kids out on green grass on a 75 degree day. Maybe 80 degrees where they were hanging out. Just enjoying the sun.

Playing basketball as they should. While the others played football as they desired. They all had smiles on their faces when they came to dinner.

Why? Because they understood that God's good gift to us takes place under the sun. Now, I was thinking about the sunrise and youth being likened to the dawn of a day.

[16:33] So I did the Google thing. And I said, does the sun rise more quickly than the sun sets? Because it always feels to me like when you watch the sun come out of the Lake Michigan, it's like it hasn't started.

And then you turn around. You get from 55th Street to the ramp going on to 55. You look back on your shoulder and it's already fully in play. Well, what happens is this week in particular, it does rise a little faster.

Because of the tilt of the earth, the sun rises about two minutes quicker than the sun sets. But generally, we live in an ordered world. The sunrise and the sunset takes about the same amount of time.

What makes the difference in the morning is when the sun is about six degrees beneath the line where it comes up, the refractory light begins to just explode across the horizon quickly, more quickly, because there aren't all the pollutants in the air.

And so the sunrise seems to go fast and it's up. Whereas the end of the day, just like the end of life, yeah, just like the end of life, seems to take its time.

[17:49] Slow down. And the sunrise becomes the sunset. And the final years, we're failing and walking slowly, as this text will tell us.

What I'm trying to tell you today, if you're young and you'll decide what that age is, rejoice. Because you're not here long.

Rejoice. Because it's going to be over like that. Come to a point in life where the cool breeze of a spring morning causes you to rejoice.

Come to the point in life when the screen are finally in play and you're sitting in the evening hours because God has given you a longer day in which to take pleasure.

What advantage is there to being under the sun? What is the gain? What do we get out of this life given all of the perplexities? We get to give him joy because this life under the sun is God's good gift to you.

[19:03] Don't waste it like Milton called us to worship on. Don't think this is something you're supposed to do back then or something you're supposed to do later. Don't waste it like Milton called us to worship on.

Don't waste it like Milton called us to worship on us to worship on us. I will rejoice and be glad in it. Goes quick, doesn't it?

A few years ago, a university student asked me, a University of Chicago student, because they're going to ask you some questions that are tough. They said, what's the most surprising thing you found in life, Pastor?

Simple answer, didn't take me long. The brevity of it all. I may look old. I am old. In fact, the lady that cuts my hair tells me, Pastor, I can't even get that gray out anymore.

You always tell me to cut the gray out. I can't do it. I said, well, okay. Make it shorter then. That's really what seven and ten is doing, people.

[20:20] It's rising like a preacher in the pulpit. I tell you to get glad. In spite of all the contrasts, all the because's. Not enough, though, is it?

At least the text doesn't think so. We're commended to enjoy life. We're commended to rejoice. We're commended to get glad. However, a call to enjoy life under the sun is incomplete if it stands alone.

See, this is where our own confession of faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith, got it right. When it finally got time to try to teach the church what's going on in life, it asked one simple question.

What's the chief end of all this? And the answer is, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. You see, it didn't just say enjoy.

It didn't just say glorify. It didn't just say the chief end of man is to rejoice. No, it had to bring God into the picture. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[21:34] Just so, our text reverses the look on that. While we are to rejoice and enjoy and get glad, we are to give God his due. All the while, along the way.

Which is why the text moves at the opening of chapter 12. It says, remember. So now here's the added word to rejoice. Rejoice while remembering.

That's what we're called to do. Remember. And it says here, remember your creator in the days of your youth. I want to show you the structure of this, because to me, this is some of the most beautiful, elegant, elevated poetry in all the scripture.

This little bit here between 12.1 and 12.8. And I think it's elevated and elegant and stately because the subject is remembering God before death.

And death is so consequential for all of us. Death is what will snuff the light out of our life under the sun.

[22:55] But because it's so irreversible. The language on what to do until that day must be so beautiful and precious.

So look at the way he structures this poem of sorts. Remember also your creator in the days of the youth.

And here's the critical structural marker. This word before. Remember your creator before. Take a look again at verse 2.

The words repeated again. Before. And then take a look at verse 6. For the third time. Remember your creator before.

Now, I want to take those things in reverse order. When are we supposed to remember our creator while living a life that is given to gladness?

[24:01] Well, verse 6. Before the silver cord is snapped. Or the golden bowl is broken. Or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain. Or the wheel broken at the cistern.

And the dust returns to the earth as it was. And the spirit returns to God who gave it. I mean, how do you write lines like that? In other words, he's saying, remember your creator before you die. Did you take note of the way the metaphors that are just pregnant with meaning? It views life, your life, as a silver cord.

It's beautiful. Your life is beautiful. One day, though, it's going to fray and be snapped. It views your life not only as a silver cord, but as a golden bowl.

It speaks of the preciousness of your life. But the day is going to come when the bowl is going to be dislodged from the planter upon which it sits.

[25:22] And it's going to hit the ground. And it's going to be shattered. See, remember God before the beauty, the majesty, the glory of life is taken from you.

Not only the beauty and the value and the cost of your life, but it goes on with other metaphors as well. Or he says, the wheel is broken at the cistern or a pitcher shattered at the fountain.

You see, what happens at the well is the wheel goes and the bucket goes down and it draws on water. Just as this pitcher is what holds water.

This speaks not necessarily to the significance of life and the value of life and the costliness of your life, which you ought to value. But it speaks of the sustenance of life.

The things that keep us alive. Water. But the day will come when the bucket can't go down because the wheel is broken and you won't be able to draw water for yourself.

[26:35] The day will come when the pitcher itself, which sits at your dining room table this afternoon, which sustains your life. Well, that too is going to get a long crack in it and eventually fall and be gone.

And your life will be given up. It is true. It's true. Those of us who are older have seen it, have we not? With parents, grandparents, from vigor and life, where they set the table for us and poured our water until the day when we visited them in a nursing home and they struggled to draw on the sustenance of life from a straw.

Is it not true? It's true. And that day will come. And so the writer says, remember God before the ultimate consequential act takes place.

Your cord is snapped. Your bowl is broken. Your pitcher's dry. And the wheel can't take in water. And you go to return to the dust from which you came.

The before of verse 3, I'm sorry, verse 2, asks you to consider, don't even just remember him before you die, but remember him before the inevitable dissolution of your physical frame begins to set in.

[28:07] Now, I know what I'm talking about on this. Look at the way he puts it. Verses 2 and follow.

What a string of pearls put forward here to speak about the dissolution of our human frame. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain. In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, yeah, last night I was, two nights ago, sleeping in a place.

It wasn't my home. They didn't have any lights either. Dark. I love my lights in the alley. If somebody's going to kill me, at least I'm going to see them.

But I know what it's like to be a keeper of a house and tremble too. Some of us do, do we not? The room they put me in at this retreat didn't even have a lock on the door.

[29:12] Now, you've got to believe me. I lock my doors at night. I set my alarm system at night. I won't give you the code, but I got one. Because if they're coming, I'm going to hear them.

So what did I do a couple nights ago as the keeper of my house? All by myself, a grown man, went over to the edge of the room and took a chair and drug that chair over in front of that door.

It didn't reach the doorknob like it does on the movies, but I put it there anyway. Because if they're coming for me, I'm going to hear them. I'm just telling you, those of you who are young are like, give me a break.

Just get in bed and go to sleep. What are you worried about? Well, there comes a day where the keepers of the house tremble. Where it says, and strong men are bent.

And it's a good day. One of my images of a strong man is a pastor who mentored me. Kent Hughes. That man was strong.

[30:25] In fact, we'd sit behind him. You know, the churches of old, you had the Pharisee chairs. Where the younger ministers sat. And the big dog, he had the big chair. And he would get up there.

He was kind of like Tiger Woods. He'd button his thing, which I can't do very much anymore. He'd button his thing. And I'd sit behind him. And he was just like, whoo. Strong man. Last summer, he preached right here.

Bent. Going to happen. Going to happen. I can feel it. I can feel it. Happen. You got to remember God then before the dissolution of the human frame that's in.

Check this out. He says, and the grinders cease because they are few. Probably a metaphor.

Again, he's painting this picture of a person, isn't he? Now stooped.

Afraid of the night. Walking through the house with a limp or a worse. And the grinders are few. Herman would be raising his hand.

[31:35] Like, man, I'm in my mid-60s. I went to the dentist the other week. And they said, you know, you're suffering a little tooth decay. I'm like, what's that? They're like, well, you know, we got to work on this. The grinders.

That's why every dentist among us says, take care of your teeth. Tell the young people, brush your teeth. You lose your grinders. But the day's going to come when we're all going to be like George Washington, looking for a set of wood teeth to get it done.

The dissolution of the human frame. It says when those who look through the windows are dimmed. Yeah. The eyesight itself.

Going on out there. My father used to come visit us. He was a little frightened early on 30 years ago, coming to the south side in Hyde Park.

And he'd park his car. And if he had to park his car out of range of what he could see out the window, man, if somebody pulled out, he was out there moving his car just so he could see it out the window. In case anyone was going to break in.

[32:40] Well, guess what? The day's going to come when you can't even hardly see your way to the sidewalk. Someone else might have to lead you. The doors on the street are shut.

The sound of grinding is low. This harvesting notion of life is done. And one rises up at the sound of a bird.

I'm telling you, this stuff is real. This is poetry at its finest. Might be four in the morning and I'm starting to hear these birds outside my window. When I was young, I just slept through them all. But now you get one bird going and you're awake and you can't get back to sleep. Isn't that right, Leon? One bird. One lousy bird. I can't sleep anymore.

The daughters of song are brought low. Not too many parties taking place in this home anymore. And they're afraid of what's high and the tears that are on the way.

[33:42] And the almond tree blossoms. Do you know what color the almond tree goes when it blossoms? It goes white. Probably here even emblematic of the aging of an individual.

And the grasshopper drags itself along. You know, there's a day in the springtime where you can't catch a grasshopper.

Too quick. You're going to need a net with a long handle. Even in your youth. But you wait long enough. It starts to get a little cold outside.

You just come on up and grab that grasshopper. Because it's going too slow. Can't get by. Men and women, even in our own congregation. Thank God for a multi-generational congregation.

Where every week we see ourselves in the fullness of life. Generations go like Laredo Taft's thing on the midway.

[34:38] They rise up in their youth. They become warriors in the middle. And they stumble off into the waters bent over. And time waits for no one. Desire fails.

Because man's going to his eternal home. And the mourners are already about the streets. And one day they're coming to your door. Remember your creator.

Before you die. Get it done. Because it's so consequential. Remember your creator. Before your own physical frame. He begins to suffer the dissolution.

Something that the gift is giving way. He goes on and says that first before. Before the evil days come and the years draw near.

Of which you'll say. I have no pleasure in them. Remember your creator. Before you die. Before the dissolution of the body comes in. And before the difficult days get underway.

[35:43] Because they will be many. Give God his due.

Dylan put it well. He sung, I'll remember you. When I've forgotten all the rest. You to me were true. You to me were the best. When there is no more. You cut to the core quicker than anyone I knew. When I'm all alone in the great unknown. I'll remember you. I'm going to just put that and direct it vertically to God.

And that's what this book is telling you. In the climactic moments of this text. Get glad.

[36:46] While giving God his due. Rejoice. Every day. Find reason to rejoice. While remembering.

Him. In it all. And if you close this thing out today. And you're like. Wow. That's quite a call. But. How do I handle.

The element of life. Where I'm just overwhelmed. And actually feel like. I got nothing to get glad about. Just remember this. Jesus. Jesus.

Jesus. God gave you. Jesus. He actually has given you one. That underwent the dissolution of his own frame.

He gave you one. Who knew the presence of your dark days. He gave you one. That died. But then rose again.

[37:49] He gave you one. If you got nothing else today. And you have him. You have. Life.

Not just under the sun. In the sun. Our heavenly father. May we get glad.

While giving you your due. May we. Be a people. A church family. That.

When others see us go. I don't know much about them. But they got joy. They rejoice. They rejoice always. While remembering you.

so as we leave this auditorium today thank you for giving us breath thank you for giving us your son  
thank you for giving us this son help us to praise you till the morning falls on the farthest hill may we  
praise you God may we praise you still