

LIFE WORTH LIVING Sunday School- October 16, 2011

Unifying Topic: WISDOM FOR AGING

Lesson Text

I. Remember Your Creator (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10)

II. Redeem The Time (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7)

III. Revere God (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

The Main Thought: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13, KJV).

Unifying Principle: All people experience the aging process. Is there a way to appreciate the fullness of life without regard to our age? Ecclesiastes concludes that the only thing that makes life worth living is to remember and honor our creator God all the days of our lives.

Lesson Aim: To discover the wonder and brevity of life expressed in Ecclesiastes.

Life aim: To reflect on the meaning of life even as we move toward death, and to develop a plan to honor God with mind, body, and soul.

11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

12:2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

12:3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

12:4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

12:5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

12:6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

HISTORY:

This is the Preacher's final appeal before the conclusion in chapter 12. If you have indecision about the meaning of life with God your attention will turn to the value of risk (chapter 11:1-6); the value of life (11:7-8); enjoyment of youth (11:9-10); a description of old age (12:1-7); and the vanity or emptiness of most things; the value of proverbs (12:11); the vanity of excessive study (12:12); and the importance of obeying God in everything (12:13-14).

•Your Life Is Uncertain: Embrace It (Ecc.11:1-6).

•Your Life Is Brief: Enjoy It (11:7-12:8).

•Your Life Is Mysterious: Examine It (12:9-12).

•Your Life Is Obedience To God: Express It (12:13-14).

Chapter 11:1 "Cast your bread on the waters," for in the wisdom and purpose of God it may very well return to you some day when you are in need of help. ¹"Bread" refers to grain and wheat from which bread is produced. One of the main trade commodities was grain. The merchants of Solomon's day would load their grain ships and send them off. The Israelites were "casting [their] bread upon the water." But notice that with the word waters is plural: "cast your bread on the waters." In other words, don't put all your grain in one ship. Put your wheat in several ships, and send it out in a diversified way so that if one of the ships should sink, you'll not be ruined. In others words, "*Don't put all your eggs in one basket.*" Therefore if we are giving our substance freely and liberally, bestow it upon the waters by faith; upon those who are utterly in need; as the seed which a man casts into the sea or river, it shall certainly be restored to thee, either by God or men. The return may be slow, but it is sure, and will be so much the more plentiful. It is admonishing us to avoid selfishness, self-centeredness, and pessimism. You have to send it to receive a return.

¹ <http://bible.org/seriespage/no-risks-no-rewards-ecclesiastes-111-6>

11:2 Give to many, so that in your day of need you may encounter at least one who in gratitude will assist you. The words **"to seven, and also to eight"** serves the purpose of indicating that this is expounding on verse 1. It is saying, do not stop by giving one person bread, but give to everyone in need. The number marks the limit of the extent of our benevolence. The evils of our day would be if the real estate market collapses; if the energy market collapses; if the governmental systems collapse; if the financial markets collapse. We don't know what evil will come or when it will come on the earth. Then guess what--we are not ruined because our portions are trusted in the hand of God!

11:3 I have two interpretations that can preach on this verse. First: Many things like rain and wind storms are inevitable. We cannot stop the clouds full of rain from falling. Trees will lie wherever they fall. If we spend our time just watching and not doing, we will give. ²If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth. They do not retain it; they let it down softly and gently, in plentiful showers upon each of the parts of the earth without distinction, by which it is refreshed, and made fruitful. Men, who are full of the good things in this world, should not keep them to themselves, and for their own use only; but should consider they are stewards under God, and should be like the full clouds that empty themselves and give to those who want of what God has given freely, cheerfully, bountifully, and plentifully to those without respect of persons, imitating their God and Creator, who sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust. There is no excuse to stop working just because you think the weather may turn bad.

Second: ³Some things are inevitable. The clouds being full and pouring rain is natural, the tree falling is not under our control either. This is just saying that life is uncertain. We do not know when troubles will come. We must be thoughtful of others in trouble, and then, God will take care of us in our trouble. Trouble is inevitable. It comes to everyone sometime. So we don't know the works of God who makes all. If a tree is about to fall whether it leans to the south or toward the north, we can't do anything about it, only God. Both interpretations in the end, are saying these things are inevitable.

11:4 This verse criticizes those who are overly cautious. The farmer who waits for the most opportune moment to plant, when there is no wind to blow away the seed, and to reap, when there is no rain to ruin a ripe harvest, will never do anything but sit around waiting for the right moment. Waiting for perfect conditions will mean inactivity. However, don't stand around observing rain clouds. Don't stand gazing idly at the clouds wondering when and where the rain is going to fall. Don't allow your actions to be governed by the capricious conditions of life under the sun. Don't wait for conditions to be perfect, because that will never happen. The "perfect opportunity" begins now—while we still can sow and reap. Sow because it is the honorable thing to do.

11:5 There are things we cannot comprehend. These are the many mysteries of God; like the way of the wind (or spirit). *"The wind bloweth where it listeth, thou hearest the sound thereof, but you cannot tell from whence it is coming, or where it is going. So is he that is born of the Spirit"* (John 3:8). Like the development of a child in the womb, this is far beyond our comprehension. We cannot comprehend God's working; therefore do not restrict your efforts to the God who makes all possible.

11:6 Be ready at all times to show mercy; begin in the morning (*early*), and continue till the evening (*late*). This is to represent God in all that we do, with all that we have, and not withholding anything. Do not try to figure out if it would prosper or not, so act by faith. We must put out whatever effort is needed to succeed. *Verse 5 says "God who maketh all"* meaning we do the work, and it is God who prosper the effort. If both morning and evening efforts prosper, how great that prosperity will be. Both are good and have success. We can bless many and invest widely not knowing what seeds will find fertile soil and spring forth in life. True, the value of what you are doing is shrouded in mystery, as in the formation of the child in the womb. Man does not know what God is doing, but that lack of knowledge is never to serve as a cause for inactivity.

11:7 Light, in this sense, could be speaking of life. Every day we wake up, it is good to see the sun with our eyes. The point is that life is "sweet" and should be savored like honey. It's just good to be alive. Have you ever awoken

² <http://bible.cc/ecclesiastes/11-3.htm>

³ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ecclesiastes/13.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

and you feel so good because nothing on your body hurts? Now, that's good! And indeed it is "good to see the sun"

11:8 It is a good thing if a man can live to old age (many years) and rejoice in them. There are many days of darkness that the aged will see and remember. ⁴It is not the amount of trouble we have that makes us what we are. It is our attitude toward that darkness. The time of darkness makes us remember how wonderful the Light is and therefore, appreciate it. There is physical darkness, and there is spiritual darkness. Man has little control over the times of darkness and light. He does have control of his own attitude about that darkness. It is better to add life to your years than to add years to your life. The Bible declares that we will all die, yet many of us miss out on the abundant life that God offers us. Don't let that happen to you. Live while you are dying. All things which befall any man belonging only to this life are but vain, because they are short and transitory. If God is excluded in your eternity, all that followeth in the evil and dark days is vain, as far as work for God is concerned (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

LESSON:

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 Remember Your Creator

11:9 *"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth;"* Youth is devoid of cares; and, consequently, of many perplexities and distresses. There is a command and a warning for young people to rejoice in his days of innocence; *"...and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth,"* have a cheerful heart in those youthful days; do all you want and desire to do, but know that youth, who follow the call of his flesh, will bring himself into the judgment of God, because of the sins he commits. *"...and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes:"* Young people are not to act like old people, but many old people are trying to make youth act out of their age. They are youth! This is not saying they should run wild while they are young but make good choices. *"...but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."* God wanted the youth to know that they will answer for all they did; to all they haven't asked forgiveness of. It is best to let the Spirit of God teach and direct your life from an early age, to avoid much sin.

11:10 **Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh:** The word translated "*sorrow*" means "*vexation, inner pain, anxiety.*" There are two things the youth are to remove and put away:

1. remove sorrow from their heart
2. and put away evil from their flesh

As far as possible the problems that beset the heart and mind are to be resisted. Quit being a worrywart. Guard yourself from being stressed out by school, sports, and relationships. Worry is a sin, so avoid it at all times. It's just not worth it. Why? - Because fretfulness over existing circumstances will rob a man of that joy. The time of childhood and youth is vanishing and passing, and old age and death will speedily come. *"...for childhood and youth are vanity."* All actions done in the childhood and youth are for the most part vain and foolish; and all the delights, joys, and pleasures thereof, are vanishing and fleeting. They pass away and come to nothing. Eternity alone is permanent; live for eternity.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 Redeem The Time

12:1⁵ *"Remember"* means to live your life with what you know about God clearly in view, not just to remember that there is a God. *"Now"* means at this moment. *"Thy Creator in the days of thy youth"* connotes God as the One to whom we *"while you are young"* are responsible because we are His creatures. The *"evil days"* are the days of old age and death. These days **haven't come yet** to those that are still young. Being young is exciting. Remember you are God's property, so serve him from the start of your years, not the end of your years, when service is very limited. Some people are old before they realize their need for a Saviour. Make your strength available to God when it is still yours—during your youthful years. Don't waste it on evil or meaningless activities that become bad habits and make you callous. The opportunity for remembrance will soon be over and **the years draw near and they say, I see no purpose in my years or I don't enjoy them** meaning, they have wasted their existence.

12:2 Remember your Creator *"while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened"*— the time of dawning light; you are still in your prime and you are not impaired but there will be darkness growing and diminishing vision. *"...nor the clouds return after the rain:"* — the time of twilight's gloom; the infirmities of old age of which winter showers life; chiefly set-backs. You are expecting the sky to clear eventually. All means remember thy Creator.

⁴ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ecclesiastes/13.html>

⁵ <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/ecclesiastes.pdf>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

12:3 Each phrase of the allegory is designed to describe the declining of strength in a specific organ of the body. "*In the day when The keepers of the house*" — the hands and arms. It is their specific duty to guard the house from intrusion. In old age they "*tremble*" so severely that they can no longer move swiftly to the defense of the body. "*The strong men shall bow themselves*" refer to the legs. They are thus designated because they are supported by the largest muscles of the body. In old age the legs fail and the knees grow weak. They are not naturally bent over nor do they choose to be, but rather forces working contrary to their will impose conditions to which they finally succumb to the body. "*The grinding cease because they are few*" — the teeth. The mouth is the mill (crusher). It is difficult for the mill to function effectively when the teeth become few in number. "*They that look out of the windows be darkened*" are no doubt the eyes whose ability to perceive images lessens with the passing of the years.

All of this is describing the later years of a person's natural life. The strongest man will be bowed, if he lives long enough. The tremble could be for weakness, or for fear of his last days. Sometimes we stand at the window looking out contemplating our past life. It is not as bright as it was in the youth. Life is fading away. The vision becomes weaker as he nears the end of life on this earth.

12:4 *The door*" is a symbol of interchange with the outside world. "*The doors that are shut in the streets*" probably represent the deafness that cuts the elderly person off from the sounds of the city. The ears become hard of hearing and the lips do not have much to say. "*...when the sound of grinding of grain is low*", refers to little noise being now made in eating, because the teeth are either lost, or become so pressed close together; whereby both his speech is low, and the noise which he makes in eating is but small. The teeth are distinguished into classes:—

1. The incisors, or cutting teeth, in the front of the jaw.
2. The canine, or dog teeth, those in the sides of the jaws, for gnawing, or tearing and separating hard or tough substances. And,
3. The molars, or grinding teeth, the posterior or double teeth, in both jaws, generally termed the grinders; because their office is to grind down the substances that have been cut by the fore teeth... and thus prepare it for digestion in the stomach.

"*...and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird*" suggest the light sleeping habits developed in old age; he goes to bed early which cause him to awakening early, to coincide with the rising of the birds. "*...and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low*" are all those senses which are employed in music; the voice, the throat no longer able to sing the sound of music. It also speaks, of a time when the person, who is aged, does not desire the music and parties that went with youth and their songs grow faint because of impaired hearing.

12:5 In this verse "*Also*," is a continuation to let us know with increasing old age "*they shall be afraid of that which is high.*" They are not as sure of themselves, as they were in their youth because of the feebleness and weakness of their limbs now, their difficulty of breathing, and the dizziness of their heads, lest they stumble and fall and come about with broken bones. All this brings a "fear of high places", even traveling roads of increased traffic or walking along sidewalks can bring terror. We do not mend as quickly as we did in our youth. "*The almond tree shall flourish*" shows us that the almond tree blossoms and turn from pink to white when the season is about over. It is a reference to the white or gray hair that appears upon our heads as an external sign of internal physical decay. Like the almond tree, it looks very beautiful, and is admired, especially if found in the way of righteousness. "*The grasshopper shall be a burden*" is associated with pestilence (plagued with disease) and then compared to the walk of an old man. Like the grasshopper the old man's bones shall stick out and his body will be exhausted. And some might be deemed burdensome because their strength is so exceedingly diminished. Some in the hospitals or nursing homes are in this image of death because their body is now nothing but skin and bones protruding out as a grasshopper. "*...and desire shall fail:*" *The* lust of their youthfulness has failed in the older person; they abandon their appetite for food; physical and mental desires fail (no hope causes you to perish) as life begins to ebb out like the retreating tide "*because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.*" The mourners are there, because he has died. In ancient times there were professional wailers that draw near to the man's home, waiting with expectation to be hired for his funeral. They go about in the streets mourning, and accompany his body to the grave.

12:6 ⁶Then shall *"the silver cord"*, by which soul and body were wonderfully fastened together, *"be loosed"*, that sacred knot untied, and those old friends be forced to part; then shall *"the golden bowl"*, which held the waters of life for us, *"be broken"*; then shall *"the pitcher"* with which we used to fetch up water, for the constant support of life and the repair of its decays, *"be broken"*, even "at the fountain", so that it can fetch up no more; and *"the wheel"* (all those organs that serve for the collecting and distributing of nourishment) shall *"be broken"*, and disabled to do their office any more. The body shall become like a watch when the spring is broken, the motion of all the wheels is stopped and they all stand still; the machine is taken to pieces; the heart beats no more, nor does the blood circulate. Some apply this to the ornaments and utensils of life; rich people must, at death, leave behind their clothing and furniture of silver and gold; and poor people their earthen pitchers, and the drawers of water will have their wheel broken. The silver cord, golden bowl, pitcher, and wheel symbolize the beauty and fragility of the human frame of life; how easily death comes to us. *"The cistern"* is the well with all its treasures is then beyond the reach of man. It is irreversible!

12:7 *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was:"* refers to the flesh of man returning to the dust (Gen.3:19) from which it was originally made (Gen.2:7a). *"...and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* The life within the flesh is the spirit of man. It lives on. ⁷Here is a most evident distinction between the body and the soul: they are not the same. The body, which is matter, *dissolves and* returns to dust, its original place; but the spirit *or the breath of life*, which is immaterial (having no physical substance), returns to God. It completely shows that the two natures can be more different, or more without a doubt distinguished.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Revere God

12:13 Well we are coming to the end; winding up things with these final words: *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:"* Youth or old age or death, in spite of the focused attention that had been given in Ecclesiastes was not the greatest equalizer. Life is totally profitless or pointless without God. The sum of human life is comprised in this short sentence: **Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.**

1. Know that **HE IS**, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.
2. Reverence Him; pay Him adoration.
3. Love Him, that you may be happy.

Keep his commandments— They are contained in two words:

1. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;"*
2. *"And thy neighbor as thyself."*

This is our duty! And one last thing that is not in our lesson but is in verse 14—Judgment/retribution is the real equalizer for God will bring every person's act to judgment!

SUMMARY:

In our lesson ⁸this chapter also introduces counsel from the Preacher designed especially for the young. The young man is encouraged to rejoice, letting his heart cheer him. He is told to walk in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes, yet with the knowledge that God will hold him accountable for all that he does. So remove sorrow (i.e., rejoice!). But also put away evil during the fleeting years of childhood and youth (11:9-10). ⁹The final chapter begins with a continuation of advice directed to the young. They are told to remember God in their youth, before difficult days come in which there will be found little pleasure. Such days are described through a series of illustrations that depict the feebleness of old age and eventual death. When the inevitable happens, the body will decay back to dust, and the spirit will return to God who gave it (12:1-7). Finally, we are told the "grand conclusion" of the whole matter. The Preacher ends his search for meaning by concluding that the whole purpose for man's existence is to fear God and keep His commandments (12:13).

APPLICATION:

Value your youth while it is day by remembering God, redeeming the time, and revering God because life is worth living.

⁶ http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/mhc-com/view.cgi?book=ec&chapter=12&verse=2#Ec12_2

⁷ <http://www.theparkwaychurchofchrist.com/SermonsE-L/life11.htm>

⁸ http://executableoutlines.com/ecc/ecc_11.htm

⁹ http://www.executableoutlines.com/ecc/ecc_12.htm

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>