

The Golden Years?
Ecclesiastes 12:1-8
Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16– 5:10

Bethany Baptist Church
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One day, **1985**, *Maxine* came to me with an ***opportunity***.

Maxine was a *faithful* member of our *little church*, one of our *sr. women* – **fiery red hair & fervent love** for Lord & family.

I was not in *ministry*, but I loved to *study* and *teach* the Bible. Joanie and I were completely plugged-in to our church's *ministry* and sense of *family*.

“Would Joanie & I be interested in her ***weekly nursing home ministry*** at *Shawn Manor* – ***music & Bible teaching & visiting?***”

How could I say *no*? We *went*...

We spent almost every *Friday* night, for the next **16** years, at *Shawn Manor*.

Joanie played the *piano* (later Bethany & Sarah). I *preached*.

One of my *first memories* was ***Alice***. Large. Hung over her old wooden wheel chair. Stroke. Couldn't *talk* but wasn't *afraid to talk* (she knew what was going on). *Smiled* all the time. Never *missed* one of our little *Fri* services. But *Alice* was *distracting*! In the middle of my lessons she'd look at me & *smile*, & *push* her *dentures* out of her mouth w/ her *tongue*!

I learned to *keep preaching*! ☺

I learned a lot of other *lessons* at *Shawn Manor*...

I learned that *old saints* still loved music.

And *fellowship*.

That they were very *often lonely*.

I learned that growing old is *difficult*. I learned that *everyone dies*...

Turn w/ me to the last chap in Eccl (12). Solomon's documentary of the pursuit of *joy & meaning in a life lived to the max, under the sun*. Read 1-8.

Vv.1-7 comprise *one long sentence* that nearly brings us to the end of Eccl. **One** key feature of that **one** long sentence is Solomon's **three** uses of the word *before* (**1, 2, 6**). Time is *slipping away*. Listen to your Creator, *before* it's *too late*.

Solomon calls you to *remember God* while you are *still young*, so that the *difficulties & disappointments* of *old age* do not render you *too infirm* or *embittered* to trust Him at all.

When is the *best time* to turn to God?

1. Remember Him at the *best time* (1).
2. Remember Him *before* the *worst time* (1-5).
3. Remember Him *before* there's *no more time* (6-8).

Did you see v.8? Your life will be *completely pointless* if you *live & grow old & die* w/o Christ!

...pray...

Youth is the *best time* to turn to your Creator! Read 11:9-12:1.

1. God calls you to **come** while you are **young**, because it will be so much **harder** when you are **old**. There are **3** key words that appear immediately. **Remember & Creator & before...**
2. **Remember.**
 - a. The **OT** heroine Hannah was *faithful*, but *barren*. She *begged* God for a son. The priest thought she was *drunk*! God know heard her *prayer* & knew her *heart*. **1 Sm 1:19** – *and the Lord remembered Hannah*.
 - b. **Remember.** This is a *forceful* idea. To *remember* is to **act** on someone's behalf. The Lord *remembered* – Jehovah *acted* on Hannah's behalf, and Hannah & her husband had a son (*Samuel*)!
 - c. If you are young, God is calling you to **remember**. Not so much to review a *Sunday School lesson* or recite a *Bible verse* or recall the *catechism*. Your Creator calls you to **action** – to *act* for Him!
3. **Creator.**
 - a. **Act** for God because God *acted* for you (= *made you*)! There it is: the **first & most impt** fact the Bible teaches about God: **Creator**. He **made** you! → He **owns** you. → You are **accountable** to Him!
4. **Before. Remember your Maker...before the evil days come...**
 - a. That word (*before*) shows up **3x** in Solomon's appeal: **v.1, 2, 6**. That tells you Solomon is *all about timing*. Someday it will be a **much harder time**, and then someday it will be **too late...**
 - b. Young friends, it is so much easier to *act for your King* when **life** is *joyful* & your **heart** has not *calloused* by too much contact w/ *world & sorrow*.
 - c. Young friends, it is *too late* to *turn to your King* when **life** is suddenly *shattered* like a lovely & thin *porcelain vase*.

5. **Remember?** Let me tell you how to *apply* this command as you *act* for God! 2 Tim 2:8: **Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel.**
- a. **Remember** that your loving Creator sent His perfect Son (JC) to live & die on the cross to **pay for sins**, not His own!
 - b. **Remember** that your mighty King **raised His Son from the dead** to prove that death is *conquered* & men can have *new life*.
 - c. The **action (remembering)** God calls you to, is to **repent & believe in** [this] *Good News* of a loving Savior & King.
 - d. *Remember...Creator...before...*

The best time to turn to your loving God & King is when you are young!

The best time to remember your God is before the worst time creeps up on you!
(Read vv. 1-5)

1. They tell me they call them *the golden years*... I've heard some of you call them *something else*!
 - a. Solomon begins with a general description of those *golden years* (1-2). Then he paints Eccl. famous portrait of the "old man in the mirror" (3-5).

2. Those *golden years*.... Solomon calls them *evil days*!
 - a. The entire world becomes *sepia toned*. Even when the **sun** is *shining*. Even when the **moon** is *full*. Maybe it's those *cataracts*, maybe it's that **AARP** *funk* you're always fighting.
 - b. Things that should bring *light & joy* just don't have the warm power they once had.
 - c. **Trouble?** Old age seems, for some, a *parade of troubles*. It's not just that it *rains* every once in great while, then clears up. **No!** One *dark storm* just follows right after another. Often it's your health. "***It never rains, but it pours!***"
 - d. Wise old Solomon *sums* it up w/ a *sigh* (v.1): "***no delight...***" "***I have no delight in [these years].***"

3. Solomon's sighing all *boils down* to what he sees in his *mirror* (**re-read vv.3-5**)! **This is a powerful, no-holds-barred, portrait of old age!** Many of the king's images were found in & around his *royal palace*. But they apply to the *decaying temple of his body*. (**Young people**, are you *listening*?)
 - a. *Trembling watchmen. Trembling hands.* One of my very fav men is now very old. He grew up in the **Depression** and was a **working cowboy** on an **Oklahoma ranch**. Then he worked in **oil patch refineries**. He had his problems (some self-inflicted), but he is *strong & uncomplaining*. Now he has hard time w/ his *knife & his fork & his cup*. His still-strong hands *tremble* w/ age.

- b. *Stooping strongmen. Worn out legs.* Tired backs, varicose veins, worn-out knees. Even the biggest muscles in your body run out of steam...
- c. *Failing grinders.* The Hebr text (3) is lit. *grinding women (grinding servant women)*. That's who did this *tedious* but *essential* task. Solomon is saying, the *older you get, the fewer teeth you have*. Every *meal* becomes a chore.
- d. *Opaque windows.* Actually, it's the *watchers* that grow dim, peering out in frustration thru the lattice. First it's *reading glasses*, later it's *cataract surgery*. Can you *read*? *Thread a needle*? Should you still be *driving*?
- e. *Closed doors & quiet streets (4).* *You can't hear!* Everyday sounds *fade away*. Conversations become *confusing...and frustrating*.
- f. *The daughters of song will sing softly.* Are we still talking about *hearing loss*? More likely, it's the fact that will all these problems, *nothing's really seems fun anymore*.
- g. The *evil days* are *fearful, intimidating days*. Unsteadiness, dizziness; *life* suddenly moves too fast. *Traffic* moves too fast. Decisions seem more *complicated*.
- h. *White almond tree blossoms. Silver hair.* Actually, you have **2 choices – it'll turn grey, or it'll turn loose!** Not that you really get to pick.
- i. *Grasshoppers!* When a *grasshopper* is too old to ***spring & fly***, he *drags* himself. It just isn't the *same*...
- j. *Caperberries?* The Hebrew word is actually *desire*. All the *appetites* that *spiced* your life when you were *younger* (*kitchen* → *bedroom*), become duller & less compelling as you grow *older*.

4. Solomon *captures* his *portrait* w/this *commentary* in **v.5b** (*For man goes...*). *And then...you die.* People mourn, but life goes on...
 - a. But did you read *carefully!*?! Solomon understands that *death* under the sun *isn't the end, at all.*
 - b. An *eternal home* awaits the *faithful.* Though *judgment* awaits the *foolish & unrepentant* (**read 11:9b** – *Yet know that God will bring...*).

5. This isn't really a *pretty picture*, is it? All of us will find it *unfolding in our mirror*, one day.
 - a. Solomon's *main point* is to appeal to the *young*, to turn to God before *old age* makes *repentance* harder. It gets **harder** to *remember God, not easier!*
 - b. But I want to make a second *appeal* from Solomon's text, that I believe is *readily implied* from the ideas of *remember & before.*
 - c. If you are *aging*, and you are **not convinced** that you are *in Christ* (*sins forgiven, eternal home secured*). It is **not too late.** You can know for sure that you have *eternal life.* Being a *member* (long-time attender, baptized) of this church is **not** your *ticket* or *guarantee* of heaven! **Trusting Christ is!**
 - d. Dear *older friends*, if you are struggling w/ questions & doubts about where you will **soon** *spend eternity*, can we spend some time together? Just *call me*...drop by my office! ☺ You can *know!*

The best time to remember your God is before the worst time creeps up on you!

The best time to remember your Maker is before there's no more time...

1. **Read vv.6-7.** *More of the Solomon's pictures! All framed-up as a 3rd appeal to **remember** (act) for God, **before** your time runs out. These are all still-lives of every man's death...*
 - a. **Silver cord** – broken. Cords have no power when they are pulled apart.
 - b. **Golden bowl** – crushed. No matter how valuable it was, the bowl's not much use once it's been smashed.
 - c. **Handy pitcher** – shattered. How will you carry the water now?
 - d. **Cistern wheel** – crushed. How will you **draw** your water now?
 - e. Every life, in this life, once strong & beautiful & useful, will eventually come to its earthly end.

Mike Wittmer (*The Last Enemy*)

You are going to die. Take a moment to let that sink in. You are going to die. One morning the sun will rise and you won't see it. Birds will greet the dawn and you won't hear them. Friends and family will gather to celebrate your life, and after you're buried they'll return to the church for ham and scalloped potatoes. Soon your job and favorite chair and spot on the team will be filled by someone else. The rest of the world may pause to remember—it will give you a moment of silence if you were rich or well known—but then it will carry on as it did before you arrived.

2. Solomon knows where our bodies (tents) **first** came from! The wise old king has been reading **Genesis**: God made man's outer man from the dust. So to dust your body returns (for now!).
 - a. But the Creator *breathed* life into men & women, *fashioned in His image*. So after death your **spirit** (the real you) returns to God.
 - b. Again, **11:9b**. *Know that God will bring you to judgment...*
 - c. And again, **v.6**. *Man goes to his eternal home.*

- d. *Naked I came from my mother's womb, & naked I shall return there. The LORD gave & the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* (Job 1:21)
3. Turn w/ me to **Eccl 1:2** (*hold your place – we'll be right back to **ch 12***).
Now back to **12:8** (**see it? Read**)
 - a. "*Vanity of vanities...*" If all of Eccl is a *sandwich*, there's the **2 slices of bread** Solomon squeezes it into. His search for *fulfillment & meaning, **under the sun***, all boils to down to this:
 - b. No matter what you do, you *grow old & die. Death & dust & judgment to come.*
 - c. **Before** it's too late, & **the sooner the better**, **remember** your Creator.
 - d. Or *all* will have been *in vain!*

...pray...