

Preparing for Eternity

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Date: 20 May 2018

Preacher: Rev. Murdo Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 11.

Ecclesiastes chapter 11, I'd like us just, we'll walk through the whole chapter, but if we just take as our text the words of verses 7 and 8. Ecclesiastes 11 at verse 7.

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. Eternity.

Eternity. That was the word that changed the face of the Australian capital of Sydney during the 19th century.

[1 : 08] Eternity. And that one word was written by a man who had spent most of his life in and out of prison. Arthur Stace, he was unable to free himself from the web of poverty and addiction.

He even pleaded with the police to lock him up and keep him away from alcohol. Arthur Stace's life was a mess. Until one night, he stumbled into a church hall where the evangelist John Ridley was preaching.

And during his sermon, John Ridley said, I wish that I could shout the word eternity throughout the streets of Sydney. And he repeated himself again and again by saying, Eternity.

Eternity. Eternity. And that night, Arthur Stace was converted. He committed his life to following Jesus Christ.

And when he came out of the church hall, he felt this powerful call from the Lord to kneel down and write the word eternity. And so Arthur Stace, he found a piece of chalk in his pocket.

[2 : 14] And even though he could hardly write his own name, he wrote the word eternity in beautiful handwriting. And from that moment on, Arthur Stace devoted his whole life to writing this one word, eternity.

And what's remarkable is that Arthur Stace, he spent the next 37 years of his life just walking through the streets of Sydney with a piece of chalk writing the word eternity.

Everywhere people went throughout the streets of Sydney, they would see this single word that would give them the solemn reminder of where we're all going.

Eternity. And you know, although it was only one word, it spoke a thousand words. Because it reminds us about the shortness of time and the length of eternity.

And you know, that's what Solomon is doing here in his sermon called Ecclesiastes. The book of Ecclesiastes is a sermon. It's the sermon of King Solomon.

[3 : 21] And Ecclesiastes, it means the preacher. Which means that Solomon is the preacher, and Ecclesiastes is the preacher's sermon. And Solomon's sermon, it's all about the vanity of living your life without God.

And Solomon, in his opening statement of his sermon, he said, Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.

And from that opening statement in chapter 1 at verse 2, Solomon proceeded to preach about the vanity of living your life in a foolish way. And Solomon says throughout the whole sermon that we need to look at life.

And we need to live our lives and love life even with an eternal perspective. Because if we're not living our life with an eternal perspective, he says, then you're wasting your life.

And Solomon's plea to us in his whole sermon is don't waste your life. Don't waste your life living for yourself and living for the pleasures of the world.

[4 : 25] Because what's of the utmost importance and what's of eternal value is your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But you know, what we see in chapter 11 is that as Solomon begins

to bring his sermon to a conclusion, he concludes it in chapter 12.

But as he begins to bring his sermon to a conclusion in chapter 11, Solomon gives us some advice in order to prepare for eternity.

And there are four words of advice that Solomon gives to us in order to prepare for eternity.

Solomon says, Be alert, be active, be attentive, and be aware.

Be alert, be active, be attentive, and be aware. So we look at Solomon's first piece of advice.

He says, Be alert. Be alert. Look at verse 1. Solomon says, Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

[5 : 33] Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth. And if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

In these opening verses, Solomon advises that in order to prepare for eternity, you need to be alert to your opportunities. You need to be alert to your opportunities.

And Solomon emphasises this by giving an illustration of a ship going to sea. Because when Solomon says, Cast your bread upon the waters, he's not talking about feeding ducks.

He's talking about commercial trade. He's talking about ships that would go on commercial voyages across the world to trade their produce. And what's interesting is that, as the king of Israel, Solomon had his own fleet of ships.

They were called the ships of Tarshish. And you see them mentioned in the Psalms. The ships of Tarshish, they would return once every three years. And they would bring back gold and silver and ivory and various other things.

[6 : 48] They returned once every three years. Because as you know, there were no navigation systems in the year 1000 BC. There weren't really maps either.

So ships, they would sometimes just sail into the horizon and keep sailing until they came to land and then trade their goods. And those farmers who had loaded all that cargo onto these ships to be sold in other nations, it might be months, sometimes years before they would receive any money for all their produce.

And you know, this is what Solomon means when he says in verse 1, Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. But putting produce onto a ship, a ship that was going to keep on traveling towards the horizon, it was a bit of a blind exercise.

They didn't know where they were going. But they knew that they would eventually reach some land. And that they had to trust that when they got there, they could trade their goods and then try and return home safely.

One commentator says about this verse, you know, it was a venture of faith. That voyage into the horizon was a venture of faith.

[8 : 04] And that's the point Solomon is trying to get across here. That entering eternity is a venture of faith. It's a voyage into the unknown.

Because none of us have been to eternity. None of us have seen what's on the other side of death. But without hesitation, Solomon says, you need to be prepared for eternity.

You need to be prepared for the voyage that you're going on. A voyage into the great eternity. You need to be ready for eternity because it's a venture of faith. And Solomon says that the only way to be ready for eternity is commitment.

And I say this because the word cast, the first word in chapter 11, the word cast, it refers to total commitment. Therefore, the only way to be prepared for eternity is to be totally committed to Jesus Christ.

And you know, commitment, commitment is what separates a person with head knowledge from a person with heart knowledge. Total commitment to Jesus Christ is the difference between being saved and being lost.

[9 : 16] total commitment is the difference between being in Christ or being out of Christ. It's the difference between being a Christian or not being a Christian. My friend, total commitment to Jesus Christ is the difference between spending an eternity in heaven or spending an eternity in hell.

And Solomon is saying to us, if you want to be prepared for eternity, then you need to be committed. You need to cast yourself upon the mercy of Jesus.

You need to repent of your sins. You need to look to Jesus by faith and trust in Jesus and confess that he is your Lord. And Solomon is saying to us, you need to do it now.

You need to do it now. Because as Solomon says in verse 2, give a portion to 7 or even to 8. For you do not, you know not what disaster may happen on the earth.

He says you need to do it now because you don't know what a day nor an hour may bring in your life. You don't know how close you are to eternity. You don't know when you will be taking that great voyage into eternity.

[10 : 35] My friend, you have no idea when death will leave you and judgment will find you and eternity will hold you. And maybe for you as someone who is not yet prepared for eternity, you are still unconverted, you know, you need to commit your life to Jesus Christ.

And you need to do it tonight. My friend, what Solomon is reminding you is that you need to be alert to your opportunities because you will not always have them.

And for some of you here, you've had many opportunities. You've had many opportunities to prepare for eternity by committing your life to Jesus Christ.

But sadly, up until tonight, you've wasted all these opportunities. You've had many opportunities to prepare for eternity. And you know, all you have to do is think of the times that you've sat in church under the preaching of the gospel.

Think about the amount of times people have pleaded with you to commit your life to Jesus Christ. Think about all the Christians around you in your home or in your family or your parents or your friends or your neighbors or your work colleagues.

[11 : 50] Think about the many times they've spoken to you about your soul or asked you where you are at with Jesus. Think about all these reminders of the frailty of life or the closeness of eternity.

Think about all these warnings that you've had. Maybe through illness or accidents or the death of a close family member or friend. And yet, the wonder of it all is that the Lord has kept you.

The Lord has kept you. The Lord has protected you. The Lord has helped you through all these things. Others have entered eternity. They've taken their voyage into eternity.

But you, you've been given more time. You've been given more opportunities. You're still on mercy's ground. But my friend, be alert to your opportunities.

Don't waste them. Take your opportunity to commit your life to Jesus Christ. Make Him your Lord and your Savior. Take your opportunity now because you just don't know when you've taken your last opportunity and wasted it.

[13 : 06] And you know, that's what Solomon says in verse 3. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth. And if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there, it will lie.

And what Solomon means by this is that you can't prevent anything in life. When you look up into the sky and you see that the clouds are full of rain, you see that the rain is coming.

You know that you can't prevent the rain. But instead of doing nothing, you take shelter from the rain, don't you? You prepare for the coming rain. And in a similar manner, Solomon says, if you know that eternity is coming, then you'll prepare for eternity.

You'll commit your life to Jesus Christ. And you'll know Him and love Him as your Lord and Savior.

My friend, if you know that death is coming and judgment is drawing near and eternity is just on the horizon, if you know all these things, then you'll be alert to your opportunities.

Because as Solomon says, where the tree falls, there it will lie. Where the tree falls, there it will lie.

[14 : 26] And of course, what Solomon means by this is that when you are cut down like a tree and your life is taken from you, the position you fall in will determine your eternal voyage.

Because you can only fall in one of two directions. Solomon says, you will fall to the north or to the south. You will die in Christ or out of Christ.

You will die saved or unsaved. You will die lost or found. You will die and spend an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell.

My friend, you need to be alert to your opportunities. You need to take them while you have them. because where the tree falls, there it will lie.

And so Solomon is giving us advice in order to prepare for eternity and it's good advice. It's advice that we need to listen to. But the second bit of advice that Solomon gives us is be active.

[15 : 38] Be alert. Be active. Look at verses 4 to 6. He says, He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

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. 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.

In these verses, Solomon reminds us that inactivity is a waste of time. In other words, doing nothing is pointless, because if you do nothing, then nothing will happen.

And it's, you know, if we don't make a move, then you'll go nowhere. And you know, it's an obvious point to make, but it seems to be a necessary point to make, because there are far too many people who have heard the gospel all their lives, but do nothing with it.

We spoke about this morning, about the hardened heart. We spoke about the seed being sown again, and again, and again. It just seems to wash over you.

[16:55] It doesn't seem to have any effect, doesn't make you move, doesn't make you come and follow Jesus, it doesn't make you commit your life to Jesus Christ. My friend, you've heard the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

You've heard it so often, but you seem to do nothing with it. And it just seems that you're waiting for a more convenient season in your life.

And you know, that's what Solomon is describing here. He said in verse 4, that the man who looks at the wind does nothing with his seed. He won't throw his seed into the wind just in case nothing happens with the seed and no good will come of it.

But in the other hand, says Solomon, you also have the man who when it comes to harvest time, he doesn't reap what he has sown because he looks at the weather again.

And he does nothing with his veg that has grown and is ready to be reaped and ready to be eaten and ready to be enjoyed. He just leaves all his veg in the ground to rot.

[18:06] And you know, verse 4, it's an interesting illustration because it's all about the fear of commitment. The man who is to sow his seed, he's afraid to sow his seed because he doesn't know what will happen.

The man who is to reap his produce, he's afraid to see what has been growing under the ground because he doesn't know whether it will be good or bad. And Solomon's point is that sometimes becoming a Christian and committing your life to Jesus Christ and coming out on the side of the Lord, sometimes it's a scary thing because you just don't know what it will be like.

You just don't know what changes will take place. You just don't know how people will react. And there are all these questions and worries and concerns that people have.

Maybe you have them. Maybe you're worried about what it will be like if you become a Christian and what will people think and what will people say? What will my wife say?

What will my husband say? What will my children say? What will my work colleagues say? And all these things are genuine concerns. concerns. But sometimes it's these concerns that make you want to put it off until another time.

[19:27] Until a more convenient season in your life. Where you know what you have to do. You know what you need to do. But because of worries or doubts or fears, you want to just leave it just now.

But you know, I love what Solomon says in verse five. 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.

Solomon is saying, you don't need to know how a baby is formed in the womb to know that the baby is real. You don't need to know all these things about a baby, how its bones come together and how the flesh comes.

You don't need to know all these things in order to believe that God created the baby. And in a similar manner Solomon says, you don't need to know the future in order to be a Christian.

You don't need to worry about the future in order to be a Christian. You don't need to wait until you're older in order to be a Christian. You don't need to wait until you're a better person in order to be a Christian.

[20:43] No, my friend, what you need to do is to actively seek the Lord with all your heart. You need to be active in seeking the Lord.

Because doing nothing will lead to nothing. Doing nothing will leave you in the lost hell-bound state that you're in tonight.

Doing nothing will not save you. My friend, to sit and wait and to do nothing will be fatal. And you know, there's some people, they have this fatalistic view of salvation.

They excuse themselves from committing their life to the Lord and becoming a Christian. And they do it because they hide behind the doctrine of election. They have this perverted view of God's sovereignty in salvation and they say all the time, if I'm going to be saved, I will be saved and there's nothing I can do about it.

If I'm in the elect, I will be saved. And you know, sad to say those who think like that and sit and stay where they are and do nothing, when they die, they go to hell.

[22 : 01] And they go to hell because the Bible never, ever tells us to sit and stay where we are. The Bible never says sit and do nothing.

No, my friend, the Bible is a divine invitation full of divine imperatives. And in the Bible, the Lord says to you, listen to me, incline your ear, hear and your soul shall live.

Look to me and be saved. Take my yoke upon you. Ask, seek, knock, call unto me, come to me. All these are imperatives.

Listen, incline, hear, look, take, ask, seek, knock, come. Not one of these divine imperatives says if you're in the elect, stay where you are, sit and do nothing, wait for the bright light and the voice from heaven and the procession of angels confirming your salvation.

None of that is there. know all these divine imperatives, they plead with you to respond to Jesus Christ for your salvation. They all plead with you to come and find rest for your soul.

[23 : 18] That's what Solomon says in verse 6. He says, in the morning sow your seed. At evening withhold not your hand for you do not know which will prosper. This or that or whether both alike will be good.

Solomon says, don't wait for a more convenient season in your life. Don't put off seeking the Lord. Don't stay away from Jesus because you think you're not good enough or that you have doubts or that you lack assurance.

Don't stay away from Jesus. The Bible says, no, come to him. Come to him. Come to this Jesus and commit your life to him. My dear unconverted friend here tonight, in order to prepare for eternity.

You need to be alert to your opportunities. You need to be active in seeking the Lord. And you need to be attentive to God's word. And that's what we see thirdly.

Solomon is giving us good advice in order to prepare for eternity. Be alert, be active. Thirdly, be attentive. Be attentive.

[24 : 28] He says in verse 7, 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. As Solomon continues to give good advice about preparing for eternity, he says that we need to ask the Lord to open our eyes.

He says truly the light is sweet. sweet. And it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun. And needless to say, we all love the sun. We love sunny days.

We love the longer nights. We love the light that the sun gives. We love its warmth. We love the sun. And that's what Solomon is saying. Truly the light of the sun is sweet.

But you only know that the light of the sun is sweet if you can see it. If your eyes are closed or if you're blind to the light of the sun, then all you have is darkness.

[25 : 35] And if you're in darkness, you don't know where you're going. You're without direction. You're lost. Without light, you're lost.

And that's a point Solomon is making, that we need to be attentive to God's word. Because God's word is light. And God's word is light because God is light.

And in him there is no darkness at all. My friend, God's word, the Bible, it is a light to those in darkness. Because this book that you have before you tonight, it illuminates the mind, enlivens the soul of those who are in darkness.

It gives direction to those who are lost. It gives clarity to those who are uncertain. And that's why it's so good for us to read our Bible. That's why it's good for us to come to church, both ends in the Lord's Day and during the week.

Because this book, this precious book, that's what gives light to those in darkness. And you know, that's what we were singing about in Psalm 119.

[26 : 45] Psalm 119 is a psalm which we said it praises God for the Bible. And in Psalm 119, the psalmist confesses, thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

But you know, that confession from the psalmist, it only came because the psalmist asked in a previous verse, open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

My friend, the reason you're still in darkness tonight, the reason you're still not a Christian, the reason you're still lost, the reason you're still not prepared for your voyage into eternity, it's not because the Bible isn't giving you direction and clarity and light.

It's because your eyes are closed and you need them to be opened. You need to ask the Lord to open your eyes. You need to ask the Lord to make you see.

You need to pray like the psalmist prayed, open my eyes, that I might behold wondrous things out of thy law. And when you ask, what does the Bible say?

[28 : 00] You will receive. When you seek, you will find. When you knock, it will be opened. Jesus says to us, I am the light of the world.

he who believes in me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. My friend, you need to be attentive to God's word. Because if you refuse to ask for your eyes to be opened, you will remain in darkness for all eternity.

And that's what Solomon says. 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. And you know, this darkness that Solomon mentions, it's what Jesus affirmed when he described those who will spend eternity in hell.

Because hell is described in the Bible as this outer darkness where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. And as Jesus said himself in the Sermon on the Mount, if the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness?

[29 : 18] My friend, you need to be prepared for eternity. You need to be alert to your opportunities. You need to be active in seeking the Lord.

You need to be attentive to God's word. And you need to be aware of the coming judgment. And that's what we see lastly. Solomon is giving us advice in order to prepare for eternity.

Be alert, be active, be attentive, and be aware. Be aware. He says in verse 9, 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 in 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.

In these closing words of advice that Solomon is giving to prepare for eternity, Solomon says that you need to live your life with an eternal perspective.

[30 : 28] You need to remember that the moment you enter eternity, you will be standing before Jesus Christ. You will stand before his judgment seat, his throne.

And the Bible solemnly reminds us that we must all appear before that judgment seat of Christ and give an account of our lives. And that's what Solomon is saying.

He's saying that far too often life is lived without a thought towards Jesus. Far too often life is lived without a thought towards eternity.

Far too often life is lived without a thought towards God's judgment against our sin. And he says in our youth we think that eternity is so far away from us that we can live our life any way we please. But when we're old we know that eternity is closer. And you know as Solomon says for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

[31 : 38] And my friend you need to be aware of God's judgment in your life. Because every Lord's day that you sit here you know that you begin another week hearing the gospel and sadly you walk out of here unchanged.

That has been your condition all your life until tonight. You begin the Lord's day. You begin a new week in the Lord's house and you leave here unchanged.

And you know the reality is you might not be here next Lord's day. next Lord's day you might have taken your voyage into eternity.

Next Lord's day you might be before the throne of Jesus. And if you're not prepared for eternity next Lord's day you might be in hell.

And if any of you know me by now you know you know that I don't say that lightly. You know that it's the truth and it is a possibility that you might not be here next Lord's day.

[33 : 10] But one day it will be a reality. You will enter eternity and you will spend eternity in the place that you have prepared for in this life.

My only plea to those of you who are unconverted uncommitted call it what you will. My only plea to you is make sure you do not spend an eternity in hell.

Make sure that you do not spend an eternity in hell. Because this evening Solomon has given to you the best advice. The best advice in order to prepare for eternity.

He says be alert to your opportunities. Be active in seeking the Lord. Be attentive to God's word. and be aware of the coming judgment.

Be alert, be active, be attentive, be aware. My friend, please prepare for eternity by committing your life to Jesus Christ.

[34 : 31] May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.