

Chapter 11

Good morning and thank you for joining us for our final study in Ecclesiastes! Would you please turn to chapter 11 as we finish this startling book.

Just a reminder next week we'll begin our study in the NT book of Hebrews.

Our society has always seemed to idolize celebrities. **SHOW PIC**
Back in the day there were magazine covers, now it's all about instagram followers and tik tok views. But the principle hasn't changed-we love to follow the moves and actions of celebrities.
CLOSE PIC

The only thing that piques our interest more is when a celebrity falls from grace. **SHOW PIC** The addictions surface. The mental struggles come to light. And suddenly, everyone's attention is captivated. **CLOSE PIC** We develop almost a morbid curiosity-what are they doing? Better yet, what are they thinking?

And throughout our study of Ecclesiastes, we've been given the ever so rare insight into the fragile mind of a struggling king.

If you've been following along in our study, we've been witnessing an uncomfortable scene unfold as we watch the most powerful and wise man in all the world, wrestling, and agonizing as he pens these words.

Solomon started off great, but as we know, it's not how you start, it's how you finish. And Solomon is not finishing his life well. The problem was that King Solomon had his focus in all the wrong areas. You'll recall "under the sun", and nothing brings him satisfaction.

His 700 wives don't bring him fulfillment. His building projects don't bring him fulfillment. All the food banquets and celebrations, all the possessions, and repeatedly we see Solomon say, it's all vanity. It's all a puff of smoke.

He's covered every area of life, and now we'll see this morning he summarizes with the conclusion of the whole matter.

We're gonna study chapters 11 and 12, and the title of this morning's message is THE MEANING OF IT ALL

Let's pray

Now as we open in chapter 11 you'll notice that it's very similar to the format of the book of Proverbs. And who wrote the majority of Proverbs-it was Solomon. So here we get to see some practical wisdom before Solomon comes to his conclusion.

And in the first few verses, Solomon is gonna talk about the importance of looking beyond today, and preparing for the future.

1 Cast your bread upon the waters,
For you will find it after many days. **SHOW PIC** When a merchant traveled to a distant port to buy goods, he would load his purchase onto the cargo ship to sell it back home. But he was taking a risk. What if the ship got lost at sea? What if thieves

came, and looted the ship? Anxious days awaited the arrival of the man's purchase. **CLOSE PIC**

He had cast his bread out on the waters, and usually his bread returned and netted a nice profit. But it certainly involved a risk.

And here's Solomons point, life is full of risks. Solomon is sticking with this cargo metaphor in v2.

2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight,
For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

Its talking about diversification here. Rather than ship everything all together on 1 boat, give a serving to 8 different vessels. Yes we need to be willing to take risks, but do what we can to minimize our risks.

3 If the clouds are full of rain,
They empty themselves upon the earth;
And if a tree falls to the south or the north,
In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. So much of life is outside our control. **SHOW PIC** We can't even properly predict the weather, let alone can't stop clouds from pouring rain. We can't stop trees from falling to the earth. **CLOSE PIC**

4 He who observes the wind will not sow,
And he who regards the clouds will not reap. So much of life is outside of our control, but some people allow their fear of circumstances to paralyze their initiative.

SHOW PIC Solomon says don't stop sowing your seed just because the wind might blow it away. Don't refuse to harvest the crop just because it might rain. **CLOSE PIC**

And the lesson for us is simple. Don't get paralyzed by fear. Too many folks get strangled by the what-ifs of life. In the business world I called it paralysis by analysis

Solomon is warning us of an overly analytical approach to life.

5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind,[fn]
Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child,
So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

Here's the problem we face. We live in such a knowledge oriented culture, especially with AI becoming more widespread, lots of people just try to figure everything out and understand all of life's processes before they really participate.

They refuse to walk by faith.

But the reality is, as much as we try to know everything there is to know about life, scientists can't even fully understand how our cells reproduce when life begins!

SHOW PIC Why is it that all of a sudden some cells decide to become bone. Why do some cells decide to become muscle? Why do some cells all of a sudden decide to become eyes

CLOSE PIC

Scientists don't know why

I know why. It's because each one of us is a creation. God created you, and designed you in His love and mercy and grace

6 In the morning sow your seed,
And in the evening do not withhold your hand;
For you do not know which will prosper,
Either this or that,
Or whether both alike will be good. Don't be afraid to live your life.
We can't predict what's gonna unfold the rest of today, let alone the next 5 or 500 days. Be wise, but don't be afraid to live the life that God has given you.

7-8

7 Truly the light is sweet,
And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;
8 But if a man lives many years
And rejoices in them all,
Yet let him remember the days of darkness,
For they will be many.
All that is coming is vanity. It doesn't take long to realize that life is full of good days, and bad days. We'd love to insulate ourselves from the bad that happens in life and experience only the good times, but life doesn't work that way.

You take the good
You take the bad
You take them both and there you have the facts of life

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9-10

9 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 in the sight of your eyes;
But know that for all these
God will bring you into judgment.

10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart,
And put away evil from your flesh,
For childhood and youth are vanity.

If we realize the truth that there is more to life than what we can see — that there is an eternity and an eternal God to reckon with, then the legitimate pleasures of life can be enjoyed.

A person may live a carnal life, but they need to remember there is a God in heaven who will bring all their life and works into judgment. **Rom 14:12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.**

Remembering that this world isn't our home is a wonderful incentive to live a holy, godly life in our days on earth. We know that our good will be rewarded and blessed; not only in this life, but also in the life to come

Chapter 12 starts with a word specifically for younger people.

1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,

“I have no pleasure in them”: A lot of young people make the mistake of thinking that when we get older, we automatically become wiser. But that’s not the case.

Solomon is saying, “Act decisively and radically toward your Creator in the days when you’re young because harder days are coming.”

Young men and women-If you are not spending time in the Word now, worshiping God now, serving God now, when you get older, you’ll just be an old, cranky fool. And society is loaded with people like that.

But if you decide now to walk with God and commit your life to Him, you will age gracefully, become increasingly wise, and be a blessing to so many. But the choice is yours to make.

Over the next several verses Solomon has some interesting things to say about aging that are applicable to every one of us. No matter what age you may be, we are older than we were when we started this chapter...

In v 2-6 we’re about to see a poetic picture of aging

**2 While the sun and the light,
The moon and the stars,
Are not darkened,
And the clouds do not return after the rain;** This phrase refers to the mind becoming foggy.

We all experience storms of forgetfulness, but when we're younger, the sun shines, everything brightens, and we say, "Oh, yeah, now I remember." As we age, however, the clouds take longer to dissipate.

3 In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, The "keepers of the house" speak of the legs. Those who study physiology tell athletes that the first thing to go is their legs.

...3 And the strong men bow down; Gravity has taken its toll. You walk sort of bent over. Strong men bow down.

...3 When the grinders cease because they are few, In other words, you lose your teeth.

...3 And those that look through the windows grow dim; Windows are the eyes.

Now as I get older I gotta do the checklist-phone, wallet, keys, glasses.

Solomon says the day is coming when your shoulders will stoop, when your teeth will be missing, when your legs will be shaking. These things are going to happen. And then he continues the description...

4 When the doors are shut in the streets, Not talking as much as you used to,
And the sound of grinding is low; hearing is going
When one rises up at the sound of a bird,

And all the daughters of music are brought low. You know the things that you want to hear, you can't hear and the things you don't want to hear is what you hear. You have a hard time hearing and then the slightest chirp of a bird wakes you up

**5 Also they are afraid of height,
And of terrors in the way;** pause here. Older people, tend to warn you about everything. Be careful when you go there. Don't get out of your car when you get there. They do this because they recognize their own bodies are becoming frail, they can't do what they used to do.

...5 When the almond tree blossoms, Almond trees are white on top. This speaks of the graying of one's hair.

The grasshopper is a burden Little things. As we get older, things that were once no problem suddenly become surprisingly difficult.
And desire fails. Intimacy no longer plays a large role

**...5 For man goes to his eternal home,
And the mourners go about the streets.** As he gets older he finds himself mourning at more and more funerals for his friends and loved ones.

But notice in v5 the end of life is not the end of the road, because every person will go to an eternal home.

And this is the most crucial decision that a man or woman makes in life, and that's to choose where they're going to spend eternity. Whether their eternity will be in heaven with Jesus, or whether their eternity will be in hell with the lost.

Now here's some 3000 year old medical terms that describe death.

6 Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed,[fn] The “silver cord” speaks of the spinal cord.

Or the golden bowl is broken, The “golden bowl” was a phrase used to describe the brain.

...6 Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain This speaks of the lungs. As you get older you find yourself out of breath more easily as your breathing capacity diminishes with age.

...6 Or the wheel broken at the well. This speaks of the heart-that incredible machine that pumps blood through one hundred sixty-eight million miles of veins, arteries, and capillaries each and every day.

**7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit will return to God who gave it.** No matter how healthy we might be or how young we might feel, we eventually die.

What is Solomon saying through all of this?

Aging is not only inevitable, but aging is essential because through it, God gives us daily reminders that we're headed for eternity.

Psalm 90:12

**So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

God helps us do just that by reminding us of the passing of time every time we look in the mirror.

Aging is inevitable, essential-but, praise God, not eternal because we're only here for a short time.

We'll discard these bodies and move on to our glorious, new resurrected state where there shall be no aging or disease, no breaking of the fountain, no trembling of the pillars, no losing of the grinders.

Aging is not an eternal process. It's short-then on to heaven, where we'll have new bodies designed for eternity.

That is why Solomon says, "Today is the day to remember your Creator. You're not dead yet. You still have your mind. Your heart is still pumping."

Now is the time because most people think, "As soon as I get out of high school, then I'll really live for God," or, "As soon as I get through college and finish my studies, then I'll be serious about seeking the Lord," or, "As soon as my kids grow up, then I'll have time to wait on God," or, "As soon as my kids get out of the house...."

The truth, however, is that it will never be easier than now for you to wholly surrender to God. It does not get easier as you get older.

That's what Solomon is saying. Physically, you start to fall apart. Mentally, you're vulnerable to depression. So today is the day to take inventory of our lives, to act decisively on behalf of God.

8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity." This is key in it's placement. This is how Ecclesiastes started out.

Having examined the meaninglessness of life with an under the sun premise, the only conclusion is that life is not only meaningless, but the ultimate in meaninglessness.

9 And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. Grappling with advancing age, struggling with the meaning of life, Solomon still continued to teach.

This means that even during seasons of struggle, we need to minister to others by sharing the truth with them. Truth needs to be spoken faithfully, consistently, diligently.

10 The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth. No matter what we may personally be struggling with, truth is still the truth.

Never forget that Satan will constantly whisper in your ear that you have no business, no right, no authority to minister because your life is a mess. That's only the accuser of the brethren trying to sideline you.

Don't buy his lies. Instead, keep being faithful in what God has called you to do.

One of my favorite scriptures...

Mark 14:8 "She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.

This is one of the biggest challenges with aging. You can't do what you used to do. That's ok, that's part of the process. Just do what you can do for the Lord.

11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars^[fn] are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.

Just as goads are used to prod cattle, the words of the wise get us moving in the right direction. Words of wisdom nail down the truth

God's word is like a nail that fastens us to the path of righteousness. You stay faithful to God by being tacked down with His Word.

V12 is for every high schooler and college student...

12 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Solomon is not suggesting we don't study, that we don't read books, that we don't pursue knowledge. In fact, Solomon was quite a pursuer of knowledge.

I love the old saying that says the man who does not read has no advantage over the man who cannot read.

But you see, there's a balance. Some folks spend all their time studying life and never living it. They are always studying about God, but they don't obey God, nor do they seek to know God more personally.

It's true, too much study is wearisome and can actually become counterproductive.

13-14

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all.

14 For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing,

Whether good or evil. So here is the conclusion of Solomon's experiment. He's tried all that life has to offer, and he's discovered that the only thing that really matters in life is to fear God and keep His commandments.

SHOW SLIDE So what does it mean to fear God?

- 1) To fear God is to realize that God knows better how I should live than I do. Do you fear God?
- 2) To fear God is to acknowledge that God is the designer and the creator of life, that He is our final authority.
- 3) To fear God is to bow my knee before him and to ask God, what will you have me do? **CLOSE SLIDE**

Hey, that's it. That is the whole reason any of us exist-for the joy of the one Who created us.

SHOW PIC Reinhold Messner was a famous mountain climber. He scaled Mount Everest without an oxygen bottle by himself.

Afterwards, Messner was asked, as are all mountain climbers, why did you do it? And his reply was classic, he said, because at the top all the lines converge. **CLOSE PIC**

This is what Solomon is telling us. This is the way it is with life under this sun. From a strictly human perspective, life is a puzzle with a lot of missing pieces.

But when you dedicate your life to Jesus and when you focus on what exists above the sun, suddenly the missing pieces come together and all the lines converge. We can't explain or understand everything that happens, but we know that there is a limit to everything under the sun.

Hey if our thoughts and ambitions are on the horizontal-based on our circumstance, under the sun, our lives are gonna feel pretty empty and unfulfilled. It's only when we live our life with our creator in mind, that we find meaning, and purpose and direction,