

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

These notes are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye, mistakes can possibly be found. Therefore, he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabible.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabible.org).

**Date:** August 20, 2017

**Sermon Title:** Life is Sweet - Remember God

Sermon Series: Ecclesiastes

Text: Eccl. 11:7-12:8

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

Date: August 20, 2017  
Title: Life is Sweet - Remember God  
Text: Eccl. 11:7- 12:8  
Theme: Remember God before overtaken by old age and death.

### **Introduction:**

Remember the yellow tags on the ice age trail. No matter where you are on the trail look for the yellow tags. If you do not see the yellow tag, you are not on the trail and you could be lost. If you cannot see the yellow tag, you need to double back and find where you left off and get back on the trail.

“In verse 9 his tone becomes more personal because he stops speaking of ‘a man’ in the abstract and turns directly to his students. This is the only indication in the entire book that he is addressing young men. God brings everyone into judgment. That the preacher means the judgment of death is indicated not only by the immediate context but also by his usual manner of speaking (see 8:6, where the same Hebrew word occurs, and also 3:17 and 8:11).”<sup>1</sup>

“He calls them to remember before old age makes change difficult. Trust God in the vitality and vigor of youth because a day is coming when old age tests and challenges that faith.”<sup>2</sup>

“Verses 1-7 describe old age and are actually addressed to the youth, v.1. The gradual darkening of the heavenly bodies represents declining vitality and joy. The approaching clouds represent the storms of old age, v.2. The keepers of the house are the arms; the strong men are the legs; the grinders are the teeth; and those that look out of the windows are the eyes, v.3. Growing old is further compared to the decline of a great estate, v.4. The almond tree is a reference to the white hair of old age; the crippled grasshopper pictures the halting gait of the elderly; and desire that fails many be the loss of sexual desire, v.5. Finally, life itself in all its preciousness is cut off. Death is pictured as the irreversible shattering of a golden bowl when cut from the end of a silver cord and the similar smashing of a pitcher or wheel, v.6. After death the spirit returns to God for judgment and the body returns to dust.”<sup>3</sup>

v. 7 is proverbial as an expression of life and its celebration. Verse 7 and 8 function a summary statement and/or proposition/thesis to what follows from 11:9-12:8.

He has referenced God’s judgment already in Ecclesiastes.

- “I said to myself, ‘God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,’ for a time for every matter and for every deed is there” (Eccl. 3:17).
- “For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl. 12:14).

The NASB translates the Hebrew word for “good” as “pleasant” in verse 9, but good in verse 7. Both are the same. The word the NASB translates as “pleasant” in verse 7 means “sweet.” Thus, light is sweet in verse 7 and we are encouraged to let our heart be good in verse 9.

This word occurs in eleven verses in the Old Testament: twice in Judges, once in Psalms, once in Isaiah and once in Ezekiel. The remaining six occur in the wisdom literature: three times in Proverbs, twice in Ecclesiastes and once in the Song of Solomon.

- “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Prov. 16:24).
- “My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste” (Prov. 24:13).
- “The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Prov. 27:7).
- “The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep” (Eccl. 5:12).
- “Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun” (Eccl. 11:7).
- “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3).

No one can read Ecclesiastes and walk away thinking life will answer all of their questions. Life cannot fix what is broken, straighten what is crooked, and fill what is empty. Life cannot do this, and when we think it can our only conclusion is “vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

There is a way of reading Ecclesiastes pessimistically. The reading is dark because life’s experiences can be dark. The conclusion one can come to is “why try, why bother?” Such a reading causes one to implode and retract. There is bitterness and a cutting off where no effort is made to engage others and life. Such a reading is unfortunate. There is another way of reading Ecclesiastes that swings the pendulum in the opposite extreme. Where we focus on pleasure and we abandon ourselves to the shadow because nothing matters in the end. Nevertheless, the shadow cannot provide, it can only point.

However, I believe there is a third way of reading Ecclesiastes and that is realistically. There is a realism to what the preacher says. We hear his story because it is our story. We know of life’s frustrations and disappointments. What he wants us to see and hear is God’s Story and Song. We know that life cannot answer our deepest needs. We know that death awaits us all. NEVERTHELESS, we also know one who can fix what is broken, straighten what is crooked, and fill what is empty. We know that God has appointed life and He makes it all beautiful. We hear this and believe this even when life does not mirror this reality. This is the faith walk. Despite life’s inequality and injustice, God is just. He knows and He will level the entire playing field.

Where has he taken us? If we think it can be god, we will become disillusioned, discouraged, depressed, and dead. Because of playing god, we become bitter and unpleasant. Why? Because we have lost sight of God's *Story*, we no longer hear God's song.

Yet despite the darkness, disease, and dysfunction, Solomon exhorts us to see life, your life, as a sweet thing. Life is something we are to enjoy. Why? Because God gave it, you earned it, and death will take it. The question before us is how. How might we enjoy the life we have? If we backup just a little bit we can hear his counsel.

First, choose wisdom over folly. Guard yourself against the fool.

Second, live generously, decisively, intentionally, and obediently. Do not live to earn God's favor; live like you have God's favor.

Now, he is going to call us to rejoice, remove, and remember. It is as if the preacher calls us to "start early and stay long."

This is where we have been and this is the gist of where we are going. Let us precede.

### **THE BIG PICTURE:**

"In its present position this passage constitutes Qoheleth's final words to his readers. From a literary point of view it differs from the rest of the book in several respects – sustained poetical form, wealth of imagery, the use of allegory; and this may partly account for its present climactic position."<sup>4</sup>

"Because of the somber nature of the material, Qohelet resorts to emphatic speech. Jussives occur in thematic statements about the advisability of rejoicing and remembering. These quickly shift to imperatives, the first of which is accompanied by an identification of the addresses as young men. Four additional imperatives elaborate the theme of pleasure during youth and of concomitant obligation (walk, know, remove, banish). The second use of zakar (remember) introduces a thought that continues for seven verses, with parenthetical comment in verses 3-5."<sup>5</sup>

v. 8 - "If a man live many years] And even have prosperity through the whole; yet the days of darkness-times of affliction, weakness, and perhaps old age, will be many. If he die not a violent death, which no man can wish, he will die a lingering death; and this is ordinarily attended with many pains, and many sorrows; therefore let him prepare to meet his God; and to carry this thought through life, that all must terminate in death. The writer of Ecclesiasticus, Eccl 7:36, has a good saying, similar to this: 'Whatsoever thou takest in hand, remember thy END; and thou shalt never do amiss.'"<sup>6</sup>

What follows is a series of commands. What I find so compelling in our text is the merging of the physical and the spiritual. There is this fusion of the shadow with the substance. Striking that balance can be difficult until we realize that our story is His *Story* and that our shadow is simply the shadow of the substance. There is not an either this or that scenario. Here we see it is

both this and that. I missed this in much of my life and I could look back with regret or I could start living the life God gave me. Part of my problem was this false dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. And that division was no more pronounced than the division between the Christian ministry as a vocation and what the rest of you do. Somehow, we elevated the Christian minister as something or someone special and different from what we did. They were holy and placed on a pedestal. We also did/do this with the Christian life as if our lives are intrinsically different from that of our unbelieving counterparts. We all have shared experiences because we are all living under the curse. We are just like them experientially, but different because of JESUS. Our unbelieving counterparts are either pessimistic or narcissistic. We, on the other hand, are realistic. The shadow cannot provide, it can only point. Rather than being vulgar or base, the preacher's call to enjoy your life is a call to enjoy the presence of God. God gave you this life so that you and I might taste and see that He is good.

Where is it in your life that you taste and see that He is good and just goodness is not just in those moments of euphoria, but also in the bitter moments when everything tastes bland and boring?

### Outline:

#### I. Rejoice and be good / pleasant (v. 9)

- "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (Eccl. 12:9).

**REJOICE samach**, "a primitive root; probably to brighten up, i.e. (figuratively) be (causatively, make) blithe or gleesome:--cheer up, be (make) glad, (have, make) joy(-ful), be (make) merry, (cause to, make to) rejoice, X very."

- "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to **rejoice**, and to do good in his life" (Eccl. 3:12).
- "Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should **rejoice** in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" (Eccl. 3:22).
- "There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 4:16).
- "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to **rejoice** in his labour; this is the gift of God" (Eccl. 5:19).
- "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be **merry**: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (Eccl. 8:15).
- "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh **merry**: but money answereth all things" (Eccl. 10:19).
- "But if a man live many years, and **rejoice** in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity" (Eccl. 11:8).

- **“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” (Eccl. 11:9).

We have to allow the truth of Scripture and the substance to cast its shadow over the troubling circumstances of our life. What we know to be true must envelope the harshness of existence. If you and I do not push back against the darkness, we will fold. The only way for us to enjoy in the life we have is to live generously, decisively, intentionally, and obediently. This has nothing to do with one’s rightness with God, but with one’s enjoyment of the present.

Again, Christians can face life and death soberly. We can enjoy life and embrace dying and death. Neither life nor death should overwhelm us. As Christians, we should be pleasant. This is the Christ life.

“Youth is devoid of cares; and, consequently, of many perplexities and distresses. Were it not so, we should have no old men; nay, perhaps not one even of middle age.”<sup>7</sup> Verse 9 leads us to verse 10.

## II. Remove grief and anger from your heart (v. 10)

- “So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting” (Eccl. 12:10).

“The verb סור (sur, “to remove”) normally depicts a concrete action of removing a physical object from someone’s presence (HALOT 748 s.v. סור 1). Here, it is used figuratively (hypocatastasis) of the emotional/psychological action of banishing unnecessary emotional stress from one’s mind. The Hiphil usage means “to remove; to abolish; to keep away; to turn away; to push aside” (HALOT 748 s.v. 1). The English versions render this term in a variety of ways, none of which is very poetic: “remove” (KJV, RSV, ASV, NASB); “turn aside” (YLT); “ward off” (NAB); and “banish” (NEB, MLB, NIV, NRSV, NJPS, Moffatt).”<sup>8</sup>

Proverbs uses the word seventeen times, but only once in Ecclesiastes [9:10] and never in Song of Solomon.

“Here, it refers in general to unnecessary emotional stress and anxiety that can deprive a person of the legitimate enjoyment of life and its temporal benefits.”<sup>9</sup>

Do not allow the uncertainties of life and the certainty of death to rob you of living generously and decisively.

When we were young, we seemed so resilient and nothing seemed to bother us. Now as we age, we seem less resilient and stress becomes a killer of life. We must push this off.

### III. Remember your Creator (vv. 1, 6)

- “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’” (Eccl. 12:1)
- “Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed” (Eccl. 12:6).

“Remember” occurs once in Proverbs, four times in Ecclesiastes, and once in Song of Solomon, for a total of six occurrences.

- “Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and **remember** his misery no more” (Prov. 31:7).
- “For he shall not much **remember** the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart” (Eccl. 5:20).
- “Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man **remembered** that same poor man” (Eccl. 9:15).
- “But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him **remember** the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity” (Eccl. 11:8).
- “**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” (Eccl. 12:1).
- “Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will **remember** thy love more than wine: the upright love thee” (Song 1:4).

The word does not occur in 12:6, but is added to make sense.

The exhortation to remember presupposes you are going to forget!

#### A. Remember God because you are prone to forget God.

The exhortation to remember sits in the context of approaching “darkness.” What is it we are to remember?

1. Be obedient [You are a creature].
2. Be grateful [you are young and not old].
3. Be mindful [now / today].

#### B. Remember God before the dark days arrive.

v. 1 “The imperative זָכֹר (zekhor, “Remember!”) is a figurative expression (metonymy of association) for obeying God and acknowledging his lordship over one’s life (e.g., Num 15:40; Deut 8:18; Pss 42:6-7; 63:6-8; 78:42; 103:18; 106:7; 119:52, 55; Jer 51:50; Ezek 20:43; Jonah 2:7; Mal 4:4). The exhortation to fear God and obey his commands in 12:13-14 spells out what it means to “remember” God.”<sup>10</sup>

If the Lord should tarry, all present will pass and go the natural and inevitable end of all creation. You will decay and die. The judgment of God in verse 9 is the awaiting death.

The description of growing old[er] is graphic.

- Unstable - Easily spooked.
- Frail – no longer able to “do the job”
- Removed [Nosy] - They no longer participate outside so they look through the window to see what is going on.
- Isolated / irritable – do not like loud noises.
- Bland – lack desire – life is only vanilla or chocolate rather than moose tracks.

The Aging process:

Diminished mental faculties (v. 2)

Trembling limbs, trouble walking (v. 3)

Losing teeth (v. 3)

Fading eyesight (v. 3)

Gumming food (v. 4)

Trouble sleeping (v. 4)

Hard of hearing (v. 4)

Fear (become shut ins) (v. 5)

Grey hair (v. 5)

Stiffness, difficulty walking (v. 5)

Loss of desire (v. 5)<sup>11</sup>

Someone asked me if I am in the best shape of my life. My response is, “Yes, because I have never been 57 before.” I am active, but my activity cannot compare with someone in his twenties, thirties, or forties. At 57, I am unstable, frail, isolated, irritable, and bland. I do not like loud noises. At 57, I try not to convince myself that I am 47, 37, or 27. Nope, I am 57.

Own your limitations and work to be positive rather than negative. You need to figure out how to finish well. The advice Solomon gives to youth is with the hope that as they age they will continue to do the same: REJOICE and be pleasant, REMOVE anger and grief from your heart, and REMEMBER God. Here is how to live well regardless of your age. Here is advice for finishing well.

Before you get there, REJOICE, REMOVE, and REMEMBER.

“12: 8. This affecting and minute description of old age and death is concluded by the author with the same exclamation by which he began this book: O vanity of vanities, saith Koheleth, all is vanity. Now that man, the masterpiece of God's creation, the delegated sovereign of this lower world, is turned to dust, what is there stable or worthy of contemplation besides? ALL-ALL is VANITY!”<sup>12</sup>



v. 5 “caperberry” **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."<sup>13</sup>

“Important here is only the idea that the principle of life is in God’s hands. He gives life, he takes it back. Without that principle no human existence is possible.”<sup>14</sup>

“Life was a gift from God for which one should be thankful; but it was in the nature of human existence that it should be a temporary gift which God would one day withdraw. Qoheleth never reproaches God for ordaining things in this way. It is characteristic that these should be his final words, echoing the theme of God’s gift which recurs again and again through the book.”<sup>15</sup>

“There is nothing comforting about Qoheleth’s acknowledgement that life comes from God, who breathed into the human nostrils and now sucks the breath back out.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Shepherding the Sheep:** (What is the NEXT STEP?)

I see the exhortation to rejoice, remove, and remember intertwined. The only way to do any one of them well is to do all three. I find it unfortunate that we have made walking with God or experiencing God so mysterious and mystical. It is really quite simple. The yellow tags are everywhere.

1. Rejoice and be pleasant around others
2. Remove anger and stress from your life
3. Finally, remember God – keep trusting God as to His gifting and oversight.

In so doing, you will enjoy life with God on the horizontal.

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<sup>1</sup> J.A. Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 130.

<sup>2</sup> Donna Siegesmund, Simeon Trust Study Group on Eccl. 12:1-8.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bible-studys.org/Bible%20Books/Ecclesiastes/Ecclesiastes%20Chapter%2012.html>

<sup>4</sup> R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 161.

<sup>5</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 182.

<sup>6</sup> *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* on Eccl. 11:8.

<sup>7</sup> *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* on Eccl. 11:9.

<sup>8</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!bible/Ecclesiastes+11:7>

<sup>9</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!bible/Ecclesiastes+11:7>

<sup>10</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!bible/Ecclesiastes+12>

<sup>11</sup> Donna Siegesmund, Simeon Trust Study Group on Eccl. 12:1-8.

<sup>12</sup> *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* on Eccl. 12:8.

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik\\_david/studyguide\\_ecc/ecc\\_12.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/studyguide_ecc/ecc_12.cfm)

<sup>14</sup> J.A. Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 168.

<sup>16</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 189.