

Remember Your Creator in the Days of Your Youth

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[0 : 0 0] What a cheery note to finish on, eh? David Soushi, ladies and gentlemen. Let me encourage you to grab a Bible, if you have it there, and turn to those two chapters.

So Ecclesiastes chapter 11, and we'll be dipping into the first part of chapter 12 today as well. For those of you joining us, we've been in this little series in Ecclesiastes over the last little while.

And it's been teaching us so much about life, and it's really been sobering us, and it's been helping us to slow down and to take stock and to ask some big questions about this thing called life.

And we'll see that same vein kind of continue on this morning. So why don't we pray, and let's ask God to help us by his spirit this morning as we come to his living words. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this morning.

Lord, we've been thinking about the privilege it is to meet together, that we have the freedom to do that, that we remember those who gave their lives that we could have this freedom today. And we remember those around the world, our brothers and sisters, for whom it is a difficult thing to meet.

[1 : 0 6] And so, Lord, we would want to take advantage of this glorious opportunity that we have to make full use of it. And so, Lord, we pray that as we turn to your word, we pray that the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 119, that you would open our eyes so that we may contemplate and see wonderful things from your law.

And that is our prayer, Father, knowing that you will answer us, because we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Well, when I was growing up, any time we used to travel anywhere in the car, my dad always insisted on picking the music for the car journey.

So, car journeys in the Shanks household for us growing up, my childhood was kind of brought to you by artists like Spandu Ballet and Simply Red and Seal, and that was just the S's.

Some looks of nods out there, you know what I'm talking about. Others just blank expressions. YouTube is a wonderful thing. Okay, go and check them out. And another artist that used to make an appearance now and again was Scotland's probably best-known singer, one of the best-known singers for this guy, Rod Stewart.

And we've been thinking about our unchanging God this morning, and if you need proof of the fact that we live in a world that changes, okay, check out his hairstyle. There you go. Rod Stewart was in a band that we used to listen to called The Faces.

[2 : 3 0] Okay? And one of their best-selling songs was called Ooh La La, and it went like this. This was the chorus. I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger.

And remember this one? Okay? I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger. This was one of their best-selling songs. And I imagine it was because people clicked.

And this is what we do with song lyrics, isn't it? We click with what people are saying. We understand the experiences that they're talking about. So he's singing about an experience that we can all tap into. You know how we kind of go through life, and life teaches us things, doesn't it?

And we experience as human beings. And we learn. And we grow. And how often do we look back on life, and we say to ourselves, if only I had known what I know now, if only I had known it then.

Because if I had known it then, then maybe I would have done things a little bit differently in life. And you see people, don't you, in your life, you see them in danger of making the same mistakes, things that you learned, things that you did when you were young.

[3 : 42] And you think to yourself, you think, please don't make that mistake. Please don't make that mistake. Let me teach you what life has taught me. And this is kind of what's going on in these verses today.

You got them there. This is the teacher. This is Solomon, who we've seen him over these chapters, has come to terms with the vanity of life.

That's kind of a better translation of the word meaningless that we read there. Vanity. Right? It's fleeting. You try and grasp it, and you can't grasp it. But when you think you've got it sussed, it kind of eludes you.

And I think the key thing is it's got a lack of permanence to it. And this week's been brought to us by things with a lack of permanence to them. What's this week been about?

It's been about fireworks, hasn't it? Right? We watched them on Tuesday night with the girls. What happens? Boom, it goes up. Boom, it looks great. And boom, it's gone. Boom, it looks great.

[4 : 42] It looks great. And boom, it's gone. Boom. And you just watch the whole city. Just fireworks, fireworks, fireworks, fireworks. You had some wonderful-looking fireworks, and you had some measly-looking fireworks.

But do you know what? They were here one minute. They looked great, and boom, they were gone. This is what he's saying. Life is vanity. And he's feeling the pain of it.

And so many of us have been saying that what this guy is saying in this book about life, the pain that he's feeling, the questions that he's asking, so many of us have been commenting to one another that this is kind of life as we know it.

That's why we call the series Life as We Know It. You see, the big certainty in this book is death. And the last kind of two chapters of this book, Solomon's been facing up to the reality of life, to death.

And he wants to pass on the wisdom that life has taught him. Like, in the last two chapters, are him telling us how we should live in light of the vanity of life.

[5 : 45] And the key verse for us today, the one that holds it together, is verse 1 of chapter 12. You've got it there. Remember one thing from today? Please remember more than one thing, but this is the key verse this morning.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. So he's got the youth in mind.

You want to track this thread all the way through verse 9. What does he say? You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.

Again, verse 10. So then banish anxiety from your heart, and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are vanity. So he's got the youth in his mind here.

I think we can, youth is an age of life thing. I think we can assume that's the people he's got in mind. But I think we can also probably extend its parameters to also include a kind of stage of life thing, a mindset.

[6 : 47] Because we all know in our lives, don't we? We all know older people who we describe as being immature for their years. And we would know younger people who we would describe as being mature for their years.

So this is not just about the number of hours and minutes that you happen to have lived on earth. This is about a mindset. What is it about the young? Surely it's that they never stop to take stock of life.

They never pause to ask life's big questions. People who are running around from thing to thing to thing to thing. They're set on climbing the career ladder. They're set on progressing in life.

They want and strive to achieve great things, and they want to make their life count. And they never stop to consider the vanity of life. And I turned on the TV the other night, and on came Channel 5.

And there was a documentary on Channel 5 about the Titanic. And do you know what the documentary was called? I could see it in the kind of subtitles there to reflect on Channel 5.

[7 : 47] It was called The Unsinkable Ship. That's what they nicknamed it, wasn't it? The Unsinkable Ship. And by all accounts, you read people from around the time, they totally believed that was true.

Totally believed that was true. In fact, I went on Google after this and checked it out. I got really into the Titanic this week. Did you know that they reckoned that there should have been 48 lifeboats on board the Titanic to cater for the amount of people?

Do you know how many lifeboats there were? 20. 20 boats. Because people believed this was the unsinkable ship. 20 boats.

And they thought to themselves, because this is the unsinkable ship, how about we cut our costs, and how about we free up room on the deck, and we'll go for less than half of the amount of boats that we think we should need. Because we won't be needing them.

Solomon's got it in his sights. It's the people who are trying to live titanic kind of lives. It's never going to happen to me. Never going to happen to me.

[8 : 50] And he says to the youth, he says, remember your creator in the days of your youth. Right? Now, the logical thing to ask is, what does it mean to remember your creator in the days of your youth?

Well, let's just take two things from this passage this morning, from these verses. And I thoroughly believe in prayer this week. This is what the Lord would want to teach us as a congregation. Here's the first thing remembering our creator will mean.

It will mean thinking about what has been given to us. So Solomon wants us to think about everything that we have. Right? Just think about that in your mind. Everything that we have. So our jobs, our health, our skills, our friends and family, our possessions, our money, you name it, and keep on going.

He wants us to think about the entire sum of our lives. And he wants us to acknowledge, to come to the place where we put our hands up and say, yes, he's right. End of verse five. That God makes everything.

Now, what is he saying? It's all his. It's all his. It's wisdom, recognizing that it's not our stuff. It's not our stuff. It's all his.

[10 : 05] And in light of that, Solomon is pleading with us to use what we have for God's glory and according to his purposes. Let me just show you how this works. Come with me, verse one. If you've got an ESV, it reads, cast your bread upon the waters.

I think captured well by the NIV, if you've got an NIV, it says, ship your grain across the sea and after many days you will receive a return. Because what's going on here, what he's picturing is a king. Putting his finest exports of his country on a boat, getting a crew together and sending them off to a faraway country to trade and to make a profit.

And the image is he's sitting there looking for his crew to come back with good news about what they have made. So he's sitting there waiting for it to come back. And again, do you see it?

Similarly, verse two, give a portion to seven or to eight. So I think he's talking there about giving generously while it's in our power to do it. Giving generously to those who need it.

Because you don't know what tomorrow's going to bring. And you don't know whether the power you've got today to do something is not going to be there tomorrow. Right? And just tap into the imagery that he's using here.

[11 : 14] Do you see it? You can't stop it raining. That's what he's saying. You can't stop it raining. Like, boy, I wish that was true living in this country. Right? That was Monday, wasn't it? What did they say? Rain of biblical proportions.

It's a phrase we use here. You can't stop it raining. And you can't stop a tree falling. There's an inevitability by what he's saying here. You can't stop it. But, verse four, don't go making excuses that you're waiting for the perfect conditions before you will invest what God has given you for his glory.

Because you have no idea when they will come. And you've not even got an idea what they are. It seems to me what he's saying. Now, remember what he's saying. In light of this book, he's learned that the fear of the Lord, right, is the best way to live one's life.

What he's saying is trust the Lord with what he's giving you and get going. And he reflects on two things about the way God works. You see it there. Firstly, he reflects on the way God works.

Firstly, that it's mysterious. Look what he says. He talks about the wind. Have you no idea where the wind's coming and going? No idea how it works. And I remember in my lawyer days, I used to work for energy companies.

[12 : 24] What we used to do is we used to negotiate for them deals with the landowner so that they could put their wind turbines on the land, right? That's what we used to do. And these big companies would pour money and time and resources into working out how the wind would come and go.

So that's where they could put their wind turbines. And they ended up, when they got it, they would put 20 or 30 on a big piece of land to maximize profit, but be to hedge their bets. They had a clue how the wind worked, how it would blow.

It's not the way he's saying, isn't it? You don't know how God is at work. If you think about it, if we see Jesus saying the exact same thing to Nicodemus in John chapter three, don't we? Nicodemus trying to figure it out from a human point of view.

And Jesus says, you cannot see the work of God, how God works through his Holy Spirit. There's a mystery to how God works, but there's also, it's mysterious, but it's marvelous.

See what he says? He takes us to the womb and he says, what an amazing thing that is. What an incredible thing that is. And no one really understands how that works.

[13 : 34] But it's an amazing thing. I remember with both of our girls being blown away by the 12-week scan, the 20-week scan, little feet, little hands thinking, man, you can see the heart. How does this work? What an incredible thing.

I don't understand it. But you know what? I know that child every single day of his or her life is in the hands of this God. God's work is marvelous and it's mysterious.

That's what he's saying. And in the light of that, we need to enjoy what he's given us and use it for his glory. And all the while, and I think this is a really sobering part of this passage, all the while knowing that we will have to give an account for how we have used the things that God has given us in this life.

And I think we need to feel the weight of what he's saying there, the seriousness of it when he says it in verse 9. For all these things, God will bring us into judgment.

And otherwise, he will have the last say. He will ask us, what have you done? What have you done? I mean, sitting there thinking, I don't quite get that. Friends, let me just say this week to me, last two weeks have proved that we do get this.

[14 : 38] Right? I don't know if you saw it on the news this week that the Glasgow, or a few weeks ago, the Glasgow Lord Provost stepped down. Anyone see that in the news? She stepped down. What did she do? She spent £8,000 on outfits, including, and I wrote it down, 23 pairs of shoes.

Right? If you're in the private sector, nobody's caring how you're spending the money. Buy the Jimmy Choo back catalogue for all we care. Right? But why did we care? Because it was our money she was spending.

And she should be held to account for how she has used our stuff. And so why do we think, friends, that it would work any differently to the God who made us and created us in his image gloriously, but he's given us stuff to use for his glory?

It's a very sobering thought what he says here, isn't it? And we get that. We get that. He's telling us to make the most of the opportunities that we have today.

Don't sit in it. Make the most of the opportunities that you have today, trusting our marvellous and mysterious God, because you do not know if tomorrow we'll be there. So the questions that this passage would ask us at this point, it would ask all of us, right, as a church community, are we sowing?

[15 : 53] I think in particular, are we sowing the word? Are we telling people about Jesus? Are we making the most of every single opportunity afforded to us? Are we taking risks for the kingdom and for the renown of the Lord Jesus in this city?

Or are we playing it safe? And are we playing around with the stuff that God has given us? You know, remember that Rod Stewart song back at the start, right? Remember what we saw this guy Solomon do at chapter 2?

Remember that? I mean, your boy had stuff, right? He had stuff. He had power. He had possessions.

He had opportunities aplenty. And I wonder if this is, I just wonder, right, is this him looking back on what he did and what he had and thinking to himself, man, what was I doing? What was I doing?

And he's saying, use what you have for the glory of the Lord. Think about what's been given to you. Second point, think about what will be taken from you. Let me go back on there. What will be taken from you?

[16 : 56] Why does he want people to get this fear of the Lord thing while they are young? That's the question, I guess, of this passage, isn't it? Why do you want them to get it? Well, notice the key word, and this is one of the key words in this passage. It's the words at the end of verse 1, and it's the word before.

You see that word before? And he kind of throws it in there a couple of times in that chapter as well. Before. So there's something we need to get before something happens.

He wants us to understand something before disaster happens. That's what he's saying because he lays out for us two realities that will happen to each one of us, and he wants us to learn the lesson before these things happen, before it is too late.

And the first one of these is that our health will fade. That's what he's saying, right? Our health will fade. Verses 3 and 4, he's kind of getting us to picture our lives like a house, and he's saying, what are you going to do when that house starts to fall apart?

We're facing it with our car at the minute. Our car, everything's failing. Everything's failing. It's the kind of same thing he's doing with our house. He gets us to picture our lives like a house, and his metaphor is all over the place here, right?

[18 : 06] The keepers of the house. You see that language? Person's arms. This is what many people think he's doing. The grinders going are a person's teeth. Strong men stooping. We get that one, right?

That's backs hunching. Seeing dimly through windows. That's eyes that are beginning to fail. And later on, he talks about a grasshopper that's no longer able to spring. We get what he's saying here.

It's a scary thing when this happens to us. You get his point. You know, it was Canadian artist Douglas Copeland, who, I think it's a genius, he once said of human beings, isn't it funny that we spend our youth trying to get money?

And then when we're older, isn't it funny that we spend our money trying to get youth? Fascinating observation, isn't it? This guy's an atheist, I believe. Even a believer. It says, isn't that fascinating how we work as human beings?

Bang on the money. And this is a scary thing, isn't it? Growing old. We're no longer able to do the things that we're able to do. It's a scary place to be. This is what he's picturing here.

[19 : 11] When our health will fade. Secondly, when disaster will strike. Verse 4. Again, just feel the metaphors, the imagery. When there are no more songs. No one's singing in the street. Verse 5.

Where mourners are in the streets. And the gold bowl is broken. The jar is shattered. And the wheel is broken. So he's picturing those times in life where the storms hit. Where they hit.

And we are left bare. And we're left to face up with the reality of the fleetingness of our existence. Now we all know those times in our life. And we all know, all will know those times in our life.

And what he's saying here, friends, is that if you've built your identity as a human being. On A, how you look. Or B, what you're able to do in life. See, even those things are gone.

And you, the rug is taken well out from underneath your feet. And you are faced. You are flooded by reality. Friends, he's telling us that you will be in for the fright of your life.

[20 : 13] And I've got a friend who's the football chaplain down at Hearts. And I've heard him talk about how he's always asking the players, Have you ever thought about what you're going to do when you retire?

Right? Every single one of them, I'm sure he's said, would say, I don't want to think about that now. I don't want to think about that now. I don't think about that then. And he says, the only time that they will talk about it is when they get injured.

And all of a sudden, this career that they have built on how they're able to perform, when that's almost before them is gone, then that's when they start to ask questions about what is going to happen to them.

Do you remember that tragic story on our news last year when the 28-year-old Argentinian footballer gets on a plane in France with his biggest career move ahead of him?

Right? The world is at his feet. He is all over the news. He gets on a plane in France to go to Cardiff to sign for his team, new team. And he crashes an English Channel. And the sobering reality of life is before us all.

[21 : 27] And this is what he is saying. Face up to the realities of life. Learn that your life is but a breath.

And learn to live it in relation to the God who made you, submitting to him. And invest what you have now before it is too late. Let me just tell you from a pastoral point of view, friends, that you can tell somebody who's learned this and somebody who hasn't.

You can tell it. Those who have taken to life. Sorry, those who have taken to heart what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7. Right? You know that one there that Jesus is speaking to the listening crowd and he's getting them to think about what they are basing their life upon as he's just delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

And he finishes it by talking about two men, doesn't he? Who's the fool in that parable? It's the guy who builds his house in the sand. Right?

Unstable ground. And who is the wise man? The one who builds his house upon the rock. But the thing is, nobody wants a house that's on the rock.

[22 : 38] Right? We've all been on Airbnb and booked a holiday. Say, no, I want the house that's on the sand because I want the view of the sea. I want to hear the seagulls. I want the dolphins to be able to come up and deliver me breakfast in the morning.

I don't want to be up here on the rock. But friends, what happened is that the storms came and the house on the sand didn't stand.

The context, of course, in that parable, what is Jesus talking about? What is the rock? It is his words. In other words, it's him. It is him that we need to base our lives upon.

Who he is. What he did for us on the cross. The son of God who loved me and who gave himself for me. Giving me his righteousness that I may come to know this holy God and call him Father.

And this is what he's saying. This is true wisdom. To understand that your life is but a breath and to come and bow and say, Lord Jesus, I need you. Now, I don't often do this, okay? But let me just lift up a member of this congregation in here who I had a conversation with about six months ago.

[23 : 48] Evening service. And I really encourage you, if you don't come to the evening service, you can have these kind of conversations at the evening service that you might not be able to have at the morning service. And I asked Archie. Archie's a...

He had his 90th birthday recently. Archie never tells us how old he is. But he had his 90th birthday. He's somewhere over there. And I said to him, Archie, how can I be praying for you this week? Right?

And he's not short of physical pains. But he said to me, you can pray for my devotional life. In other words, you can pray for my walk with Jesus. Because what is it that he's learned through life?

And he will have seen some stuff in his life. What does he learn? He's learned that when all this fades and all this goes, Jesus remains. And that is where he wants to be investing his time.

And that will go in my ministry memoirs when I'm 80. About true wisdom in life. Solomon says, there's a guy who's learned it.

[24 : 48] Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Learn it. That's what he's saying. Learn it. Let's think about what's been given to us.

And let's think about what will be taken from us. And do you see how the two are intrinsically linked? Intrinsically linked. The understanding that our lives are in Christ's hands.

Right? He holds it. He holds us. He'll never let us go. Understanding that our identity is built on him. The solid and unchanging rock.

It frees us up to take gospel risks for the glory of God. And to take and make the most of every single opportunity that we had afforded in this life.

Now just as we close, you're thinking, what does this look like for me? Well, let me just close by telling you a little story, okay? Of something that happened to me a couple of weeks ago. I took the girls to the, two little girls, took them to the Commonwealth pool.

[25 : 48] Okay? It was a couple of weeks ago, if you remember that. It was tipping it down. And we took our seat, waiting for our turn to go in. And there's a mum opposite us with two children.

Two kind of similar age to our girls. And she's wearing a hoodie. And on the hoodie, it says Acts 29. Okay? Now, Acts 29 is a church planting movement around the world. Planting churches all over the world.

Acts 29. And I just said to her across the table, I was like, I love your hoodie. There's a code for, I'm a Christian too. Right? We all know the game we're playing. I'm a Christian too. And she says, thank you so much.

Do you know what? We go to Nidri Community Church. And I wrote down her phrase. She wrote this. And Jesus has saved me from all the naughty stuff. So she said. Right?

And her face was beaming. I mean, beaming. Which was awesome to see. Just awesome to see. But then she, this was the best bit. She turned around and she said, she pointed me to a lady over here.

[26 : 44] She said, this is my friend. Right? This is my friend. And I'm pretty sure she said, my friend's not a believer. But I've brought her along today because we're trying to do this whole life of disciple making thing.

Right? Awesome. And outside, outside I said, oh, that's great. But inside I'm going, go on sister. Go on sister. Isn't that not awesome? That's what, but do you see how that is somebody who's learned this?

That our lives are safe in Jesus' hands. That there is somebody who's learned to make the most of every single opportunity realizing that life is short. And let me tell you, we've got good friends who work down there.

They'll tell you that life is short, reminded of it every day. She has learned that life is short, but her life is in Jesus' hands. And she is making every, making use of every single opportunity afforded to her.

So friends, let me just finish with this. Right? This is what we were singing earlier. This is it. That's why we sang this song. Okay? When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace.

[27 : 46] In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil. On Christ, the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

All other ground is sinking sand. It's exactly what he's been saying in this passage this morning. Build your life on Christ. Build your life on him. Let's pray. And just before we close ourselves, why don't we just have a couple of moments of quiet, maybe just to gather our thoughts from the word today, but also just as before we head out into the business of another, another Sunday, another week, why don't we just gather our thoughts and bring our own prayers to God?

So Jesus said in Matthew chapter seven, therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse because its foundation was on the rock.

Our heavenly father, we come to you this morning, this afternoon, with so many burdens and worries. And Lord, thank you so much that you are a God who tells us to cast our burdens on you because you care for us.

[29 : 08] And Lord, it's our prayer this week that you would help us to find our identity in Christ, to sit at his feet every day, remembering what he has done for us.

Lord, we realize there's so many things that would distract us and compete for our attention, but Lord, we pray that you would help us to help keep our eyes fixed on him. Lord, thank you that you are good all the time and your steadfast love endures forever.

We pray these things in his precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.