

Live Wisely Knowing the End

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: 30 December 2012

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Scripture reading will be Ecclesiastes 11, and we'll read from verse 7 through chapter 12, verse 7.

But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many.

Everything to come is meaningless. Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart in whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.

So then banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body. For youth and vigor are meaningless. 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.

Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain. When the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men sleep.

[1:23] When the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim. When the doors of the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades.

When men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint. When men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the street. When the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire is no longer stirred.

Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him before the silver cord is severed or the golden bowl is broken.

Before the pitcher is shattered at the spring or the wheel broken at the well. And the dust returns to the ground it came from. And the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Well, a few weeks ago my neighbor and my friend died.

[2:31] He was 40 years old. Children with children, basically the ages of my own children. And I sat with him in those last weeks.

With he and his wife. And I watched him grow weaker and weaker. Until a Tuesday came. And as I was sitting there, as I usually did.

He laid there. And he was sleeping. And there was this terrible rattling in his throat. And was very close.

Indeed it was the next day. And as you sit there, you can't escape the obvious reality that that's going to be me someday.

That's going to be me someday. As sure as I was sitting there, that's going to be me one day. And my mind came back again and again to Ecclesiastes.

[3:39] And it's been two or three years since we looked at this book. But it kept coming back to this book. And you remember there's a verse that says, It's better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.

For death is the destiny of all men. And the living should take it to heart. There was something to learn and take to heart as I was sitting there.

And it's good for me. And it's good for you to be in situations like that. Because at the end, there's going to be a funeral.

And it's going to be your funeral. And so we're heading into a new year. And we're another year closer to the end, aren't we?

Whatever that last day for each one of us, the last day for the world, we are certainly one year closer. I'm closer. You're closer. And as I was thinking about Ecclesiastes, and as I was thinking about what would be appropriate for today, my thoughts kept coming back to this passage, the passage that Charlie read for us.

[4:50] We don't know. Like we said this morning, we don't know what 2013 is going to hold. The steadfast love of the Lord will endure 2013.

We sang about that this morning. But also, it's appointed for man to die once.

And then comes the judgment. Those things are certain. In 2013, God's love will endure, and time will press on. And it will carry all of its children with it.

We are all on the boat, and the river is rushing to the end. And so, how should you live in 2013?

That's what this passage is about.

It's about living wisely in the little bit of time that you have in 2013. And so, it's a passage of wisdom, and it's wisdom for really living.

[5:48] Really living next year, this coming 2013. Now, it's divided into two commands, the passage that I had read. And we're going to look at each one of those. It's the two commands.

And you see the first in verses 7 through 10. And it should be easy for you to remember because someone wrote a very fantastic song. It says, Don't worry, be happy.

And I listened to it, and I watched it this afternoon to refresh my memory in preparation for the sermon. Don't worry, be happy.

Verse 12, you see the first part. It says, Banish anxiety. Banish anxiety. Don't worry. And then verse 9, at the very first section, very first phrase, Be happy.

So, you have their first command. Don't worry. Be happy. So, look at it with me. We start at verse 7. And it says, Light is sweet, and it pleases the eye to see the sun.

[6:48] That's a proverb. And it means that it's good to drink in the goodness of living and the goodness of God, the blessings of life. It's good to feel the sun on your face.

It's a good thing to be alive and to enjoy it. So, what should you do? Verse 8, However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all.

2013 is a year to enjoy. Light is sweet, so drink it up. It's good to walk in God's world. It can be miserable and frustrating, and there's difficult things about it and painful things.

And if you remember, when we looked at Ecclesiastes, you remember all of those things that he mentioned. And that is real, and those are real. But God is so good, and he does fill the world, and he fills our lives with good things.

And so, as long as you live, enjoy those years. So, 2013 is a year to enjoy. It's a gift of God. So, don't be forever wanting and waiting for the next thing to happen.

[7:56] There's things to enjoy now. And young people, that's especially for you. This is a passage of scripture written especially for young people.

And so, if you're in junior high, enjoy junior high. If you're in high school, don't be forever thinking, as soon as I get out of high school and I get a real job or I go on to college, then it will be really good.

Life will be really good, and then I can really start enjoying it. That's not living wisely. That's folly.

Maybe there are some things that you don't like. I'm sure there are. There's certainly things like that in everyone's life.

But there's still joy. There's joy to be had in junior high, and there's joy to be had in high school. And so, when you go on, when you graduate, wait, you can never go back.

It never happens that way. And so, enjoy these years. Or, I could talk about young parents.

[9:06] And I'm a young parent myself, and so I have to preach this word to myself. But these years are years to enjoy. Because when they're gone, they don't come back, do they?

Or, singles. Singleness is a gift from God. And sometimes, it's a hard gift to receive. It's like a nasty old sweater that someone gives you, and they want you to try it on, and you really don't want to try it on.

But they insist. But the whole time, you're thinking, when can I take this thing off? When can I take this thing off? Well, singleness is not meant to be received as that kind of gift. It's meant to be enjoyed.

Let him enjoy all the days of his life. Parents, enjoy this time with your children. Couples, enjoy this time with your spouse. Whatever years you have, enjoy them all.

Well, why? What's motivating this call to rejoice, to enjoy life, to find joy in whatever stage of life you're at? Well, verse 8 says, because dark days are coming.

[10:14] Dark days are coming. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. Remember the Hebrew word. It's, it's Havel.

And, that means it's frustration. It's futility. It's sin-cursed. It's everything in our life because we live in a sin-cursed world.

And so, as soon as we get around to enjoying them, they change and they break or they, you know, we lose them. I was just talking to my wife this, this afternoon that youth is lost on the young, isn't it? I was looking at this picture of myself and I said, I was never that young. And, she's like, no, that was just, you know, someone, whatever, you know, you really weren't that young. Well, I was that young but I didn't appreciate it.

It's all Havel. It rushes by. You can barely grasp onto it. It's like chasing the wind. Well, why should you drink in the light now because the dark days are coming, days that are full of Havel where everything is frustration and meaningless as the NIV has.

[11 : 28] And so, the end of life is what he's talking about. This is a miserable, frustrating business. And God is telling you that and I am telling you that not to be a stick in the mud but just the opposite.

The days to come are evil. They're hard. They're difficult days. And so, be sure to enjoy the days that you have now because the sun sets and the flower dies.

And so, you have to smell the flowers while you have them. While you have them. And so, don't let the future cast a shadow over you. Instead, let it chase you to seizing the day, to enjoying the day. And maybe you're thinking, but are you sure that's what it means? Are you sure that's what it says? Isn't that worldly? Aren't we supposed to be always thinking about the next world? And is it right to really want to enjoy this world?

Well, it's not worldly if it's taken from a proper perspective. Look at verse 9. It makes it plain. It makes it explicit. Be happy, young man.

[12 : 36] Be happy, young man, while you are young and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see. It makes it plain.

And I think we have a hard time hearing that, especially as Christians, because we understand the sinfulness of our hearts and probably the sirens are going off in Jeremiah 17.9 about the deceitfulness of the heart and how it's deceitful above all things who can know it.

Well, should we be reading Jeremiah 17.9 into this passage? Well, that wouldn't be doing playing fair with this passage.

And so, some people say, no, young people, don't follow the ways of your heart. The ways of your heart are evil. And so, is he saying, just do whatever you want?

If you want to sin, sin? Well, of course that's not what he's saying. He's not saying, do whatever your heart wants to even sin. But what is he saying? Well, he says, he's saying that 2013, this year before you, is the time to follow the desires of your heart of doing wonderful, good things.

[13 : 53] And so, do you want to go skiing? Well, then go skiing. Do you want to jump off the high dive, the high board, and the summer?

Well, you better do it because pretty soon it's coming to the time when you won't be able to do it, even if you want to do it. So, do it now. Do you want to go to college and study? Well, then go to college and study with all of your heart.

Do you want to go to a mission field? Do you want to do something grand for God? Do you want to do something big in your neighborhood or for your family? Well, 2013 is the time to do it.

Don't delay living. Follow the ways of your heart. And so, look around, young people. Look around. People are just mere phantoms of what they could be, aren't they? They could be doing so much more, but they don't. They settle for so little, and so they just mindlessly are plugged into the internet and mindlessly plugged into their smartphones.

[14 : 57] And they're not living. They're not doing things while they have a chance. And God is saying, don't do that to yourself.

Don't settle for that kind of living. God wants your life to be full of joy and vigor and activity. And He commands you.

It's a command. Be happy. And it's just as serious of a command as do not steal. If you would not steal, then you should seek to be happy as well.

So be happy while the light shines on your face because the days of darkness are coming. But then listen to what it says next. There is certain clarification, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment.

And so do the grouchy people finally get their way and say, hi, I knew it. You did those fun things and now you're going to pay for them. God gives it to them in the end. They'll get what's coming to them.

[16:03] Is that what He's saying? Well, is that right? For all your fun times, God's going to bring you into judgment, so don't do that. Well, there is a certain sense that, yeah, it's certainly directing what kind of things that we should find enjoyment in.

But, I don't think that's the whole story. He isn't bringing God's judgment in here to undermine our joy, to make it so that we live less joyful lives.

He's doing it for the exact opposite reason. Be happy, banish anxiety, because God is going to judge you.

He's giving you wonderful, good gifts. He's giving you families. He's giving you strong bodies. He's giving you a measure of health. He's giving you things to enjoy.

And so, God has given those things, and He's going to hold you accountable for them. Will you enjoy God's gifts or not? Judgment doesn't destroy joy.

[17:11] It underscores joy. It makes joy all the more important. Jeremy Taylor, the Puritan, he said something very remarkable. He said, God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy.

God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy. So, is God pouring sunshine in your life? Then He wants you to drink it up and enjoy it, enjoy Him in it.

Those are gifts from God, and He's holding you accountable. So, judgment underscores joy, but it also directs it. It's sort of like going bumper bowling.

You know, how you put those bumpers up, and now you can roll a ball, and you don't go in the gutter. Well, this idea, this thought of judgment, is meant to guard you from rolling a gutter ball of life, where you've done all the wrong things, and you come to the end, and it was for nothing, and you regret it all.

The thought of judgment is meant to protect us. So where can you find the best joy? Well, it's not in sin. It's not in sin.

[18:24] It's in righteousness. It's in the wife of your youth. It's not in pornography. It's in the laughter of your children. It's not just selfishly staring at the TV. The thought of judgment should keep us in the right paths.

finding joy in the areas that God wants us to find joy in. And those aren't small areas, are they? They're wonderful. They're broad areas. God has filled our lives with good things.

It just keeps us from those poisonous pleasures of sin. Because there are things that are fun for a time, but it's playing with a snake, and you get bitten, and then you die.

Well, verse 10, it finishes the command. So then banish anxiety from your heart, and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

They're havel. They're quickly over, they're rushing to an end, you can't get a hold of them and get a good grasp on them. They're out of your hands before you know it. So youth and vigor are quickly going by.

[19:33] And so what do you do? How do you be happy? How do you find joy? Well, you have to do two things. He says you banish anxiety. You banish anxiety. Anxiety can mean what we think of anxiety, worry, concern, or it can mean anxiety, or excuse me, anger, or vexation.

And he says banish it all. So think of yourself as a king, and you have your kingdom. There's something that you're not supposed to let into your kingdom, and it's anxiety. Banish it from it. Exile it. And so young people, older people, what are you worried about? Worry doesn't add a single day to your life.

It does no good. What are you worried about? Are you worried about not fitting in with this person or that group? He says get rid of it.

That worry will keep you from living a joyful, God-honoring life. So get rid of it. So are you worried about how you look? You know, we'd all like to look different, nicer, better.

[20:38] But if that consumes you, get rid of it. If you can't be happy, then get rid of it. Are you worried about meeting all the demands of all the people that have, that rightfully or wrongfully may put these demands on you?

And sometimes I think so many people can put such strict demands on our life, that it really steals our joy.

And he said don't worry about that. Toss it. Don't let it steal your joy. And then while you're at it, don't let aches and pains slow you down either, especially for young people. Don't let your aches and pains slow you down.

So are you sore from practice? Are you tired from work? Well, get rid of it. And you say, well, how can you get rid of that? Well, you know, he's not saying just totally feel better just because you want to, but he's saying don't let that slow you down.

Don't let that keep you from being happy and finding joy in life. Don't make that such a focus of your heart and your mind that you lose track of all of God's gifts and his goodness to you.

[21 : 50] you just don't have the time. You can't let pain or anxiety keep you from enjoying your life.

And the reason is you have a bigger problem on your hands. You have a fiercer foe coming for you. Old age is coming. Death is coming.

The days of darkness are chasing you. So the flower is dying. It's not staying the same. It's dying. And so you have to seize it, smell the flowers, or lose it.

Well, young people, older people, how do you live? How do you live in 2013? Well, don't worry, be happy. That's the first command. These are good commands, aren't they? God is loving us and he's telling us these wonderful things.

That's the first command. You see the second in chapter 12, verse 1. Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them.

[22 : 54] So how do you live a life worth living? How do you live wisely in 2013? Well, remember your creator. Remember your creator now, especially now, while you're young.

And young is a relative term, while you are young. So remember your creator. That means live in light of who he is and who you are.

That's how you really live. You have to bring that data, that piece of information into your life and dwell on it and think about it and center your life around it if you're going to really live.

And it's interesting, he doesn't say remember your Lord or even remember God, but remember your creator. You have to remember the fundamental reality of your life, that you are not your own.

God made you. God owns you. God has rights over you. And God commands you. You belong to him and he can tell you what to do.

[24 : 02] And so remembering God means living according to his law. God. So you aren't the captain of your soul, the master of your fate.

You're a creature. And you're a short-lived creature at that. And God commands you. And until we come to grips with that, or until that grips us, then we're going to be totally missing the point of life.

Totally missing the point of life. Totally missing what life is all about. Remember in Colossians, Paul says, speaking about Jesus, that all things were made through him and for him.

All things were made, including you. You were made through Jesus, through his power and his work, and you were made for Jesus. And until you bring that into your mind, until you believe that and live that out, you're going to be missing the grand points of your life.

But some of you still have it all backward. forward. And it's no wonder you can't find joy in your life. You're living out of sync with reality. And for you, you're still at the center.

[25 : 15] And your life drips with, who is the Lord that I should serve him? Instead, you get up and you go about your day and it's about you. So you eat breakfast and you don't thank God because it's about you.

And you eat lunch and lunch is about you and your friendships are about you and you play sports for you and you have relationships for you and you live in your family life for you. You study hard. You go to work all for you to make you good, to accomplish your goals. See, everything in your life is curved in on you. It's all about you.

And in their minds, there's no room for any thought of God. God. And if that's you, the word of God is stop.

Repent. Repent. Now in the days of your youth, now before the days of trouble, come. And now is the time to renounce the center.

[26 : 25] And now is the time to stop acting like you're the sun, when in reality, you're just a planet, and a small planet at that. So remember your creator.

Remember him. He stands ready to judge you. We just looked at that. But even now, he's holding out this pardon of peace and this way back to him to be right with him and to come to him safely.

And it's through his son. And he sent his son. He sent his son to rescue sinners. He sent his son to become the Lord of sinners and to transform their lives and change them, to put his life in them. He came to save those who would repent though, who would renounce the sinner, who would give up that place and put God in that place. And so the word is don't wait.

Don't wait to do that. 2013 is the year to do it. And actually, December 30th, 2012 is the right time, is the best time.

[27 : 38] Now before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain. Well, what is he talking about? He's saying you want to remember God and live for God now before those days of darkness come because the days of darkness are different from these kinds of days.

The clouds will roll in and it will rain. And you know, when in our weather, when the clouds and it rains, then pretty soon it's sunny again.

But old age isn't like that. There won't be sunshine after it rains. There's only more clouds and more rain. see, young people, old age isn't like youth.

When you're young, you have a setback and you get right back to it. You know, so your knee hurts, you take some Tylenol or aspirin and you feel better.

And the sun shines again. You had a little rain, but the sun shined again after anyways. But old age is different. So your knee hurts. And you go to the doctor and you say, doctor, my knee hurts.

[28 : 58] And he says, yep. And you're like, what? And that's what you're going to do for me? Yeah. Because getting better is not an option anymore.

These things become a permanent part of your life. Getting better falls away. Serious reality.

It's truth. And the sweetness of life will be over and it will be one long night. And that's why he's saying, don't worry, be happy now.

That's why he's saying, remember your creator now. Now is the good time. Now is the right time. And now is the time to do it. When you have health and vigor and strength, now is the time to live. Not later on when you're a wreck and you're a ruin. And that's where we're all headed. And that's what he talks about.

[30 : 00] We all turn into these old ruined houses, ghost towns of our former selves. That's what he says in verses 3-5. Look at it. What is old age like?

Verse 3, the keepers of the house tremble. Those are your hands. Your hands used to feed you and take care of you and keep you. With your hands, you can fight and protect yourself.

But now they tremble. And the strong men stoop. The strong men are your legs. And your legs have covered miles and miles of life.

And they've taken you over hills and down into valleys. But now they're bent. The old man is bull-legged and he totters along on his bent legs.

When the grinders cease because they are few, your teeth begin to fall out. And those looking through the windows grow dim. Your eyes glaze over and you can't see so well.

[31 : 05] Everything grows fuzzy and faded. and the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades. That's your ears. Your ears shut down. They don't hear so well.

So children, do you know why you say something to your grandpa and he says, what? It's because his ears don't work like they used to.

They don't work like yours do. When men rise up at the sound of birds but their sounds fade. And so now, there's no sleeping in. It's wake up with the birds but the sad thing is you can't hear their music.

You can't sleep anymore but you can't hear their songs anymore either. And so the old man doesn't enjoy his early mornings when men are afraid of heights and dangers in the streets.

Fear is a perpetual reality for the elder elderly. They're afraid of going upstairs. They're afraid of walking in the streets. They can't move quickly anymore.

[32 : 11] They can't dodge things anymore. They're not as stable as they used to be. And so it's nothing to trip and fall. And so it's better to stay here in this chair. The almond tree blossoms.

When an almond tree blossoms, it turns this brilliant white color. And so from a distance, it might even look like an old man with his body and his bright white hair.

And so now the thick black hair that marked the young man is starting to fall out and change colors. And old age is taking him. And the grasshopper drags himself along.

Now, children, you know what a grasshopper looks like. has very bent legs, very, very big joints. And so that's the old man with his swollen joints and his crooked limbs. And now he's dragging himself along. And desire is no longer stirred. Literally, it's the caperberry fails. Now, in the ancient world, caperberry was thought to be something that encouraged your appetite.

[33:22] So if you wanted to have a big feast, you'd eat some caperberry because it would stir up your appetite. Well, now the caperberry fails. The old man isn't hungry anymore. And he eats less and less and he begins to lose weight.

Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Then it happens. Death. And young people, now is the time to remember your creator. Now, in the days of your youth, now is the time to repent and believe before these things happen. And you say, but I won't wait that long.

I wonder how many people have said the same exact thing. Go to the nursing home and sit there and watch as the gospel is preached.

Half of them are asleep before, you know, half of them are asleep before five minutes are up. And the other half are confused and have no idea what's going on.

[34:37] And I'm not saying that to belittle them. I'm just saying there's a time and there's a place to come to the Lord. And the Lord can save whomever he wants.

I'm not saying that. But maybe that's where you'll be. He'll harden your heart for your stubbornness, for your refusal to come, and you'll put it off and you'll put it off and then he'll send you to a nursing home.

And you'll be a mumbling, confused ruin of what you used to be, without a care in the world for your soul. It happens.

So young people, now is the time to remember your creator, to remember God. Verse 1 said, remember him before the days of trouble come.

Verse 2 said, remember him before everything grows dark. And then verse 6, remember him before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is shattered, at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

[35:51] So here's two pictures of life and death. Life is beautiful. It's like a golden bowl hung from a silver cord, and it's costly, and it's wonderful to see.

It gives light to those who are around, but then the silver cord is cut, and the bowl crashes to the ground, and the light goes out.

Life and death. Or it's a water pitcher at a well, a spring, and year after year it gives the sturdy service. It's not something beautiful, but it's something useful now.

And people use it, and people benefit from it day after day. That's what life is like. But then one day the wheel breaks, and the pitcher falls, and it shatters.

So you know how it is. Year after year, he served, and he loved his family, and he taught his children, and he loved his wife, and he loved the church.

[36:58] Years of sacrifice, years of work, years of sturdy service for the Lord, but then the wheel breaks, and the pitcher falls, and he returns to the dust.

Dust you are, and to dust you will return, and the Spirit returns to God who gave it. So what will 2013 be like for you?

Will this be the year that you really live? God wants you to really live with vigor? Will this be the year that you come to Christ?

Will this year be the year that you die? We don't know. And I don't say that to be melodramatic, and I don't say it to cast a shadow on your life, but to encourage you to live life to its fullness.

You don't know what tomorrow holds. we have no idea what's going to happen to any of us in 2013. And so younger people, older people, take him at his word and really live.

[38:09] Really live in 2013. So don't worry and be happy. Banish anxiety and be happy. Remember your creator. Come to Christ. Because at the end, there will be a funeral.

And it will be yours. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this passage.

We thank you for its truth. We pray that you would apply it to our hearts. Make these realities loud and clear to us.

So that we will go out of here and we won't waste our lives. Waste our lives in sin and stupid, foolish pleasures.

But that we would enjoy the gifts that you've given to us. That you would help us to celebrate them and embrace them and not feel guilty about having them, but to take them and use them and to enjoy them.

[39 : 24] All for your glory. Pray that we would remember our creator. Thank you, Lord, that you have not only made us, but you've redeemed us, and you've not only done that, but you sent your spirit into our hearts to help us to live a new life.

I pray that we would live a life pleasing to you this year. as we embrace your goodness, as we worship you, as we repent from our sin and repent from putting ourselves in the middle, and as we put you there.

I pray that you would be honored in these things. Help us as young parents to enjoy these years, to love our children and not ourselves. Help us as husbands and wives to love our spouse and not ourselves, to enjoy them and enjoy giving to them and enjoy being a blessing to them.

Pray that you would remind us again of the shortness and the brevity of our life. Keep that from spoiling our joy in you.

Keep that from casting such a shadow that we become inert and we don't move and we don't do anything, but I pray that these things would spur us on and encourage us to live a life that's worthy of you and live a life that when we come to the end, people will be able to speak well of you and look at our life as a blessing, a blessing to them, a blessing to your people, and an honor and a praise to our God.

[41 : 11] Pray that these things would be true for us and real for us. In Jesus' name, amen.