

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, November 21, 2017**

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, 12-14

I'm not going to preach long this evening – at least not as long as usual. (That is something to be thankful for!) But I want you to consider with me what the writer of Ecclesiastes (traditionally believed to be David's son Solomon, though he is not identified by name anywhere in Ecclesiastes) has to say to us about remembering our Creator and being faithful to Him in the fleeting days of our short life here on earth.

If you're familiar with the message of Ecclesiastes, you know that Solomon uses the word "vanity" or "meaningless" (NIV) over and over again – 35 times, in fact. The Hebrew word *hevel* has different nuances. In addition to "in vain" or "meaningless," it can refer to the brevity or transient nature of life. It can refer to a breath or vapor that slips through your fingers, or to steam from a boiling kettle. *The Message* paraphrase uses the expression: "It's all smoke, nothing but smoke." It refers to the futility of making this life our ultimate goal, as if this life is all there is. Especially it refers to the futility of life without God. It does not mean that life itself is meaningless or in vain, but that we can – and many do – spend the whole of this life in pursuit of things that have no lasting, eternal value.

Ecclesiastes 12 contains some of the most colorful language in the Bible in its description of old age and the inevitability of death for all of us in this fallen world. As one commentator says, it is really a poem about the reality of our mortality (Philip G. Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, 269). It paints for us a picture of what getting old is like, and urges us to remember God now – to make God the center of our lives while we are still young, before the ravages of time and advancing age take their toll on us.

The truth, of course, is that for some (many?) of us, it is too late to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, because the days of our youth are past, and there is no way to get them back. Some (many?) of you have lived your lives for God since the days of your youth, which has been a blessing to others and has brought joy to God's heart. If that is not the case for you, hear me when I say it is not too late for you to remember your Creator, though the days of your youth may be long gone. It is not too late to make God the center of your life. It is not too late to put Jesus first. It is not too late to trust Him as your Savior and hand over to Him the keys to your life as Lord. It is not too late. The day will come for each of us when it *will* be too late, and we don't know when – we don't know how soon it will be. Whether you're young or old, now is the time to "remember your Creator" and to live your life for His purposes and glory.

This exhortation in Ecclesiastes 12 is addressed specifically to the young, because you (generally speaking) have more of your life ahead of you, and more opportunity to allow God to use you for His glory. (My definition of "young" for this evening is anyone who is younger than I am.) The message of Ecclesiastes 12 for you is to remember the Lord *now*, to give Him first place in your life *now*, not to waste your life in pursuits and experiences that

are self-serving and will not bring you the lasting fulfillment you long for. Get rid of any youthful pretense of immortality or self-sufficiency, and the folly of self-idolatry, worshipping yourself and your own desires. It may look incredibly attractive. It may be what our culture encourages and entices you to do. But it is a dead end that leads to ... death.

“Remember your Creator (*now*) 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’” (12:1). Look at how Solomon describes the onset of old age and death itself. It is a picture of what happens to “this old house” of our body as we get older.

In verse 2, getting old is like the coming of winter or an approaching storm. The sky becomes increasingly overcast and dark, the rains come, only to be followed by more clouds. The light of this life grows dimmer, the days grow shorter, and life slows down. We don’t have the same energy or ambition we once had.

The “keepers of the house” (12:3) are our hands and arms that begin to tremble as we get older. That “the strong men stoop” means that our legs become weaker and less stable and it is harder for us to stand up straight. The ceasing of “the grinders” refers to the loss of our teeth. “Windows” is a reference to our eyes and the decrease of our vision. The “doors to the street” (12:4) are our ears that become hard of hearing and, as a result, we don’t hear what is going on around us. Nevertheless, in spite of our hearing loss, we don’t sleep well and are awakened early in the morning by the sound of a bird. We don’t sing as much as we once did because we can’t sing like we once did. We are afraid of heights (12:5), afraid of falling or being attacked in the street. The “almond tree” of verse 5 is a metaphor for white hair, since the blossoms of an almond tree are white. The “grasshopper (dragging) himself along” is another picture of growing old and of the decline in desire, including sexual desire, that comes along with aging. After all this, says Solomon, “man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about in the streets” (12:5).

In verse 6, the call to remember God is renewed. The silver cord, golden bowl, pitcher, and wheel are all references to death, when “the dust” from which we were made “returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (12:7). As it says in Ecclesiastes 3:20: “Dust we are and to dust we shall return.”

Getting old is no picnic. For most people, the “golden years” aren’t so golden as we deal with the effects of aging and the decline of our physical and mental abilities. Many of us get to the point where we no longer want to acknowledge our own birthdays. And yet, it has been scientifically proven that birthdays *are* good for you, because the more you have, the longer you live. (Let that sink in for a moment.)

Then, of course, there are these “facts” of growing old:

- You know you’re growing old when you actually look forward to a dull evening at home.
- You know you’re growing old when your mind makes commitments your body can’t keep.

- You know you're growing old when everything hurts, and what doesn't hurt doesn't work.
- You know you're growing old when you've owned clothes for so long they come back into style ... twice.
- You know you're growing old when you sing along to elevator music.
- You know you're growing old when you quit trying to hold your stomach in no matter who walks in the room.

(Source: Greg Laurie, *God's Cure for Heart Trouble*, Preaching Today Audio No. 282)

In light of the inevitability of aging (that is, if we live long enough) and of death, how then should we live? Solomon's answer is clear: Remember your Creator. *Now*. Don't put it off another minute. Getting to know your Creator and living your life in fellowship with Him is the most important thing you can do with your life. If you're young, do it now. Don't wait until the best years of life are behind you. If you're old, or rapidly moving in that direction, do it now. Don't waste another minute or year of your life. Only God knows how much time you have left. Make your life count for God. Live every moment of your life *coram deo* – before the face of God, under His gracious and loving Lordship, and unto His glory.

To remember your Creator and honor Him in your life as Lord is the purpose for which God made you. And me.

Remember who God is. Remember what you are apart from Him – a sinner, helpless to save yourself, helpless to fix what is wrong with you, helpless to become the person you were created to be. Remember who and what you are in Jesus Christ – forgiven, redeemed, set free, reconciled to God, justified, adopted, at peace with God.

Remember that your Creator loves you. Remember that your Creator will never forget you or leave you or forsake you. Remember that your Creator is also your Heavenly Father. Remember that your Creator is also your Savior. Remember that He loved the world so much that He gave His only Son to save all who believe in Him, and to adopt you as His beloved child. As the Bible says in 1 John 3:1: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” That is what you are, if you have put your trust in Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross for you.

Remember too that He is a gracious God and that His grace comes free of charge to people like you and me who don't deserve it and never will. Remember that He is sovereign and that not a single square inch of the entire universe lies outside the bounds of His dominion. Remember that nothing in all creation, not even death, can ever separate you from His love shown to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, because His love is stronger than death. Remember that He has prepared an eternal home for you – for all who believe in Him and belong to Him by faith – in heaven.

Remember your Creator. *Now*. And rejoice in your Creator. Rejoice in Him, as the Scripture says, always (Philippians 4:4. Take joy in who He is and what He has done for you.

And, as you remember Him, regardless of your age, give thanks to Him. There is, as you have heard it said, never a time when it is not time to give thanks to the Lord. And, as you have heard this evening, there are actual health benefits that accrue to grateful people.

The Bible commends thankfulness in a variety of ways and places. Take Colossians 3:15 and 17, for example: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” (“Cultivate thankfulness,” it says in *The Message*.) “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Whatever you do, be thankful and give thanks to God.

And, of course, there is Paul’s famous three-fold exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” We can do that as long as we remember that our Creator is our Father and our Savior and our Sovereign who causes all things to work together for good in the lives of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Which means that He can use even the hard things of life to serve His redemptive, gracious purposes, and He can bring good out of evil. There is never a time when it is not time to give thanks to God.

Remember your Creator. Make Him the center of your life. Rejoice in your Creator. And give thanks to Him in all things and for all things. Do it now. Do it as long as you live. To live for Him, to revere Him and honor Him and love Him and trust Him and follow Him and serve Him and worship Him is what life is all about. And there is nothing meaningless or futile about it.

This is what life is all about. Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.