

"Remember Your Creator"

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. It's good to see you all this morning. Would you turn with me again to the book of Ecclesiastes? Today, we're nearing the end of the book, not quite the end. We'll do one more sermon after today, but we're near the end.

We're looking at chapter 11, verse 7, and we'll read through chapter 12, verse 7. So, chapter 11, verse 7, chapter 12, verse 7.

So, let me pray for us, and then I'll read our text. Father, as we come to your Word, we ask that you would give us ears to hear and hearts ready to receive what it is your Spirit is saying to us through these words.

Lord, lift our eyes to you by your Spirit. Help us to see Christ in His glory, that in beholding His glory, we might be changed more and more into His image as you intend us to be.

We pray this in His mighty name. Amen. All right, Ecclesiastes 11, 7 through 12, 7. It says this, [2 : 45] So, act one, scene three of Shakespeare's play Hamlet.

And at the climax of his speech to his son, Laertes, the character Polonius says this.

Do you remember what he says? This above all, this above all, to thine own self be true. Here's the sum of wisdom that Polonius wants to impart to his son.

Before his son leaves for the university, this father says, This above all, to thine own self be true.

Now, as late moderns broaching the second quarter of the 21st century, this sort of life wisdom is the kind we've grown very accustomed to, right?

We love the sound of this. To thine own self be true. Who would argue with that today? And isn't that the key to real flourishing, right?

[4 : 07] Who wouldn't tell their son or their daughter leaving for college the same thing? Be true to yourself. Be authentic. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Now, the irony in Shakespeare's play is that these words come from Polonius.

Now, if you've read Hamlet, you know that Polonius is not the paragon of wisdom and a life well lived, but he's a self-serving, meddling, and downright unpleasant bore.

You see, for Shakespeare, to thine own self be true, is actually the pompous, hypocritical, and empty advice of a man who ends up spying on his own children and who dies hiding behind a curtain in order to eavesdrop on a private conversation.

Not exactly the sort of character from whom you want to take overarching life wisdom, right? Now, consider how different that is.

[5 : 22] Consider how different that is to what we've been considering this semester in the book of Ecclesiastes. Unlike Polonius, the speaker of Ecclesiastes actually tried to live life to the fullest under the sun.

He actually pursued pleasure and wealth and wisdom and set his mind to build a lasting legacy. He was true to himself in the deepest degree.

He lived the life most of us are telling ourselves we ought to be living. Be authentic. Live your truth.

To thine own self be true. And for the most part, Ecclesiastes achieved that goal.

But what did he find? He found that it was fleeting and it was empty. The vanity of vanities.

And so, here, as Ecclesiastes nears the end of his exploration of life under the sun, as he now begins to sum up the message he wants to pass on to the next generation, the hard-earned wisdom he's won, the key to real flourishing, his central message becomes this.

[6 : 48] Remember your creator in the days of your youth. It's not a message of self-centeredness or self-actualization or self-expression, but God-centeredness.

That's the key. Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Now, with our time together, I want to meditate on why and how.

Why should we remember our creator in the days of our youth? And how can we do that? First, let's meditate on why. Why should we remember our creator in the days of our youth?

And I think we can point to at least three reasons that Ecclesiastes has been putting up before us. And the first is this. Remembering our creator in the days of our youth is the only pathway to lasting joy in our youth.

And this message runs throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. As Ecclesiastes has lived for wealth and for pleasure and for fame, he found that it was all empty. And then when he turned to base his life on earthly wisdom and earthly philosophy, he found that that too couldn't provide the meaning and stability that his soul was looking for.

[8 : 09] In fact, even the best human wisdom, which was certainly better than foolishness, of course, but even the best of human wisdom was at the end of the day, fleeting. It was vanity.

What does this mean? It means that lasting joy can only be found not by living life exclusively for what's under the sun. Instead, we must seek the one who created all these things.

Only in relationship with our creator will life have lasting meaning. Too often we think, I'll care about God when I'm older.

When I'm young, I want to live. But Ecclesiastes comes to us and says, listen, life apart from your creator isn't living.

It's chasing the wind. It's chasing the wind. Trust me. I've tried it. When Beth and I first moved to New Haven, we would make regular trips to Ikea to get things for our apartment.

[9 : 30] Some of you may be moved here this summer and have been to Ikea far more than you care to admit. Right? And if you've ever purchased furniture at Ikea, you know that when you bring it home, it doesn't look anything like it looks like on the showroom floor.

It comes in a flat brown cardboard box. And when you open the box, you don't find inside the box a nice piece of furniture all ready to go.

You basically find a bunch of pieces and parts. It doesn't look anything like a sofa or a bookshelf.

You have to put it all together. But thankfully, as you shake out all the hardware and the particle board, there's a set of instructions with that weird nondescript guy there, whatever his name is, the Ikea guy.

Now, does it make much sense to look at that pile of parts that you know you really want to become your sofa and say, who needs instructions?

When I'm young, I want to live. And just plunge headlong into the project. How many hours will go by before you realize that you're just chasing the wind?

[10 : 47] And come on, in our town, some of you are very mechanically adept and very skilled. But come on, a lot of us are not that mechanically skilled, right? That's not what brought us to New Haven.

Wouldn't your time have been better spent remembering that this piece of furniture was designed by someone who in grace has showed you how it all goes together?

And friends, if that's true of a piece of furniture, how much more true of a human life? You have a designer who wants to show you how it all goes together, who wants to show you how life is meant to be lived because He made it for you as a gift.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. That's the path to joy. But let's press this point a little deeper.

What if, in the days of your youth, you meet not just with success or prosperity and all the pieces fitting together, but with failure or adversity?

[12 : 02] What about when trials come? It's easy to think that trials and hardships are actually barriers to believing in God. That adversity makes it harder to believe in God.

And the truth is we never want to downplay genuine questions or genuine doubts, right?

Ecclesiastes is a book that welcomes questions and doubts.

And given the fact that Ecclesiastes is in the Bible, that must mean that God welcomes your genuine questions and doubts too. He's put a whole book in there so that you can know, you can bring your doubts and questions to Him.

But when it comes to trials and hardships, Scripture doesn't come and answer all of our questions, but it does offer hope. If you believe that life is ultimately a random series of accidents, time and matter and energy and chance sort of just bouncing off of one another, then suffering really is meaningless.

And you have very few resources to face it. And probably the best you can do is avoid it as long as you can. But if there is a Creator whose good and wise purposes are being worked out even in the midst of trials, then even if you don't and can't know all the reasons, you can know that suffering is not purposeless or meaningless.

[13:49] You see, remembering your Creator in the days of your youth, it won't just save you a lot of heartache, it will also bring you a lot of comfort in the midst of heartache too.

But this is not just advice for our younger years. Why should we remember our Creator in the days of our youth? It doesn't just bring joy in our younger years, but second, remembering our Creator in the days of our youth is what brings peace in old age.

Look again at verse 1 of chapter 12. Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come. And that word evil there can mean something like before the trying and troubling days come.

Before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them. And then, in verses 2 through 6, Ecclesiastes presents this extended metaphor of aging. Look over those metaphors. Don't you see there? Our eyesight grows dim. Our hands tremble. Our hearing goes away.

[15:07] Our hair turns gray. If we have any, our strength wanes. Scan through these verses for yourself.

Imagine how many of these images of a household are pictures of human aging. Ecclesiastes is reminding us that a day is coming when the vigor of our youth will pass and old age will set in.

And we will find ourselves beset with many limitations. And friend, as you begin to age, what will keep you from becoming increasingly bitter or cynical or afraid?

as all the things that you used to be able to do and all the honor and admiration you used to receive from others begins to be lost.

Ecclesiastes says, start practicing now what will be your only hope of peace then. Start practicing now, young person.

[16:26] Start practicing now what it means to be a dependent creature before your almighty creator. Because the days are swiftly coming when you will be dependent whether you like it or not.

And if you've learned to lean on your creator in the days of your youth, then old age will be just one more step on the path of learning to rest in God's goodness and sovereignty.

If in the days of your youth you've already come to grips with the fact that your life is not your own but a gift from God that you don't belong to yourself but you belong to your creator who made you, then old age won't steal your dignity or your hope or your peace because you've already learned that your dignity and your hope don't come from your independence or your productive capacities. peace. They come from being a creature made in God's image bearing the image of a holy, good, loving, and excellent creator.

And so you can face old age with peace because you've already learned where your true dignity comes from.

[18:07] And old age far from stealing it away makes it shine all the more. But what if you've already come to the brink of old age and maybe you're starting to realize that you haven't lived your younger years remembering your creator?

What if all of this is just now coming into view for you? Is it too late to begin? Not at all.

Ecclesiastes aims his words at the young but there's good reason to think that he speaks as an old man. He came to his realization late in life and so can you.

You don't need to face your latter years apart from the truth that there is a God who created all things and who created us human beings in his own image to love and know and serve him.

It is not too late to come to the deep realization that your life is not a meaningless blip in a silent cosmos but your life is the gift of a loving and good God who calls you to himself to know him and to love him and to worship him with as many days as you have left and to turn to him in hope that as a creature made in his image you were created to live forever in his presence.

[19:41] The end of our passage says the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

And this brings us to the third reason why we must remember our creator in the days of our youth. It's not just about joy in our younger years and peace in our older years. It's also about hope when our years come to an end. You see verses 2 through 6 aren't just an allegory of old age.

They are at the same time deeply apocalyptic imagery of God's final judgment and reckoning of creation.

When the sun and the moon and the stars are darkened and all the earth is silenced before the creator when he comes to judge the earth in perfect justice see in those images and hear in those images resonance of what the prophets spoke of.

[20 : 54] When in deeply symbolic language they talked about the creator coming back to his creation and his glory being so weighty that even the stars fall from the sky and we stand before the one who is awesome in holiness.

Friend, imagine facing that day having lived your whole life for wealth or pleasure or fame. Imagine facing that day having lived your whole life for wisdom or knowledge.

Imagine facing that day having lived your whole life even for morality and good works but not having lived them for God your creator. Imagine facing that day when the creator finally calls creation to account and realizing that you've lived your whole life using God's good gifts but having given no thought to him the giver but instead having functionally rejected him in your heart.

What will you and I bring to God on that day when he calls our lives to account? Remember your creator in the days of your youth before the sun and moon and stars give way and before the picture is shattered of the fountain before the creator returns to reclaim his creation in perfect judgment.

As C.S. Lewis said in that memorable part of mere Christianity he said that won't be the day for choosing sides it will be the day when it is revealed whose side you are truly on and on that day it will be no use saying that you choose to bow before God when in fact you are unable to stand.

[22 : 59] But how can a creature stand before the creator? Because after all we humans are not just creatures are we?

Beautiful in his image yes but we are not just creatures we are sinners. In light of that how should we remember our creator?

we have seen why we need to do it but now we need to consider how do we remember our creator? And here the Bible gives a somewhat surprising answer because you know the natural human response seems to be well if we are going to remember our creator then we have to lift our thoughts up to God we have to somehow seek God above we have to climb up out of our mundane existence somehow somehow get to God and many religions will offer you a path for achieving some sort of transcendent connection some kind of path that you can climb but Christianity is very different Christianity says you can't actually climb your way to God not through moral efforts not through spiritual practices you and I are creatures finite limited we can't traverse the distance between our finite existence and God's infinitely holy presence but more than that we're sinners we're flawed and fallen there's no way we can get from us to God the only hope we have of remembering our creator and being in relationship with our creator is if the creator comes down to us only if the creator remembers us will we have any hope of remembering him and that friends is exactly what the earliest

Christians believed and proclaimed had happened in the person of Jesus Christ the creator had come to us listen to what the apostle Paul wrote about Jesus during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses of Jesus ministry Paul writes this when there were plenty of people around who lived with Jesus and knew Jesus and walked with him and could testify to him Paul writes this he says Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God and the rightful owner of all creation because by him all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things were created through him and for him and he's before all things and in him all things hold together what did the eyewitnesses of Jesus's ministry see they saw him heal the sick and they saw him restore sight to the blind and they saw him cause the weak to walk again and they saw him calm storms and cast out demons and they saw him even raise the dead to life who could do such a thing who could exercise such complete control over the material of the created order both seen and unseen friends it was not without evidence that the earliest

Christians proclaimed Jesus to be one with God the very creator of all things the one through whom and by whom all things exist but look again at that evidence and what do you see you see the broken made whole and you see chaos restored to order you see frightened fishermen brought peace in the midst of a storm you see death pushed back and life restored you see these mighty deeds that Jesus did were not just evidence that Jesus was the creator although certainly that but that he was also the redeemer that he had come to heal the broken creation he'd come to reconcile

sinner to himself and to do supremely what only

[28 : 22] God could do forgive sins and how would the creator forgive the sins of his creatures this way on the cross Jesus underwent that divine judgment that sinners deserved so that we sinners could receive the perfect righteousness that Jesus deserved and so this really is the only way to remember your creator rightly and fully we must look upon the face of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for in Jesus Christ our creator lived among us and we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth and in Jesus Christ crucified and risen our sins can be forgiven only in his work can we face death and judgment with hope because he died and faced that judgment for all who turn from sin and trust in him you see friends the good news of the gospel is that when we had rejected and forgotten our creator our creator remembered us and he came and he lived among us accomplishing everything necessary so that we might repent and be reconciled to him and so now remember your creator and your redeemer

Jesus Christ the Lord remember him now live for him now why would you chase after the wind when the one who commands the wind and the waves calls you to follow himself with as many years as you have left whether you have many earthly years ahead of you or whether you have more earthly years behind you the reality is there is an eternity to come so remember your creator don't live another day without making him the center of your thoughts and your affections and your desires and your goals live for him with all your strength and when your strength then begins to wane and when your years in this earthly pilgrimage come to an end then may we hear well done good and faithful servant enter into the kingdom of your father let's pray holy spirit we pray that you would come and help us to do what this passage is saying we must do to turn our hearts to our creator lord there's so many things that crowd our minds and our hearts so many fears so many distractions so many worries Jesus come and be the prince of peace in our midst open our eyes to see you as the only trustworthy one that we might follow you and live our days knowing that we've been forgiven and that we might know the joy and the peace of following you in our young age and in our old age pray this in Jesus name amen