

Rejoice and Remember

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[0 : 00] Hey guys, it's good to worship with you. I do apologize for the cancellation for the prayer. I think it's been like nine years running almost and we haven't canceled prayer, so it's an unusual season we're in, but we will resume the following week.

If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to get you a copy and you can have that as your own to take home with you. Thanks guys.

And if you have your Bibles already, please turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 11. We're gonna go through all of 11 all the way to chapter 12, verse 8. This is the second to last sermon in the book of Ecclesiastes.

We've made our way through the entire book and the author is starting to wrap up his main points here. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sean.

I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church and it is my great joy and privilege to preach God's word to you this morning. Let me pray now for the reading and preaching of God's word.

[1 : 16] Father, we ask that you rejoice our hearts, delight our hearts, with revelation of who you are.

What a gracious, generous, merciful God you are. So that our hearts well up with praise and thanksgiving to you this morning.

And I ask also that you'll help us to remember that you are our creator, that we are your creatures. That a deep humility may be instilled within us so that it affects everything we do in life and how we carry out our days.

Address us now from your holy word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are able, please stand and join us for the reading of God's word.

We stand to honor God as we read his word to us. Ecclesiastes 11, 1 to 12, 8. Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

[2 : 55] 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. 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 a 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. 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. 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 the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

[4 : 08] Remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. 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.

In the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent and the grinders seize because they are a few and those who look through the windows are dimmed. And the doors on 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.

They are afraid also of what is high and terrors are in the way. The almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails because man is going to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets.

Before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain or 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.

[5 : 21] A vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity. This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. In a 1931 interview, Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw is quoted as saying this, Youth is the most beautiful thing in the world and what a pity that it has to be wasted on children.

That's most likely the origin of the popular saying, Youth is wasted on the young. It gets at the idea that youth lack the wisdom and experience to make the most of their health and energy. But by the time they gain that wisdom and experience, they become old and they no longer has that youthful energy. energy. Our church is young.

It has been less than 10 years since we planted this church. I'm a young pastor. I'm just shy of 40. I know that seems old to some of you, but according to 1 Timothy 5, it's in the Bible, right?

This is according to 1 Timothy 5, the cutoff line between older widows and younger widows is 60. So I still have 20 years of youngness left.

[6 : 44] And by that definition, only a handful of people in our church are actually old. So most of us don't get to wear that I'm old and wise badge yet. And Ecclesiastes 11.1-12.8, which specifically addresses youth multiple times, offers us timely and relevant advice.

And the main point of the passage is this. Knowing that life is but a breath, we should rejoice in our youth and remember our creator. First, I'm going to talk about accepting risk, 11.1-6, and then we'll talk about rejoicing, the main command of that section, rejoice in your youth.

And then later in chapter 12, remember your creator. 11.1-6 is a reminder that we cannot know or control the future. Over and over again, we are told what we do not know.

So look at the passage with me, verse 2. For you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

Again, verse 5. And you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones.

And again, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. Verse 6. For you do not know which will prosper, this or that. So 11.1-6 is all about the uncertainty of life and risk that characterize that uncertain life, the life of creatures.

[8 : 06] Because we are not the creator who is sovereign and in control over all things, but the creatures, we live in that uncertainty and we must accept that risk.

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, recognizing that God is God and that we are not God. So then the truly wise recognize the limitations of their wisdom.

And that wisdom is not meant to make us masters of our fate, to be able to control the outcomes of our lives, but rather wisdom is meant to make us servants who are submitted to the sovereign purposes of God.

That's why the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord and humility. And humbly acknowledging that reality means we accept and account for risk in all the choices that we make.

Verse 1 says, cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Bread here doesn't refer to a literal loaf of bread but to our income or our source of livelihood, similar to how we use the expression breadwinner to refer to people who are winning the livelihood, the main income of the household.

[9 : 15] And so this here, probably we can think of bread as money or our resources and the preacher counsels us to cast that upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

Those two main words, cast and waters occur together in Isaiah 18, verse 2, which is a helpful parallel for understanding this. It speaks of nations that cast ambassadors by the sea in vessels of papyrus on the waters.

I think this is meant to help us understand this first. I think this is a reference to maritime trade.

When you cast your resources out upon the waters in hopes that it will yield return after many days. Maritime trade in those days especially took a long time and it required patience. It was not for people who desired instant gratification. A patient investor who is willing to make an investment for the future and wait for a long time, that's the counsel that the preacher is giving here.

It's similar to what famous investor Warren Buffett said one time. He says, someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.

[10:32] Verse 2 continues that theme. Give a portion to 7 or even to 8 for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. Here's another example of graded numerical parallelism.

You guys remember that from a few weeks ago? Yeah, there you go. The point isn't that you should invest in exactly 7 ventures or exactly 8.

The point is that you should diversify your investments. Don't put all your eggs in one basket for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

Don't put all your money into real estate because a housing bubble collapse might ruin all of your investments. Don't put all your money in a single company stock. There are countless cautionary tales of people who have lost all their money that way.

As recently as 2022, the cryptocurrency exchange FTX collapsed due to embezzlement. Their customers lost 8 billion in assets and their investors lost 1.7 billion.

[11:29] And who could have seen that coming? At the height of FTX, the CEO, Sam Bankman-Fried's net worth was above 15 billion. He was compared to finance titans like J.P. Morgan and Warren Buffett.

He was sitting on conference panels along with people like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. But now he's in jail. Who could have seen that coming?

No one can look five or ten years into the future and say this stock will do well and that this company, this industry will boom. Diversification is one of the first important principles of investing that you learn.

By spreading out your investments across different assets, you reduce your chance of having all of it wiped out on a single bad day. This interpretation of verses 1-2 as referring to financial investment and trade is confirmed by the fact that it was just preceded by 10-19.

Bread is made for laughter and wine and gladden's life and money answers everything. Given the effectiveness of money and the usefulness of money in this world, it's teaching us now to be a good steward of that.

[12:40] This interpretation is also confirmed by the following verses, verses 3-6, which talk about financial investment this time with the metaphor of sowing seeds. Verse 3 says, 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.

Again, the point here is we can't control these things. We can't control when the rain falls. The rain falls when the clouds are full, and there's not much we can do to change that.

Even to this day, the best we can do is forecast the weather, and even that is hit or miss because the rain falls when it's ready, when the clouds are full and we have no control over it.

When rain doesn't fall, we have drought, and when rain falls too much, we have flooding and we can't control it. Similarly, we can't control whether a tree falls to the south or to the north.

That depends on the natural lean of the tree or the direction of the wind that brought the tree down, and we can't control it. And unless you have heavy modern equipment, you also can't move a large tree when it falls to the ground.

[13:52] It's going to sit there, whether it fell to the north or to the south, and we have no control over it. These are things, and these are examples of things that are outside of our control in life, and if we preoccupy ourselves too much with things that we cannot control, it makes us indecisive and inactive.

Verse 4 says this, He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. If we're spending all day observing the direction of the wind, trying to find the very best time to scatter the seeds, then you will always be watching the wind.

Likewise, if you spend your day watching the clouds to make sure there is no hint of rain or trying to figure out the very best time, the perfect time for you to start reaping the harvest, then you're going to be looking on for too long, and the harvest will be gone.

We need to learn, the preacher is telling us, we need to learn to relinquish control over that which never had control in the first place. We need to be okay with acting at times that are not what we deem to be the best or the perfect time sometimes, because the opportune moment might not come.

Verse 5 continues this theme of ignorance. 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.

[15:29] The spirit, the breath of life, comes from God and animates the conceived baby in the womb, but we can't tell which way the spirit comes. We do not know the work of God who makes everything.

Just as we do not know from where that spirit comes to the baby in the womb, we do not know exactly which direction the wind will blow or when the rain will fall, and it is our humble lot as creatures to acknowledge that and live in accordance with that ignorance.

is there something that you've always wanted to try but you haven't acted on it because you're waiting for the perfect time?

That perfect time may never come, and no amount of scheming or planning on your part will give you control or guarantee you success. So why not act on it?

Why not try it? In fact, why not try several things because you don't know which one will succeed. Don't let idolatry of success prevent you from enjoying the life you currently have, but also don't let fear of failure paralyze you from making bold decisions and taking risks.

[16:51] It says in 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. You don't know which seed will perform better, one that you sowed in the morning or the one that you sowed in the evening, and so do both.

That's the preacher's counsel. Acknowledge your ignorance, diversify your investments as a function and outworking of your humility before God. Verses 1 to 6 are all getting to the same idea from different angles.

There's one more application I want to bring out from this. You might think this is a bit of a stretch, but I think there is a helpful application for this for evangelism in our lives. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the master entrusts his wealth, his property to three different servants. Two of them invest their money wisely and they make some dividends and they are commended by the master, but one of them, instead of doing anything with the money, decides that he's just going to bury the money in the ground so that he could have it safe for when the master returns.

And this is his excuse when the master brings him to account. Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground.

[18:11] Here, you have what is yours. The master is understandably upset with him because this lazy servant didn't do anything with the money that he asked him to manage.

At the very least, he could have just put it in the bank and it would have accrued some interest, but instead he decided to bury it in the ground to keep it safe because he feared the master, because he had an erroneous perception of the master as a hard man and a stingy man.

He feared something might happen to the money, so he hid it and didn't do anything with it. He didn't take any risks. But the point of the parable is that God, our master, is not a hard master. He is a gracious and kind master and he has given us his grace. He has entrusted to us the good news of Jesus Christ so that we might sow it widely and liberally and give it out and share it with others.

He wants his people to take gospel risks and to sow our gospel seeds widely. Knowing that we cannot control the outcome of our evangelism, God knows that better than we do.

[19:20] He's the one who gives the growth. Some of us never share the gospel with our unbelieving friends and our neighbors because we're always waiting for that perfect opportunity.

We're observing the winds and watching the clouds, waiting for that perfect opportunity to come. Waiting for that moment when no one will be offended.

Waiting for that moment when you will not be embarrassed. Waiting for that moment when you have all the theological answers. Brothers and sisters, that day might never come.

And all the opportunities might pass you by while you're observing the wind and watching the clouds. So listen to the exhortation of 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.

This is a not so well hidden secret that the best evangelists among us do not usually have a higher percentage of success rate in terms of people converting than the rest of us.

[20 : 37] You guys know that? They don't have a very high success rate on their own. The only difference between them and some of us is that they sow a lot more.

They spread a lot more seeds. D.L. Moody was one such prolific evangelist in the 19th century. He was actually converted to Christianity right here in Boston and there's a little forgotten plaque that nobody ever visits that commemorates where he was converted.

I'll be happy to take you guys there one day if you want to see it. And after one of the evangelistic meetings of D.L. Moody there was a woman that approached him and confronted him saying, Mr. Moody I don't like the way you do evangelism and he replied ma'am how do you do it?

Probably generally wanting to learn and see what she has to say and then she responded I don't. And then D.L. Moody responded I like my way of doing evangelism better than your way of not doing it.

Brothers and sisters stop observing the wind and regarding the clouds let us sow in the morning let us sow in the evening because we don't know which one will bear fruit. Moving ahead verses 7 to 10 teach us to rejoice in our youth.

[21 : 58] Note the repetition of the word rejoice in verse 8 verse 9 so if a person lives many years let him rejoice in them all. Rejoice oh young man in your youth and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.

The verb rejoice and the noun form of that joy are key words that we have seen repeatedly throughout Ecclesiastes and especially in those carpe diem or the seize the day passages that are key for understanding this book that we've seen so far.

And those passages have taught us to enjoy life. to relish the simple pleasures of life because these pleasures of life enjoyed within their proper boundaries given to us by God are meant to comfort us in the midst of the painful realities of life in this broken and fallen world.

They are gifts from God in order to punctuate the pains in our lives with joy like flowers or ice cream that we bring over to an ailing friend at the hospital.

Comfort in the midst of the pain in the midst of the suffering. So light is sweet it says verse 7 and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

[23 : 15] I don't think I'm alone in saying that I enjoy the sun. You guys all enjoy the sun. We enjoyed some unexpected summer days here in New England fall this past week.

I think Friday November 1st we hit a high of 79 degrees which surpassed the 1974 record of 77 degrees. Like sweetness that delights our taste buds.

The warmth of light on our skin delights our senses does it not? And we don't have to enjoy sunny days only.

There are days to enjoy in the winter too. Some of us enjoy the chill of winter when we step outside and feel that cool refreshing sensation from head to toe.

Who knows what I'm talking about? You guys enjoy that? Yeah? I know Josh enjoys walks out in the cold winter days. Yeah, I'm sure he's not alone. And that walk in the fresh fallen snow and that squeak in the snow that you hear walk on ground and nobody else has stepped on.

[24 : 31] How beautiful is that? Remember, under the sun is a phrase that the preacher of Achilles Yastis has used repeatedly many times to describe our sinful world and our life in this broken and sinful world.

But if you're seeing the sun, then you're at least alive. And he's saying enjoy life. Enjoy the gifts that come to you wherever you find them.

It says in verse 8, 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. Remember is another key word and it will occur again in chapter 12 and reminds us here of the two commands, main commands of Ecclesiastes.

Rejoice or enjoy life and remember. Remember the reality of death and reality of our creatureliness. The joys of life are not meant to function like opioids that block the pain signals between the body and the brain.

We have an opioid crisis in the country. 130 people die per day because of opioid overdose. People get addicted to these painkillers, these opioids, because it gives them this sense of well-being and euphoria and it helps them to escape to this alternate reality and to run away from the pains of life.

[26 : 04] But that's not the counsel of Ecclesiastes. It doesn't tell us to seek to escape the realities of life. No, it faces us front and center with the reality of life and reality of death and the reality of suffering and evil in this world and then tells us in the midst of that to enjoy life.

to have the humility and the fear of God to have the freedom of insignificance to be able to enjoy the simple gifts and the pleasures of life.

It's only, in fact, it's only when we are staring death in the face that we learn humility and the freedom of insignificance so that we are released from the shackles of illusions of godness and the shackles of profit and performance in life so that we can actually enjoy life.

Ecclesiastes has taught us to number our days and to remember our impending death over and over again but have you really reckoned with your own mortality? 19th century English writer William Hazlitt wrote an essay that captures what it's like to be young versus what it's like to be old and this is what he has to say about death and old age to the young.

He says that to the young words like death and old age are words without meaning. They are merely a dream of fiction and life is a delightful journey with no end in sight to prospect after prospect.

[27 : 43] To be young he writes is to be as one of the immortals. I think John Calvin will concur with this assessment because he writes in the Institutes of Christian Religion that human life is like smoke or shadow that human life is like smoke or shadow is not only obvious to the learned but even ordinary folk have no proverb more commonplace than this.

But there is almost nothing that we regard more negligently or remember less for we undertake all things as if we were establishing immortality for ourselves on earth.

If some corpse is being buried or we walk among graves because the likeness of death then meets our eyes we I confess philosophize brilliantly concerning the vanity of this life.

Yet even this we do not do consistently for often all these things affect us not one bit. But when it happens our philosophy is for the moment it vanishes as soon as we turn our backs and leaves not a trace of remembrance behind it.

In the end like applause in the theater for some pleasing spectacle it evaporates. Forgetful not only of death but also of mortality itself as if no inkling of it had ever reached us we return to our thoughtless assurance of earthly immortality.

[29 : 03] The thought of perpetuity nonetheless remains fixed in our minds. I only have two weeks left this Sunday and next Sunday in Ecclesiastes to really get through to you about this.

Don't be reminded of death during Sunday worship only to let it affect your life not one bit. If we can gain this wisdom now while we're still young then we can truly enjoy life and rejoice in our youth as gifts from God.

Verse 9 continues this thought rejoice oh 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 the side of your eyes but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Walking in the ways of your heart and the side of your eyes are different ways to speak of enjoying life. Sometimes in Ecclesiastes the side of the eyes is a symbol for wisdom for example Ecclesiastes 2.14 and 6.9 but in other places eye represents the seed of human desire.

So for example Ecclesiastes 2.10 says whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them or Ecclesiastes 4.8 his eyes are never satisfied with riches. Earlier verse 7 spoke of how it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun so similarly eyes here represents the seed of desire.

[30 : 37] Heart is similar it's representing the human capacity to rejoice and to enjoy the things in life. So Ecclesiastes 5.20 says if a man enjoys the gifts of God in life God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

So the preacher is telling us in verse 9 to enjoy life to rejoice in the simple pleasures that God gives. Let them cheer your heart and let them delight your eyes and satisfy your eyes.

And of course this doesn't mean that we should indulge in sinful pleasures which is why there's an important caveat here but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

We will be judged for our indulgence in sinful pleasures as well as for our prideful refusal to enjoy the gifts of God in life. Verse 10 says remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

This verse brings into relief this fascinating nuance and layers of depth in this book of Ecclesiastes. Interestingly enough the word vexation here is the same word that was used in Ecclesiastes 1.18

where it says in much wisdom is much vexation and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow and in Ecclesiastes 7.3 it says sorrow is better than laughter for by sadness of faith the heart is made glad and there that word translated sorrow is the same Hebrew word translated vexation here.

[32 : 13] So on the one hand wisdom brings vexation and we're supposed to grow in wisdom by becoming acquainted with sorrows and vexation and death by remembering our finitude by remembering that the days of darkness in life will be many in this fallen world but on the other hand we are supposed to remove vexation from our hearts and put away pain from our bodies for youth and the dawn of life are vanity because life is short and youth is but a breath so these two truths are held in tension all throughout the book of Ecclesiastes we are to be wise and acquainted with sorrow and to number our days but we also are not supposed to become gloomy or sullen or depressed always preoccupied with the brokenness of the world instead we are to rejoice in the gifts of life rejoice in our youth and remember our creator and our creatureliness are you rejoicing in your youth now this doesn't mean that if you're old you can't enjoy life it said in verse 8 so if a person lives many years let him rejoice in them all so yes even when you're old there are days you should enjoy gifts from God that you should enjoy however there are particular joys that you get to enjoy while you're still in your youth enjoy the health and strength of your body while you still can go out for a run go play some basketball go throw some frisbee around while your joints can still handle all the jumping and cutting across the field enjoy the beauty of youth the tight skin that is not yet wrinkled and sagging and thank God for it if you're young and married have kids while you still can and enjoy watching them grow up because soon you won't be able to have them anymore in Deuteronomy 28 45-47

Moses says this to the Israelites all these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart because of the abundance of all things what led the Israelites into their unfaithfulness to God and into their disobedience to the Lord's commands what caused that what was at the root of that a lack of joyfulness and gladness of heart because of the abundance of all things because joy and gladness and the abundance of all things that God has given us this joy and gratitude they fortify our hearts from the temptation to think that we'd be better off apart from God that we can find things that are better for us than what God is offering that we can find more joys in the forbidden things than in the things that God has graciously given that's how all broken relationships with God begin how did the serpent tempt Eve in Genesis 3 did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden in reality

God said to Adam in Genesis 2 16 and 17 you may surely eat of every tree in the garden but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die Satan twists that generous gift from God and while tempting Eve to eat of the one tree that God has forgiven he asks her did God actually say you cannot eat of any tree in the garden he's warping Adam and Eve's perception of God oh he is withholding something good from you he's stingy he's not generous he's not good he doesn't really love you if you find yourself full of grumbling toward God rather than gratitude toward God if you feel that God is withholding good things from you then you're in greater danger than you realize greater spiritual danger than you realize this is why it's so important that we rejoice in our youth and enjoy the simple pleasures of life as gifts from our generous God

Pastor Corey Whitmer was a study assistant to his uncle John Stott John Stott if you don't know about him was a very influential 20th century Christian leader pastor and theologian and in a book Whitmer recounts an interaction that he had with Stott that was particularly impactful for him he said every morning at 11 a.m. sharp I would bring him a cup of coffee I would find him hunched over some letter or manuscript at his desk consumed with the work before him putting his unparalleled powers of concentration to whatever task was at hand not wanting to disturb him I would quietly set the cup and saucer adjacent to his right hand and often times he would mumble a barely audible word of thanks I'm not worthy initially I thought this comment was amusing but after a few months I began to find it slightly bothersome how could someone pronounce himself unworthy of an acidic cup of instant coffee one morning

I was feeling a little cheeky and when Uncle John mumbled his usual expression I'm not worthy I quipped back oh sure you are Uncle John stopped and I saw the powerful magnetic look of his

concentration ease from the papers before him he slowly raised his gaze and with a look of immense seriousness yet boyish playfulness he responded you haven't got your theology of grace right I laughed I grinned awkwardly and then said it's only a cup of coffee Uncle John and as I turned around and headed back into the kitchen I heard him mutter it's just the thin end of the wedge what does it mean by that a wedge is a tool made of wood and iron it tapers off into a very thin edge right and that thin edge is what you put inside a crevice a small gap and then once that thin edge is in you can hammer that wedge in and that the larger bigger part goes in along with that thin edge that's already been wedged in and it breaks apart logs and even rocks what he's saying is if I don't appreciate the small things

[39 : 45] God has given me and I'm not grateful and thankful to God for them that's the thin end of the wedge and soon larger doubts larger grumbling and larger problems in your perception of God will be driven in so I want to challenge you with the simple pleasures of life maybe sit sit with it this week say I'm not worthy thank you God thank you God thank you God that I get to hug my kids thank you God that you have given me food to eat thank you God that I can walk around on two limbs I'm not worthy knowing that life is but a breath we should rejoice in our youth rejoicing in our youth is particularly important because death is quick on our heels and we won't be able to rejoice in our youth anymore when we're older that brings me to my final point chapter 12 verses 1 to 8 remember your creator remembering our creator means remembering that God is the creator and that we are creatures as I've been saying that God is infinite and that we are finite it says in chapter 12 verse 1 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 if we get to live until we are old then there will come days when pleasure will be hard to come by there are three clauses in this paragraph that all begin with the word before verse 1 before the evil days come verse 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened verse 6 before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken because of this parallel structure I think all of the vivid images of this section are meant to be a picture of aging and approaching death and it's warning us before that time comes learn to enjoy life and remember your creator the first image is in verse 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain it's a moving image we always count don't we on the light the sun and the moon and the stars we always expect it to be there when we need them but imagine one day when that light fails how tragic that would be what a gaping hole that would leave in your daily experience that's what old age is like things that you used to count are not there anymore your mind is not as sharp as it used to be your eyes are dimmer than they used to be you can't move around like you used to everything seems darker and picture this the clouds return after the rain normally we expect clouds to part after rain to give way to a clear sunny day but it says here the clouds return after the rain even after the rain there are more rain clouds looming above think about it this way when kids trip and fall they bounce right back right

I mean our kids are falling all over the place all the time right like oh he okay you fell okay that's fine we just move on right usually I mean at worst there's a little scrape and a band-aid takes care of it right their bodies are strong and young and light they heal quickly they bounce right back but then have you heard of elderly people falling when you hear that an elderly person's fallen that's not a little trip it could be fatal because their bodies are not light and young and spry anymore they're heavy they're weak they can't break their fall they can't recover after they get hurt after the rain more clouds when you're young time heals when you're old time kills if we get to live to old age there will be a day when we lie down on the bed and then we won't be able to get up anymore and then in verses 3 to 5 the preacher compares aging to the sad decline of a formerly vibrant city in the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent and the grinders seize because they are few and those who look through the windows are dimmed servants who are supposed to be the keepers of the house tremble strong men who should be standing erect in guarding the city are bent over grinders women who work at the mill to grind food the mill they are not there's not enough for them to continue to labor so they seize because they are few those who look through the windows are dimmed looking through a window is an image it's a picture of hope and expectation but the hope has dimmed expectations are dimmed for those who look through the window the doors on 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 they are afraid also what is high and terrors are in the way the almond tree blossoms the grasshoppers drag itself along and desire

fails the streets of the city are deserted and the doors on the street for that reason are shut with the sound of the grinding low the city is so eerily quiet that even the sound of the fluttering of a bird startles you and wakes you up the daughters of song who used to sing songs of joy are brought low there's also fear of what is high and terrors are in the way usually enemy forces invade from high places down so this is speaking of fear of disaster looming disaster not only are these the city that desolate they're they're gripped with fear and that's the meaning of the almond tree blossoms almond tree is a symbol of coming judgment in Jeremiah 1 9-12 the grasshopper known for hopping on its hind legs drags itself along and desire fails remember that this image of a desolate city is meant to be a picture of old age and approaching death so there's a long history of interpretation that says that trembling keepers of the house represent our shriveled hands that tremble with old age and that the strong men who are bent over represent our bent backs in old age and that the grinder is seizing because they are a few represent our inability to grind food down with our teeth in old age because they are so few and that the dimming of those who look through the windows represent dimming of our eyesight in old age that the doors of the street being shut and the sound of the grinding being low represent the doors of our ears becoming hard of hearing in old age the almond tree blossom represent our hairs turning white and hoary the grasshopper that drags itself along represent our legs that are weak it's not spry anymore and then you shuffle and waddle slowly desire failing might represent the impotency of old age it's a sad forlorn picture the images of verse 6 get the same idea before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain or the wheel broken at the cistern the snapping silver cord and the broken golden bowl may be a picture of a golden bowl of a lampstand that is hung up on a silver cord and one day the cord that was hanging by a thread snaps and the bowl falls and shatters or when you bring a pitcher to draw water with at the well and you bring a wagon with it let's say and then the pitcher breaks and the wagon wheel breaks and you can no longer take water draw water and take it back home that's what our aging bodies are like one day they wear out and break and you can't do anymore what you used to be able to do life ebbs away from us we know that this section is about old age and death because verse 5 and verse 7 tell us explicitly verse 5 because man is going to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets verse 7 says and the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it this is one of the most important things that we can know about ourselves and remember as we live that we are creatures of dust and that God is the creator

French philosopher Jacques Ellul he comments on this verse in this way in his book on Ecclesiastes remember your creator only here does the preacher call God by this name and he does so by design you may consider yourself autonomous but you are incapable of knowing what should be done incapable of knowing what wisdom is you are a creature all the evils and I and I and I choose my words carefully all the evils of the world stem from our taking ourselves to be the creator if we remember our creator then we remember that we are creatures then we know that it is our law to serve him not the other way around and that means we are accountable to him not other way around and that means he is the center of the universe we are not we are just satellites orbiting around him if we remember our creator and that we are merely creatures then we know that we are not going to live forever that our bodies will return to dust and our spirits will return to God who gave but we so often fail to live this way don't we we live like masters of our own fate we live like we can control life we live like we are the creators like little gods running around and we expect [50 : 59] God to do our bidding we expect God to conform to our preferences that's what we call sin and the wages of sin is death so how can we have any hope of that eternal home that the preacher speaks of how can we have any hope that we will survive that judgment that he says is coming when we have to give an account to God for all that we do in John 14 1-6 Jesus said let not your hearts be troubled believe in God believe also in me in my father's house are many rooms if it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also and you know the way to where

I'm going he's talking about that eternal home that the preacher speaks of but then his disciple Thomas objects Lord we don't know where you're going how can we know the way and then Jesus answers I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me we have all styled ourselves to be these creators these little gods living for our own will for ourselves instead of worshipping God we have sought worship for ourselves and we have worshipped creatures rather

than worshipping the creator we have all sinned in this way and the amazing thing is God instead of doing what we would do in this place which is to shove us back down and put us in our place he decides that he'll send his only son to earth to take the form of a creature the creator takes the form of a creature the son of God becomes son of man he lives the life of our weakness he lives in our life this world that is broken and fallen he experiences the futility and the vanity of life and then he goes to the cross so that he could die for our sins for our arrogant presumption of God's place so that we might be forgiven of our sins so that we might be able really to be exalted with God and reign with him forever what kind of mercy is that and so we are to live now knowing that our bodies our outer selves are wasting away as we read earlier in the assurance of pardon 2nd Corinthians 4 and 5 but our inner cells are being renewed day by day a day longer in our decaying body is a day closer to our eternal home let's pray father really teach us to know that we're but a breath that our life is but a breath help us not to forget this in the busyness of life and in the distractions of the world help us to know remember you are creator and enable us as we do that to rejoice in our youth to enjoy the life you've given for your glory and for our good in Jesus name we pray amen for the mas on our way to space toede us or