



Sunday, May 8, 2022

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Theme: The Purpose of Man

Sermon: Words to live by

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:14

God is good. What a joy it is to be together again this morning. It is truly a gift to be here. This week as I was listening to someone talk and just saying thanks about the gifts that they had been given, this place has been a gift to my wife and I. We just need to say thanks as well, and to see the community come together in the last few weeks is a gift to each other. We need to be grateful for that. We need to acknowledge that and to say, "Thank you, Lord, for putting us in a place in which celebrates God and celebrates each other." That is a real gift and so we just need to say thanks for that. [Clapping from congregation.]

This morning, we are continuing on with a look at Ecclesiastes. Last week we looked at Ecclesiastes 1. If you remember, we talked about how in Ecclesiastes when it talks about meaninglessness, it is as if life is like a vapor or like smoke. It is that way if you live under the sun, and under the sun here is the concept of living by the world or living without God. For the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon kind of goes through and he just expands on this concept of how living under the sun, meaning without God, is meaningless. If you want to find meaning in life, you need to live under the Son and find meaning in life there. Today we're going to jump to the last part of the passage and we're going to look at the last chapter. We'll start at Ecclesiastes 11:9.

9 You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. 10 So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"— 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; 3 when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; 4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; 5 when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

6 Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, 7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. 8 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”

The Conclusion of the Matter

9 Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. 10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. 11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. 12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. 13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Join me in prayer.

Dear Lord, we come to you this morning. Lord, we look to your word to give us insight as to how to live. Lord, we are reminded that living under the sun of the world does not give life. Lord, help us to remember also that living under your Son gives life and gives meaning to life that is far beyond anything else that we can find. Lord, may the words be your words. May a thing of me, Lord, not be spoken. That your name may be honored and glorified and that you may be praised. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Last week, as we looked at Ecclesiastes 1, I invited you into my study here to kind of look at the words and to see what the teacher had to say. So today we're going to continue on in that space. You'll notice that the teacher begins by talking about the youth. Now, that's quite appropriate. I think for us, we all remember - for those of us who are still young - our youth.

For those of us who are a little bit older, we remember the days of our youth. The amazing thing is that when you are a child, you think, "I'm never gonna grow up." When you're in your teen years, you think, "This is life. I'll be like this forever." Then one day, you get invited to play hockey with all your friends and all of a sudden at the end of the game, you're panting heavily. "When did this happen?" Suddenly you realize you're getting older. Then one day your friends invite you to play hockey and you're thinking, "You know, that's a great idea but have you seen the size of those blades? I'm not sure I can balance on those anymore. Maybe I'll have to sit this one out and enjoy from the sidelines."

We all get older. That's the reality of life. As we saw last week in Ecclesiastes 3, he says, "There's a time for this and a time for that," time moves on. Every year we celebrate birthdays - actually today is my granddaughter's birthday. She turns five today. Next year, she'll turn six. She's not going to go back to four. One day she'll turn 35. And then one day hopefully 55 and so on. We all continue to grow.

So here in Ecclesiastes, Solomon is saying, "When you are young, it is time to take advantage of your youth." For some they're like, "That's awesome. I can do whatever I want." But that's not what Solomon is saying. Solomon is saying, "When you are young, that is probably the most important time to make decisions." Sometimes as young people, we don't always know what decisions need to be made.

But as for those of us who are older, as we can attest to, oftentimes results of where we are today are because of decisions we made as kids. Whether that's health, whether it's anything else. For those of us who started smoking, chances are most of us started before 20. For those of us who are still smoking, it's been a lifelong process. Decisions we make when we're young affect us, and that's what Solomon is saying here. When he says, "Give joy in the days of your youth," but then in verse 10, he says, "So then banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body."

A different translation of that reads, "Remove the sorrow from your heart and put away evil from your flesh." I think many of us will look back at our younger years and there will be times that we will say, "This was amazing," but there will be other times where we'll say, "You know, that was a bad choice. It was not one of my smartest moves and now I'm paying for it." Solomon joins that piece. So if you think about where you are in your youth, Solomon joins that to Ecclesiastes 12:1. Remember, there are no chapters in the original Hebrew Bible, so the end of chapter 11 and chapter 12 flow right into each other and the first words in chapter 12 are, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say,

"I find no pleasure in them." "Remember." Remember is one of those very important words in Scripture. We often say when we remember, it's this concept of, "Okay, I'm not going to forget. I'm going to remember. I won't allow myself to forget it." But in Hebrew and in context of Scripture, remembering is not a passive act of not forgetting. Remembering is an action. It is where you take notice on something and you act upon it.

For example, in the book of Genesis when we read about the story of Noah, Noah is in the ark and it has rained, and the world has flooded. And there is Noah. Now just picture this for a second. He's got Noah and his three sons and their wives and his wife. So that's like eight people. And you've got all these animals. Have you ever thought about the job of cleaning up after all these animals? For those of you who are farmers, you know what it is like to do, you know, a herd.

But imagine, you're cleaning up after elephants and hippos etc. So there is Noah, and then it says this, "And God remembered Noah and he sent a wind to dry up the water," so that Noah wouldn't have to be in there as long. The remembering is not just a, "Oh yeah, that's right. There's Noah. Hmm." It's a, "No! Noah needs something and I'm going to act on it."

So when Solomon says here, "Remember your Creator," it's not just a, "Oh yah, God created the world. Isn't that great." It's a, "God created the world! Look at what he gave you! Look at all the incredible things he gave you!" Act on it! Thank him for it! Make wise decisions on it. Be the steward that God has called you to be. It's the same word again that we read in the 10 commandments where it says, "Remember the Sabbath day. Act on it."

Marva J. Dawn wrote a book called, "Keeping the Sabbath Wholly." In there, she talks about this Jewish concept of the Sabbath day is the feast day of all feast days. Now they didn't work on the Sabbath, but they celebrated, they feasted after the Sabbath was done, they rested, they ceased from doing the things that were not of God, and focused simply on God. And Solomon here says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," and then he goes on in verses two through seven, giving this incredible description of growing old. Now, in many ways you read this and you're like, "Okay, I can kind of get it." But then you start looking at it and going, "Oh man. This is what it's like to get old. The sun and the moon, they lighten, they darken. We talk about not being quite as bright as before."

The clouds return after the rain. Just when you think you're healthy and not without pain again, there's more pain that shows up. "When the keepers of the house tremble. Your arms begin to shake. Strong men stoop." The legs aren't as strong. "Grinders cease because they are few." We have dentists now that help us but before this, you would lose your teeth and that took care of that. "Looking through the windows grow dim." Your eyesight fails. "Doors to the street are closed." I mean, let's be honest. As we get older, we have less desire to go outside at night. It's like, "No, I'll just stay home tonight. This is good." "The sound of grinding fades," because as you lose your teeth, you have softer food and you're not eating the crunchy stuff anymore.

Right? "When people rise up at the sound of birds." I don't know about you but some people when they retire, they're thinking, "Hey, this is good. I can sleep in every day and they do. But a lot of other people as they get older, it's like, "Good grief! It's 5:30 a.m. and the birds are singing and I'm wide awake." Then it says, "Their songs grow faint," because our hearing goes bad. "When people are afraid of heights." Think about all the things that you did as a youth and you're now thinking, "No, that's okay, I really don't need to go on that ladder anymore. Someone else can do it." "And of dangers in the streets when the almond tree blossoms." That's a beautiful gray hair that we get blessed with. Grasshoppers drag themselves along and desires are no longer stirred. Then people go to their eternal home." And you're thinking, "Really Solomon? This is a word of encouragement? I think not."

Actually what it is, it's a word to the youth saying, "Youth, take notice of what you have. It won't last forever." There will come a day when you will suddenly realize that the young at heart really is only the heart. The rest of your body has deteriorated. That's the reality we live.

And you're thinking, "Well, that's not really encouraging." And Solomon says here, "Now listen. Remember where I started. I started with, "If you live under the sun without God, this is what you end up with. But now, if you live under the S-O-N, let me change what it looks like when you go to your eternal home." Suddenly your eternal home is not a place of dread but a continuation of life with God.

The patterns that we develop within our youth become that pattern which we find in our old age. Think about your devotional life and your prayer life. Remember, he started chapter 12 with, "Remember your Creator." The best way to be actively remembering our Creator is in prayer and in the word.

Then notice what it says right after going to the eternal home. It says, "and mourners go about the streets." I will tell you this, the greatest gift that you can give your family is the gift of knowing that when you pass on, you are going to your eternal home with God. That is a gift in which the mourners can say, "I know where they are." That is a gift which we can leave them as we continue in our growth.

So then the author that says at the conclusion, a number of important pieces. It says this in verse 11, "The words of the wise are like goads. Their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd." A goad. A goad is a stick in which one end is sharpened and it would be used by the shepherds to urge the sheep on. So when the sheep weren't moving, the shepherd would gently poke the sheep with the goad. And the sheep would then begin to move. The firmly embedded nails means that there were times when the shepherd would nail a pen together to create a pen for the sheep to remain inside. Because he knew that those sheep would tend to wander and go all over the place.

And notice it says, "by one shepherd." The words of one shepherd. Jesus is the Word. Jesus invites us through this passage to say, "Be in the Word and allow the Word to do what it needs to do. For some of us that means we need to be goaded. For some of us we need to be urged on in our own spiritual growth. Sometimes we become kind of complacent. We become kind of like the youth thinking, "This will just go on forever." Others of us, we need to be put in a pen by the Word. We need to be put in a pen because our lives are wandering from God all over the place. And as Solomon says in the book of Ecclesiastes, "We have chosen to live under the sun."

We have chosen to say, "We are going to go wherever the world takes us and will indulge in those pleasures and those ideas." The author reminds us, "Some of us need to be in the Word to create a pen around us to give us boundaries so that we may live freely." Then it says just after that, "Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them." This is the Word of God. This is just one of many places where we are warned about adding or changing the Word of God. Here it is. This is what God says. There's a warning here. Don't take it lightly but don't change it either. Remember it.

Then he says, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." It is interesting that he says, "Making many books there is no end." There are lots of books within the world. There is one book from the Word. But even this one book isn't really enough. If you look at the end of John 21:25, he writes this, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." There are lots of books out there and more books every year. And there's a lot of good books.

There's a lot of books which point to the Word, but there's a lot of books which point to the world and what it wants. Solomon says here, "Choose what you're looking for." Then he says, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind." Fear God and keep His commandments. To fear God is to be completely human, to be fully alive. When you fear God that's not being, "afraid of God." To fear God means that you respectfully acknowledge who he is, and that you give him holy reverence. Our God is a Father who loves us deeply. In fact, he loved us so deeply that he gave us His Son to die on a cross so that we may be with him. And that love is extended to each one of us.

But we must also remember that our God is a holy God. He's a righteous God and a perfectly just God. And if God says, "Thou shalt..." then we better obey. At the end of this book of Ecclesiastes, he says, "Fear God... for God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." That to me, is frightening. What I think of standing before God and that He knows all the evil things that I have done, it scares me and it helps me remember what it means to fear God. But that fear is not a fear of afraid-ness. I don't know if that's a word but it's not being afraid. It's a fear in that understanding of His holy reverence, that this same God who says, "I am going to judge you on every evil thing that you have done," also is the God who gave His Son to pay for those evils.

Notice what Solomon says, "God remembers it whether it is good or evil." We often think of God going, "Oh, there they sinned again. Let me just mark this one off." But have you ever thought about God going, "Wow, there they loved someone again. Oh, they were kind to somebody, let me mark that down. Oh, they were generous. Let me mark that down. They praised me this morning. Let me mark that down."

They were acting as... fill in the blank. God is also noticing all of the beautiful things and the wonderful things that we do. You need to hear that as well this morning. God is a God who is excited to be praised and is smiling down on his people. When God joins us in worship, he is blessed and he is honored. So we go back to, "How do we live in this place? How do we live under the Son?" In the reformed faith, one of the catechisms that we abide by is the Heidelberg Catechism. Many of us know and are familiar with the first Lord's Day which says, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" Because when we look at the book of Ecclesiastes, basically what he's saying is, "If you will live and you will die, enjoy what God has given you now, and be prepared for what God has given you later."

So the question is, "What is your only comfort?" The answer is, "I'm not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death, to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ. He has paid fully for all my sins with his precious blood and he has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not even a hair can fall from my head, without the will of my Father in heaven. In fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ, by the Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

When asked, "When is the best time to plant an oak tree?" The answer was 20 years ago, or right now. So Ecclesiastes is inviting us this morning. He's saying, "When is the best time to live under the Son?" It was 20 years ago. If we started 40 years ago, or 60 years ago, 80 years ago, that was the best time but if we haven't started yet, now is the best time whether you are five, or 15, or 50, or 90 or older. Now is the best time because as the Catechism says, "And makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on, to live for him." And then it says, "What must you know to live and to die in the joy of his comfort?"

Three things. First, how great my sin and misery are. We need to acknowledge that we are sinners. Second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery. We need to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. And third, how I am to thank God every day for my deliverance. And that's what Ecclesiastes is saying. He's saying, "Look at your life. Look at all that God has given you. When you are young, God has given you so much. Use it, enjoy it, and give glory to God for it." When you do it as a youth, it will become your life when you are older.

Eric Liddell was an Olympian. He was also a missionary. And he was told that he should give up running to be on the mission field. And Eric Liddell responded with this, "God made me fast and when I run, I feel His pleasure." God has made you the way you are. When you live the way God has made you, you feel His pleasure. Ecclesiastes is inviting us into that space of living under the Son, where we can feel God's pleasure. So remember your Creator. Act on it. Fear God in holy reverence. Live under the Son.

Start young or start now. Spend time in His Word. Devote yourself to prayer and be thankful in how he has blessed you. Amen.

Dear Lord, we thank you for the gifts that you have given us and for the life that you have given us. Lord, we thank you that in your Son, there is meaning to life and that we can live life to the fullest. When we fear you, we are fully known and we will be fully who you have made us to be. Lord, thank you for your gift. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Transcribed by Liza Perry