

Remember God

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[0 : 0 0] in life we all forget things sometimes, don't we? When our kids were little and we were at a different church, we invited some people around for lunch and so I drove home separately to my wife Michelle to pick up the bread rolls. And when I got home, I said to Michelle, look, I've got the rolls for lunch, you've got the salads, we've got the two kids. And at which point Michelle says, hang on, we've got three kids, Andrew. Where's Tim? I'd actually forgotten my son and left him back at church. At this stage, he was only six years old, so I raced back to church and he was in the hall playing soccer with some other friends and so I very casually walked in and said, okay Tim, just time to go now. So nothing had happened. But I was busted because he came over and said, dad, I thought you forgot me. To which I replied, I think I have a lolly in the car.

And to this day, he still remembers that I did not remember him. The theme of remembering seems to run loosely through our passage, which is on the next slide there. It comes up at a number of points in our passage, but it's also there implicitly, like in the idea of fearing God. You can't fear God if you forget God, can you? But the passage actually begins with the teacher's advice to rejoice in God's gifts while we can. So at point one, and on the next slide, verse seven, light is sweet and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. I think this verse is just for us here in Melbourne.

We know it's true, isn't it? I'm solar powered and when the sun is out, I can feel my batteries recharging. I don't know if you're the same. Or have you ever had that experience on a winter's morning when you're sitting in the lounge room or wherever you are and the sun's coming through the window and hitting you on the face and just warms up? Or how about yesterday morning when it was clear blue sky and the sun was out? How beautiful was it? It really is pleasant to our eyes. Now, this is just one of God's good gifts. The teacher on the next slide had said earlier that each person may eat, drink and find satisfaction in all their toil. This is the gift of God. So there's other gifts as well. And so verse eight on the next slide, we're to rejoice in them all. Do you see verse eight? However many years anyone may live, let them literally rejoice in them all and let them remember the days of darkness for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. We're to rejoice in all God's good gifts in all the years he's given us because he says many dark days will come. And that's true, isn't it? Remember Adam and Eve sinned, which meant they had to leave the garden of Eden. And now we live in a world under judgment, all because of sin. And so our world's broken where there is disease with masks and lockdowns, disasters like floods and landslides, and of course, sadly, death. And that's why the teacher says, however many years you have, because he knows our years are limited, aren't they? Death will come, which is why he ends his first point by saying everything to come is meaningless. That is, it's fleeting, short-lived. It's like soap bubbles, if you remember this picture from the very first talk. You know, they're fun for a while, but then pop, they're gone. And so we're to rejoice in God's good gifts while we can. And there is wisdom in this. Even the New Testament says that we receive, sorry, on the next slide, for everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. And so we're to enjoy God's good gifts. But what about the dark days? For there will be many, he says. What are we to do with them? How are we to handle them? Is there any wisdom for us regarding them? Well, it seems the teacher doesn't give any because he changes tack now to focus on the young. And he tells us, can I say us? Am I young? I don't know. Either way, the teacher tells the young to rejoice in their youth while they can. So point to verse nine.

You who are young, be happy or literally rejoice while you are young and let your heart give you the joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. And so then banish anxiety from your heart and cast off troubles of your body for youth and vigor are meaningless. Now I'll let you decide for yourselves if you are young or not. But if you're still feeling vigorous, then perhaps this is for you

too. But notice he says a similar thing as before, doesn't he? To be happy or literally to rejoice at this time in the days of your youth, to banish anxiety from your heart and troubles from your body, which I think means don't try and grow up too fast. Don't put the burden and anxiety of the future onto yourself in the present when you're not there yet. Why would you do that? After all, our world forces kids to grow up way too fast already, doesn't it? What's more, kids, young people and even us who are young at heart, we can be so preoccupied with the next stage of life that we miss out enjoying the things in this stage of life. There's things to enjoy in every stage of life. Instead, rejoice and verse 9, follow the ways of your heart or whatever your eyes see. Not that we're to follow sinful ways or indulge in sinful things because the teacher also adds, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. And so it still matters how we live. And so he's saying rejoice in your youth in a way that pleases God, basically. And rejoice in your youth while you can, because, end of verse 10, youth and vigour are meaningless, fleeting, soap bubbles pop and it's gone. My daughter got contacts the other day and the first thing she said to me was, Dad, you have more wrinkles than I realised. I think I liked it better without contacts.

[7 : 02] I used to be able to run a whole lot faster than I can now. I get puffed a lot more easily. Youth goes, doesn't it? And so rejoice in your youth while you can, knowing God's judgment. But what if the young do wrong? Which they all do, don't they? We did when we were young. We still do. What if they do wrong?

Is there any forgiveness or is it just God bringing them into judgment? Is there more wisdom in this? Well, again, the teacher doesn't answer, but moves on to point three, to remember God, to truly enjoy life while we can. So chapter 12, verse 1 and 2, he says, Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain.

Now, I think this is a wider group than just the young we saw before, because the days of our youth are the days before we grow so old that we find no pleasure in life anymore.

And I take it you all here still find some pleasure, don't you? There's a good cup of coffee and so on. What's more, he's talking about the time right at the end of our lives when even the sun grows dark. Just before we die, in other words. So unless we're there, then we still have some days of our youth left. And we're to remember God during these days. Why? Well, so that we can truly enjoy life.

[8 : 47] Before the end of verse 1, we find no pleasure in life. Before it's too late to really enjoy life. Because we are really old about to die.

And so in verse 3 and following, the teacher describes very old age by using a metaphor of a house for a body. And so in verse 3, the keepers of the house are the hands that feed and protect the body.

That's the house. But now they tremble. And the strong men are the legs that hold us up. But now they're stooped or bowed. And the grinders, what do you think the grinders are?

Teeth? Yep, they are, well, they're grinding ceases because they are few. Most have fallen out. And the windows grow dim, which are the eyes that can hardly see.

And then on the next slide, verse 4, the ears can hardly hear. The doors to the street are a person's ears that are closed.

[9 : 53] And even the sound of grinding or eating with their few teeth goes. And then he starts to drop the metaphor of the house and talks about how even when people rise up early with the birds to go to the toilet or whatever, even the bird's sound grows faint.

It's loss of hearing, you see. And verse 5, they're afraid to go outside in case they fall over or run into trouble.

And the almond tree blossoms. And an almond tree blossom, I don't know if you've ever seen one, but it looks like this on the next slide. So it's all white. So their hair goes white.

And then when their desire is no longer stirred, I think that's talking about the bedroom, actually.

And they're like grasshoppers that no longer hops, but drags itself along.

It's not a particularly inspiring picture, is it? Getting old ain't easy. But for most of us, we're not quite there yet, are we?

[10 : 56] We might relate to a few of those descriptions. But remember, this is very old age, right at the end of life. And we know that because at the end of verse 5 there, it's when they go to their eternal home, by which the teacher means their grave.

When the mourners go about the streets because they've died. Now that's when, verse 6, the silver cord is severed.

Death. The golden bowl is broken. The pitcher is shattered. The wheel broken at the well. And verse 7, the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the breath returns to God, who gave it. Death. Death. And so if we're not at this very old age, just about to die, then as I said before, I take it we have some days of our youth left. Even me, who my children affectionately say is ancient. And during these days, we're to remember God. Why? Well, so that we can truly enjoy life before we're no longer able to find pleasure in it.

[12:03] I've already seen that in life outside the garden, and it's hard enough to find enjoyment and satisfaction, even as God's people, but it's even harder if we forget God. And so we're to remember God to truly enjoy life.

For example, if we remember God in times of stress, then we can hand things over to him in prayer and find peace. It's like that well-known hymn on the next slide. What a friend we have in Jesus, and it says, Oh, what peace we often forfeit.

Oh, what needless pain we bear, or because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. We forget God. But if we remember, we can have peace. Or if we remember God and seek to live his way, it can save us from making mistakes and having regrets in life.

I used to think that my story of becoming a Christian was very boring, because I grew up in a Christian family, and I made a conscious decision to follow Jesus about age 13.

But there was no, you know, dramatic event. There was no inspiring turnaround, you know, from a life of drugs and alcohol or whatever, to finding Christ, you know, no kind of blazing light of glory.

[13:16] You know, those inspiring testimonies you sit in awe of. I used to wish that was mine until I met one who had one of those stories. And he said to me, I wish I had your story, because it would have saved me so much pain in life.

He'd have fewer regrets. You see, because I grew up generally trusting or remembering God, it saved me from a whole lot of pain. I didn't realize it at the time. But the point is, remembering God helps us to truly enjoy life as much as we can outside the garden.

For life is short, fleeting, meaningless. Verse 8, this is how he ends, meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher. Everything is meaningless.

It's the same way he ended the first two points, saying that life is short and fleeting. And so we're, while there are things to rejoice in and enjoyment to be found, old age and death will come.

That's why all the points, one to three on your outline, all end with, while you can. Because life is fleeting. Even as God's people.

[14:32] And life can be hard and feel futile, can't it? And so, is this all the wisdom the teacher has for us? Life is meaningless, so rejoice and remember, while you can, the end.

It's a bit depressing way for him to end, isn't it? And I wonder if that's why the editor now chimes in to defend the teacher.

Because the teacher's wisdom has been pretty brutal at times, hasn't it? And yet life outside the garden can be brutal at times, can't it? And so, the editor says, in verse 9, not only was the teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people.

He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. Now you might think, has he read the teacher's writings?

But he has. As I said before, the teacher's wisdom has been very brutal at times, but that's often how life can be outside the garden, can't it?

[15:45] Even as God's peaceful. So the teacher's words are true. And his wisdom does two things. It goads us and guides us in life. And so, verse 11, Now I'm sure every student, particularly doing the VCE coming up, can relate to much study wearies the body.

I need to go and watch some TV. But the teacher's not really saying that of study in general. He's talking about the so-called wisdom of the world.

There's always another book, like on the next slide, How to Get the Most Out of Life. That was published in 2003. Guess what? On the next slide, there was one in 1946, Getting the Most Out of Life, almost identical heading.

It just comes this endless stream of worldly wisdom that keeps being churned out. And so the warning in verse 12 is not to be wearied or consumed by it, nor to replace God's wisdom with it,

including even the teacher's wisdom.

Because the teacher's wisdom, verse 11, is given by one shepherd, who is God. And so this is God's wisdom to us.

[17:17] We can't rip it out of the Bible. But it's given to us, verse 11, like a goad to force us, to prod us, and poke us, to make us face up to the realities of this world, to have realistic expectations of this life, that life outside the garden will sometimes be really hard, even as God's people.

And so we shouldn't be surprised when it is. But it's also given not just to goad us, but to guide us through this life. Because verse 11 also calls the collected sayings like firmly embedded nails. Nails that are firmly fixed so that we can hang our life on them. Or like tent pegs, you know, stuck into the ground that secure our life to live by them.

These wise sayings. The sayings give us wisdom to guide us through life outside the garden. Like rejoicing in God's good gifts and remembering God to truly enjoy life.

Wisdom which the editor now tries to summarize. Verse 13. Now all has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments.

[18:29] For this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. And so we're to fear or revere God.

By obeying him. Because first it says this is the duty of all mankind. It's less about duty and more about our design because it literally says in the yellow there, for this is the whole of mankind, men and women.

This is our design. We were created to be in relationship with God where we trust and obey him for our good. And just like kids are supposed to trust and obey their parents for their good.

We're to fear God for this is our whole. This is how we were created and what we were created to do for our good. And second, we're to fear God because he is our judge.

It says there he will judge every hidden thing, every deed done, which would strike fear into anyone, wouldn't it?

[19:33] Because we've all done bad from time to time, haven't we? But this is where the book ends. And so even the editor hasn't quite dealt with the meaninglessness of life, has he?

So is this it? Well, thankfully, this is not where the Bible ends. For God's greater wisdom is given in Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom, including how God has redeemed us from a meaningless life and gives us more wisdom than the teacher could give.

We saw this on our second reading where God says, or Peter writes, that God has redeemed us from the empty way of life, the meaningless life with the precious blood of Christ, such that we now have eternal life and eternal is not short, is it?

It's not fleeting, meaningless. Nor will it be futile, rather it will be life to the full in a new creation, a better garden. Which is why Peter also calls us towards the top there, foreigners.

We're to live our time here as foreigners because this is not our true home. Christ has redeemed us such that our eternal home is not the grave as it was for the teacher, nor is it this world, but the world to come.

[21:06] In Christ, we are redeemed from a meaningless life, you see. And which gives us then more wisdom to live this life. And so, yes, we are to rejoice in God's good gifts while we can, but we can even rejoice in those dark days.

Why? Well, for God works through all things for our good, doesn't he? as the Bible says, we rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance in our character.

And these dark days will lead to our glory. In fact, our glory will be so great that these troubles and dark days will seem light and momentary by comparison.

So, in Christ, we can rejoice in God's good gifts and even the dark days, you see. And yes, the young are to rejoice in their youth while they can, but not knowing God's judgment, but knowing God's forgiveness in Christ, which only gives them more reason to rejoice, doesn't it?

And yes, we're to remember God to truly enjoy life, but it's not just before the grinders cease and the almond tree blossoms. We can remember God to enjoy life even in the face of death.

[22:27] for in Christ, we have the certain hope of life after death. I think I've told you before about a lady who used to attend this congregation for whom the sun had grown dark.

She was at the end of her life and yet she could still smile in the face of her very old age and pending death because she knew Christ had secured her life after death.

So much so that one time she almost died and when she woke up in hospital, she told me she was disappointed. You see, as she pondered her life beyond death, she had enjoyment even in the face of death, knowing where she'd go all because she remembered God and the hope we have in Christ.

You see, because Christ has dealt with the meaninglessness of life, which the teacher and the editor couldn't, then we have even more wisdom to help us in this life and even more reason to fear God, not in terror but in reverence and we saw that in our second reading as well where we call on God as our judge before whom we'll have to give an account for every deed and hidden thing and so there is a level of fear towards the one who will judge us but notice it says there in the very top line that he will judge us as our father for Christ has already taken our judgment and made us part of his family.

And like the young we have forgiveness and so it's not a terrified fear we'd have a reverent fear instead. It's kind of like going to court knowing for certain the judge will acquit you and let you go. [24 : 17] So you go not with a terrified fear do you but because it still is court and he still is the judge you still show reverence don't you? especially if you knew what it cost the judge to set you free and for God it cost him the blood of his only son and so we're to fear God not in terror but in reverence for this is our whole he is still our judge but he has redeemed us by his son's precious blood.

Last year the doorbell rang between lockdowns it was and it was a family we had invited over for morning tea but I had completely forgotten to tell Michelle and I actually didn't even remember myself.

What made it worse was that our cupboards were bare so we had nothing to give them for morning tea in fact all that we could give them was the cake that they brought for us. How bad is that? Everyone's still embarrassed by it. Remembering helps us live life doesn't it? So I hope you remember God's word of Ecclesiastes which gives us wisdom about the reality of life outside the garden and even wisdom to live this life outside the garden but I also hope you remember God's greater wisdom in Christ who helps us to rejoice in God's good gifts and even in dark days who helps the young rejoice in their youth knowing God's forgiveness who helps us to enjoy life even in the face of death and who helps us to fear God not in terror but in reverence for redeeming us. Let's pray. better thi because I think they