

Praising the Almighty with Aging People

Ecclesiastes 12

The Book of Ecclesiastes records Solomon's grand experiment with worldliness. Yet 1 Kings 4:30-34 described him as the wisest man on the face of the earth. Which one would win? The same struggle is going on within each of us: Will we continue in godly wisdom? Or will we start grasping for worldliness? This struggle shows you the amazing potential to learn from Solomon's writing in the Book of Ecclesiastes. He had it all! Here was a wise man, blessed with all the work he wanted to enjoy; he had all the wine, all the women and all the wealth his heart could desire. And he wrote out the details of his worldly experiences and gave us his wise conclusion. What did he observe about his numerous experiences? "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" that vexes the spirit (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; 2:11, 17, 26; 3:19; 4:4,8,16; 5:7; 6:2, 9; 7:6, 15; 8:10, 14; 9:9; 11:8; 12:8). This is the theme of Ecclesiastes. What was Solomon's conclusion?

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

On this Grandparents Day, 2022, I would like to preach to you from Solomon's wise conclusions in Ecclesiastes 12. I would like to speak to you as your own grandfather or grandmother would if they could step to the pulpit today. But to get this exactly right, we need to go back just a few verses to show that this chapter is like a volume between two bookends. In Ecclesiastes 11, Solomon applied his findings specifically to young people with this personal address: **"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. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity"** (Revelation 11:9-10)

Young people, you are encouraged to love life cheerfully and let your heart be thrilled with the God-given joy of living. But to do so without sorrow and vexing evil, you need to keep in mind that God will judge every action and every attitude in every episode of life. So in your zest for living, **"fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."** Do that, and you will gain victory over vanity. With wise, aging people, you can praise the Almighty God.

Solomon's Risky Wager

No one knows why Chance took that chance. No one knows why Solomon seemed to take leave of his senses. When 18 year old Chance Warner graduated from high school earlier that day, he probably saw the future bright before him. The father of an 8 month old, he was proud that he had finished high school. To celebrate the day, Chance and his friends went to Lake Allatoona, near his home in Georgia. And that was when the dangerous game began. Using a long rope, they tied a shopping cart to a tree on a steep hill above the lake. When the time came for his "joy ride", each player would get into the cart. His friends would release the cart to send him hurtling down the hill. Gaining speed, the cart would fly onto a ramp and launch into the air. With a heavy splash, cart and rider would plunge into the lake. Then the friends would drag the cart out of the lake for the next rider. But when it came time for Chance to ride, he changed things. He untied the rope from the tree and tied it to his belt. Maybe he thought that he was a good swimmer and could bring the cart back

by himself. But he couldn't. Chance drowned in 30 feet of water that Saturday night when the heavy shopping cart dragged him to his death. The authorities recovered his body from the lake the next day, still tied to the shopping cart. Chance's father indicated that he might have been drinking before he died.¹ In Ecclesiastes, chapter 2, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived described his foolhardy project: *"I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine, (yet acquainting my heart with wisdom) and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life."* (Ecclesiastes 2:3). So how do we gain victory over vanity? In a tug of war with worldliness and wine, Solomon thought that his great wisdom would ultimately win out. Maybe he was betting that he could just watch the tug of war as a referee. After all, he was wise enough to know that it was an empty endeavor, right? But 1 Kings 11:4-11 makes it clear the Solomon ultimately lost his tug of war. He was no longer totally devoted to the Lord. His heart laid hold of folly and it dragged him into the deep. Laying hold of folly, his heart lay hold of false gods. If this happened to the wisest man on the face of the earth, where does that leave the rest of us? As we shall see, the words of truth are right, but each one of us is individually responsible to put them into practice – even Solomon. Solomon was careful to write down the results of his experiment in "laying hold of folly." His warnings are recorded in the Book of Ecclesiastes. You can learn great wisdom there without having to pay the painful price that Solomon ultimately paid. Life lived that way is "vanity of vanities" and vexation of spirit. But you could learn to praise the Almighty with aging people.

Remember Your Creator, the God Who Gave You Life, vs. 1-7: "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... Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 7). Verses 1 and 7 give us the right view of God for this discussion. The Lord God made you; He is the Giver of this life that you enjoy so much. How will you use it to honor His Majesty and avoid personal misery? He gave you every nerve ending you have; how can you use these for His never-ending glory? How will you win a victory over vanity? According to John 1:3, your Creator is Christ. Serve Him while you are still young. Why? He came to earth, became a man and gave up His young life to die for your sins and mine. Rising again, He showed us the glories of endless, joyful life. Will you embrace your Creator to ask Him to make you a new creature in His new creation? (See 2 Corinthians 5:1-17.) Jesus said that He had come so that men would have **"...life, and that they might have it more abundantly"** (John 10:10).

What Is It Like? Being at Home in a Human Body (an Aging Body)

Verses 2-6 use a number of illustrations about aging to awaken the younger generation. According to verse 1, "the evil days" (the days of adversity) are coming. If you reach old age, you will come to the place where you say, **"I have no pleasure in them..."** (in those days). Shortly thereafter, your body will return to the dust of the earth as your spirit passes into the hands of God. What would your grandparents tell you? What can you learn about aging people from your grandparents? First, raise your hand if you are an aging person. The fact is that from the youngest child to the oldest adult, we are all aging; we are all growing older. And the days of adversity are coming. Solomon thoughtfully compared an aging home with an aging human body. Step outside on a foggy, overcast night. That's what the evil days will be like: **"While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain"** (v. 2). Your eyes and ears will become dark and cloudy, and life will begin to seem like a dark fog.

Ever been inside your house to hear it creaking and shuddering when a strong wind blew at night? Here's what your feeble body will feel like when you reach "that age." **"In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves ..."** (v. 3a). Keep an eye on the weakness in those older human bodies – we are all headed that way. In a home at that time, there would have been a grist mill for grinding grain. So when you get to the age that you start losing your permanent teeth, remember the words of Solomon: **"...and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened"** (v. 3b). Whether it is cavities or cataracts, dentures or macular degeneration of the eyes, you know those days are coming.

Then there is hearing loss. Listen to your neighbor's mower as you walk inside your house and close the door. Notice how the mower sound is muffled? That's what your hearing will be like when you approach "the evil days." Your ear cells will start dying off. This is so common, that many public parks now play high pitched tones at night to ward off young vandals. They play those tones because they know older people can't hear them! So, ready or not, here it comes: **"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 music shall be brought low"** (v.4). But why do older people wake up when it's still dark outside? It's because older people have difficulty in getting a good night's sleep; they wake up and often have no idea why.

When you are not as spry as you used to be, you will probably be a lot more careful about stepping out on high places. Ladders will take more of your effort than they used to. So verse 5 says about the aged, **"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..."** Why does Solomon mention the almond tree while describing aging? Hint: the blooms are white. Have you started looking for grey hairs yet? Is that snow on the roof? And all of us have been around older people who make mountains out of molehills. Why? When you get to be older, little things start to bother you. Those grasshopper-type annoyances that you used to be able to dispatch with a flick of your finger start to become a burden. In verse 5, Solomon went on to say, **"and desire shall fail: because man goes to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."** There will come a time when the desires of youth are no more. Appetites of all kinds just start to fade, especially as you approach the day when the funeral procession is for you.

Various commentators have made guesses about verse 6, but you get the picture: **"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"** (v. 6). Whether these refer to the brain, the spine and the heart is anybody's guess. But the point is the same. Those organs necessary for life are falling apart little by little. In 2 Samuel 14:14, the wise woman said to King David, **"For we must needs die, and are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again ..."** Then shall the dust return to the earth. Ecclesiastes chapter 1 began with a description of endless seasonal cycles; chapter 12 concludes with the end of a human life.

Remember the Words of Truth from Your Wise Shepherd, vs. 8-12

With all these aging illustrations around them, why do so many people try to forget what is coming? What more could God give them to help them awaken to righteousness and usefulness? The answer to that question is in verses 8-12: pointed words of truth. **"⁸Vanity of vanities, says the preacher; all is vanity. ⁹ And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are**

given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh*" (vs. 8-12). The astounding emptiness is everywhere. What should an older, wiser generation do for the younger generation? Wise Solomon leads the way: "... he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed and sought out and set in order many proverbs." The Book of Proverbs with its appeal to "my son" has helped young people across the generations. As a preacher, he sought to find appropriate words – the upright words of truth. Surely, this is what aging people – of all ages – need. And we can learn to praise the Almighty with aging people.

With apologies to Humpty Dumpty: *Empty Empties live for their lusts, Empty Empties crumble to dust; Wine, wealth and women, vexation and pain, cannot put Empties together again.* But what will "put Empties together again?" In Ecclesiastes 12, Solomon prescribed the "**words of truth... given from one Shepherd**" which are like sharp sticks (goads) and sharp nails. Goads keep animals moving in the right direction; nails keep a building together; sharp words help to reattach you to meaningful life. In Psalm 23, we learn that "**The Lord is my Shepherd.**" That Shepherd is Jesus Christ who gave His life for His sheep, and rose again from the grave. Jesus said, "**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one**" (John 10:27-30). Ecclesiastes 12:12 warns us about the enormous number of information sources in our world. From the books of Solomon's time to the web pages of our day, the danger is the same: information overload. What we really need is the wisdom to sort through all this knowledge in order to act on our priorities. C.T. Studd was a missionary to China, India and Africa, who gave up a professional sports career to serve the Lord. He gave away the sizeable inheritance that his father had given him. Why would C.T. Studd do these things? He wrote, "Only one life will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

Remember to Come to the Right Conclusion, vs. 13-14

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

According to verse 13, obeying the Holy God is the essence of what it means to be a good human being. If you would live a joyful life, victorious over vanity, learn to fear the Lord. This is not a joyless endeavor. On the contrary, the fear of the Lord will make you a confident, positive motivator. "**Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon those that fear Him, upon those that hope in His mercy**" (Psalm 33:18). Those who fear the Lord hold to their confident expectation of His mercy. "**In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence...**" (Proverbs 14:26). Practically speaking, what does this mean? It means that we think about every thing (every thought, every action, every response, every plan) with respect toward God; each of these should be evaluated in light of the coming judgment. You can fasten your thinking in place with God's words of truth. When you read a news article or hear an opinion, ask yourself, "If I believed this, where would it take me? Would it help me prepare for my meeting at the Judgment Seat?" Proverbs 14:15 puts it this way: "**The simple [the naïve] believes every word: but the prudent man looks well to his going.**" In the fear of the Lord, aging people praise the Almighty. [Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio <https://www.cbfindlay.org/praising-the-almighty-with-aging-people/>]



¹ <http://www.newsnet5.com/news/national/game-gone-wrong-georgia-teen-chance-werner-tied-to-shopping-cart-drowns-in-lake>