

It's Really That Simple

Message 12

10.11.26

Ecclesiastes 12 (CSB)

THE TWILIGHT OF LIFE

12 So remember your Creator in the days of your youth:

Before the days of adversity come,
and the years approach when you will say,
“I have no delight in them”;
²before the sun and the light are darkened,
and the moon and the stars,
and the clouds return after the rain;
³on the day when the guardians of the house tremble,
and the strong men stoop,
the women who grind grain cease because they are few,
and the ones who watch through the windows see dimly,
⁴the doors at the street are shut
while the sound of the mill fades;
when one rises at the sound of a bird,
and all the daughters of song grow faint.
⁵Also, they are afraid of heights and dangers on the road;
the almond tree blossoms,
the grasshopper loses its spring,
and the caper berry has no effect;

for the mere mortal is headed to his eternal home,
and mourners will walk around in the street;
⁶before the silver cord is snapped,
and the gold bowl is broken,
and the jar is shattered at the spring,
and the wheel is broken into the well;
⁷and the dust returns to the earth as it once was,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

⁸“Absolute futility,” says the Teacher. “Everything is futile.”

THE TEACHER'S OBJECTIVES AND CONCLUSION

⁹In addition to the Teacher being a wise man, he constantly taught the people knowledge; he weighed, explored, and arranged many proverbs. ¹⁰The Teacher sought to find delightful sayings and write words of truth accurately. ¹¹The sayings of the wise are like cattle prods, and those from masters of collections are like firmly embedded nails. The sayings are given by one Shepherd.

¹²But beyond these, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body. ¹³When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. ¹⁴For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes ends the way you would expect

A. Verses 1-8 are about death and futility.

1. He describes the decay of life, and the final words are, “Everything is futile/meaningless/hevel.

2. All of the work, exploration, and wisdom ends here: death.

B. Verses 9-14 are different.

1. The style changes from wisdom and poetry to a narrator writing an ending in prose.

2. We believe all of Ecclesiastes is inspired.

3. However, God did use humans to write it.
4. When we finish Ecclesiastes, it feels like Solomon ends it with “everything is meaningless.”
5. And then the Scribe adds or summarizes the end.

C. Surely, this book can’t end with meaninglessness.

1. Fairytales have to have good endings.
2. Solomon can’t die a cynical old man.
3. Surely there is more to life than dying.
4. So the scribe adds an ending that we would more expect.

D. What do we do with this final chapter of Ecclesiastes?

1. There’s this tension between what Solomon says (we die, and it doesn’t matter) and the postscript: Fear God, for this is what matters most.
2. What do we do with these perspectives that don’t neatly fit together?
3. I think that it is in the weaving of these two non-matching cloths that we find the meaning of Ecclesiastes.
4. Life is not even, pretty, or predictable.
5. I like the wisdom of Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana who said, “There are only two things I have to do in this world: **be cool, and die.**”
6. What is Solomon’s last wisdom for us?

Solomon’s last passage

A. Solomon paints a powerful picture of aging and death.

1. When the guardians tremble and the strong stoop.
2. Before the silver cord is snapped, the gold bowl is broken, and the jar is shattered.
3. When the dust returns to the earth, and the spirit returns to the God who gave it.
4. Solomon masterfully catches the reality of aging: the hearing goes, the sense of adventure is no longer there, and even the spring in the step has stopped.

5. He does a beautiful job of painting aging in a beautiful way that is poetic but not very realistic.

B. Solomon's wisdom isn't wrong.

1. If Jesus doesn't return first, death comes for us all.

2. The Preacher of Hebrews explains the two options:

Hebrews 9:27–28 (CSB)

²⁷ And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—²⁸ so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

3. Solomon is correct.

4. Enjoy youth, he says, because you will get old someday.

5. And as I have heard many of you all say: Getting old isn't for wimps.

6. You have to be tough to be old.

C. Something that is missing in Solomon's aging is the presence of meaning.

1. He ends how he begins:

2. His first words were, "Everything is meaningless." Ecc. 1:2

3. His words end with "everything is meaningless."

4. Solomon set out to explore the meaning of it all, and found no meaning at all.

5. He chased after wind, and only found tiredness.

6. He explored it all, and found nothingness.

D. Solomon isn't wrong; he's incomplete.

1. A life that tries to find meaning apart from God will be burdensome, tiresome, and meaningless.

2. A life without Jesus is chasing after wind.

3. Let's look at what he gets right.

4. He begins with the importance of getting it right young.

Godly Wisdom Starts Young

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (NLT)

Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, "Life is not pleasant anymore."

A. Notice this command and warning!

1. What: Don't forget

Who: your Creator.

What: Honor him

When: In your youth, before you grow old.

2. Honoring God is not just for old people.
3. It is for all of us, at every stage and age of life.
4. The earlier we learn this and apply it, the more pleasant and purposeful life is.

B. The danger is that because everything is in front of you, it is easy to be distracted.

1. Remember! Don't forget! Intentionally recall the God who has created you!
2. Do it while you're young!
 - a. Before you must fight through decades of cynicism, frustration, and pain.
 - b. Before everything hurts, and nothing works right.
 - c. While you are young.
3. Before you are a grumpy old man, REMEMBER God!
4. And in that remembrance, HONOR GOD.

C. Too often, religion is the pursuit of children and old people.

1. We want our kids to be in church, even though we may not go ourselves.
2. Many churches are nothing but old men and old women, waiting for either Jesus' return or the undertaker to show up.
3. Although our end has been ordained, that does not mean we can wait until death to honor God.

D. Let me speak boldly for a moment:

To the youth.

- What you are sowing into your life right now you will reap in your 20s.
- Your life is the least busy and complicated it will ever be.
- What you invest yourself in now, you will reap in the years and decades to come.
- Invest in your health. Invest in your future.
- But above all else, invest in your relationship with Jesus now.
 - Your opportunity for spiritual leadership is not decades away; it is today.
 - Read your Bible, Pray, worship with passion and intensity, serve, and tell friends about Jesus.
 - Start small groups and group chats.
 - Don't wait until you are old!

To the parents.

- Who gave you permission to stop discipling your kids?
 - Who gave you permission to delegate your opportunity to disciple your children to coaches, pastors, and media influencers?
 - It grieves me when parents either delegate or ignore their calling to train up the children in the way they should go.
 - This is more than knowing how to change a tire or set up a budget.
 - Disciple your children by showing and telling them about Jesus and living a life that honors him.
 - And that doesn't stop when they turn 18.
 - This is one of the most sickening things I've witnessed:
 - Parents who stop praying and investing in their adult children.
 - They can stay on your insurance or phone plan until they are 25, but you won't continue to invest in their spiritual maturity.
- The youth must remember the Lord while they are young.
- **We can't remember what we have never known!**
 - Can your children remember dad lifting his hands in worship?
 - Can your children remember you leading your spouse in prayer?
 - If they can't, let that change today!
 - Let them remember the day something changed in mom or dad or grandpa or uncle.
 - Give them a Bible that has been well used and passed down.
 - Let there be tear stains on the pages.
 - Tell them the stories that tell of how God met you when.
 - And if you don't have that well-used Bible, go make one.
 - If you don't have the stories, pray for them.

To those who are getting older every day:

- Don't let the excitement of life cause you to forget God.
- While you are working, and dreaming, playing, raising kids, and trying to survive, REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR.
- Don't walk alone, but Remember.

What do we need to know and remember?

All you need to know...

¹² But beyond these, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body. ¹³ When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. ¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

A. We live in an age that has never had more information and yet has been less wise.

1. The final writer says there is NO END to learning, and not everything is worth learning.
2. We are overeducated on things that have no eternal value.

B. We have the responsibility to invest ourselves in what matters.

1. The scribe concludes: fear God, keep his commands
2. What if that became part of our filter?
3. Am I learning so that I may better Fear God and keep his commands?

C. The result of Christian study is reverence and obedience.

1. Knowing the Bible is not the goal; it is the means: to Fear God and to obey Him.
2. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever"
3. If your reading of Scripture is not increasing your desire for God and your obedience to God, then you are missing the point.

D. Let me explain in a pastoral moment:

1. I love the hunger we have for learning the Scripture, the context, the history, the words, the meaning.
2. We must always be a people dedicated to the truth and knowing the truth.
3. AND, we must be people who apply the Scripture and live it out. This is Wisdom.
 - a. We live it out in our obedience.
 - b. We live it out in the Fear of the Lord.
 - c. We live it out in our worship.
 - d. Bible reading that doesn't result in worship is amiss.
4. There will always be facts and information that you don't know. That's ok.
 - a. One of my joys as a pastor is learning every week and getting to share it with you!
 - b. Matthew 13:52 (ESV) ⁵² And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

E. I'm concerned that Licking AG is a group of people who love the Scriptures but not the God of Scripture.

1. We love knowing about God, but that isn't leading us to want to spend time with God.
2. Our knowledge is increasing, but our worship isn't!
3. It's like we are given the chance to read the autobiography or apprentice under the author, and we choose to read the book.
4. Yet, hear Jesus' invitation:

John 4:23–24 (CSB)

²³ But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth."

F. Do you know what God wants?

1. People who will worship Him:
2. How? In Spirit and truth.

3. What does that mean?

To say that we must worship God “in spirit” means, among other things, that it must originate from within, from the heart; it must be sincere, motivated by our love for God and gratitude for all he is and has done. Sam Storms¹

John Piper said:

But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.

Consider your Legacy

A. Here’s the danger of wisdom under-the-sun.

1. Solomon was supernaturally given wisdom to know and understand.
2. He encountered the very presence of God twice in his life.
3. He built the Temple.
4. Here is how Solomon began his reign.

1 Kings 3:1–3 (CSB)

Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt by marrying Pharaoh’s daughter. Solomon brought her to the city of David until he finished building his palace, the LORD’s temple, and the wall surrounding Jerusalem. ² However, the people were sacrificing on the high places, because until that time a temple for the LORD’s name had not been built. ³ Solomon loved the LORD by walking in the statutes of his father David, but he also sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

B. Yet, at the end of his life and writings, a hired scribe has to mention God in Solomon’s legacy.

1. Solomon doesn’t write the ending, Someone else has to.
2. Someone else has to put spiritual language and godly wisdom and fear onto his legacy.

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-does-it-mean-to-worship-god-in-spirit-and-truth/>

3. It's like hiring a preacher to say nice things at your funeral because no one would say them for free.

4. At the end, Solomon can speak of God only from a distance.

1 Kings 11:1–14 (CSB)

SOLOMON'S UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD

11 King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women ²from the nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, and they must not intermarry with you, because they will turn your heart away to follow their gods." To these women Solomon was deeply attached in love. ³He had seven hundred wives who were princesses and three hundred who were concubines, and they turned his heart away.

⁴When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away to follow other gods. He was not wholeheartedly devoted to the LORD his God, as his father David had been. ⁵Solomon followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the abhorrent idol of the Ammonites.

⁶Solomon did what was evil in the LORD's sight, and unlike his father David, he did not remain loyal to the LORD.

⁷At that time, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abhorrent idol of Moab, and for Milcom; the abhorrent idol of the Ammonites, on the hill across from Jerusalem. ⁸He did the same for all his foreign wives, who were burning incense and offering sacrifices to their gods.

⁹The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ¹⁰He had commanded him about this, so that he would not follow other gods, but Solomon did not do what the LORD had commanded.

¹¹Then the LORD said to Solomon, "Since you have done this and did not keep my covenant and my statutes, which I commanded you, I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. ¹²However, I will not do it during your lifetime for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of your son's hand. ¹³Yet I will not tear the entire kingdom away from him. I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem that I chose."

¹⁴So the LORD raised up Hadad the Edomite as an enemy against Solomon. He was of the royal family in Edom.

C. Solomon is remembered as a worshipper of wrong things.

1. The builder of the first and greatest Jewish Temple ends his days worshipping other gods.

2. Someday, we will all stand before the almighty God, and we will give an account for who we worshipped.

D. Your legacy matters.

1. What you leave behind must be more than money in a bank, collections of expensive toys, and a line of people saying “he was a good man.”

2. Solomon left behind a divided kingdom, a family who hated him, and the beginnings of the downfall of the Kingdom.

3. Solomon’s downfall began by ignoring the foundations of worshipping God alone and honoring Him.

It Doesn’t Have to be Meaningless

A. Is there more to life than what Solomon found?

1. Yes!

2. But if Solomon’s wisdom is incomplete, why did God inspire Solomon to write this book and why is it in our Bible?

3. Ecclesiastes shows us the results of earthly wisdom, under-the-sun wisdom, that ignores and minimizes God.

4. **When God is set aside from life’s equation, the equation equals ZERO.**

5. Without a relationship with Jesus, all the money, the relationships, the toys, the health, the influence still doesn’t add up to anything at all.

B. Solomon asked, “Where is the gain?”

1. Jesus asks in Matthew 16:26 (ESV)

²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

Matthew 16:26 (NLT)

²⁶ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

2. Do you find yourself trying to win at life, and coming up empty?

3. Are you winning in areas and with people who don’t matter in the long run?

C. Life doesn't have to feel meaningless, and it doesn't have to be Hevel.

1. You can't completely change your life overnight.
2. But your life does have meaning because of Jesus.
3. For God so loved the world.... And that includes you.
4. That very simple truth is enough for us to give our all and our best to Jesus.
5. How?

Practical Next Steps:

1. Read your Bible and add 1 worship song to the end.
 - a. Don't just read the text, worship with it.
 - b. Don't read for information and box checking; read to be transformed.
2. If you are blessed with children of any age, set up a time to share your faith story face-to-face.
 - a. I once shared a faith story of an elderly man at his funeral.
 - b. His retirement-age children had never heard it until then.
 - c. Share your story with your kid in the deer woods.
 - d. Share it at the Thanksgiving table and do it every year.
 - e. Record a video and send it to them if you can't be in person.
3. Buy a new Bible and wear it out.
 - a. Put your kid's name in it, highlight and write notes, and do it for a year.
 - b. Give it to them for a special occasion.
4. Let the church see you worship, hear you pray, and engage in the sermon!
 - a. Let them wonder "why did he go to the altar?"
 - b. Go to the altar so often people start questioning and start stating, "that's just what he does."
5. Engage in community activities, while thinking like a missionary.
 - a. If you are asked to serve, do so with the goal of introducing people to Jesus.

b. If you have to attend events, ask the Holy Spirit who you can pray and minister for.

Life doesn't have to end with meaninglessness.

Your legacy doesn't have to result in turmoil and idolatry.

Your life doesn't have to sound like Ecclesiastes, because we have someone greater than Solomon: we have Jesus.