



Ecclesiastes 11:7 - 12:7

“A Word for the Young & the Old”

11/6/2022

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Anaheim Hills | CA

RockCC.com

Transcript

21:02

I don't know about you guys, but it's always a good thing to be in the house of the Lord. But it is especially fun to me as we get to kind of finish up. We're coming down the last couple of weeks of our study of Ecclesiastes. I don't know about you guys, but I've really enjoyed this study.

21:19

I think it's been really beneficial for us. I think the book of Ecclesiastes, as we described it at the very beginning of this book, before we even started, you know, it's a book of the Bible that was written on Monday morning, right?

21:30

It's one of those books of the Bible that's very, very honest about what we see in life, what we see in the world and doesn't give us a rosy picture all the time, but gives us a

very clear picture of what it looks like to live life with wisdom, to live life and to search for meaning and all the things that we see in life.

21:50

So, you know, the book has been incredibly honest about the realities of life, but it has given us some brilliant wisdom as it has shared some details about the brevity of life, about how all of life is is hevel.

22:03

Is that word the that's translated in English as vanity or meaningless, but it's this idea of smoke. It's this idea that it's just there for an instant and then it's gone. It gives us this great wisdom talking about how short life is, but in reality, how weighty life is as well.

22:20

The fact that this life has an impact on what happens in the life to come. Once we leave this world, there's another one to come. And so it's been so beneficial, I think, for us. But as we study this week, our text is gonna be Ecclesiastes 11 seven through chapter 12, verse seven.

22:37

So you can make your way there in your copy of God's word. If you don't have one, there should be one hiding underneath of your chair. You can grab and follow along as well. But I think this week, it kind of gives us, in our passage, it gives us a beautiful summary of so many of the topics that we've seen throughout the book.

22:54

It gives us kind of a final word of wisdom as so much of the book has been focused on wisdom. It kind of gives us a final word of wisdom to the young, and then to the old. So the preacher throughout the book of Ecclesiastes has talked about this reality, that life is fleeting, that death is soon to come for all of us, and it ultimately, that death renders all of our actions in this life meaningless is what he would argue.

23:19

But the preacher ends the book by answering the question, how can I have joy in the face of impending aging and impending death? So I think in all these verses that we're gonna read in just a second, I think that there's something for each of us to take from his suggestion, his words of wisdom to the young, and there's also something for us to take, all of us, to take from his words of wisdom to the old.

23:44

So I would encourage you to follow along. We're gonna read now our entire passage. We're gonna start in Ecclesiastes 11:7, and make our way all the way down to chapter 12, verse seven. It says starting in 11:7, that light is sweet and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

23:59

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. So rejoice, oh young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.

24:13

Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. Remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

24:27

Verse one of chapter 12, he says, 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. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain.

24:45

In the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent and the grinders cease, but because they are few, those who look through the windows are dimmed and the doors on the street are shut.

24:55

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, 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.

25:16

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 and the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

25:29

These are the words of the Lord. Would you guys pray with me now? God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that we can gather together, that we can gather as a church and that we can humble ourselves collectively, that all of us can humble ourselves before your word so that we might hear what beautiful things you have to say to us.

25:47

God, we pray this morning that you would open our eyes to behold the wonders of your word. God, we pray that you would help us to, God, to hear from you. God, that your spirit, that you have given to dwell inside of all who have been brought into your family.

26:02

God, we pray that your spirit would work in our hearts. God, that you would work in our lives. God, help us to grasp and to hold onto and to live by this wisdom as the preacher kind of begins to conclude his arguments in the book of Ecclesiastes.

26:18

God, we humble ourselves. We pray as Samuel did. As Samuel encouraged the young boy, speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. God, we pray all this in Jesus's beautiful name, amen. All right, well, as we jump in, the first thing that we see in our passage is this word of wisdom to the young in the end of chapter 11.

26:39

In chapter 11, verses seven through 10, we see this word of wisdom to the young. So we see that the first command, the first call in our text that we're looking at this week is to rejoice in the goodness of life.

26:52

Even though we know that life is short, even though we know that life will be gone in a moment, that it's this wisp of smoke that's there for a moment and then it's gone just as quickly as it came, the call to rejoice is a clear one that we've seen several different times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes.

27:08

We've been told that it's important for us to enjoy all the days of life that God chooses to give us. Now, we don't know how many days that may be. We don't know if we have hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands, I don't know how many years that would be, but yeah, we don't know if we have a huge number of days or if we just have a few days left.

27:28

That can be different for each and every one of us, but we do know that however many days God has left for us, however many days God chooses to give us, we should be thankful for every single one of those and we should enjoy them.

27:42

As verse eight and verse nine tells us, that if a person lives many years, well, let him rejoice. It tells us if you're young, rejoice, oh, young man in your youth. He tells us that joy should be a characteristic of our lives that we see.

27:57

You know, when older people are commanded here in verse 8 to praise God for the length of their days, young people by contrast are commanded to praise God for the strength of their youth. I think the preacher here is giving us instructions and first he looks at young people, at these youth that he's speaking to.

28:17

He tells us what a full young life looks like when it's lived in the way that he's commanding in verses 9 and 10. He says in verse 9 and 10, rejoice, O young man, in your youth. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.

28:32

Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. He tells them to remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

28:48

the young man in these verses. We read these and I think if you've been around church for a while, depending on what church you've attended or what preachers you've listened to or kind of where you come from, I think many of us will read these verses and go, that doesn't sound like anything I've ever heard before.

29:03

Did he just say that a young person is supposed to pursue joy and that he should let his heart cheer him? He should walk in the ways of his heart and whatever it is that his heart and his eyes want, well he should pursue those things.

29:16

It's kind of what it seems like it's saying here, right? Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. You know, I think once again, as we've seen several times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, the preacher here is affirming the goodness of creation, is affirming the fact that we should enjoy all it is that God has given to us.

29:36

Everything that that God has blessed us with in this life, we should enjoy it. And he's telling this young person to make the most of it all. But it still sounds strange, doesn't it? Just go do whatever you want.

29:46

Is that what he's telling us here in these verses? Go walk in the ways of your heart. Whatever it is that makes you happy, go for it. Well of course not. Of course that's not what he's saying because we have to fit scripture together with scripture, right?

30:00

It all supports, it doesn't ever contradict each other, it doesn't ever disagree. We believe that this is one document that is completely written by God's Holy Spirit and given to us as his word to us.

30:13

And so as we believe that, well then we have to make sure that, yeah, God is internally consistent. God doesn't change his mind. So in the same way his word won't change its mind. So this passage is not telling us to invite young people into just go do whatever you want.

30:30

Go live a life of worldly hedonism. If it feels good, do it... He's obviously not saying that. That's even clear just inside of the book of Ecclesiastes. He's told us that there's dangerous things that we can find ourselves going and doing.

30:44

He's warned him several times. Hey, don't do that. Don't do that, don't do this over here. It's not foolish behavior that the preacher here is advocating, but he's advocating that a young person should live their life out joyfully in the world that God has made and that God oversees.

31:03

The reason that we know that this isn't just him saying, go do whatever you want is that in the same verse, he says to follow your heart, to follow your eyes, to enjoy the good things of life, but he finishes that same verse with a statement.

31:16

He says, know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. We know that one day we're gonna stand before God and ultimately we're gonna have to give an account for all the things that we chose to do or not to do, to say or not to say, to participate in or not participate in.

31:33

He warns him, go enjoy life, but remember that one day you will stand before God. Also, he says in verse 10, I think this is just the perfect word of wisdom for young people as our 180 students are in here this morning.

31:47

Guys, listen, listen to this, because I think this is so key for you. He says in verse 10, it's a little bit of a bummer, but it's so valuable and important for you guys to understand now. He says in verse 10 that youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

32:03

Now, we as a society, treasure, value, kind of idolize youth, right? You ever watch TV, the people on the commercials are always young and happy and in good shape, and they look like the epitome of what we're supposed to want to be, right?

32:21

You know, if you're not young and you're not perfectly put together like the people on TV, well then, well, you know, what value is there in life? What value is there in all the things that we go? And it don't get old, nobody wants to get old, right?

32:37

Well, what it's saying here is it's reminding us that youth is vanity, that it's that wisp of smoke that's there for a moment, but eventually, it's gone. Things start to hurt. When you sit up, it's not quite as easy as it used to be.

32:53

I find myself, I know there's a lot of people in the room that would tell me I'm not old yet, and I don't get to complain about being old, but I've found myself starting to make noises when I get up out of bed or when I get up off the couch, right?

33:04

You know, there's just that kind of like natural ugh, that you kind of have to crawl yourself up out of the couch or whatever. I think anybody that's walked through this process of starting to get older, in the process of getting older, we realized that, you know, it seems like just yesterday that we were, you know, looking forward to driving for the first time, or we were looking forward to graduation so that we could go and do the things that we wanted to do.

33:30

And it seems like just a moment ago that those days were in our future still. And now they're, some of us, miles, some of us more miles in the past, right? The reality is young people, that youth doesn't last forever, and that there's something to be said for living life with wisdom, with the end in mind.

33:52

If you know what you want to be, how you want to end your life, well then you can work backwards from there, and you can make decisions that'll help you make wise choices that help you get there. If you want to be successful in life, well then you need to make the appropriate decisions on how to get to that point, right?

34:07

If you want to have a good family at the end of life, well then you need to make the decisions that help you get to that point. All these things that we look around and we see, it's not saying here that youth is meaningless, that there's no value, that there's no joy in being young.

34:22

He's already told you, rejoice in your youth, rejoice in its many pleasures. But he's reminding us that it's going to be gone in a moment, so enjoy it while it's here, right? Enjoy it while it's here.

34:34

To quote a movie that seems like it was made yesterday to some of us, right? I don't recommend all the thoughts and all the theology that shows up in this movie, but anybody remember Ferris Bueller's Day Out?

34:44

You guys remember at the very beginning and at the end of that movie, he says life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it. I think that's good advice for us to consider today.

34:57

For young people that are sitting in this room, life moves pretty fast, and before you realize it, you're going to be graduated and you're going to be out on your own. Before you realize it, you're going to have a family.

35:05

Before you realize it, it's going to be retirement time, and you're going to look back and go, whoa, where'd the days go? Enjoy them while they're here. Enjoy them. Live every day like it matters. So that's our word of wisdom to the young that we see in this passage.

35:20

Now we have a word of wisdom to the older people in our passage in the beginning of chapter 12. In the beginning of chapter 12 and verse 1, it says, 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.

35:39

I think, remember, I said it earlier, I think all of us can take some wisdom, can take some benefit from the words of wisdom to the young and the words of wisdom to the old. But as someone who's listening to this message today, whatever age you are, however many days or years or decades you have left in your life, as someone who is still on earth and is still listening to the sound of my voice, that means that there's still time for you,

36:06

that God has still left you here for a reason. So that means that in some sense you're not as old as the people that were, the person that we're getting ready to read about in this poem that we see in the beginning of chapter 12 who has come to the end of life.

36:22

God's left you here because God has a reason for leaving you here. God didn't make a mistake and somehow miss your name when it was time to call roll in heaven. If you're here, it's because he wants you here.

36:34

It's because he's got work for you to do and it's because he's left you here for a purpose. So please don't forget that. Please don't ever feel like, well I'm too old so I can't do whatever it is. I don't know what it is, but I know that there's a reason, right?

36:49

There's a man that comes to mind for me as I think about this. I don't know exactly how many years it was, but he lived 60 or 70 years before he ever felt called or God called him to come and to be a preacher.

37:06

But now we have one of our elders who comes up here and preaches and he wasn't doing that up until three or four years ago, right Bruce? God said, no, no, no, no, no. I'm not done with you. I still have work for you to do.

37:19

And so he took on a new profession, a new trade as he was, you know, 70 years old, whenever it was that you started preaching. He felt like God was calling him to this and the church needed it. and he was willing to be obedient to go and to do what God was calling him to.

37:37

There's always things—thank you—there's always things that we can go and do and serve. As long as we have breath in our lungs, there's work to do, right? There's work to do. But we also see here in chapter 12, we see this poetic description of the aging process that I think at the beginning of chapter 12, it starts to talk about this reality that comes for all of us.

38:04

It soon will have its effect on all of us, whether you're close to this or whether you're already experiencing it or whether you have years to come still. He encourages us, remember your Creator at the beginning of chapter 12, as God has created you, but in the end, death comes for all of us.

38:22

This section here that we're getting ready to read has been described by some as the most beautiful poem ever written about growing old. The preacher at the beginning of chapter 12, he says to remember your Creator, and he says that the time to remember our Creator is as it starts in verse 2, remember your Creator before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars have darkened and the clouds return after the rain.

38:48

In the day when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men are bent, the grinders cease because they're few, those who look through the windows are dimmed 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.

39:08

They're 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.

39:22

Verse 2 as it speaks here, it compares the troubles of old age to a gathering storm, right? Both day and night are darkened by clouds and even after the rain comes, it says that the clouds gather and form again.

39:36

It's suggesting that the lights of life, the sun and the stars and the moon, that the lights of life grow dim. As Derek Kidner was describing this scene in his commentary, he said that it's somber enough to bring home to us not only the fading of mental and physical powers, but the more general desolations of old age.

39:56

There are many lights that are liable then to be withdrawn besides those of the senses and faculties. As one by one, old friends are taken, familiar customs change, and long-held hopes now have to be abandoned.

40:10

That sounds familiar, doesn't it? I think many of us have experienced loss in some way, shape, or form. As you get older, those losses become more and more frequent. First you lose your grandparents, right?

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Then you lose your parents one day, and then you start to lose peers, people in your own generation that age starts to come for all of us. And, you know, as I'm reading this, I remember I think of Kari's great-grandmother that, you know, by the time she reached, I think it was 101 years old, she had actually had to bury, as a parent, all but one of her children.

40:45

Life has a way of making those lights in our life. They start to go out as we get older, don't they? The senses start to dim, verses three through five compare an elderly person to a house that is slowly crumbling with decay.

41:00

Philip Reichen provided a clear and simple explanation of all the symbolism of all these things in his commentary. So I just wanna read this chunk as he explains all of these things to us as we look at them.

41:10

I think it's a profound insight. He says that the keepers of the house are a person's arms which start to tremble. The strong men are legs which are bent with age. The grinders are teeth, of course, if there are any left.

41:24

The windows are the eyes that are dimmed by cataracts or a general loss of vision. The doors are ears that are deaf or hard of hearing and thus closed to the hustle and bustle of a noisy street. The daughters of song are vocal chords that no longer have the elastic strength to make sweet music.

41:42

Since almond trees are pale in the springtime, the phrase "the almond tree blossoms" indicates that someone's hair has turned white with age. Finally, he concludes that the crumbling house will one day fall and he points to this image of a grasshopper in verse five to illustrate this.

41:58

He says, typically grasshoppers spring up in the air. So if a grasshopper is stiffly scraping itself along the ground, well, it's a goner. Yeah, the same fate awaits us all. Not just the diminishment of old age, but the dust of death.

42:14

I've heard people say over and over and over again, growing old isn't for wimps, right? I've heard that and it always sticks with me, but I think we can look to people who have aged well, who have aged gracefully.

42:26

I think we can look to their story at whether they're someone who we can look in the eyes today or whether it's someone- who has already gone on to be with the Lord, we can look at their stories of faithfulness and we can learn from them.

42:37

We can benefit from them. Anybody have a parent or a grandparent who's played an influential role in your life that you could benefit from watching and learning from their experiences? Anybody ever enjoy going back and reading biographies, reading stories of saints who have gone before us, who have come and lived faithfully, have served the Lord faithfully up until the very end?

43:00

I think we can learn from the witness of these people who have come before us. We look at these stories of growing old, of facing death, and I think some of those things are some of the hardest experiences in life that we're ever going to have to face.

43:16

I think the Bible is honest about this reality, but it's not bitter about this reality. It just speaks to the realities that the eyes start to get dim, that the senses start to go, that the loved ones that were around us start to ultimately go one day.

43:34

But the fact is that God shows loving care for his children all throughout life. The Bible even talks about as God loves the saints that have gone before us, loves his saints as they come to old age and ultimately to the grave.

43:50

Psalm 116 is a verse that a chapter that always comes to mind for me with this. Psalm 116 verse 15 says the precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. We have this word of wisdom to the young that we looked at, we have this word of wisdom to the old that we looked at, but now I think there's a reminder to all of us that we're gonna look at here in the last couple of verses of our passage.

44:15

You know verses 6 and 7 in chapter 12, they they kind of conclude this poetic description of death, but they do so with a somber warning to all of us that I think we

should take heed of. Now before we read those verses though, I want to ask you guys for just a minute to do a little bit of homework with me, right?

44:33

I want you guys to look at chapter 12 verses 1 through 7. I want you guys to count how many ending punctuation marks we see in that passage, in that chunk of scripture. Ending punctuation marks, periods, question marks, exclamation points, whatever punctuation would tell us that this sentence has ended and a new one has started.

44:52

How many do we see there? There's just one, right? There's just... that is the... you would fail English class if you wrote a sentence that was that long and tried to stick it in a research paper, right?

45:06

But Ecclesiastes 12 verse 1 all the way down through verse 7 is a single sentence. It's a single thought. It's a single idea. So all of the rest of verse 2 verse 3 all the way down through verse 7 is driving home this same idea that he opens up with his opening in verse one. Verse one, he tells us that we should remember your creator. And then he continues on. Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Remember your creator as the lights start to go out in life.

45:37

Remember your creator as your senses start to dim. Remember your creator in the midst of all these things described. And ultimately, remember your creator before your body is placed in the ground and as your spirit returns to God, as it's gonna say in verses six and seven.

45:53

Verses six and seven, talk about this dying process as this person has finally come to the point of death. It says, 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, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

46:12

In all those things, he's telling us, remember your creator, right? Barry Webb observed in his commentary about this passage, he observed that the images of the cut cord and the broken bowl and the shattered jar and the broken wheel, they collectively referred to the system that was used to draw water out of a well.

46:32

We didn't always have indoor plumbing where you just turned a knob and water came out. So he said, speaking of this, he said that the problem is that the system to get life - sustaining water has deteriorated and shattered into the finality of death.

46:46

What we're talking about here, these verses are a call to everyone listening today, young, old, somewhere in the middle. He's telling us to remember God now while you still have breath in your lungs.

46:57

He's telling us to remember that one day, no matter how long it feels like you still have in this life, that one day this life is going to come to an end, and it's gonna come sooner than we think it is.

47:08

But he's telling us that in the midst of all of this, as we're forcefully confronted by the reality of death one final time at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, he uses this to drive home his point.

47:19

You're going to die. So he's telling us, remember your creator. Remember that when this life is over, that one day you will stand before God and you will give an account for the

things that you said, for the decisions that you made, for the actions that you were a part of.

47:36

Remember your creator. So as we come towards the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, I think the message has been clear all throughout. We've seen these themes that have been trying to come into focus week after week after week, but I think this theme is becoming incredibly clear for us in these final verses.

47:57

You know, the preacher has noted how fleeting life can be, that it's hevel, that it's smoke or vapor, that it's there for a moment and then it's gone. He's telling us how empty the things of life can leave you.

48:09

As he's talked for several different chapters, he talked about how, you know, well maybe money will make you happy and I chased after money and it didn't make me happy. Well maybe career will make you happy and you chase after work and pour yourself into your work and work didn't make him happy.

48:23

You know maybe family, maybe relationships, maybe stuff, maybe... you know all these different things. He said maybe this, maybe this, maybe this and he tried all the things that life had to offer and time after time after time he realized that the things that he was putting his hope in if they were of this world that they couldn't bear the weight.

48:43

They couldn't bear the weight of expectations that he was placing on them. If you live for your work, your work is one day gonna let you down because that company is gonna either go belly up one day or is going to decide to move on without you, right?

48:57

There's gonna come a day where you're gone, where you've retired or you've passed on and that company is gonna move on just fine without you. If you make your life all about your career, it's gonna leave you empty one day.

49:10

If you put all of your hope in a relationship, that person may, may... sin against you and fracture that relationship. You may do something stupid and make a decision that fractures that relationship.

49:23

Something may happen where that relationship one day isn't going to be the thing that you can live for anymore. Maybe it's even death, but one day that relationship is going to end. If you place all of your hope in any of these things that he's talked about, ultimately they don't stand up.

49:42

They won't hold up to the weight of expectations. But you know what else he's told us in the book of Ecclesiastes? I think he's given us this beautiful picture. He points out how the world that God has created for us, the good gifts that God gives to us over and over and over again, that God has given us an extravagant number of blessings.

50:02

He tells us over and over again about how good life can be when we use it as God has given it to us properly. When we enjoy the good gifts that God has given us, we can smile, we can laugh, we can celebrate.

50:15

Ecclesiastes 11:9, we saw it at the beginning of our passage this week. It tells us, Rejoice, O young man, in your youth. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment.

50:31

So I know you guys haven't been listening for the last six months, but please listen to me now. Let me give you the whole book of Ecclesiastes right here in the next three minutes, right? So please, please, please do what this book is begging you to do.

50:45

Seek the balance in life that Ecclesiastes is teaching us. We know, anybody that's lived for more than a few minutes in this life realizes that one day this life is going to end. That one day we will stand before God as the ultimate judge, as the one who ultimately sets all things right.

51:04

The preacher throughout the book of Ecclesiastes has been telling us that, right? He's been looking forward to the day where God would bring justice for all the injustice that we see in the world. One day we will stand before God.

51:20

So make sure that you know Him. Make sure that you're following Him. Make sure that you are serving Him. Make sure that you're obeying Him. I feel like I've heard that before somewhere. Oh, that's why we exist as a church, right?

51:32

To help people know Jesus and follow Jesus and serve Jesus and obey Jesus. Also, smile, right? It's a good thing, there are good things in life. Smile, laugh, enjoy life with the ones that you love that God has given to you and blessed you with.

51:47

Enjoy all the good gifts that God has given. It's telling us over and over again in this book, enjoy what you have while you have it. It's a good thing that God has given us

family. It's a good thing that God has given us work that we can go and be productive and enjoy doing the things that we do.

52:04

It's a good thing that God gives us good gifts. If that food tastes good, enjoy it every once in a while, it's okay. Eat desert every once in a while, enjoy life as it has been given to you. There's this block quote that I want to read for you guys from Ian Proven, I think, that gives us kind of an additional warning here on this topic of enjoying life.

52:29

Ian Proven, he said, why is it that so many religious people's lives are characterized by fear and defensiveness with a joy -suppressing legalism that is more concerned to, quote, do the right thing than to revel in God's blessings?

52:45

Qoheleth, the preacher from Ecclesiastes, is himself concerned that people, quote, do the right thing. But the first and foremost right thing is to revere God as God. And we do not do this by suggesting through the way that we live our lives that God is a mean -spirited and harsh tyrant.

53:02

We do not honor God by proclaiming falsely in our attitudes and our actions that he's the kind of person to create a wonderful world and then systematically to forbid his creatures to enjoy it. All other, "right things" have to proceed, rather, from the primary right thing of rightly relating to God as God truly is.

53:22

It is when this is a reality that virtue flows out of love for God and for our neighbor rather than out of fear or defensiveness or legalism, for perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, as 1 John chapter 4 tells us.

53:38

On this same topic, as we're talking about this warning to go and to enjoy life, I can think of numerous times where I've seen and witnessed firsthand. I've felt and experienced these feelings of religious, you know, we have to do it the right way, right?

53:55

I grew up in the South. The Bible Belt, I don't know how many of you guys have experienced living in the South, but, you know, there's a lot of things that we do just because it's what we do, right? You dress a certain way when you go to church.

54:06

You act a certain way. You got to use the right words. You got to live life just the way that you're supposed to all the times, not because there's any biblical evidence for it, but because that's what Christians do, right?

54:17

You know what that is? That's legalism. I can think of times where, you know, we were studying the book of Luke, right? Before we studied the book of Ecclesiastes, we were studying the book of Luke. And I can think of time after time after time as we were studying Luke, where Jesus, we saw Jesus give a pretty strong rebuke to a certain group of people, right?

54:37

You guys remember who that was? It was the Pharisees, right? It was the religious leaders. It was the ones who were acting like they had it all together. They were this legalistic group who had this defensive posture.

54:50

You know, they believed, if God said, well, you shouldn't do this, well, then not only are we not gonna do that, we're not gonna do this, or this, or this, or this. And they made all these rules. If God said one thing, they made nine more rules to make sure that they didn't get anywhere close to that.

55:07

And you know what Jesus had to say about it? Jesus rebuked them over and over again for their oppressive laws that they placed on the backs of the people that were impossible for those people to bear.

55:18

It was impossible for people to live life the way that the Pharisees were telling them to. They were oppressive laws. Matthew 23, we see Jesus specifically talking about the Pharisees. He says that they preach, but they do not practice, that they tie up heavy burdens that are hard to bear and they lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

55:39

That they put this burden of expectations on people with all their religious expectations, their religious laws, that you have to do it this way and just write and take care of every little detail, every little thing.

55:53

I'd like to read for you guys kind of a significant chunk of Colossians chapter two and three. It's one of my favorite passages of scripture. I think it's gonna be just another reinforcement of this point that I'm trying to make before I really clearly make this.

56:07

Paul is describing the gospel, is describing our salvation and is giving us a word of wisdom in Colossians chapter two. He starts in verse 13. I'm gonna read all the way down through chapter three, verse two.

56:19

If you don't wanna follow along, it should be on the screens. It says in Colossians 2:13, that you who were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, that God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all of our trespasses.

56:32

By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

56:45

So therefore, let no one pass judgment on you with questions of food or drink with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

56:58

So let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with a growth that is from God.

57:18

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of this world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they're used according to the human precepts and teachings.

57:33

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they're of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. So chapter 3 verse 1, if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

57:53

Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. As we look at that, as we read this, I should have given you guys a definition. I think it helps kind of this out. You know, asceticism is a word that we don't use a whole lot anymore, but asceticism is defined by Oxford languages as severe self -discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence.

58:16

Asceticism and its strictest form is, you know, that the monks that go live up on top of the mountain with no modern gifts, no modern luxuries that we get to experience. You know, you go so far out of your way not to enjoy anything that you think that somehow that's more godly, more holy than the people who, you know, live down here and have running water, right?

58:39

What Paul is saying in Colossians chapter 2 and 3, he's saying, if you belong to Jesus, if you call yourself a Christian, you belong to the family of God, well then he has to be your primary focus. He is the reason why we do everything that we do.

58:54

He is the reason why all of it exists. Do everything that you do out of love and devotion to him. If he's told you that something is dangerous, listen to him, right? This isn't to say that we can just go do whatever we want.

59:07

That's a philosophical belief that's referred to as antinomianism, which is a big word that referred to a group of people that said, "God's going to forgive you for whatever, so just go do whatever you want and then just come back and say you're sorry," right?

59:21

God said no, but it looks fun. God's going to forgive me anyways. I'm going to run over here and do it, and then I'll just come back and say sorry, right? The Bible doesn't in any way, shape, or form tell us that that's okay.

59:33

If we love Jesus, if he is our primary focus, if he is the reason why we do everything that we do, if he has told you that something is dangerous, listen to him. That's the reason why it's important for us to know what's in this book, because he has told us in different places how we should live our lives.

59:51

So he's told us, you know, hey, this is dangerous. Don't do that. This is sinful. This is going to hurt you. We'll look out for this. He tells us over and over and over again the things that we should look out for.

01:00:02

It's important for us to listen to those things. But if he's given you a good gift, that as your heavenly Father has given you, has created a good gift for you to receive and to enjoy, for you to look at that and go, nah, I'm good.

01:00:20

No, thanks. I hear that you're saying that this is a good thing for me to do. I don't want it. Parents buy you a new car. Teenagers, I know you guys will hear this for a minute. Your parents buy you a, like a Maserati or Ferrari, whatever it is that you want.

01:00:34

And you go, no, I think I'll take the bus. Like, that's insulting, isn't it? Parents, I don't know why you're buying your kid a nice car like that, but if you did, we're gonna have problems if he goes, I don't want it.

01:00:47

I don't want your car. I don't want your, that's insulting to me as a parent that wants to give good gifts to my children, right? If God has created and has given you a good gift, you should enjoy it.

01:01:01

If you think that somehow refraining from something is going to make you seem more religious, it's going to make you seem like you're more godly than anybody else is because, well, I don't do that. I don't live that way.

01:01:13

You know what that is? That's the legalism. That's the attitude that the Pharisees had that Jesus said was also sinful, right? That is just as sinful as to run off and say, I'll do whatever I want and tell God sorry later.

01:01:27

Neither one of those options is the right option. I want to tell you guys a story just super briefly about a conversation that I had years ago that still just resonates in my head. So, yeah, at a church that I was working at a few years ago, I was having a conversation with my pastor and we were talking about a specific, one of those moral issues, one of those gray issues that Christians disagree on.

01:01:49

And so I'm not going to tell you exactly what the issue was, but at the end of the conversation we, well, what about this Bible verse? Well, what about this? Well, what about this over here? And we had gone back and forth and had this whole conversation.

01:02:00

At the end of the conversation, he said something to me that has resonated in my mind for years. You know, he said at the very end, kind of his conclusion, he said, you know, you make a lot of good biblical points, but I think I'd rather stand before God one day and have him say, son, you should have loosened up on this issue than to hear him say, you shouldn't have assumed that this wasn't a big deal when actually it was a big deal.

01:02:25

You shouldn't have been doing this. He'd rather hear him say, you could have loosened up than you shouldn't have been doing that all along. Now, while I understand what he's getting at, I actually kind of even agreed with him at the point that was kind of the conclusion of the conversation because it makes sense to go, yeah, I think it might be better for us to take the safe road, right?

01:02:45

So I'm just not going to have any more of this conversation. We'll just be done with this issue, with this conversation, because it was better to air in this direction than to air in that direction. But you know what I think we're reading in the book of Ecclesiastes?

01:02:59

I think he's telling us that in either direction, either legalism, asceticism, that I'm not gonna touch or do or say or experience any of the good things because I don't want to get too close to the line.

01:03:11

For us to err in the legalistic direction is just as dangerous and as wrong as for us to err in the antinomian, the hedonistic, I'm gonna go do whatever I want because it feels good direction. Both of those errors are errors, right?

01:03:27

Both for us to say, no, God, you've given me a good gift, but I don't want it. Well, that's wrong. And for us to say, God, I'm gonna go do whatever I want even though you told me not to, well, that's wrong too.

01:03:39

I understand where my pastor was coming from, but God created the world and God created a lot of good gifts that we can enjoy. Eat a chocolate bar every once in a while. It's okay, right? Go enjoy your time with your family.

01:03:53

Enjoy your life with the ones that you love. Smile, laugh, enjoy the good gifts that God has given to you. St. Augustine, Augustine of Hippo, gave a quote that I think is just perfect to kind of drive this whole thing home.

01:04:07

Augustine said, love God and do what you like. Right? It seems like a good simple statement to live by. Now, there's a couple of things in there. Does the quote say, do whatever you want? No. Right? It says, love God.

01:04:22

That's an important first step. If we love God, well, then that means that I'm gonna do things, the things that I want are the things that he's gonna give me, the things that that are gonna make him happy, the things that that I'm gonna live in a way that he says, this way is best for you and this way brings glory to me.

01:04:39

And so there's a lot of things that I'm gonna choose not to do because they're not good for me. Because they're not good for my testimony, because they're not good. God has told me not to do them, right?

01:04:51

Those things I should avoid because I love God enough that I'm gonna choose not to do them. But as I love God and as I want to live my life his way, if he's told me, hey, I gave you this good thing, enjoy it, you know what I'm gonna do?

01:05:03

I'm gonna go and I'm gonna enjoy it. I'm gonna have fun. I'm gonna smile. I'm gonna laugh. Does the Bible say that it's okay to just go commit adultery? Well, of course not. The Bible tells me that sex was created to be enjoyed between a husband and a wife.

01:05:18

What if I want to go get drunk? Well, now the Bible says pretty clearly that drunkenness is a sin. It says it over and over and over again. What if I want to just go be lazy and sit on my couch and play video games and watch Netflix all day?

01:05:29

Well, no, that's not okay either. The Bible says that it's a good thing that we should work hard as if we were working for the Lord and not for men. You know, love God. Live life the way that he tells you to, but also go do what you want.

01:05:43

Enjoy it. Have fun. Ecclesiastes is not advocating that we can do whatever we want. This same passage clearly told us a few verses earlier that all things will be brought into judgment. That we should take all of God's commands into account when we're making decisions in life.

01:06:00

But legalism is not the God -honoring solution to life, just like antinomianism cannot be the God -honoring solution to life. Colossians chapter 3 verse 2, it told us to set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

01:06:16

Ecclesiastes 12:1 told us, remember also your Creator. Live life with God in mind, with God at the center of it, but also enjoy it a little bit. Thank God for all the good gifts that He's given to us, and smile every once in a while.

01:06:32

Our prayer team is going to be down here in just a minute. They would love to pray with you about whatever it is that's going on in life, but as we talk about the good gifts that God has given to us in life, there's one gift that comes to mind more than any other that I think we can be thankful for.

01:06:45

It's the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross, that made this entire relationship possible. The fact that Jesus came, that Jesus lived among humanity, that He lived as God, that He... put on flesh and came and lived among us and lived perfectly.

01:07:01

Showed us what it looked like to have a relationship with God, to show us what God was like. He came and he lived perfectly. But you know what he did? Know what else he did? He went to a cross and paid a penalty.

01:07:14

He died a criminal's death on a cross to pay a penalty that he didn't deserve. Because I deserved it. Because you deserved it. And right before he did that, right before he went to the cross, he gathered his disciples together and he told them to remember what he was doing, to remember his sacrifice, to remember that his body was going to be broken for them, that his blood was going to be spilled out for them.

01:07:39

That the wrath of God was gonna be directed on Jesus' back so that sinners could receive Jesus' offer of salvation so that we could be forgiven, so that we could be set free from the consequences of our sin, so that we could be brought into the family of God, to be made right in God's eyes, to be adopted as his son or his daughter.

01:07:58

That free gift of salvation is the ultimate thing that we should be thankful for. And in just a moment, we're gonna take communion. In just a moment, we're gonna take communion and we're gonna remember the sacrifice of Jesus as his body was broken, as his blood was spilled out, as he gave his life for sinners like me and like you.

01:08:20

And if you have received that offer of salvation, we don't have a closed table where you have to meet special qualifications to come here except for the fact that we believe that this is for Christians, for people who have received Jesus' offer of salvation that he's made to us.

01:08:36

So if you have placed your faith in Jesus alone for your salvation by his grace through faith alone, then this remembrance is for you. Just a minute, I'm gonna read a few verses from Luke where Jesus instituted this practice and he told the disciples to continue to do it.

01:08:56

As often as you do this, remember me is what he told them. So in just a moment, I'm gonna read, we're gonna pray, and then I would invite you to come up and to grab from one of the tables we've got here in the front, or if you're back at the back, there's a table in the back as well.

01:09:09

Come take of these elements, take them back to your seat. Thank Jesus for all that he's done for you, and thank him for the cross. Thank him for the sacrifice that he made so that you could be brought into a relationship with God.

01:09:22

Confess any known sins that may be separating you in that relationship with him, and remember the sacrifice that he made for you as you take of this bread and this cup that symbolize his broken body and his spilled out blood for us.

01:09:38

Let me read for you, Luke 22, verses 14 through 20. Jesus, as he was preparing for the Passover, it says that when the hour came, Jesus reclined at the table and the apostles with him. And he said to them, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

01:09:56

For I tell you that I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took a cup, and when they had given thanks, he said, Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

01:10:11

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

01:10:29

Would you guys pray with me? God we thank you for, God we thank you for all the good gifts that you've given to us. And most importantly, we thank you for Jesus. God we thank you that we can come to you in the strength, in the power, in the boldness that comes through his sacrifice, and we can come to you as your children and that we can ask for things, that we can request things, that we can thank you for all that you're doing in our lives.

01:10:55

God we pray that as we kind of are coming down the final stretch of the book of Ecclesiastes, God we pray that you would help us to grasp all of these things that have become so clear for us throughout this book.

01:11:06

God that this life ultimately will come to an end one day. God that it's important for us to remember our creator. God to remember that you are ultimately the one that everything

is for. God we exist because of you, we exist for you, and God we want to do everything that we can to bring you glory and all the things that we say and do and think and feel.

01:11:28

God we want it all to be for you. God help us to love you, but God also help us to enjoy the good life that you've given to us. God you have given us so much good in this life. God we thank you for all of those good gifts.

01:11:42

God we thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary that he made a way for us to know you and so God as we take of these elements in just a moment, God I pray that you would help us to remember, that you would stir our affections.

01:11:56

God, that you would use these gifts of grace as we come and take of these elements. God, we pray that you would use those gifts that you've given to us. God, that you would use them in the power of your spirit to stir afresh and a new in us, the joy of our salvation.

01:12:13

God, we are so thankful for all that you do for us and we're thankful that we can come to you and that we can know you and we can come to you through Jesus and through his sacrifice and it's through Jesus's sacrifice, through the name of Jesus that we come to you and know that you hear our prayers. It's in his name that we pray. Amen. Take and eat.