

The End of the Matter – Ecclesiastes 12

Main Idea: Let not the circumstances around you, or the praise or even approval of others, become a condition for you to live for the glory of God.

I. Remember | Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

Solomon opens the final chapter of Ecclesiastes with a command that carries the weight of the entire book: “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth” (v.1). Throughout Scripture, the call “to remember” is never mere mental recall. **To remember God is not simply to recall facts about Him, but to live under a daily, gripping awareness of who He is—an awareness that shapes our choices, directs our path, and steadies our hearts.** Throughout redemptive history, God consistently calls His people to remember—not so they might feel nostalgic, but so that their lives might be shaped by obedience and worship (Ex. 13:3; Deut. 5:15; 8:2; Ps. 77:11; Luke 22:19; John 15:20; 2 Tim. 2:8). **Solomon’s warning is directed especially toward youth, not because young people are less spiritual, but because youth is often marked by strength, opportunity, and the illusion of permanence.** The Preacher urges us to remember God before the inevitable decline of life arrives—“before the evil days come” (v.1). In verses 2-7, Solomon uses rich poetic imagery to describe aging and death. The darkened sun, moon, and stars; trembling keepers of the house; bent strong men; dimmed windows; failing grinders; restless sleep; fading desires—all point to the gradual unraveling of human strength. These images culminate in death itself: “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (v.7; Gen. 2:7; 3:19). **Detached from God, even our best days dissolve into *hevel*—breath, vapor, air emptiness.** Yet Solomon’s call to remember God is gracious. It is an invitation to anchor life in what is eternal rather than what fades. To remember our Creator, especially in seasons of darkness, is to abandon self-sufficiency and cast ourselves fully upon God as our Sustainer. **Scripture consistently shows that God often uses seasons of marked by hardships and challenges to teach His people to trust Him (Ps. 60; Prov. 3:11).**

The command to remember is most urgent precisely when circumstances seem most unstable. **Remembering in the dark means anchoring the heart to what God has already revealed in the light: His character is unchanging, His promises are trustworthy, and His purposes are never thwarted.** The God who sustained us in joy does not abandon us in sorrow. Darkness does not negate truth—it tests whether we truly believe it and trust the Lord as the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb.12:2). **When dark times settle into life—when marriages strain under unresolved wounds, when finances fail despite careful planning, when health declines without warning, or when hope feels painfully distant—the temptation is to question God through the lens of suffering.** In these moments, fear can grow louder than faith, emotions can threaten to replace truth, and self-reliance gives way either to despair or control. Yet Scripture repeatedly calls God’s people to resist this drift. To remember your Creator in hardship is therefore an act of deliberate faith. It means choosing trust over suspicion, obedience over escape, worship over complaint, and endurance over despair. **When life feels fragile, remembering God calls us to serve Him not because circumstances are favorable, but because He is worthy.** It calls us to love Him not for what He gives, but for who He is. It calls us to obey Him even when obedience feels costly, slow, or unseen. This posture does not minimize pain, nor does it deny grief; rather, it places suffering within the larger reality of God’s sovereign care. **When all earthly securities collapse, remembering God becomes the means by which faith is refined and hope is preserved.**

To Ponder:

1. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to live as though outcomes ultimately depend on you rather than on God?
2. What does it look like for you to practically “remember your Creator” in your daily decisions?

II. Fear | Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

In the closing verses of Ecclesiastes, Solomon reflects on the purpose of wisdom itself. **Wisdom, rightly understood and practiced, does not result in self-improvement or intellectual pride but leads to reverent obedience before God.** Solomon reminds us that he not only possessed wisdom but faithfully taught it, carefully arranging truthful words for the good of God's people (v.9-10). He then offers a powerful image: "The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed... given by one Shepherd" (v.11). **A goad was a sharpened instrument used by shepherds to prod sheep back onto the right path. In the same way, God uses His Word—sometimes painfully—to correct, guide, and preserve His people (Prov. 3:11).** This shepherding imagery emphasizes that true wisdom comes from submission to One Shepherd (Christ), not from endless speculation or empty philosophies. Solomon warns against the illusion that more books or more study can replace obedience: "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (v.12). This is not a rejection of learning, but a warning against knowledge divorced from devotion.

Solomon then brings the entire book to its climax, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (v.13). **To fear God is to take Him seriously—to order life around His holiness, authority, and truth. It is not paralyzing terror but reverent awe that frees us from fearing lesser things: people, culture, comfort, money, or approval.** As Jesus Himself warned his disciples, "Do not fear those who kill the body. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Solomon closes Ecclesiastes with a sobering certainty: "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (v.14). **Divine judgment gives moral weight to life. It assures us that salvation is needed, obedience matters, injustice will not prevail, and nothing escapes God's gaze.** Life is brief, fragile, and often perplexing, but it is not meaningless when lived in reverent submission to our Creator. Remembering God, fearing Him, and keeping His commandments anchors us in eternal truth. For believers, this final word ultimately points beyond Solomon to Christ. The One who bore judgment on behalf of His people so they might live wisely, faithfully, and joyfully before Him. **Because of who Christ is and what He did, death no longer paralyzes; it clarifies. Our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58), our obedience matters, and our hope reaches beyond the sun into eternity.**

Ecclesiastes ends by lifting our eyes beyond the limits of life under the sun. Solomon exposes the frustration, longing, and dissatisfaction that accompany even our best efforts when life is lived apart from God. These unfulfilled desires are not accidental; they are revelatory. As C. S. Lewis observes in his *Mere Christianity*, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most plausible explanation is that I was made for another world."¹ Solomon's repeated refrain of vanity does not deny meaning—it points to misplaced expectations. **This world was never meant to fully satisfy us. Our longings are signposts, directing us toward eternity and toward the God who alone can fulfill them. Ecclesiastes ends where true wisdom must end—with God.**

To Ponder:

1. How do your private thoughts, hidden habits, and unseen choices reflect either the fear of God or the fear of being exposed?
2. If God were to remove the people, possessions, or positions you rely on for security, what would be revealed about the foundation of your faith?
3. Where do you find yourself obeying God selectively rather than wholeheartedly, and what does that reveal about who—or what—you fear most?

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 136.