

“Make the Most of Your Mist” // Ecclesiastes 10–12 // Ecclesiastes (Life Without God) # 5¹ th 630

LOCAL READER: Ecclesiastes chapter 10 v 1, Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. 2 A wise man’s heart inclines him to the right, but a fool’s heart to the left.

And now, chapter 11 v 1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. 2 Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth...4 He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. 6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

8 So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will

be many. All that comes is vanity. 9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Finally, chapter 12 v 13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Reader: *This is the Word of God for the people of God.*

Congregation: *Thanks be to God.*

Well, raise your hand if you’ve enjoyed Ecclesiastes... I know for sure I have. But, as Solomon says, every good thing under the sun must come to an end, and sadly we’ve come to the end of our time in Ecclesiastes.

Remember, in Ecclesiastes the author pursues one central thesis, a thesis he sets out for us in the opening verses of the book:

Ecc 1 vs 1: The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 Vanity of vanities, says

¹ Sources consulted: Bobby Jamieson, *Everything Is Never Enough: Ecclesiastes' Surprising Path to Resilient Happiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2025); David Gibson, *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of*

the End (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Tim Keller, “[Problem of Ethics: How Do We Know Right from Wrong?](#)”, June 28, 1992, Redeemer Presbyterian. And others as noted throughout.

the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. 3 What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

Two key concepts we identified in there and come back to again and again:

- The first is **"vanity"** (you see how often it's repeated in those first verses) which, in Hebrew, is the word... *What, class? "Hevel."* And remember that **'hevel'** literally means a vapor, like a cloud--something that looks so appealing from the outside but is actually substanceless. If you try to grasp it, it will slip through your fingers; if you try to rest on it you'll fall right through it. This is life under the sun, the Preacher says; life subjected to the curse of futility, a curse that has come about because of our sin.
- And because of that, he says, it is useless to seek **"gain"** in life here, under the sun--remember, **"gain"** in Ecclesiastes means to try and hold onto something, to make it permanent, to have it fulfill your deepest longings, to base your life on it. Solomon says, **if you try to find meaning, permanence, or satisfaction in life under the sun (if you try to 'gain' life here), it's going to disappoint you bitterly.**

There is a way to be happy--there is a way to enjoy life--the Preacher says, but it starts with recognizing that life under the sun can't make you happy--***happiness and permanence are found only in God***. And when you embrace that, the most wonderful thing happens: you begin to appreciate life under the sun for what it is--a gift. A temporary gift, yes; a fleeting gift, but a gift you can really enjoy.

Chapters 10–12 of Ecclesiastes bring us to... **"The End of the Matter" (12:13)** which means the author is going to draw some conclusions. I'm going to highlight 5 conclusions from these chapters that basically encapsulate the whole book.

How should we live in a world of hevel?

The author gives us 5 truths to live by:

1. Life is designed by God, so live by wisdom (10:1–2)

Look at chapter 10, vs 2: **A wise person's heart goes to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.** (This is not a political statement, btw, though I'll let you deduce whether there's any wisdom in *that*).

- **"Right" in the ancient world** meant skillful (right-handed); **"left" connoted** clumsiness.²
- (And I know that may be offensive to you southpaws out there, but that's just how they saw it in the ancient world. We know better, but that's how they saw it.)
- **His point** is that yes, because we live in a world under the curse of hevel, life is not foolproof.
- Sometimes you do the right thing and you still fail. But even so, the world is still designed by God, and **wisdom will more often lead you to success and blessing than foolishness will.**

The first week I told you that Ecclesiastes **comes right after the book of Proverbs in our Bibles**, which is intentional, because Proverbs and Ecclesiastes present opposite sides of a divine tension. Both Proverbs

² CSB Study Bible, note on Ecc 10:2

and Ecclesiastes are a part of what we call the 'Wisdom Literature' of the Bible--that set of about 5 books right in the middle of our Old Testament that contains reflections about life and how it works.

On one side of the tension, Proverbs lays out principles for us and says, *"If you live this way, here's how your life will probably go and it's probably going to be good."* **But** books like Ecclesiastes and Job show you that because we live in a world of hevel, sometimes life goes wrong even when you do everything right!

(In fact, let me share with you a little seminary humor--normally I don't share this kind of stuff with you, but I feel like after this series you're ready for it. One of my professor friends sent me **this**. If the wisdom literature in the Bible were a family, this is what it would look like:



Ecclesiastes, Job and Lamentations are these Goth looking people, telling us about the tragedy of life. "I did everything right, and life still **imploded!**" Meanwhile, Proverbs is **this kid**: *"Live this way and you'll be blessed!"* (And Ecclesiastes doesn't deny that! I mean, Solomon says it right here in chapter 10: **2: A wise person's heart goes to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.**)

Why does Solomon say that, even though we're in a world of hevel? Well, **first, he says, wisdom still works.** The Proverbs are generally true.

- **Prov 22:6**, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."
- **Prov 3:9**, "Honor God with the firstfruits of all your wealth and your barns will overflow with plenty, and your vats will burst with new wine."

Those are biblical principles that are generally true, and if you live by them, generally speaking, your life will turn out well more often than not.

But, more importantly, Solomon says, you should pursue wisdom because ***wise living is its own reward***. Even when things don't work out exactly the way you think they should, living in a way that pleases God has its own rewards.

Wise living may not always lead you to an easy life, you see, but foolish living will always lead you to a tragic one. Solomon's pretty dogmatic about this--look at what he says in vs **1: Dead flies make a perfumer's ointment give off a stench, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.**

- Here you have this beautiful, awesome-smelling perfume but it's got some dead bugs floating in it, which, btw, would have made it ferment, which would make the whole thing smell putrid. Or think of making a nice, delicious cake batter but unknown to you a mouse crawls in the bowl and drowns and the batter sits there for 3 weeks. When you bake that cake, you're not just gonna be able to eat around the mouse carcass. That decaying carcass is gonna make the whole cake stink.
- In the same way, a **few ignored areas of foolishness** can ruin an otherwise amazing life! So you need to pay attention to anywhere

in your life that you are living foolishly and not wisely. There's **a question that some of my accountability partners and I ask each other**. We say, "OK, if we could look 5 years into the future and see that you had been disqualified from ministry, what would have been the cause? IOW, what in your life is Satan most likely to use to bring you down?" It's a sobering question because it forces me to think, not where am I in trouble now, but where I might have some dead flies floating in my perfume.

I know most of you aren't in full-time ministry, but let me ask you: *If we could know that in 5 years Satan will have destroyed your life, what would he most likely have used? Maybe it would be...*

- **Sexual temptation**: You've got some overly friendly relationships at work or in the neighborhood that you've let develop. Nothing has happened yet, but you can't say you haven't thought about it. Or maybe it's a pornography addiction you secretly excuse trying to tell yourself it's not hurting anybody.
- **Money**: You cheat--in small ways: expense reports—you lie on them a little bit; little fudges on your taxes. Or maybe you skimp on your tithe.
- Maybe it's your **temper**: this is a big one. I know people who are just amazing but man, something flips their switch and they lose it. All your Enemy has to do is get you in the wrong situation and you could lose everything.
- **Maybe it's Laziness**: You just lack the discipline and drive and can so easily settle into apathy.
- **Maybe it's an inability to control your cravings**: Proverbs says that a man without self-control is like a city broken down without walls, meaning the enemy can come in via your cravings and plunder you anytime he wants.
- **Maybe it's something with your ego**. Remember in *Back to the Future* how Marty McFly's fatal flaw was that he just couldn't stand to be called a chicken? If you wanted to provoke him to do something, just call him a chicken and he'll do whatever stupid

thing to prove to you he's not a chicken. And it was funny because we all know people like that. Some trigger that always gets them. Truth is, we're all kind of like that. For a lot of people, if they feel like they're looked down on, or they're not being respected, or admired, or they're being criticized, they can be manipulated to do anything.

Where is there a dead fly in your ointment? If we could look 5 years into the future and know that Satan had ruined your life, what would most likely be the cause? BTW, this is one of the reasons we strongly encourage you to be in small groups, because small groups are where those things surface and others can point them out and help you with them. I can't do it from up here; you don't want me to do it from up here, right? "You, this is your problem!" No, you need to be in that kind of small group environment, because that is where people take the Word of God and the gospel and they help you root out where these dead flies are. That's the first thing he wants you to do as you are leaving this book.

2. Life is adventure, so take a risk (11:1–6)

Solomon tells us that even though success in this hevel world is never guaranteed, God wants us, he expects us, to take a risk.

Look at 11 vs 1, 'Cast your bread upon the waters, and you will find it after many days...' That's an ancient euphemism for the shipping business.³ You'd put your stuff on a boat--your "bread," so to speak--and you'd send it off into the vast, uncontrollable ocean, knowing that it might never come back to you: In a day before insurance, the boat might sink or might get blown off course or pirates might plunder it.

In putting it out there, you were taking a big old chance! But unless you do that, Solomon says, you'll never see it multiply. Even though the world is uncertain, even though you cannot have surety, risk, he is saying, is an important part of a faithful life!

BTW, the phrase "**you don't know...**" is repeated 4 different times in this chapter: "You don't know... (vs 2) what natural disasters might occur" ; you don't know (vs 3)... what the weather will do" ; "you don't know... (vs 5) what God will do ; "you don't know... (vs 6) which venture will succeed." A defining feature of life in a hevel world is you don't know. Even so, Solomon says, you should risk.

Look at what Solomon says in vs 2 - "**...give a portion to seven, or even to eight.**" IOW, because of life's uncertainty, diversify your investments. Don't put all your eggs in one basket, because there is no such thing as a "sure thing."

- Some of you are not going to want to hear this, and I'm ready for the emails. Sometimes **people come to me with an idea they are just SURE is from God**, because it came to them in their quiet time and they got a warm, tingly feeling when they first thought about it, and then they saw a Bible verse later that reminded them of it, and that proves it's from God, and because of that they assume it's foolproof! It has to work. And I try to tell them, and they never want to hear this, but that's just not how God set up the world to work. I'm sorry... **Nothing** in a hevel world is foolproof; there's always a risk, and even great ideas sometimes fail. You don't know what the weather might do or what God has in store.
- You see, a lot of times what you're looking for is a path that won't require faith. **True faith requires embracing that you don't know**

³ Which Solomon was very involved in: 1 Kings 10:15–22

exactly what'll happen, but you trust that God will take care of you regardless.

And even though the path ahead of you is not sure, the God who is above and in and beyond that path is sure. The uncertainty of life in a hevel world is not a reason to freeze in paralysis, but an occasion to trust God.

Scripture commands us to adventure, to risk. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a story about a rich Master who goes on a long journey and leaves his servants with various sums of money to invest. Investing back then was just like it is today; you never knew for sure what was going to happen. You probably know the story: to one he gave five “talents;” to another, two; to another, one. A talent was a sum of money back then that represented about twenty years’ salary for the average day laborer, so we’re talking pretty massive amounts of money.⁴ So,

“He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. (So he turned his 5 talents into 10) So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. (so now he’s got 4) But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.” (Matthew 25:16–18)

To that guy, when the Master returns, he commends the first two servants and to this third servant, the Master said:

“You wicked and slothful servant... You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from

him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (26–29)

Jesus calls the one who did not take the risk “wicked.” My first reaction is... *Wicked?* I mean, what *wicked* thing had he done? He didn’t steal the money or embezzle it or blow it on gambling and prostitutes. In fact, the servant returned 100% of it back to the boss. And yet, Jesus calls this servant “wicked,” because **apparently, failing to take a risk with what God gave you is wicked in Jesus’ eyes.**

You see, one of the questions you have to ask yourself in this parable is why that servant did not take the risk. You think, “Well, maybe he’s just being conscientious.” Look at the excuse he gives in **vs 24: “Master, I knew you to be a hard man... 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.”**

Why did he fail to invest? He thought of his Master as a “hard,” uncaring man. He didn’t trust his Master. You see, faith recognizes that even in a hevel world of uncertainty, we have a **Father who will always take care of us, and wants us to risk what he’s given to us for his kingdom.**

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. What’s he saying to you? Take the risk!

- **Apply for the job**
- **Start the company.** Again, consider wisely and carefully, and maybe diversify your risks into 7 or 8 things, as Solomon says, but take the risk.

⁴ So you could translate that as, to one he gave \$10 million, \$5 million, and \$1 million. See footnote to Matthew 25:15 *ESV Study Bible*.

- **Launch the ministry.** Pray about it. Get lots of counsel, but when it's time, take the risk.
- **Invest the money.** Maybe even better...
- **Give the money.** Every year our church invests literally millions in church planting, and we know that money is not guaranteed success. Sometimes churches fail, sometimes disaster happens. But we also know that church planting is, hands down, the greatest kingdom investment we can make. Our studies show that for every 1 person we've sent out to church plants, there's 50 new people worshipping and 5 new dollars coming into the kingdom. That's 50 new givers. Fifty new people as a result of every one that leaves here that then come to church and begin to give. You show me a business venture with a 50 to 1 return rate, and I'll show a business venture worth investing in. So, it's a risk, but we'll gladly take it because 'nothing ventured, nothing gained.'

My point is, life is an adventure. He says, there is no sure thing, so take the risk!

- **Go on the mission trip**
- **Join the team.** *Some of you considered that at Live Sent. Join the team! Go with the church plant. Even go overseas. I know it's a risk; that's the point. Start the ministry or company overseas.*
- **Here's one: "Hey bro, ask her out."** Is it me, or do guys just not ask girls out that much anymore? Listen, I know it's not a guarantee that she says yes, and if she does say no you need to respect that, and maybe you'll get a little embarrassed if she says no. But hey, listen, we've all been there. The most risky, unrealistic chance I ever took was when I put my bags down by my car at Camp Willow Run and walked back to where Veronica McPeters was standing with some friends to try and ask her out. Everybody knew she was out of my league--my friends knew it; her friends knew it (and very unhelpfully kept telling her that); her dad knew she was out of my league But she said yes and now...

we have 4 kids. Nothing ventured, nothing gained; no risk it, no biscuit. That's also somewhere in the Bible. So, bro: get your backbone out of your mama's purse and go ask her out! Cast your bread upon those waters so it can come back to you multiplied! And all God's sisters said...

My friend Tony Merida, a pastor actually here in the area, says, "Verse 2 says, '...give a portion to seven, or even to eight.' Rather than sitting in fear, God invites us to be venture capitalists for the Kingdom of God, doing 7 or 8 things for the gospel and waiting to see which ships come in. You're freed to fail, but it's not failure if you're being faithful to the Scriptures."

3. Life is a gift, so enjoy it (11:8)

Jump down to vs 8...

11:8 ***So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all***, but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

Enjoy every season of life to the fullest because all of them are gifts and none of them last forever. As I've said every week of this series. Every season is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Every era is "the good ol' days." So he implores you eight different times in this book, live every season, every day, every minute to the fullest!

Imagine if **every morning someone deposited \$86,400** into your bank account with only one stipulation: whatever you don't spend by midnight disappears forever. You can't save any of it, you can't roll any of it over until tomorrow. At 12:00 a.m., whatever is left in that account simply... vanishes. What would you do with that money each day? That would be a fun way to live, right? (**Brewster's Millions**)

Every morning, **God deposits 86,400 seconds** into your time account, and you don't get to keep or roll over a single second into tomorrow's account. At the end of the day, every unused second is gone forever.

So enjoy every dinner. Laugh with your kids. Call your parents. Pursue excellent and meaningful work. Take the walk. Watch the sunset. Enjoy a good TV show. Every second is a gift from God, and every second has an expiration date. What you don't use, you lose.

As Bobby Jamieson, another local pastor, puts it, **"Ultimately, you can't save time; you can only choose how you spend it."** Which is exactly Solomon's point. We can't preserve time: the only question is whether we'll spend today's gift on what matters most.

And that brings me to #4...

4. Life is hevel, so don't cling to it (11:8)

This is the other part of vs 8, **"(Enjoy life, but...) ...let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity."**

You can't hold onto the good days, to the joys and the gifts, and bad days come, too. Remember that everything in this world is hevel, like a cloud, and if you try to grasp it or hold onto it, it will slip right through your fingers. So enjoy it, but don't cling to it or depend on it for permanence or happiness, because it surely will break your heart if you try that.

My 16 year old son and I were talking about this sermon series the other day and he said, "Dad, you need to tell them the 'Here's Rusty' illustration. We haven't heard that in a while." Adon is kind of my sermon-whisperer, just so you know, so here goes:

Pastor **Joby Martin** talks about how when he first moved to **Jacksonville, Florida**, he got invited to the dog racing track there. We don't have those in Raleigh, NC, but that's Jacksonville. Joby told me that the best moment of every race is when the dogs are at the gates ready to race and the announcer comes on the loudspeaker and bellows out, **"Heeeere's Rusty!"** Joby said that the first time he went, when that voice boomed through the loudspeaker he didn't know what was going on, but everybody stood up and started cheering, and a fake rabbit popped up on a little railway and shot down the track. He said, "Man, when those dogs behind the starting gates saw Rusty, they lost their ever-lovin' canine minds... they'd start barking and jumping banging up against the doors of those gates, and when they let down those gates, those dogs tore off after that fake rabbit like they'd been fired out of a cannon." They chased "Rusty" all the way to the end of the track, he said, when suddenly... "Rusty" disappeared back into a hole in the ground. Joby said, "I'm sure, later in the kennel, the dogs were like 'Ahh... I was so close this time! I almost had him.' And their dog friends were like, 'Gosh, me too! You think we'll ever have a chance at Rusty again?'" And sure enough, the next day, Rusty's back! And the dumb dogs never learn that they're never going to catch him! And we're like, 'Huh-huh, yeah, dumb dogs.' But consider this: Everyday our alarm clocks go off, and I want you to imagine that alarm clock bellowing out, **'Heeeere's Rusty!'** And you hop out of bed and off you go in pursuit." The promotion. The corner office. The new boyfriend. The biggest deal you've ever closed. The new car.

Pastor Joby said he's gone to the track enough now (I don't want to know why he's going or what he's doing there) to know that there are times when something goes wrong and one of the dogs actually catches "Rusty." The track carrying Rusty breaks or something, and one of those dogs latches onto Rusty with his teeth, that object of his

greatest dreams and desires, his one ambition in life, and he chews into it and then thinks, “Hey... wait a minute, I’ve been duped! This isn’t what I thought it was.” “That dog,” Joby says, “will never run in quite the same way again”—and this is where the dogs might actually be a little smarter than us—because, you see, some of us have caught “Rusty.” You moved into the new house; you got the corner office. And you chewed into it, you got the next marriage, and thought, “Hey, this is disappointing. This isn’t all that I thought it was.” But, unlike the dogs, you say... “I know, it must just be a different Rusty I need. A bigger Rusty. This Rusty was not what I thought it would be, but I’m sure the next one will be!” And again, that’s where we might be even dumber than the dogs.

There is nothing in this world—nothing under the sun—that will satisfy you. There is no future circumstance in your life that is going to give you the satisfaction that you crave. If you cannot be satisfied now, there is no condition in the future in which you will be satisfied. God has put an eternity-sized hole in your hearts, Solomon says, which means that only something infinite can fill it. If it’s an eternal gap, it needs an infinite filler to the gap. You keep trying to fill it up with little Dixie cup sized amounts of water. You got an ocean-sized hole in your heart and you keep trying to fill it up with Dixie Cups.

Which brings me **back to C.S. Lewis’s statement**. It’s so important. I’m giving it to you 2 weeks in a row, because you really need to ponder it:

“The (things) in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really

desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshipers.

Every gift—every good thing, marriage, kids, retirement, a boat—whispers, “Not me.” Every beautiful thing says, I’m... ~~“For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of the tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”~~⁵

This longing that you feel—this nostalgia. This yearning that you feel, for something... it’s pointing you not backwards in nostalgia, not to a new Rusty, but upward, to God. To eternity. **Here’s Lewis’s conclusion:**

“If I find in myself a desire which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only explanation must be that I was made for another world.”⁶

You were created for a relationship with an eternal God, and only knowing him can satisfy you because you’ve been given eternity in your heart. So, enjoy life’s pleasures, but don’t cling to them or grasp them.

If you try to grasp them, they’ll crumble in your hands. Think of the pleasures of life **like a butterfly (PIC)**: if a butterfly lands on your hand, the way to enjoy it isn’t to grab it. In fact, if you close your fist around it, you’ll crush the very thing you were trying to keep. The only way to enjoy it is to hold your hand open and receive it as a gift. If it stays, enjoy it. If it flies away, let it go, thankful for the moments you had with it. Solomon’s like, life is hevel, so don’t cling to it.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 29–31

⁶ This last sentence is from *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 10, “Hope.”

5. Life is short, so revere God (12:1–7, 13–14)

Vv 13–14 is the Author's big conclusion. "This is the end of the matter..." And at this point, the Editor I've been telling you about (remember, I told you it's like a stage play and you've got one guy, Solomon, up here complaining about life, and every once in a while, the editor, the other guy) steps forward to sum everything up.

But let me show you, first, how he sets this grand conclusion up, because it's pretty awesome.

In the first few verses of this chapter, Solomon walks through the inevitable aches and pains of aging, a process that is overtaking us all. It's light-hearted, almost humorous until you get to the end, and then he sticks you with a knife:

Vs 3 in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, (He's talking about that point in your life when your limbs start shaking, and you hunch over--or when you stand up you have to walk stiffly for a few minutes. Anybody else? Or when you get sore for no discernible reason. I hurt my knee earlier this year and I've been limping a little bit--I've been trying to mask it so you don't notice it. But here's the thing: I have no idea *how* I hurt it. I went to the doctor here in our church, Dr. Kanaan, and he X-rayed it and told me I'd torn my meniscus and we talked about possible things that could have caused it, but he said, "Look, J.D., the real problem is that this thing was made in 1973 and the warranty has long since expired. They don't even make parts for this anymore." I've told you, sometimes I wake up sore and all I did the day before was watch TV and sleep. Somehow going from this position to this position is enough to make me sore and limp around the next day.)

Solomon continues: ...and the grinders cease because they are few, (which means your teeth fall out)

...and those who look through the windows are dimmed, (What do you think this is? Your eyesight gets bad. Listen, I cover this up pretty well, too... You can't see it, but the font in this little notebook of mine is enlarged from what it used to be, and I know one day I'm gonna have to wear glasses to read anything up here and I am not looking forward to that day. You're gonna be like, "I feel like there's one word per page in that notebook," and you're gonna be right. The worst thing is I can hardly ever read the menu in a nice restaurant without turning on my flashlight. And it drives my wife crazy! She's like, "Stop that!" And I'm like: Why can't they just turn the lights on in here? Yeah, laugh it up, young adults. It's coming for you and it will be here before you think it will.

4 ...and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, (Hearing loss. The doors are SHUT. Veronica says the way she knows she's getting older is that one of the most important factors in choosing a restaurant now is how quiet it is, so we can hear each other. We used to choose them based on food and vibe; now we choose them based on lighting and sound.)

...and one rises up at the sound of a bird, (Anybody else wake up at 3am and think, "Well, I guess that's just the night"?)

...and all the daughters of song are brought low— (failing vocal chords. I'm probably going to get in trouble for this, but I told Molly Vidovich, one of our worship leaders, that her voice is so beautiful that I want her to sing at my funeral... as long as I don't die when she's 90. At that point, I'm going to request somebody younger. I'm not being mean, that's just Ecclesiastes. The "daughters of song" are brought low; even the most beautiful voices don't stay beautiful forever.)

5 ...they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way;

(Older people live with a heightened sense of risk. That is a polite way of saying it. Stairs look steeper. Curbs look more dangerous. This, btw, seems to be what the entire cable news industry is built on. So much out there to be afraid of! Or, do you ever notice--if you're watching TV during a time period when they assume it's mostly older people watching TV--the themes of the commercials? Like, 10am on a Tuesday morning, you're watching TV--that's not a good idea, btw, go get a job--but if you do, they're always trying to sell you stuff to address some fear: identity theft protection, reverse mortgages; gold because China's messing with our economy; buttons to press in case you fall; special locks for your prepper bunker. Something. That's a function of old age, Solomon says--you become more fearful. When you're twenty-five, you think you're invincible; when you're seventy-five, you realize **GRAVITY** has remained undefeated for a very long time and you're not going to be the first one to beat it.

Still vs 5: ...the almond tree blossoms, Almond blossoms are a pale white in springtime, so this is a reference to your hair getting white and gray, something I'd know nothing about.

...the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails...: This one's funny. The Hebrew word we translate here as desire (**abiyonah**) refers to the caper berry, a berry which was considered to be both an appetite stimulant and an aphrodisiac. As you get older, desire--for everything!--dims. Those who once bounced through life like grasshoppers now mope through the days not feeling much of anything. Again, you young people, don't sit there looking so smug. It's coming for you. It reminds me of the words of the old British author Terry Pratchett, "**Inside every old person is a young person wondering... WHAT HAPPENED?**"

Vs 5...because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners (are about to) go about the streets— (IOW, the mourners for your funeral) vs 6 before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken (these are all references to losing your mind or losing your life spirit), or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain (that may be a reference to a heart attack), or the wheel broken at the cistern (maybe, incontinence in your digestive tract; or getting up 4x a night to use the bathroom, something) 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

We live in a world under the Genesis curse of death: hevel. And God did not design it to be that way, but that's what it is. And so, as God said to man when he cursed him, after he sinned: "From dust you came, and to dust you will return." Which is Solomon basically saying, this whole curse of hevel I've been telling you about for 12 chapters, it's the curse of sin and it goes back to Genesis 3. We sinned; God put futility on the earth—from dust we came and to dust we're going. And so it all just vanishes and goes away.

Solomon, in these verses is not simply trying to get us to laugh about getting old. He's trying to wake us up, especially if you're younger. **This is where we're all headed, he says. All of us.**

So, **"This is the end of the matter... Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth..." (12:1, 13)**

He's saying to young people, 'I know you assume that you're invincible and life will last forever. WAKE UP! Your enemy in the Garden of Eden said, 'You will not surely die.' He is still saying that to you. You're not invincible and life doesn't last forever." David Gibson, whose book on Ecclesiastes (**PIC**) **Living Life Backward** I found immensely helpful in preparing this series (and if I had one book to recommend to you to read on Ecclesiastes, it would be his)--**sums up**

Solomon's final words this way: "Simple wisdom is preparing for the end when God will bring every deed into judgment. One of the hardest things about Ecclesiastes is letting it instruct us that there are no immediate answers for some things in this life, like oppression. There is ultimately only one answer: *God will put it right, and we should prepare to meet him.*"

12:13 (*This is...*) The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. **14** For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

VAMP

Have you ever had one of those panicky dreams in which you find yourselves in a situation you're totally unprepared for? In college it would always be showing up in a class and there is some assignment due and I have no idea what's going on. Now, I have a recurring dream where I show up here to preach but I'm totally unprepared and no idea what I'm supposed to be talking about, and I literally fumble around up here for 45 minutes, trying to make jokes, trying to get in a groove and figure out what I'm supposed to be saying, take a cue from you about what I'm supposed to be saying, and you're all sitting there with a weird, almost pitying look on your faces. It's my worst dream, and I have it probably once every 6 months, and I'm sure psychologists will tell me it's got something to do with my inner impostor syndrome or something like that, and they're probably right, but most of us have some dream like that. Don't you? And isn't the most relieving thing in the world when you wake up and realize that it was all just a dream? That you haven't missed the deadline--that there's still time to prepare for whatever you're worried about?

Solomon is warning us that a day is coming when a lot of people are going to discover they're not ready for **THE most important moment of their entire existence**--the moment they stand before God, and it's not going to be a dream. Their whole life has been one long exercise in avoiding reality and shutting their eyes to the truth about judgment and death. Every day, they got up and looked in the mirror, and the mirror told them it was happening, and they said, "Not today." This one won't be a dream, it will be real.

...Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

But I've got good news: you don't have to be afraid of it. I know what I just said terrifies some of you. There's time to prepare now! Hear me: You don't have to fear judgment! In fact, believers look forward to the judgment. You see, for us, judgment means the end of pain and suffering; the restoration of justice; reunion with God and loved ones. We don't fear judgment because we know our sins have been covered--paid for--by Jesus. We've accepted his offer to cleanse and forgive us and have been reunited with him.

You see, none of us have lived in a way, on our own, worthy of God's acceptance. We should all be terrified of judgment, because Ecclesiastes says, **"God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."**

On that day when every secret is brought into judgment, the book of Romans tells us what the verdict on the entire human race will be:

"There is none righteous, no not one... for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God."

Everybody is guilty before God. If you haven't received Jesus's forgiveness, at that point you will enter into eternal judgment for every secret sin you've committed. And that's a terrifying thought. It should make you terrified. But if you've accepted his forgiveness, you don't have to be afraid.

There's a great irony about final judgment. For those in Christ, it's a joyous thought, because it means the end of pain and everything bad. For those outside of Christ, it means the end of joy and everything good. Like Randy Alcorn says, **"For the believer, this world is the closest thing to hell you will ever experience. For the unbeliever, this world is the closest thing to heaven you will ever experience."**

I'm telling you: You don't have to be afraid of judgment! The whole Bible is about how Jesus entered into this world of hevel for you. For God so loved this world, under the curse of hevel, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever would believe in him would not perish, but have eternal life.

If you receive him, you can be confident in judgment and even look forward to it, because for you, it will mean the end of pain and futility.

And then, when you do that, even life in a hevel world can become enjoyable. Listen, Solomon has spent a whole book warning us that there is no 'gain' to be had under the sun. So, do you think it's any accident that when Paul talks about death in **Philippians 1:21** he says, **"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."**

This is the Christian's life! All the gain I couldn't find here, I'll inherit with him there. I'll go into eternity with him, where there's no more pain. And there I'll find out that everything I did for him here, with Christ, mattered. Every bill I paid in his name, every test I took in his name, every order I fulfilled, every person I helped, every dollar I invested---and most of all every person I helped know Jesus a little bit more--it all matters.

Martin Luther said when you understand these things, when you understand Ecclesiastes, "Only 2 days on your calendar will matter: that day, and this day. That day--the day you know you'll stand before God; and this day--the day the Lord has made to rejoice and be glad in and be faithful to him in whatever assignment he's given to you.

Which is why we say, Summit: **"Only one life to live, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last!"**

So Summit, LISTEN: **make the most of your mist!** Make the most of your hevel mist of a life. Enjoy it, but make the most of it. That's the whole point of Ecclesiastes.

I'M GOING TO TURN IT OVER **RIGHT NOW** TO YOUR CAMPUS PASTORS WHO ARE GOING TO GIVE YOU SOME WAYS TO RESPOND TO THIS... Let me get you to bow your heads, and **Campus Pastors**, you come... **(INVITATION BY CAMPUS PASTORS)**