

Remember Your Creator

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 January 2025

Preacher: Joe Tough

[0 : 00] This evening we find ourselves coming to the last chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes. Now the book of Ecclesiastes might be a familiar book to some of us, but to others it might be completely new. For some of you tonight this might be the first time you've ever heard anything about Ecclesiastes. But wherever you find yourself on that scale this evening, my prayer is that words that either sound familiar or new will be shown to be words of beauty and wisdom. Words that will challenge our worldview. Words that will make us confront realities we choose to ignore and words that in the end will ultimately show us more and more of God's goodness. So with that let's look at our passage this evening. Ecclesiastes chapter 12. And our passage this evening begins with the famous final call of the preacher at the start of verse 1. Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth. Now for those of you who are new to the book of Ecclesiastes, the preacher is the one who's been speaking throughout the book. He first began his dialogue in chapter 1 and ends it here at the start of chapter 12. And he rounds everything off by saying, remember also your Creator in the days of your youth. And it's this statement that we're going to unpack this evening together by walking through the chapter. And we will frame our journey by asking three simple questions. When, how and why? When should

I remember my Creator? How do I remember my Creator? And finally, why should I remember my Creator? So let's start with when. When should I remember my Creator? Now the answer is given to us in verses 1 to 7 of our passage this evening. Where the preacher calls us to remember our Creator before. Notice the word before appears three times in these verses. Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth. Verse 1, before.

Verse 2, before. Verse 6, before. Okay, I get it. Remember also your Creator before. But before what? Well, firstly and quite bluntly in verse 1. Before the evil days come and the years draw near, of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them. In other words, before old age starts taking full effect. Now it's this aging process that verses 2 to 5 unpacked the for us by using poetry to paint a vivid picture of the difficult realities of growing old. The poetry from verse 3 onwards does this, but ascribing the fall of a great house. Graham Riken in his commentary of Ecclesiastes calls these verses one of the most memorable poems in the Bible and the most beautiful poem ever written about growing old. So let's walk through this poem together and let us get a sense of the picture that's being painted for us. Please follow with me from verse 2. Verse 2 begins, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain. The preacher compares the troubles of old age to a gathering storm. The light of youth has dimmed and the clouds have gathered.

Verse 3, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble. The keepers of the house are your arms. They become weak and shaky. Arms that were once strong and sturdy now tremble under the string.

And the strong men are bent. Not only will your arms start to weaken and fail, but so will your legs. And the grinders cease because they are few. Teeth fall out and fail you. Eating anything solid becomes a near impossible task. And those who look through the windows are dimmed. The loss of eyesight.

[4 : 01] The eyes that were never satisfied with seeing a thousand pictures now can't even make out just one. Verse 4, and the doors in the street are shut. Ears become deaf and shouts are heard as whispers.

One rises up at the sound of a bird. Sleep escapes your eyes. Sleeping through the night is now foreign. And waking up at the crack of dawn is the usual. And all the daughters of the song are brought low.

Vocal chords fail. Speech is now strained and difficult. Verse 5, they are afraid also of what is high. And terrors are in the way. Youthful boldness and ease are now replaced with caution and fear. The almond tree blossoms. White hairs start to show. You no longer have the colour of your youth. The grasshopper drags itself along. Running, jumping and skipping are all now just replaced with a shuffle.

And finally, desires fail and are diminished. Here we see in poetic form what time does to a body. [5 : 16] It shows us what ageing truly is and that is simply just a process of decay. We are all, we are all just slowly decaying.

And what awaits each one of us? Well, weak arms, bent legs, no teeth, poor eyes, deaf ears, white hair, wearisome movement, restless nights and diminished desires. You see, the reality of old age is something we all naturally want to shy away from. We don't want to think about it and we certainly don't want to talk about it.

Our culture is always selling us the lie that you can stay young forever. You can stop the hand of time. All you need is this new gadget or this new pill. It's a reality to flee from. It's a reality to ignore. But here the preacher does the complete opposite. He wants us to come face to face and embrace the blunt reality that youthful abilities don't last forever. Therefore, we should remember God while we are young and make the most of our fleeting youth. The call to remember your creator isn't a call simply just to call him to mind like you would with what you had for dinner last night if I asked. No. The call to remember is a call to live for him. Live for him while you're young. John Piper tells a powerful story in the opening chapter of his book titled Don't Waste Your Life. And he begins by sharing a story of a man who came along to a service that his dad was preaching at. Now John's dad was an evangelist and one night when his dad was preaching an old man walked in and sat down. The old man was well known in the community.

For years people had been praying for him, praying that he come to faith. He'd spent his whole life pushing God away. Now the old man came in and sat down. He listened all the way through and in the end, amazingly he came to faith that night. But after the service, the old man sat there weeping and sobbing and all he could say through the tears was, I wasted it. I wasted it. You see, that's the words of a man who waited till his youth was over before remembering his creator. And how did he reflect on a life ignoring God? Well by saying through tears, I wasted it. I wasted it. Here the preacher is just simply saying, don't let that be you. So many of us grow up in churches or hear the gospel at a young age and think, you know what, I'll worry about that when I'm older. In the meantime, I've got my life to live.

[7 : 50] Yes, okay, I hear you. Old age is fast approaching, but because of that I need to make the most of my youth. I need to make the most of it and I'll do that by forgetting God. That's where true joy and satisfaction are to be found, right? Isn't that how our minds work? Isn't that how many of us in this room used to think? It's definitely how I used to think. It's the lie I believed. It's the lie many of you here this evening might still be believing. But let those words, I wasted it, I wasted it, be a warning. My friend, whoever you are, I beg you, hear the call of the preacher to remember your creator in the days of your youth. Come to Christ, give him your life. Don't waste any more time. But not only does the preacher want to show us that youth will soon be over, he also wants to remind us that life itself will be over one day too. We see this in verse 6, where the preacher lists the breaking and smashing of different objects to drive home the fact that one day this life will all be over.

Look down with me to verse 6. Before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel is broken at the cistern. And in case we didn't get his point, verse 7. And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. One day, the end of our lives will be like the snapping of a cord, the breaking of a bowl, the shattering of a picture, and our bodies will be left to decay into dust. The preacher wants us to look ahead to the future. He wants us to look ahead to the future and embrace the reality that our bodies are slowly shutting down and we are all, we are all going to die. He wants us to do this in order, in order for us to see that the best way we can spend the present is to remember our Creator.

One day your body will fail you, one day you will die. So in light of that reality, the best way you can spend your life is to remember your Creator. You want to make the best use of the fleeting years of your youth? Remember your Creator. You want to be able to look back at your life with satisfaction and joy? Remember your Creator. You want to be able to die well? Preacher says, remember your Creator.

Now with the call to remember our Creator ringing in our ears, it takes us nicely on to our second question this evening. The question of how? How do I remember my Creator? Now to answer this, you must now first turn from the words of the preacher to the words of the narrator. In verse 8, the preacher finishes his message by concluding with those famous words, vanity of vanity says the preacher, all is vanity.

And in verse 9, another voice appears to conclude the book. This voice was first heard at the beginning of the book when he introduced the preacher to us at the start of chapter 1. And now at the end of chapter 12, he reappears to conclude. In verse 8, it's like the preacher drops the mic and then walks off stage. Then verse 9, the narrator comes in, picks up the mic and then summarizes everything that has just been said. Look at how he begins his conclusion. He begins verse 9 by telling us about the preacher, the man who wrote Ecclesiastes. He tells us that he was a wise man who taught God's people and arranged proverbs with great care. He then goes on to describe the words of the preacher in verses 10 to 12.

[11:39] The preacher's words, we're told, are words of delight. Words written to make you smile and give you joy. Words of truth, written to give you the right perspective on life in the face of death. Words of pain, written to be like a shepherd's gold that prick and pinch the wandering sheep back onto the right path and away from danger. Words to remember, written in such a way that they stick in your mind like nails firmly fixed. But look what else he says about the words of the preacher at the end of verse 12.

They are given by one shepherd. Now here lies the key phrase for understanding the words of the preacher in Ecclesiastes. The words of the preacher in Ecclesiastes are given to us by God, the one true shepherd.

When we read the preacher's words, we are reading God's words. God's words of delight. God's words of truth. God's words of pain. God's words to remember. And this helps us as we look to understand the summarizing statement in verse 13.

Because in verse 13, the narrator sums up everything that has just been said by the preacher and he sums it all up in just two lines. The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments.

Now for any of you who have experience of trying to write a summarizing statement, you know that they are a real challenge. You might be given an essay or a paper and asked to read through it and then summarize the main points into just a couple lines.

[13:13] And you know how mind melting it can be at times. Whenever I'm given any passage from the Bible from Joe or Donald, the first thing they always get me to do is to summarize the main message of the passage into just a few lines.

A theme and aim sentence, they call it. And I can't lie. For the first few weeks of my internship, I despised the theme and aim sentences. They were hard. They took ages. Hours and hours and all you had to show at the end of it was just a couple lines.

But I have to say, I've learned to appreciate them as time has gone on. Why? Because it gets you to the point of the passage. And the one key rule when writing a summary statement is not to introduce any new ideas.

It would be weird, right? In the summary statement to suddenly introduce a new idea that was totally foreign to the writer's intentions. This can be how we look at the end of Ecclesiastes.

We can look at the call to fear God and keep his commandments in total isolation from the rest of the book. But I believe the narrator knows the words of the preacher better than anyone.

[14:17] He's listened to him carefully. He's familiar with his words. And he summarizes it all by saying, fear God and keep his commandments. I believe this isn't a new idea thrown in at the end of the book.

It's what the preacher has been showing us all the way through his message. The preacher has in many places been teaching us what it looks like to fear God and keep his commandments. He's just showing us a different angle to what that looks like.

One we are far too unfamiliar with. But now to link this back in with the question we started asking. The question of, how do I remember my creator? Well, we see the answer is given to us in verse 13.

That to remember him is to fear him and keep his commandments. But now the question we look to answer is, well, what does it look like to fear God and keep his commandments? Now, admittedly, this question can be answered in many different ways.

If taken in isolation. We could go to Deuteronomy. We could go to Romans. We could go to the Psalms. To be honest, we could go anywhere in the Bible to look to answer that question. But this evening, we're in Ecclesiastes.

[15:26] And these verses are given at the end of this book to summarize all that has gone before. So we are to look at what Ecclesiastes shows us about what it looks like to fear God and keep his commands.

What has the preacher been telling us time and time again throughout his book? What is the angle he's been showing us? If you're to read through Ecclesiastes, you'd notice that there is one instruction that keeps coming up time and time again.

There's one drumbeat that the preacher keeps on hitting time and time again throughout his book. And that is, enjoy, food, drink, work, marriage as gifts from God.

Don't believe me? Just listen to the drumbeat.

Ecclesiastes chapter 2 verses 24 to 25. There is nothing better for a person that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also I saw is from the hand of God, from apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment.

[16:32] Chapter 3 verses 12 to 13. I perceive that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live. Also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.

This is God's gift to man. Chapter 5 verse 18 to 20. Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun.

The few days of his life that God has given him. For this is his lot. Chapter 8 verse 15. And I commend joy. For man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful.

For this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun. And finally, chapter 9 verse 7 to 10. Go, eat your bread with joy.

Drink your wine with a merry heart. For God has already approved of what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love.

[17:30] All the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun. Because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.

For there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going. My friends, that's the drumbeat of Ecclesiastes. Life is fleeting and only lasts as long as a breath.

Therefore, enjoy your food and drink. Enjoy the work you've been given. Enjoy your wife or husband by recognizing that they are all good gifts from God.

That's the angle he's been showing us. That's the main way Ecclesiastes shows us about what it means to fear God and keep his commandments. But just to pause here for a moment.

Because if you're anything like me, you hear that and instantly you're suspicious. No way that's true. It's far too positive. Fearing God and keeping his commands can't possibly look like me enjoying food, drink, work and marriage as all gifts from him.

[18:33] That can't be right. My friend, if that's you, and that's a little voice in the back of your head right now, think back with me to the words read at the start of the service.

The words read from the very start of the Bible in Genesis 1. It sealed it for me and I hope it does the same for you. This is what we read. Here we see the first commands ever given to humanity by God.

And what three things do we see? Firstly, be fruitful and multiply. In other words, enjoy the benefits of marriage. Have sex.

Have kids. Enjoy each other. What comes next? Subdue it and have dominion. In other words, work. And finally, you shall have them for food.

Eat. I've given you all these plants for food. Therefore, enjoy it. You see, the preacher is just echoing the words spoken by God first in the garden.

[19:53] Yes, there is more to what it means to fear God and obey his commands. That's why we have Deuteronomy and Romans and all the other books. But an important component of it looks like us enjoying the good gifts God has given us.

Something we are far too unfamiliar with. I wonder. I wonder how you plan to grow in your relationship with God this year. Maybe you plan to read more.

Pray more. All great and good things we should look to do. But I wonder if enjoying the gifts he's given us. By recognizing they all come from his hand. Is on our to-do list this year.

I wonder how our fellowship with him would deepen. And I wonder how our love and generosity for others would grow as a result. But now to recap.

We have heard the call to remember our creator before we grow old and die. And we have seen that remembering him looks like fearing him and keeping his commands. By enjoying food, drink, work and marriage as all gifts from him.

[20 : 56] But now the question is. Have you done it? Look again with me to verses 13 and 14. Fear God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment. With every secret thing. Whether good or evil. Here we have the answer to our final question. The question of why.

Why should I remember my creator? And the answer is twofold. Firstly, because it's your duty. You see it's not a suggestion. It's a command.

It's not a lifestyle choice. It's your duty. It's why you exist. It's why I exist. And secondly, because judgment is coming. The great day is coming when God will put right every wrong.

All the oppression, all the injustice will finally have its day in court. All the evil deeds that have been done in secret will be brought into light. We look around the world and see all the carnage and oppression and our hearts ache.

[21 : 58] We long for justice. We long for justice. And the great hope is that one day we will see it. When the creator of all the earth brings everyone and everything before him to be judged.

Every secret thing, whether good or evil. The question is, are you ready? Are you ready for that day? Have you lived a life remembering your creator?

Or have you lived a life forgetting him and pushing him away? Have you recognized that every good thing comes from him? Or do you credit yourself for all that you have? Do you enjoy food and drink, recognizing them as gifts from him?

Or do you just mindlessly indulge? Do you see work as a gift or only ever something to complain about? Do you see relationships as gifts from God?

Or do you let them bring you further away from him? You see, the reality is, we all fail. And we all fail miserably. None of us, in and of ourselves, are ready for that day of judgment.

[22 : 59] We have failed to live by his commands. Even when he commands us to enjoy the gifts he's given us, we can't even do that right. But my friends, the good news of the gospel is that there is one who has.

You see, we need to know God more than just our creator. We need to know him as our savior. And in Jesus Christ, we can. In Christ, our creator becomes our savior.

The eternal son of God took on human flesh, became a baby in a womb, so he could fulfill the duty we failed to carry out. We are told that he came eating and drinking. He knew what it meant to enjoy food and drink to God's glory, and the religious hypocrites called him a drunkard and a glutton.

He came to fulfill the work given to him by his father, and he came to claim for himself his bride. And he did this by living the life we failed to live, and dying the death we deserve to die.

We deserve to face judgment on that final day. But Christ on the cross came to face that for us. On the cross, our sin was placed on him.

[24 : 04] He took the wrath we deserved. Then he was raised from the dead, showing that his work is complete, and was seated at the right hand of the Father, showing our debt has been paid, and we can be forgiven, and we can be brought into a right relationship with God through faith in him.

So if you're here tonight, recognizing your need of a savior, recognizing that you have spent your life forgetting God, rather than remembering him, come to Christ.

Come to your creator, and ask him to save you. Don't waste any more time. If you're older here this evening, and the words of verses 3 to 5, are more than just a poem to you, because you feel the difficult reality of old age each day.

You know what it's like to see your body gradually failing you. You know the struggle, and you know the pain. And dear brother or sister, hear the assuring call to rest.

Rest in the assurance that faith in Christ gives you. Rest in the fact that if your faith is in Christ, you don't have to fear that day of judgment. You also don't have to live in fear of old age, because in Christ, you can look forward to when your creator calls you home, and you can see aging as a process that takes you closer and closer to that sweet reality.

[25 : 25] He has you in his hands, and he'll sustain you to the very end. But finally, for those of us who are Christians here this evening, let us give thanks and rejoice in Christ, that he covers all our failures.

But let us also come to him, asking that he grow our enjoyment of the gifts he's given to us. May we fear him and obey his commands, by enjoying food and drink, by finding fulfillment in the work he's given us, and may we enjoy the relationships he's blessed us with, all to his glory, recognizing that all these things come from his hands.

May that be our desire, and may that be our prayer for 2025. Amen. Let's now pray together in closing. Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, thank you for your word.

Thank you for what it teaches us about you, that you are a God who is so kind and so generous, that you are a God who gives his people gifts that they do not deserve.

Father, thank you. Thank you for Christ, the greatest gift ever given. Thank you for his work on the cross, that we can be forgiven. Father, I ask that through the work of your spirit, that you would make us into men and women, who enjoy food, drink, work, and marriage, as all gifts from you.

[26 : 52] And Father, please, would you purify our enjoyment of these things, I pray. Would you draw near to anyone tonight, that is feeling the effects of old age. May you give them great peace and contentment in Christ.

And may they know your sustaining arm around them. I also pray, Lord, for anyone this evening, that does not yet know you. Lord, I pray that they would hear the call from your word, to remember their creator.

And Lord, may this be the night that they give their life to you. So Lord, as we come now to sing our last song of praise to you this evening, enable us again through your spirit, to give you praise, that is not only from our mouths, but Lord, more importantly, from our hearts.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.