
Remember

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8

Russ Kennedy

Bono of U2 fame has written: "Ecclesiastes is one of my favorite books. It's a book about a character who wants to find out why he's alive, why he was created. He tries knowledge. He tries wealth. He tries experience. He tries everything. You hurry to the end of the book to find out why, and it says, 'Remember your Creator.' In a way, it's such a letdown. Yet it isn't." No, it isn't. Getting to know our Creator before we grow old and die is the most important thing we can ever do. [Bono cited by Hughes, p. 271]

Between Eden and Eternity we will live a life between youth and old age realities...

The Realities of Youth (v. 7-10)

"Candid as ever, these verses match the delight of existence with the seriousness of it. Each joy here is confronted by its opposite or its complement; there is no softening of the colours on either side. The bliss of being alive is captured in the lovely sentence which opens with the saying, 'Light is sweet...'" (Kidner)

⁷ Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

⁸ So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

Solomon addresses those who are young. So he is speaking to the youth. This includes more than we would. But for our young people and young adults, listen carefully to what the Preacher says.

Ups and Downs of Life (v. 7-8)

The opening couplet reminds of the ups and downs, the light and dark of life. Make no mistake. There is an authentically godly enjoyment of this life. It is sad when all Christians see is the darkness. The light and the sun are sweet to the senses. We don't even need to "spiritualize" the experience. Often Solomon has pointed us, as Christian realists, to really enjoy what God has given us even in the days under the sun. So, enjoy while you can. There will be enough dark days as it is.

Live life to the fullest. If you have a long life, be happy that God has been pleased to grant it. But never take the pleasures and joys of this world for granted. Remember that there have been and will be even more, dark and difficult days. This is simply the way of life. We may not deny the light or the dark days. But we must not only see the light or the dark days. It is foolish and futile to do otherwise.

If this sounds dark to you then you need to get out in the light more.

Freedom and Accountability in Life (v.9)

Young people, be glad for the days of your youth. These are good days. These are days that you will not have again. But you must keep something in mind. The warning here is not meant as dire threat to kill your joy. This warning is meant to keep your joy in bounds. As one writer says, "Joy was created to dance with goodness, not alone." (Kidner p. 98)

Joy untempered by a sense of the seriousness of this time under the sun just becomes triviality. Joy uncontained by accountability will become vice. So you are allowed to dance. You are allowed to leap and quiver with joy but not dance in a way that abandons all restraint. Your present time is not all there is. There is coming an accountability. That future answering to God then gives realness to present joy.

But too many are enjoying life in order to avoid thinking about the future and accountability. The very noise of their happiness is drowning out and covering over the thoughts of facing God. You will face God, one day. The question is will you face Him on your own or with Christ as your advocate?

Spiritual and Physical Pains in Life (v.10)

Commentators are all over the map with verse 10. The first phrase is easy. But what does it mean to "put away pain?" The couplet is intended to read together. The second is expanding on the first. They follow on the lines before them. If this is so, then is this not the meaning?

Stop being agitated about all the things in life. It is easy to be vexed about many things. We sweat the small things and worry about the inconsequential. We are agitated over things distant from us over which we have little or no control. These worries and vexations cause many aches and pains in the body. There is a connection between the two. What is going in your heart affects your body. What is going on in your body tempts your heart.

This is an important lesson for youth to learn. There are so many high powered, high pressured things that disturb and make young people anxious. With social media and the immediacy of verbal affirmation or destruction, with the driving focus on craving approval and acceptance, young people often nervous, anxious, vexed over many things. Put those things away. Put away the cravings in your heart that cause you to be anxious about so many stupid, silly, trivial things. Put away getting your identity and your worth from other people. Rejoice much in this time of being young. Stop worrying about the wrong things. Do understand that you are accountable. Do understand that you are not and cannot be eternally young.

One commentator wrote, "Rejoice responsibly. Enjoy life's pleasures, but not in sinful ways. Celebrate the gift of youth, but at the same time follow God's command to 'flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.'" (2 Timothy 2:22)." [Hughes, p.266]

The Realities of Aging (12:1-7)

This is where we are all headed. No matter who we are, we will all get older. If God do grants us long years, in this fallen world we will become frailer and weaker. Part being a Christian realist is recognizing the inevitable march of time. We are, after all, living between Eden and eternity.

This is why we should enjoy relishing and remembering our youth. There is something good and healthy about remembering our lives. We are designed by God to do it. Yes, it is possible to take it into an unhelpful and morbid direction. But sit and share and savor what we remember about the goodness and grace of God in our younger days is a sweet thing.

Sunsets can be beautiful. But they do come just before the darkness...

¹ Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; ² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, ³ in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, ⁴ and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— ⁵ they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— ⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, ⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Keep your Creator in Mind (v.1)

A keen observer of people wrote, "Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened." (Pratchett cited by (Gibson))

To you young people, you young adults, Solomon speaks with consummate wisdom. There is something much, much more important to remember and to reflect on now. Yes, there is the privilege of rejoicing in the life you have and the responsibility to be mindful of your accountability. But in the days of your youth, before the fallenness and darkness of life hardens you, remember your Creator.

The word remember is not simply to recall, to recollect. The word means to remember so as to give attention to. It is basically a call to pay attention to God through what you have been taught and what you know. This call comes to not only those who have been taught about God, but also to those who only know of the wrath of God revealed in them to all creatures since the creation (Romans 1).

Why is that so? Because it is the "Creator" who is to be given attention to. All humanity, all creation, is accountable to God who is our Creator. The denial of being created by God is ultimately a denial of accountability to Him. But this is delusion. God exists whether you believe in Him or not. He made you, whether you acknowledge that or not. The fact that you deny it is itself monstrous rebellion against the One who not only gave you being, knit

your soul and body in the womb, but also who sustains you right now at this moment by His power. In the joy of life and the energy of youth, give whole hearted attention to your Creator.

And do so now before the dark days come. The dark days maybe referring the days when you are hardened against God. Or it may be the dark days when God withdraws His grace and leaves you to your own devices. Or it may be the dark days when your reason leaves you and no faith is possible.

Keep your Troubles in Mind (v.2-5a)

Remember your Creator while you can for growing old is not an easy thing. There many troubles and trials attendant to it. These troubles and trials may draw you to consider the Lord. But too often they are met with a hard heart and a disregarding mind.

Here is a stunning picture of an elderly person. It is unhelpful to try to say what each thing is. That would be like dissecting a butterfly or an eagle. The image is arresting. We can see the elderly person, body bent, legs trembling, teeth missing and eyes cloudy with cataracts. They are early to bed yet wake often. They are careful as they walk lest they are knocked down. Their hair is white, their gait slow and energy weak.

This lovely imagery hides and highlights the painful changes that come with growing older. We hope to do well. We hope to be ready. But then there come the surprising and disconcerting troubles and weaknesses. Trifocals... sleeping often, waking often... new pains...

Keep your Death in Mind (v.5b-7)

...because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern,⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Most memorably of all, the pictures of verse 6 capture the beauty and fragility of the human frame: a masterpiece as delicately wrought as any work of art, yet as breakable as a piece of earthenware, and as useless in the end as a broken wheel. The first half of this verse seems to portray a golden lamp suspended by a silver chain; it will take only the snapping of a link to let it fall and be spoilt. And if this seems too finely-drawn a picture of our familiar selves, it is balanced by the scene at the deserted well—eloquent of the transience of the simplest, most basic things we do. There will be a last time for every familiar journey, every routine job. There is a reminder in verse 7 of the future for all of us, dust to dust... (Kidner)

But we must remember that the outer person, the body is not all there is. The New Testament in 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5 gives us a deeper perspective as we draw closer to eternity.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not

be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

For Christians, part of our Biblical realism is a hope, an assurance. This failing, fading, faltering body is actually evidence of an inner, renewing, growing new man. How is that so? Because this whole old creation that we are a part of is decaying and fading away. But the new creation begun at the resurrection and extended through our regeneration is being renewed day by day. So, while we groan now in the ever-present struggles of this creation, even the struggles of growing older, we may be moving in one sense toward death. But death is not a destination. Death is a door with immeasurable glories waiting on the other side.

Reflections...

On being young

On the fleetingness of youth

On the flightiness of youth

On growing old

Its certainty...

Its frailty...

Its difficulty...

Its ministry...

On minding the older

Exhort children...

Encourage..

Engage...

