

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Lesson 9: Remember Your Creator; Fear God and Keep His Commandments -- Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:14

Step outside on a clear morning and feel it: the light is sweet, and it is good to see the sun. The Preacher who has spent twelve chapters chasing the wind finally stops to enjoy the warmth on his face. After all the dead ends, all the toil that the next person inherits, all the riddles he could not solve under the sun, he turns to a young man and says, in effect, Live. Rejoice in your years. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. But he cannot say it without the other half of the truth in the same breath: remember the days of darkness, for they will be many, and know that for everything God will bring you into judgment. The sweetness and the seriousness ride together. That is the whole book in miniature.

Then comes the most famous command in Ecclesiastes, and it lands like a hand on the shoulder of every reader who is still young enough to hear it: Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them. The Preacher is not scolding the young. He is loving them. He has been to the far country and back, and he is begging the next generation not to wait. Remember Him now, while the knees are strong and the eyes are bright and the heart is warm, because a day is coming when remembering will be harder.

And then he paints that day. In one of the most haunting poems in all of Scripture he describes a house growing old: the keepers of the house tremble, the strong men stoop, the grinders cease because they are few, those who look through the windows are dimmed, the doors on the street are shut, a man rises up at the sound of a bird but the song grows faint, the almond tree blossoms white like a head of gray hair, desire fails, and man goes to his eternal home while the mourners gather in the street. He is describing the body slowly closing down. He will not let us look away, because death is the one appointment we all keep, when the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl broken, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

We have walked this whole book together. We have heard vanity of vanities until the word echoed. We have stood at the grave with the wise man and the fool and watched the sun rise on the same weary round. And here, at the very end, the Preacher hands us the key that unlocks every locked door we passed: The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. That is not an escape from real life. That is what makes real life make sense. So this week, before the alarm rings and the day swallows you whole, ask the one question this book was written to make you ask: Am I living today as a person who remembers my Creator and will stand before Him?

Group Discussion: Why do you think the Preacher waits until the very last two verses of the whole book (12:13–14) to give his plain answer, and how does saving Fear God and keep his commandments for the end change the way we read everything he said about vanity?

Personal Reflection: Where in your own life right now are you living as though no one is keeping account, and what would change this week if you truly believed that God will bring every deed, including every secret thing, into judgment?

Read Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:14

Study Questions

1. In 11:7–10 the Preacher tells the young to rejoice in their years yet remember the days of darkness and the coming judgment. What does it teach us about God that joy and accountability are commanded together in the same breath?
2. The Preacher says, Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, yet know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment (11:9). Where are you tempted to enjoy God's gifts while quietly forgetting that you will give an account for how you used them?
3. What does the command Remember your Creator in the days of your youth (12:1) actually call a person to do, and why does the Preacher attach such urgency to doing it now, before the evil days come?
4. Reading the poem of aging and decline in 12:2–5, how does honestly facing the days when you will say I have no pleasure in them shape the choices you are making today?
5. In 12:5–7 the Preacher says man goes to his eternal home, the silver cord is snapped, the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. What does this verse teach about what happens to a person at death, and why does it matter that the spirit returns to God?
6. When you picture the silver cord snapping and the golden bowl breaking (12:6), what does the certainty of your own death stir in you, and what is God inviting you to do with that feeling rather than run from it?
7. After everything, the Preacher cries again, Vanity of vanities; all is vanity (12:8), and then calls his words goads and nails given by one Shepherd (12:11). How can the same book be both a brutal verdict on life under the sun and a gift from a caring Shepherd?
8. The Preacher warns that of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the flesh (12:12). What in your own search for answers, advice, or information has left you weary, and how is God redirecting that hunger?
9. The conclusion of the whole matter is this: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (12:13–14). Why is this the key that unlocks the entire book, and how does the New Testament show that this same God now calls all people to fear Him, obey the gospel of His Son, and stand before Christ in judgment?

10. Looking back over the whole book of Ecclesiastes, name one specific way the Lord has used this study to form you, one habit, fear, idol, or hope that has changed because you have learned to seek meaning not under the sun but above it, in Christ.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 9:27, every person dies once and after that comes the judgment; 2 Corinthians 5:10, all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give account; Acts 17:30–31, God commands all everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day of judgment by the Man He raised; John 5:28–29, all in the tombs will hear His voice and come out to the resurrection of life or of judgment; Colossians 2:3, in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge

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