

“Rejoice & Remember Your Creator”

3 April 2022 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: Across the Lands

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Baptism

Aaronic Blessing

Praise: Revelation Song

Reading: Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8

Sermon:

As some of you know Karen, Katie and me, were away last week in Nottingham at a Biblical counselling conference. It was lovely to be with many Christian people, sing wholeheartedly, and be challenged about how our church can be a talking Church. Meaning talking of Jesus to the realities of life. Then Karen and I journeyed on to Amsterdam and had the pleasure of seeing both Andrew and David and their girlfriends. What a deep joy that was!

I also had the pleasure of being in this wonderful place on the outskirts of Amsterdam, Keukenhof. (show a picture) Wonderful, almost perfect, colourful, sweet smelling, and sunny. Life was indeed enjoyable (7-8)

However, as you know Karen's eye was bothersome and didn't improve and she ended up in hospital on our return. We bought her a brimmed hat, and she wore sunglasses, and she was in great pain, at times distressing, going on for 5 weeks despite the best efforts of the doctors.

We enjoyed these times in the knowledge that our brother Ken was critically ill and his life hung in the balance and many in the church have suffered a lot with serious illness, and many have deep concerns over loved ones, and the war in Ukraine is still real, bringing death a destruction. (v8b)

The Teacher gives commands and advice in light of the juxtaposition of the joys of life and the darkness and sufferings in life. Rejoice in the life you have and remember you creator. This advice is given to the young. I really do want the younger people listening to pay close attention, but I think David Gibson is right, the young in this passage is relative and includes all who are not yet fully given over to the dismantling of their bodies due to age. It applies to all of us.

So let us look closely at what he says.

I. Rejoice in life: Don't waste it; use it. (11:7-10)

When I was at university, there was a tendency to talk about what you did the previous weekend until Wednesday and then turn to discussing what you were to do the weekend coming on Thursday and Friday, particularly when you were supposed to be dissecting a dead body. We tend to live not for the moment but for the future, for the holiday, retirement, a

bonus, a new car, promotion, or indeed the weekend. We often don't enjoy the present, but the observation of the Teacher is that life is sweet, and it pleases the eye to see the sun, life under the sun is like honey, which those of us who live in colder climates understand; and his advice, indeed command, is life is to be enjoyed, now. The creation is good, and God has given us the gift of life to enjoy.

However, he highlights that alongside these sweet days, days of darkness come, suffering, sickness, and sin, there will be many, and the future is meaningless, *"Everything to come is meaningless"* We must remember that he uses the word Hebel, translated meaningless, or vanity and Hebel means like a vapour, quickly gone he means our lives will be over soon.

If our lives are over soon, he is keen that young people would particularly grasp this command to rejoice in life. (v9-10)

It is an incredible mandate of freedom, is it not! *"Let your heart give you joy", "follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see"* Whatever way we look at this it advocates exploration, adventure, relationships, learning, fun. So why do we feel uncomfortable. As a parent is this the advice, indeed command that I am giving my child or children.

Does the following statement of verse 9, not seem to quash all the freedom, *"but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgement"* Lots of us were brought up with the instructions to not do things though the lists may vary. In reading Fintan O'Toole's new book *"We don't know ourselves"* he tells of the no go area of sex in Ireland, of a distorted view of its being sin and leading to sin. This was the advice given to every child in Ireland and how restrictive that was, and the consequences really devastating. Is this what the Teacher is doing? I believe not. Firstly, in keeping with scripture he would have said sex is the most beautiful gift given to all of us, our sexuality is a gift and to be treasured and enjoyed, and sex is a gift to be treasured and enjoyed. He would then tell us that all gifts are to be used within the guidelines of the creator who will judge you for their non-use and inappropriate use. Pursue the gift now within the boundaries set by the giver. This is responsible pleasure; it is not self-indulgent or exploitive pleasure.

Therefore, in light of the command to enjoy life, the young, are given this amazing command, and I want you to hear it clearly, *"banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body."* Again, sadly it has been tough for the youth in our society, social media pressure, body shaming, the pandemic, worries about jobs and money, the insecurity of climate and political turmoil and their existential threat to life are taking a huge toll on their mental health. Self-harm, alcohol and drug binging, severe anxiety and suicidal ideation are very common.

The teacher is not saying by the way that youth and vigour have no meaning, he is using the word Hebel again, and means they are short lived, quickly gone and you are not able to grasp them again, as he will eloquently go on to say old age is coming and there is a time when you cannot do what you can now. Youth and its abilities and desires is a tremendous gift, don't waste it, use it, live it, enjoy it, and keep to God's rule as you do so and do not worry because God has given this time to you and this world for you to enjoy; appreciate it, explore it, enjoy relationships, and do it now. Rejoice in life, don't waste it, use it.

II. Remember Your Creator (12:1-8)

I think David Gibson in his book *destiny* has written a great chapter on this section and I recommend it to you all. I studied Ecclesiastes using Derek Kidner's commentary in the BST

series when at university and this was one of the sections that I remember vividly and was so impressed with the writer and explanation.

The command is to remember your creator, he doesn't say Remember God though of course he means God because the idea he wishes to communicate is that God has created us and the world, we are to remember the doctrine of creation. How essential that has become in our society that questions everything about us, Evolution? Gender? Identity? Sexually? Purpose? You are created, made by a good God who when he saw his creation declared that it was very good.

Remembering is important, in the bible and in life and it doesn't just mean calling to mind, it means action, as when God remembered Hannah and set about reversing her infertility. It means all we have said before about enjoying, exploring and living life to the full, rejoicing in the life God has given you.

Remembering now in the days of your youth, before "*the days of trouble come*", (v1) before "*the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark*" (v2) before "*the pitcher is shattered at the well*" (v6). Before, before, before everything is broken, broken, broken (v6-7).

The teacher compares getting old to a house that falls into disrepair, to a storm coming, and it is a memorable and accurate picture of the dismantling of what God created as the effect of the punishment for our sin, works itself out in our bodies.

III. A vivid description of old age and infirmity (v3-7)

The keepers are hands, they tremble, walking that becomes unsteady, getting out of the chair is difficult, they are bent over, the strong men stoop. Teeth are decayed and removed, and eyesight dims and requires assistance. Fear increases and it is safer to stay indoors, and hearing becomes dull, and communication is difficult. The old do not climb trees and they have more fears than most, their hair goes white like the almond blossom and they only shuffle along and every appetite is diminished and everyone realises that death approaches and a funeral is immanent, and their eternal home is the grave.

He pictures the life we have been given by God as something precious, a golden bowl containing oil and giving light held by a silver cord which snaps and so the bowl breaks. A jug beside the well that is broken and useless there is no more water to be drawn because the wheel mechanism is also broken. No water no life! So, the creator's brilliant work is slowly dismantled and what was formed so magnificently in the womb is gradually returned to dust and He takes back the spirit (Soul) given to us as a gift.

It is a magnificent poetic description of the effect of aging, it is the truth we all can testify to, and it is sobering. The Teacher's argument again hinges on the brevity of life (v8) old age is coming and your God-given abilities are being dismantled and someday you will simply be unable to function as you once did. Usually this comes to us gradually, but it can come to us suddenly and unexpectedly, so his advice and command is to remember your creator. It is in appreciating the brevity of life and the gift it is from the creator that we find life and the incentive to live. The time of judgement is coming, the gift given (v7) will be taken back and the question asked will be did you, enjoy it, use it, and glory in it as God intended. He will judge you on what you did with the gift, he gave you. David Gibson illustrates this by saying a parent loves to see their child using the gift they have been given, there is no pleasure in

seeing them keep that gift in its box. Nor is there any pleasure in seeing the child destroy the gift given, by inappropriate breaking of the rules of use or deliberately destroying the gift.

Remember your creator, what a precious gift we have been given, it comes to an end too soon, rejoice in it and remember your creator.

However, we have another and greater reason to remember our creator, because our creator bought our lives back from sin and death by the gift of his son Jesus and his death on the cross. We are told to rejoice and be glad that we are heaven bound, because his death has given us the gift of eternal life (Matthew 5:12, Romans 6:23). We are also told to give thanks and to remember him, our saviour in the sacrament of communion. (Luke 22:19) And we are to know that in every aspect of life God the creator and our saviour is with us in life and death. (Matthew 28:20) What a gift, what a promise, what an instruction. We are to rejoice and remember our creator and saviour as we live our lives to the full, every day he gives us, because they are short.

Praise: Beautiful Saviour

Announcements

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: Yet Not I, But Through Christ In Me

Benediction

Discussion Questions:

Reflect on your attitude to old age. How does Ecclesiastes challenge you?

What changes could you make to your life to "follow the desires of your heart" (11:9)?

If you are "young", how can you "remember your Creator"?

If you are "old", how can you rejoice in God's gifts and be thankful for gifts past?