

March 26, 2017

## “The Conclusion of the Matter”

### Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 (NIV)

Cross References: Proverbs 9:9-11; Matthew 12:36; 22:37-40; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 2:16; 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 4:5; 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15

**Lesson Idea:** Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

#### BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Mar 19 Judges 3-5	Mar 20 Judges 6-7
Mar 21 Judges 8-9	Mar 22 Judges 10-12
Mar 23 Judges 13-15	Mar 24 Judges 16-18
Mar 25 Judges 19-21	Mar 26 Ruth 1-4

**Background:** Ecclesiastes 12 continues the conclusion that began in Ecclesiastes 11:9. The passage in the lesson today comes from the *New International Version* of the Bible, because it is easier to understand the poetic language it contains. After examining every part of life “under the sun,” the Preacher concludes that there is more than just “life under the sun.” We have a Creator to whom we will give an account of how we spend the life He has given to us. We need to remember Him from an early age and live for Him and in Him all the days of our lives.

#### Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

*1 Remember your Creator  
in the days of your youth,  
before the days of trouble come  
and the years approach when you will say,  
“I find no pleasure in them”—*

*2 before the sun and the light  
and the moon and the stars grow dark,  
and the clouds return after the rain;*

*3 when the keepers of the house tremble,  
and the strong men stoop,  
when the grinders cease because they are few,  
and those looking through the windows grow dim;*

*4 when the doors to the street are closed  
and the sound of grinding fades;  
when people rise up at the sound of birds,  
but all their songs grow faint;*

*5 when people are afraid of heights*

*and of dangers in the streets;  
when the almond tree blossoms  
and the grasshopper drags itself along  
and desire no longer is stirred.*

*Then people go to their eternal home  
and mourners go about the streets.*

*6 Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,  
and the golden bowl is broken;*

*before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,  
and the wheel broken at the well,*

*7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from,  
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

*8 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.  
“Everything is meaningless!”*

#### DISCUSSION:

- V 1. What does it mean to “remember your Creator?” Why is that important to do while you are young?

**NOTE:** from David Guzik:

**Remember now your Creator:** The idea of the Creator is important. This is the first mention of God as Creator. To this point the Preacher worked hard to ignore the eternal God one must stand before in the future; yet he also refused to think about the Creator God who existed before he did. This self-imposed ignorance relieved the sense of accountability before the Creator, which still must be accounted for in the life to come.

**Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth:** Solomon knew that youth are often those most likely to discount the reality of eternity and the eternal God. This is natural, but regrettable, in youth - they are often the most difficult to convince that this life is merely a brief prelude to eternity.

Adam Clarke suggested several practical and important points to draw from this exhortation, among them:

- ✓ You are not your own; you have no right to yourself. God made you; He is your Creator.
  - ✓ Remember Him; consider that He is your Creator.
  - ✓ Remember Him in your youth; do not fail to give God the first and the best.
- v 1-8. What are the “days of trouble” to which Solomon alludes? (the NASB translates them literally as “evil days”) How does he describe them? How could all of these things be related to the process of aging? How do they sum up the first eleven chapters of Ecclesiastes?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

**While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened:** Most agree that what follows here is a poetic description of the effects of advancing age. (See NOTE at the end of this lesson.)

- v 7. What did Solomon believe happened to people after their time “under the sun?” What is significant about our spirits returning to God who gave them?

**NOTE:** from Guzik about v 5-8:

**For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets:** At the end of man's advancing age is his eternal home - not the unknown grave and darkness. The Preacher has now set man's advancing age in connection with eternity, not vanity.

We do well to remember that the Old Testament generally does not state the life and condition of man after this life with great certainty. Yet through his diligent searching, the Preacher has come to the right conclusion - that after this life, man goes to his eternal home as the mourners go about the streets.

"So this wonderful book closes with the enunciation of a truth found nowhere else so clearly defined in the Old Testament, and thus opens the way to the clearer light shed upon the awful future by the revelation of the gospel." (Deane)

**Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it:** This is why it is so important to remember your Creator in this life; because when this life is over, one will answer to the eternal God and to eternity.

- v 8. Why did Solomon see life “under the sun” as meaningless? (this is where the book started: see Ecclesiastes 1:2)

#### **Ecclesiastes 12:9-14**

*9 Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. 10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.*

*11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. 12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.*

*Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body.*

*13 Now all has been heard;*

*here is the conclusion of the matter:  
Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the duty of all mankind.  
14 For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
including every hidden thing,  
whether it is good or evil.*

#### **DISCUSSION:**

- V 9-10. How did Solomon describe himself? What was his purpose in writing? Why?
- v 11. What are “goads,” and how are they like the words of the wise? How is wisdom like “firmly embedded nails?” How does “one Shepherd” give all wisdom? (see Proverbs 9:9-11; 2 Timothy 3:16)
- v 12. What is the warning he passes on, and how should we heed this? How does much study weary the body? How could this relate also to time spent online or viewing television?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

**Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh:** The Preacher cautions us to not believe everything we read, for all does not come from the one Shepherd.

- v 13. How could you paraphrase his conclusion? Why does this apply to every person?

\*How does his conclusion compare to Jesus' summation of the Law and the Prophets in Matthew 22:37-40?

*37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

**For this is the whole duty of man.** The word duty does not appear in the Hebrew text, and it has much more the idea of for this is man's all.

"The last phrase reads literally: 'For this is the whole of the man.' Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, however, the 'whole of the man' is a Hebrew idiom for 'every man' (cf 3:13; 5:19). The sense, therefore, is 'This applies to everyone.'" (Eaton)

- v 14. How should the judgment of God affect the way we live every day? (see Matthew 12:36; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 2:16; 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians

3:11-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15)

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

***For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil:***

This is impossible to say with an under the sun premise; yet it is the root reason why it is wise and good for man to fear God and keep His commandments.

There is, and will be, and eternal accounting for everything we do. This is the complete opposite of believing that all is vanity or meaningless; it means that everything has meaning and importance, both for the present and for eternity. "If God cares as much as this, nothing can be pointless." (Kidner)

Through this book the Preacher carefully thought through (and lived through) a premise commonly held: of life lived without consideration of eternity and the eternal God. After all that, he comes to this conclusion - and challenges all those who continue holding to the premise he held through most all the book. "What would it be like, asks the Preacher, if things were utterly different from what you thought? What if this world is not the ultimate one? What if God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him?" (Eaton)

As Paul explained, this puts life into perspective: *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.* (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:2)

**APPLICATION:**

- ✓ Read 1 Corinthians 6:20. How does belonging to God affect your life?

**NOTE:** from Guzik on verses 1-8:

***While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened:*** Most agree that what follows here is a poetic description of the effects of advancing age.

- The arms and hands that keep the body now begin to tremble (***the keepers of the house tremble***)
- The legs and knees begin to sag (***the strong men bow down***)
- Teeth are lost and chewing is more difficult (***the grinders cease because they are few***)
- The eyes are dimmed (***the windows grow dim***)
- The ears become weaker and weaker (***the sound of grinding is low***)
- Sleep becomes more difficult and one is easily awakened (***one rises up at the sound of a bird***)
- Singing and music are less appreciated (***the daughters of music are brought low***)
- One becomes more fearful in life (***afraid of height, and of terrors in the way***)
- The hair becomes white (***the almond tree blossoms***)
- The once active become weak (***the grasshopper is a burden***)
- The passions and desires of life weaken and wane (***desire fails***)

***Desire fails:*** "The word rendered 'desire' is found nowhere else in the Old Testament and its meaning is disputed." (Deane) Although, Kidner states: "This is the point of the Hebrew expression, 'the caper-berry fails'. This berry was highly regarded as a stimulus to appetite and as an aphrodisiac."

## **COMING NEXT IN SUNDAY SCHOOL:**

### **1 Thessalonians**

- Apr 2 1:1-10 We Give Thanks to God for You
- Apr 9 2:1-12 Walk in a Manner Worthy of God
- Apr 16 2:13-20 You Accepted the Word of God
- Apr 23 3:1-13 Abound in Love
- Apr 30 4:1-12 How You Ought to Walk and Please God
- May 7 4:13-18 Don't Grieve Like Those Who Have No Hope
- May 14 5:1-11 The Day of the Lord Comes Like a Thief
- May 21 5:12-28 How to Treat Each Other