

Remember God

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[0 : 00] but in life we do often forget things. I wrote that question late at night and did forget the word you. But one other time when our kids were little and we were at a different church, we invited some people around for lunch.

I drove home separately to pick up the bread rolls, and when I got home I said to Michelle, I've got the rolls, you've got the salads, we've got the two kids, and then she said, hang on Andrew, we've got three kids.

Where's Tim? I don't know if I think he remembers this. I'd actually left my son at church. At this stage he was only six years old, so I raced back to church, and luckily there were some people there still playing soccer in the hall.

I wandered over to Tim, all very casually, oh, okay, Tim, it's time to go home as though nothing had happened. But he busted me and he said, Dad, I thought you forgot me. To which I replied, I think I've got a lolly in the car for you.

But to this day I think he still remembers how I did not remember him. Well, today the theme of remembering seems to run loosely through our passage.

[1 : 06] It comes up a few times, the word itself, but the idea is also there at other points, like fear of God means you firstly need to remember God, don't you?

But our teacher begins with some advice or wisdom to enjoy God's gifts while we can. So point one, rejoicing God's gifts, and verse seven.

Light is sweet and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. Here is a verse for us here in Melbourne, I reckon. We know how nice the sun is here, don't we?

I'm solar powered myself, so when the sun's out, I can almost literally feel my batteries recharge. Or if that's not you, have you ever had that experience on a winter's morning where the sun's streaming through your lounge room window or something onto your face and it's just warming you up?

It's so nice. Or even yesterday morning, remember the blue sky, the sun outside, and it's almost like that now. It's such a pleasant sight, isn't it? Of course, this is just one of God's good gifts.

[2 : 14] Earlier on in Ecclesiastes, the teacher said that each of them may eat, drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil. This is the gift of God. So here's another gift.

And so we are to rejoice in all God's gifts while we can. Verse eight, however many years anyone may live, let them literally rejoice in them all.

But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. We're to rejoice in God's gifts while we can, because dark days will come.

And we know that's true, don't we? Remember Adam and Eve sinned, which meant they had to leave the garden. And it also meant our world was broken. It's under judgment because of sin. And so we live in a world where there is disease and masks and lockdowns, disasters like floods and landslides, and of course, death. That's why the teacher says, however many years you have, because he knows our years are limited, aren't they?

[3 : 24] 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, like soap bubbles, if you remember this picture from the first talk.

Like soap bubbles, they only last a short time, don't they? And then, pop, they're gone. So we're to rejoice in God's good gifts while we can. And there is wisdom in this.

Even the New Testament says, everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. And so we're to thank God for his gifts and rejoice in them.

But what about the dark days that will come? What are we to do with them? Is there any wisdom for us here about them?

Well, not from the teacher, it seems, because he seems to have changed focus to the young. And he tells us, can I say us? I'm still young, right?

[4 : 30] Anyway, he tells the young to rejoice in their youth while they can. So point two, verse nine. You who are young, be happy or literally rejoice while you are young.

And let your heart give you 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 the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

Now, I'll let you decide if you are young or not, but if you're still feeling vigorous, then this is for you, perhaps. But notice he says a similar thing, doesn't he? To be happy or literally to rejoice while they can.

To banish anxiety from their hearts and troubles from their 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.

Each day has enough trouble of its own, someone once famously said. After all, our world forces kids to grow up way too fast already, doesn't it?

[5 : 43] And what's more, kids and young people and us who are young at heart can all become so preoccupied with the next stage of life, you know, getting to the kids to this stage of life and then to this stage of life or getting us to this stage of life and so on.

We can be so preoccupied with getting to the next stage that we miss out on the enjoyment that's in this stage. And so instead, rejoice and verse 9, follow the ways of your heart or whatever your eyes see.

Not that we're to follow sinful ways and indulge in sinful things because do you notice what the teacher also says right in the middle? But know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment.

And so it still matters how we live. In other words, rejoice in your youth in a way that pleases God. And while you can, because at the end of verse 10, you see, youth and vigour are meaningless, fleeting, short-lived, soap bubbles, pop, and it's gone.

One of my kids got contacts the other day and the first thing they said to me was, Dad, you have more wrinkles than I realised. I think I like them better without contacts.

[7 : 01] I used to be able to run a whole lot faster than I can now without getting puffed. Youth goes, doesn't it? So rejoice in your youth while you can, knowing God's judgment, he says.

But what if the young do wrong, which all young do, we did when we were young and we still do. Is there only judgment for us?

Is there not forgiveness? Or is God's judgment it? Is there any more wisdom we can have here?

Well, again, the teacher doesn't seem to answer, but moves on to the next group.

To remember God to truly enjoy life while we can. So chapter 12, verse 1, Here the teacher says we're to remember God in the days of our youth, which I think is a wider group than just the young before.

Because the days of our youth are the days before we grow so old that we find, at the end of verse 1, no pleasure in life at all. But I take it everyone in this room still enjoys a good cup of coffee or, you know, the sun and the blue sky, and so I don't think we're all there yet, are we?

[8 : 29] In other words, he's talking about right at the end of our lives, when even the sun grows dark just before we die. And so unless we're there, then we still have some days of our youth left.

And we're to remember God during those days. Why? Well, so that we can truly enjoy them. Before, end of verse 1, we find no pleasure in them because we can't.

We're too old. We're about to die. And the picture, the teacher then goes on to give a picture of this very extreme old age with a metaphor.

He uses a picture of a house to describe the body. And so in verse 3, the keepers of the house are the hands that keep our bodies, you know, feed and protect us.

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 they are? Teeth, yeah.

[9 : 27] They cease because they are few. They've fallen out. And the windows grow dim, which are the eyes that can hardly see. And verse 4, the ears can hardly hear.

The doors to the streets are the person's ears that are closed, such that even the sound of grinding or eating with their few teeth goes. As does the sound of birds singing.

The teacher then drops the metaphor of the house and just says, you know, when people get up early to go to the toilet or whatever, the birds are singing at that time, but they can't hear them. It grows faint.

They've lost their hearing. And verse 5, they're afraid to go outside in case of falling, in case they run into trouble in the streets.

And the blossom tree, sorry, the almond tree blossoms, which looks like this in case you've never seen one. So, you know, what happens to our hair? It goes white, doesn't it?

[10:31] And then when desire is no longer stirred, which I think is talking about the bedroom, and they are like grasshoppers that no longer hop, 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.

We might relate to a few of those descriptions, but this describes the very old right at the end of their life. Right before the end of verse 5, they go to their eternal home, which the teacher means the grave, because that's when the mourners go about the streets.

Or verse 6, that's when the silver cord is severed, the golden bowl broken, the pitcher shattered, the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and our breath returns to God who gave it.

And so again, if we're not at this very old age, just about to die, then I take it we have some days of our youth left. And in those days, we are to remember God so we can truly enjoy those days before we find no pleasure in them anymore.

[11:51] You see, we've already seen that life outside the garden is hard enough to find enjoyment and satisfaction in. But it's even harder as God's people when we forget God.

And so remember God to truly enjoy life. For example, remember God in times of stress so that you might hand over things in prayer to him and find peace.

There's an old hymn that has this verse, Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

I know it sounds trite, but it works. Or if we remember God and seek to live his way, it can save us from making mistakes and having regrets.

I used to think that my story of becoming a Christian was boring because I grew up in a Christian family. And I was about 13, I think it was, when I decided to consciously follow Jesus for myself.

[12:54] But there was no bright light. There's no amazing turnaround from a life on the streets to finding Jesus, that sort of thing.

You know those inspiring stories that you go, Oh, wow, that's amazing. I wish mine was like that until I met someone who had one of those stories and he said to me, I actually wish I had your story.

It would have saved me so much pain in my life. You see, because I grew up generally trusting or remembering God, it saved me from a whole lot of pain and regret.

I just didn't realize it at the time. It helped me to enjoy, truly enjoy life. And so the point is remembering God helps us to do that, to truly enjoy life outside the garden as much as we can.

And we're to remember God to truly enjoy life while we can, for life is short, fleeting, meaningless, verse 8. Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher.

[13:57] Everything is meaningless. And the teacher ends this point like the previous two, saying it's meaningless. For while there are things to rejoice in and enjoyment to be found, death will come.

Life is short, fleeting. Soap bubbles pop, it's gone. And that's why on your outlines, points one to three, all end with the words, while you can.

Because there'll be a time when we can't. And life can also, because it is fleeting, can feel futile. We can't always get to do the things that we want to do. And it can be hard even as God's people, can't it?

But this is where the teacher ends. Meaningless. It's not a particularly inspiring place to end, is it?

In fact, as Teresa was reading out the passage, and it got to that phrase for all of you people to say, thanks be to God. You know, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I just listened. This is the word of the Lord.

[15:00] Thanks be to God. It's not particularly inspiring, is it? And I wonder if that's partly why the editor chimes in at this point, right at the end of the book, to defend the teacher's wisdom, and to summarise it for us as fearing or revering God.

So point four, verse nine. Not only was the teacher wise, but also he 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. You'd be forgiven for thinking that the editor hasn't actually read what the teacher wrote, 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? Even as God's people. And so the teacher's words are true.

And they do give us wisdom, which goads us and guides us in life. So verse 11. The words of the wise are like goads. They're collected sayings like firmly embedded nails given by one shepherd.

[16:13] Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them, of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now I'm sure every student listening, especially studying for the VCE coming up, can relate to much study wearies the body.

And so dad, I need to go and watch TV for a while. But the teacher is really talking about worldly wisdom out there. There's always another book to tell us how to live life, like this book, Getting the Most Out of Life, that was published in 2003.

But there was another one published a lot longer, a lot earlier in 1946, Getting the Most Out of Life, almost the exact same title. You see, there's this endless stream of worldly wisdom that keeps coming out.

And we're not to be consumed by it and wearied by it, nor replace God's wisdom with it, including the teacher's wisdom. Because the teacher's wisdom, at the end of verse 11, is given by one shepherd, who is God.

And it's given by God, verse 11, to goad us, to prod us, and force us to face up to the realities of this world, to have realistic expectations of life outside the garden.

[17:31] That life outside the garden will sometimes be really hard, even as God's people. So we shouldn't be surprised when it is. But it's given by God also to guide us through this life.

Verse 11 says that the collected sayings are like firmly embedded nails, nails put into a wall that we can hang our life on, so to speak. Or like tent pegs that are into the ground that we can secure our life by.

The sayings, in other words, are wisdom to guide us through life outside the garden. Like rejoicing in God's good gifts and remembering God to truly enjoy life.

That's good wisdom. Wisdom which the editor summarizes for us in verse 13. The end of the book. Now all has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter.

Fear God and keep his commandments. 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.

[18:39] Fear God or revere God by obeying him. Why? Well, first, because this is the duty of all mankind, although literally it says, for this is the whole of mankind.

In other words, we find our purpose and sense of meaning in fearing God and obeying him, because we were created for relationship with him. We were created to trust and obey him for our good.

And just like kids are supposed to trust and obey their parents for their good. We are to fear God, for this is our whole, what we were created to do. And second, we are to fear God because he is our judge.

He will judge every kind of deed and every hidden thought, whether good or bad. Which, you know, if you look back on your life, would strike fear into your heart, wouldn't it?

Because we've all done bad from time to time, haven't we? But this is where the book ends. Even the editor hasn't really dealt with the meaningless problem yet, has he?

[19:45] And so, is this it? You know, fear God because this is your whole and he's going to judge you. That's it. Well, thankfully, this is not where the Bible ends, for God's greater wisdom is given in Christ, in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom, including how he has redeemed us from a meaningless life and gives us, therefore, more wisdom to live this life.

As we saw in our second reading, Christ redeemed us, or sorry, God redeemed us from an empty way of life with the blood of his precious son.

Such that we now have eternal life and eternal is not short, is it? Eternal's quite long, right? It says it's not fleeting, it's not meaningless. And nor is it futile, rather it will be life to the full in a new creation, a better garden.

Which is why Peter calls us foreigners, third line down from the top there of the screen. Because this world is not our true home. Christ has redeemed us such that our eternal home is not the grave like it was for the teacher, nor is it this world, it's the one to come.

In Christ, we are redeemed from a meaningless life. And that gives us more wisdom to live this life. So yes, we are to rejoice in God's good gifts while we can, but we can even rejoice in dark days.

[21 : 20] Why? Because God works in all things, even dark days for our good. As the Bible says, we rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance.

And these dark days will lead to our glory that will far outweigh all of those dark days. And so in Christ, we can rejoice in God's good gifts, as the teacher said, but we have more.

We can even rejoice in dark days. And yes, the young are to rejoice in their youth while they can, but not knowing God's judgment, but knowing God's forgiveness, which only gives them more reason to rejoice.

Knowing that if they believe in Jesus, God will forgive them time and time again. And yes, we are to remember God is to truly enjoy life, but it's not just before the grinders cease and their almond tree blossoms.

We can remember God to enjoy life even in the face of death. For in Christ, we have certain hope of life after death, don't we? I think I've told you before about a lady for whom the sun had grown dark, in the words of Ecclesiastes, she was at the end of her life.

[22 : 37] And she could, though still, smile in the face of her old age and pending death because she knew Christ had secured her life after death.

And 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 such that she was disappointed when it didn't come.

All because she remembered God and had hope in Christ. You see, because Christ has dealt with the meaninglessness of life, its fleeting and futile nature, then we have even more wisdom than the teacher.

Even more wisdom to help us live this life and even more reason to fear God. Not in terror, but in reverence. Again, as we saw in our second reading.

God is still our judge before whom we'll have to give an account for every deed and every hidden thing. And so there is a level of fear towards the one who will judge us. But notice on the top line there what God is called.

[23 : 49] Father. For Christ has already taken our judgment and made us family. Hasn't he? And so like the young we have forgiveness. And so it need not be a terrified fear, but a reverent fear.

It's kind of like going to court knowing for certain the judge will acquit you and let you go. But when you go to court, even though you know that, you still have a level of reverence, don't you?

Still the judge. And even more so reverence if you knew what it cost the judge to set you free. In God's case, the blood of his only son.

And so we're to fear God not in terror but with reverence for this is our whole. We're still going to have to give an account to him as our judge. But he has redeemed us by his son's precious blood. God. Last year, our doorbell rang between lockdowns and it was a family we had invited over for morning tea. I'd forgotten though to tell Michelle they were coming.

[24 : 58] In fact, I didn't even remember it myself. It was very awkward. What made it worse was that our cupboards were bare and so all we had to offer them for morning tea was the cake they brought for us.

Thank you. Here you go. I'm still embarrassed by it actually. Remembering helps us in life doesn't it? And so I hope you remember God's word of Ecclesiastes which gives us wisdom about the reality of life outside the garden but also wisdom to help us live through it.

And I also hope you remember God's greater wisdom in Christ who helps us rejoice in God's good gifts and even the 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. Our gracious Father we do thank you for even this book of Ecclesiastes which at times is confusing and full on and yet Father it is your wisdom to us to goad us into seeing the realities of this world to guide us through them and ultimately to point us to the Lord Jesus in whom you give us even greater wisdom and hope.

[26 : 33] And so Father we pray that in light of this word to us that you would help us to keep clinging to Christ who redeemed us by his blood for a meaningful and full life.

And we pray these things in his name. Amen.