

Ecclesiastes 11:1–12:8 "Remember your Creator"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

For a moment, just bow our heads in prayer. Father, Your Word can be hard to understand, and we give You thanks and praise that You have so ordered it, that while You want us to read Your Word on our own and You really delight in us delighting in Your Word. At the same time, You have not left us alone, but have brought us into local churches like this, where we can help each other both understand the Word, but to receive the Word and to grow and to dwell within it.

And we ask, Father, that Your Holy Spirit would do that gentle but powerful work in us to make us such a community of humble, inquisitive learners and also a community of humble teachers who submit to Your Word, desiring hungrily to receive all that You give us, desire to give us in Your Word. So Father, do that today.

[2 : 0 6] Make us hungry for Your Word. Feed us with Your Word. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. So it was a long time ago, but early on in my ministry, I would get called occasionally for generic Anglican funerals or a funeral home funeral. And by that, I mean, somebody died, they had no particular connection to any church whatsoever, but it might have been in their will or something like that. Or the family members said, no, he'd want an Anglican service. So the funeral directors would get on the phone and go down a list and eventually find some Anglican minister who would do the funeral. And so it was one of those types of funerals a long, long time ago. And I do the funeral, and there's only eight people at the funeral. And the fellow who had died, I believe was in his mid-40s, and he died at work. He was a government office worker. And one day at work, he just collapsed on his desk, dead. He just died, just instantly like that. But on the day of his funeral, and there had been no wake, were visiting hours in advance. There were only eight people at the funeral, including his divorced wife, his two sons in their early 20s, and a 15-year-old daughter. And a man who had died so suddenly like that had only eight people at his funeral.

And whatever he had done in his life, I never found out what he had done. But what had that man done that even his 15-year-old daughter did not shed one single tear at the funeral of her father? In fact, not a single person shed a tear at that funeral. And I've always wondered, what had that man done in his life? That it ended in such a way. I tell you this story, it's a very sobering story, but it's hopefully a sobering story that as we look at Ecclesiastes, you'll get a sense of why Ecclesiastes speaks like it does. And also understand that part of what, a big part of what Ecclesiastes wants to happen is for you to actually live a more joyful life, believe it or not, free from delusions.

The book of Ecclesiastes is a reality respecter. And it is trying to teach us and encourage us to be reality respecters. But in such a way that it doesn't leave us depressed, because our depression comes from delusions and lies and idols. But to actually know the true and living God and how he speaks become reality respecters. And so let's look. We're almost finished Ecclesiastes, we're preaching through it. And if you turn your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 11, verse 1, it begins in a bit of a surprising way. Ecclesiastes chapter 11, verse 1, and it begins like this. So this is the second to last literary unit in the book of Ecclesiastes. And it begins like this.

It says, cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. Now, if you're thinking to yourself, I have the vaguest idea in the world what that meant. That's what I thought when I first read it too. You're in good company. That's why I have to read learned people who know Hebrew and the culture and all that to get what is an ancient saying. And there's some debate about the exact meaning of this ancient saying, but basically what this is saying is this. Now, you notice again, look at verse 2, give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. And so what this text is saying is something very counterintuitive, and it goes right to that story that I began with. In the real world, you never know when disaster is going to hit.

My favorite example, it'll be until I die, is the Thursday before all of Ontario got completely and utterly shut down. I was one of those few people who left my house on that Monday, and it was as if the zombie apocalypse had appeared. If you were in downtown Ottawa, you didn't see virtually, you saw virtually no people, only the fentanyl addicts stumbling along like zombies. So it looked like a zombie apocalypse. That was on the Monday. The Thursday, just before that, I was with a meeting of 15 other Anglican clergy, and none of us talked about churches being shut down. None of us talked about how the churches should try to adapt to it. And all of us, as we were driving home, heard the NBA has canceled the season, the NHL has canceled the season. And then of course, the famous line, three weeks of shutdown to flatten the curve, which turned into whatever it was. But nobody knows the future. Nobody knows when disaster is going to occur. But the counterintuitive, the normal way that would react to that, nobody knows when disaster is going to happen is, therefore, one of two, well, there's three types of things that we do, but that'll come next. Here, there's two types of natural things we do. The first one is, I better hoard. I better get lots of bottled water. I better find a place in the bush where I can go. I better get gold bars, because Bitcoin, I mean, if everything goes down and there's no internet, Bitcoin becomes, I don't want to depress you, but it becomes worthless.

[7 : 27] You know, I better get gold. I better get jewels. I, you know, I better get guns. I better get lots of food. And that's, that's one thing that we think we're going to have to deal with it. The other thing is, if you think, oh gosh, good grief, disaster can come at any point in time, then I might as well eat, drink, and be merry, because what's the point of saving for the future or doing anything, because disaster would happen any time. But the, the Ecclesiastes says the complete opposite.

Disaster can happen at every time, any time. So you better be generous today. What? That doesn't make any sense. That's completely counterintuitive. I better be generous. Because if disaster happens, I don't have any money to be generous, then what, I can't be generous. Now, how does that fit with the story that I began with?

For all I know, I don't know, for all I know, that man went to work every day and said, you know what, next week would be a good time to call up my daughter and start to be nice to her and generous to her. And the week after, and the week after, and the week after, and then he died.

He never got a chance to forgive, to apologize, to be generous, whatever his issues were, he never got that opportunity. You see, the Bible here is giving us very counterintuitive advice.

And as we're going to see more in a moment, but you know, the gospel text, which I just read a few minutes ago, and part of the lesson of that text was that if you have, if God has dealt with you in a way that is filled with mercy and forgiveness, then partly what it means to live as his son or daughter is to be one who practices mercy and forgiveness. And if, in fact, the structure of the world is that we are constant recipients of the generosity of God, then it means that partly how we are to live as full human beings is to be characterized by generosity, by generosity. And sometimes the thing about cast your bread upon the water is verse one, for you will find it after many days. It actually says you might find it after many days. That's one of those things. Sometimes being generous gives you some type of payback, and sometimes it just means you have less money. It means that you can't buy a Subaru wilderness version. You've got to buy the Subaru Crosstrek because you've given away your money.

[9 : 44] So it doesn't mean you have to live with a long face and do with nothing, but it means that you choose generosity. You never, you never, there's, nobody ever has enough money to be generous, by the way, just in case you're wondering. You never have enough money to be generous. You have to choose to be generous. And this text is saying you never know when disaster is going to strike. And here's the thing about it, that disaster can strike at any time. If you choose hoarding as your solution, that doesn't mean disaster doesn't strike. If you choose just to live and drink and tomorrow we die, that doesn't protect you from disaster happening. The disaster to the person who says, I'm just going to eat and drink and just live a completely, like, why worry about the future? The disaster for you might be that you live to be 70. But with a whole pile of sexual diseases, a terrible liver completely and utterly ruined your health, you know? Or you try to hoard and all happens is that, I don't know, just something happens and all your hoarded stuff just completely and utterly disappears. Like disaster, you can't avoid the truth that disaster can happen at any moment by either eating and drinking, because tomorrow you die, or by hoarding, or by the next thing, which we'll talk about in a moment.

So there's never, so why wouldn't you be generous today? In fact, you know, if you think about it for a second, wouldn't you like it said at your funeral? You know, you know what, you know what Sue was doing, you know, just before she died like that? You know, just before Sue died like that, it was just before Christmas, she put in like a hundred dollar tip for her favorite barista, and she gave a whole pile of money to the poor in East Africa. And you know, and she had just brought in a huge big tray of donuts and cupcakes to the office, and that's what happened just before she died. Wouldn't you like to have that said at your funeral? Of course you would. You never know when disaster will strike, so you better be generous today. It's not so counterintuitive, but so wise.

And then the text is going to go, because what the text is going to do, it's going to keep reminding us of true goods that exist, and generosity is a true good. The next one here is the next couple, and sort of mixed up because the text goes zigzagging like this. It's not a linear text, it's a zigzag text. And for those of us who are really hardwired to linear thought, you hate the book of Ecclesiastes, you don't like the book of Ecclesiastes, because he doesn't believe in linear thought. He believes in zigging and zagging and catching you by surprise, coming at you from the side. But look what happens now. Another type of good, verse 3. Doesn't sound like it. But if the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth. Well, that's obvious. And if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. Well, that's obvious. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. And then just skip down, we're going to come back to verse 6 in a moment, 5 in a moment, but just skip down to verse 6. In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. And so what this is talking about here is that the book of Ecclesiastes is a reality respecter, and it wants us to respect the reality that there are just natural limits to life. Now, it's not trying to say, it's not like religion has been used historically and even today to keep people down, and say you just have to stay in your place.

You know, your parents were poor, your grandparents were poor, your great-grandparents were poor, therefore you should be poor. Your great-grandparents were persecuted, your grandparents were persecuted, your parents were persecuted, therefore you should be persecuted. Just, it's not saying to accept limits like that. It's not a tool of oppression, it's the opposite. It's a tool of freedom, a tool of actual hope and encouragement. But what it is saying is that, on one hand, if you understand it, the weather is completely and utterly indifferent to you. Get over it.

It's completely indifferent to you. Massively. It doesn't think, oh, George would really like it to not snow today. He'd only like it to snow on days other than Sundays, so people come to church.

[14 : 09] Weather doesn't care. It's going to snow whenever it's going to snow. And on one hand, then there's these two types of things that go on. There's a lot of people, and a lot of their stress in life comes from thinking that you can analyze things and pick opportune moments, the absolute, like, perfect moment to act. It's a type of the whole thing about, you know, if you're looking at all the clouds and all you won't under, it's like that, it's talking about analysis, paralysis by analysis. And it's talking about trying to pick the perfect time to act. And the text is saying, listen, there's, I mean, obviously there can be better times than others to, you know, to act, like, you know, obviously you don't organize an outdoor picnic with a blanket and beach toys in January in Ottawa. Like, obviously there's some things like that which are just obviously you don't do.

But fundamentally it is, like, work is a good. The thing about work is that God has designed human beings to be fruitful, and being fruitful is a good. God has designed human beings that they can cause things to happen. That is a good thing. Lean into it. God has designed human beings so that they can do one thing, which is plan their work, but on the other hand, they have to plan their work in such a way that they're not caught up with the delusions that they can control the future as if the clouds will listen to you about when they're going to rain, because they won't. They don't. They never will.

Like, get over it. You can't control the future in that. There's some natural limits in terms of what you know and what you don't know, and you just, you need to live within those types of things. And so you should work hard. Be fruitful. Be fruitful in the morning. Be fruitful in the afternoon. Be fruitful in the evening. There's other texts about rest, but being fruitful. So that means even if you're retired, you're still called to be fruitful. Maybe you're being fruitful as your volunteer work with the church.

Maybe it's just your helpfulness with your neighbors. Maybe it's just baking cookies and doing all sorts of other things and having a very neat and tidy and beautiful house. Whatever is, be fruitful. Being fruitful is a good. Yes, disaster can happen at any time, and just as disaster can happen any time, choose to be generous anyway. Disaster can happen at any time, choose to be fruitful. Choose to be fruitful.

That's the thing, because being fruitful is a good. Now, the verse 6 which I skipped, verse 5 I said, now this is a, a lot of people get confused by this text because, well, I'll read it. Verse 5, as you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything, or it's more literally who does everything. So this isn't saying, oh gosh, 3,000 years ago they didn't have obstetricians. That's not what the point is.

[16 : 51] The point is something very different, and it's going to become more emphasized throughout the rest of this last literary unit, which is the mystery and the miracle of life, which we just take for granted, but that all life ultimately only comes from God.

Now, I'm going to be a little bit controversial. That's, you know, I'm never controversial by the way here, but it's, I want to just be a bit of a reality respecter. One of the things which is so powerful about the evolutionary theory of how all things came to be, the neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, which is what you basically, everybody in Canada believes, and if you have any doubts about it, it shows that you probably, I don't know, you know, you drag your knuckles on the ground and you can't think and you're dumb and all that type of stuff. And one of the things we need to do is just push back a lot with that because on one hand, it's very plausible. We can understand how there can be genetic desirable developments of change. My dad was five foot five and a half. Before gravity started to win, I was five foot ten and a half. I don't know how tall I am now, but gravity is winning. I'm shrinking. And my sons are all taller than me. One of my sons is six foot seven.

He drank ant water, for those of you who like the Lord of the Rings. That's all I can say by it. And so we can understand how there can be this development, you know, natural development. But here's the thing, the huge Achilles, the huge problem Achilles heel with evolutionary theory, it is completely and utterly implausible.

That dead matter can all of a sudden create life. It is completely implausible that that which has no mind whatsoever all of a sudden develop mind. It is completely impossible to think that a world which communicates no information all of a sudden is structured around information. Those are at least three but other complete and utter things which make no sense, which we don't expect. Nobody thinks that all of a sudden the chairs will start to speak to us. Nobody thinks that if there was an explosion in here that the chairs would start to speak to us, that they would have mind and be able to communicate information. They can't. How do you go from complete non-life to life? And that is completely implausible to people. But if that doesn't happen, all the rest of the stuff which is plausible can't actually come to be without that life. And so this text is saying something that we all intuitively know that's entirely plausible. That life has to come from that which is life in and of itself. And all life is a gift.

The mystery is, you could do something to make me die and I am just a sack of chemicals. Where does life come from?

[19 : 57] We are surrounded by life. And in a sense, we are surrounded by evidence of God's existence. And we all intuitively understand that life is a positive good. In fact, if you look at the next thing here, verse 7, light is sweet and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. It's partially what this book is trying to get us to do as a reality respecter is to understand that there's things about the actual structure of reality that are inherently symbolic, that we inherently understand and most cultures have understood other than ones which are very, very evil, that there is something good about light, that there is a positive good to light. Those of you who've lived in Vancouver or visited Vancouver, gosh, all of a sudden there's a sunny day for one hour. Wow, that's fantastic. Look how beautiful the mountains are. Then the rain comes and the clouds and there you are, lost in no sunlight for quite a period of time. And so life is a positive good. Light is a positive good.

And both ultimately are things which God has created. And then it continues here with another thing which is a positive good, which is that a person can sometimes live to be quite old. Look at verse 8. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all. The teacher isn't being a Debbie Downer, a Donnie Downer, but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many.

All that comes is vanity. And the word here, vanity, once again, basically the way to understand that is that it's fleeting. Everything is fleeting. Everything is held together by something other than itself, that God ultimately has to hold everything together. And so why does it say that? On one hand, it's a good to have a long life. And you should rejoice in them all. But here's the thing, because the book of Ecclesiastes is trying to prepare you to understand, respect reality, and realize that reality is pointing to something beyond itself that only ultimately the gospel answers and fulfills.

And what's it saying here? George, just think for yourself, even if you live to be 100, the time after your death will be vastly longer than your 100 years.

Vastly longer. And so the question is, how shall you then live if this is true? How do you live if this is true?

[22 : 39] How do you not ask bigger questions about life? Even if you live to be 100, the days after you die are going to be vastly longer, incomparably longer than your 100 years of life.

So rejoice. Old age is a great good. And then it continues. And it's all setting you up to have a more, a very profound understanding of what it means to be a human being, and the shape of reality, and how it should shape your longings and your prayers. Verse 9 and 10. Rejoice, O young man, rejoice, O young woman, in your youth. Rejoice in it. 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. That's not being a downer. It's very important. Verse 10. I'll come back to it. Remove vexation from your heart. In other words, don't let woes form you. Don't let woes form you. Continues on. And put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are fleeting.

That's what vanity means here. Or they can become vanity if you're consumed with them. So what's going on here? I mean, I think it was on Friday. I can remember. Just within the last week or two, my wife had a group of my granddaughters over. I think their ages ranged from about five to about seven. And they were making cookies with my wife. And do you know that if you get four little girls together with their grandmother making cookies, do you know they bounce?

I mean, not my wife. She wasn't bouncing. But they bounce. They can't actually stand still. They bounce up and down. And they giggle all the time. And they laugh. And it's so beautiful.

Like, it's so beautiful to watch them giggling and bouncing while they try to mix things and scatter things all over. Because it's hard to mix something in a bowl when you're bouncing. But, you know, Louise is very patient with them. Because what's important is spending time with your granddaughters, not how many cookies you can make. If you make three less cookies because of scattered stuff, that's fine. Like, life goes on. Because little kids bounce. It's all beautiful. Life is beautiful like that, isn't it? And those kids should rejoice in it. And then teenagers and all of that, you should rejoice in it. And this thing about judgment, it's going to become more important as we come to the end of the text. I'm going to come back to it in another sense. But it's also, it's just really saying, but by the way, understand with all of that, that there still is a moral universe. Even though life is very short and very fleeting, and you will die, and there's more to life after you die, or the time after your death is going to be far longer than life before you. But you live in a moral universe.

[25 : 32] God sees all things. And by the way, why is it that you assume that if a person just follows their heart and does what brings them joy, that it will always mean doing evil things? It will mean, but why should that be? I mean, the fact of the matter is, the fact of the matter is, it is vastly more fulfilling to be generous than to be a hoarder and greedy. It is a better way to live. And for young men and young women, your strength, your be heroes, be courageous, defend the weak, pursue justice, enter into businesses and make money because you take risks. Those are all positive, beautiful, good things. Go for it. Goodness is good for you. It really is. If you're able to find one that you can marry and stay faithful to them, you know, because it's a good thing. And you can get children and grandchildren if God is kind to you. Maybe you can't, but you... These are all... It's not just bad things.

Like, pursue that which is good and courage and honor and wisdom and knowledge and kindness and gentleness and self-control. Pursue them.

All the days of your youth. You know, the vexation and pain, a lot of that in our lives come from either doing things which are quite evil that eventually come to haunt us. But in particular, it's often, I think, because as you know, pain resides in your body. I think there's a profound insight here about how emotional and mental and spiritual pain comes to reside in your body as well. But a lot of our vexation comes because we choose to be hoarders or vast consumers rather than generous. We choose to do these types of things rather than maybe taking on causality and being fruitful. And we think that we can control the future and control external things. And there's no limits for all that. And that's just going to keep causing us heartache and pain rather than just coming to accept that some days reality and nature is just not all ordered around me. And some days things are going to go very well and some things things are going to go very hard. But for me as a Christian, we're going to see in a moment God is still in his heaven. And the thing which causes us the most pain is thinking that we can control the future and that we will live forever. And those are delusions and lies. Those are delusions and lies. Ecclesiastes is telling you the truth. And I was going to tell you something very beautiful which human beings in their deepest part suspect and believe, but it's being articulated for you. And it's that sad bit that

Shirley read. Look at verse 12. We're coming to the end of the literary unit 12 verses 1 to 8. And it says here, remember also your creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come and the years draw near on which you will say, I have no pleasure in them.

So what's going to go on here? We'll see in a moment. So first of all, I think this is the first time in the book that it says very clearly that we have a creator. I am not my own creator. I am vapor.

[28 : 58] But I have a creator who's created me and holds me together. And I have a beginning and I will have an end, at least in terms of this earthly existence. But there is a creator who existed before me and while I exist and will exist after me. And I should remember him. And remember here, it doesn't just say, oh yeah, yeah, there's a creator. Remember here, if you go through and you read what our Jewish friends call the Tanakh and what we call the Old Testament, you'll see like it means to contemplate and dwell in the truth of with loyalty and with commitment. That's what remember means. So that's why in the fourth commandment says, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. That doesn't mean, oh yeah, it's Sunday. No, that's not what it means. It means to dwell in it, to take it to heart, to be loyal to that truth. So remember your creator, the days of your youth, the evil days come. I remember, some of you might remember last week I talked about how God created life, humans created death. Death came into the world because human beings rebelled against

God and wanted to become their own creator and be their God and even be the creator of the creator. And that brought in evil and evil automatically brought death. And I use the example, you can go back and listen to the magnets and how they fall once they're disconnected from God.

But what the Bible here is going to say now is that even though human beings brought death in, every death is a cosmic tragedy. So the next bit that I'm going to read, the next six verses, they're not literal. And there's several different ways. If you go into commentaries, there's at several different levels that the imagery works. Sorry, my phone thought I was talking to it.

That's so crazy. Anyway, it just spoke to me. By the way, if it's China or North Korea trying to listen in, I hope you come to Jesus just in case. So there you go. Or whatever AI thing some high-tech company is doing. So, oh yeah, where was I? So what you need to hear is this, and partly it's a, they're images from nature. Partly it's an image of a great house or a city coming into collapse.

Partially it's just, like if you watch some movies like Lord of the Rings and the darkness, which is all coming before the day of apparent doom. It's a series of images not meant to be taken literally. And here's what it says, right? So verse one again, chapter 12, verse one, remember also your creator in the days of your youth 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. The clouds work there as a like dark storm clouds of doom and the clouds return after the rain. In the day 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 in the street 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.

[32 : 27] They are afraid also of what is high and terrors are in the way. The almond tree blossoms. It's an image of your hair going gray. The grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails because man, human, a human, man and woman is going to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets. Before the silver cord is snapped, the golden bowl is broken, where the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, where 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 vanity says the preacher all is vanity.

Vanity of vanity. You know, I talked a bit about the fact that all life is a miracle and when this says that what what human being what Christians understand human beings to be you can look at it from two points of view. You could say that a human being is an enfleshed or an embodied soul. The other way that you can look at what a human being is that we are in souled bodies or you could say that we are in souled matter where we are in mattered spirit and death is when the spirit leaves the body and once the spirit and the soul leaves the body then the body dies and this text is saying that ultimately all life is a gift of God and all life ultimately belongs to God and it is the greatest of all delusions to believe that we have created ourselves or that we own ourselves. We ultimately belong to God. We do not belong to ourselves and the part of the the unbelievable beauty of humanity is that God took out of dust and made creatures like us that are spectacularly beautiful and intricate and fragile and transient and to understand all of the imagery of this text you go back and you read John chapter 11 and read the story of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus and at the tomb of Lazarus you see Jesus have a profound sigh at the horror of death and decomposition and he weeps.

And so all human death is a divine, is a cosmic tragedy and God weeps and God weeps.

But here the whole text is structuring us and trying to form us to understand how the real world actually works. And if you'd followed along it says actually if there's only one creator is the is the same one who is the source of all life And if that one creator who is the source of life is also the source of all good, that's the importance of that judgment text, that there is in fact a moral universe and it ultimately That same God who is the one creator who is the one source of life who is the one source of good Who is the one judge who is also the one who sees all?

all, and who's the one who knows all, and as we're going to see at the end, because it says later on at the end of the book, that he's the one who speaks, that he is the one who creates all speech, and he is the one to whom all things will come to an end, then how can anyone other than him redeem us?

[36 : 33] How can there be another, how can there be any hope other than him? All we can hope on is that he has shown himself to be gracious and generous. There is nowhere else to go for hope than him, and whatever he does to help us has to be a gift, because the whole structure of reality is that God is a constant one giving us gifts to which we receive, and so whatever it is, if there is in fact something beyond our death and the dissipation of our body, this beautiful human nature that is intricate and beautiful and precious, and over which God weeps, then, Lord, have mercy on us. There is no hope other than that which you will send, and we can only receive as a gift, and so the book of Ecclesiastes is preparing us for Jesus, the one who becomes vapor for us, the one who becomes all of those beautiful, intricate things, the one who is nailed to the cross, the one by whom which we receive forgiveness of sins and pardons, the one by whom when we put our faith and trust in him, we are made born again, and we receive new life, and we are union with him, and we know that death is not the end, because sin has been dealt with, death has been defeated, he is on the far side of the tomb, death is not the final word, there can be no structure other than us, God providing this, we can only receive as a gift, and what does it mean for how we live? You become a Christian, all good things, all pleasure, all joy comes from him. I mean, how many people here love a really, really good, thick, rich cup of hot chocolate with whipped cream and marshmallows, all the pleasure of that, that comes from him, that comes from him. It's all of a piece, these profound spiritual, mental pleasures, the gift of causality, the gift of fruitfulness, the gift of joy, of love, of youth, of life, of energy, the gift of Christ, it's all of one piece, we don't have to pick and choose between them. We, out of a concern for the poor, and a concern to be generous in the spirit of the gospel, we might have to say we can't buy that Subaru wilderness, the Subaru wilderness version, we have to live with a cross trek, because we want to be generous, but it's not as if God is ever calling you to give through joy, he wants you to understand that joy is at his right hand, pleasure at his right hand, and in his presence is a fullness of joy, and that is the structure of reality, that he wants us now to start to walk in and understand that even though we do not know the future, that's fine. It's all gift, all gift, and knowing Christ, we say, and knowing that Christ ultimately is the one that all of this is pointing to, we know who to say thank you to. Thank you,

God. Thank you for life. Thank you for Christ. For those of you who don't know him as Savior, this is why you just say, Jesus, I didn't realize it's all a gift. I want to receive that gift, and I want to belong to you. I invite you to stand.

Father, we give you thanks and praise that you are a generous God, that you are a giver of all good gifts, that pleasure comes from you, that joy comes from you, that life comes from you, that light comes from you. We give you thanks and praise, Father, that you have joys that you can give us at every season in life. We thank you, Father, that you have given Jesus to be our Savior as a profound and deep gift, a gift that defeats death and brings a new life that will last beyond this current time under the sun into the new heaven and the new earth. And we ask, Father, that you fill our hearts with gratitude for what Christ has done, and may gratitude and generosity and mercy and forgiveness and a concern for justice and goodness and truth and beauty, Father, may that, as we receive all of these good things from you, may these good things form us, Father, to pursue and to be ones who are fruitful in beauty and fruitful in truth and fruitful in justice and fruitful in generosity. Father, help us to be fruitful in Christ, and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.