

I'm Not Going to Miss You
Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8, Philippians 1:21

Slide 1

The core theme of today's passage is the idea of remembering. Specifically remembering our Creator and more specifically remembering our Creator while you're young.

But speaking of remembering, before I go any farther, do you remember or know of the country music legend Glen Campbell? He not only sang but wrote many songs, too.

He played different instruments and did backup for many different musicians. He's probably best known for *Wichita Line Man*, *Rhinestone Cowboy*, and *Southern Nights*.

He produced 70 albums of which 12 turned gold, 4 were platinum, and one was platinum plus. The bottom line is he was a very successful country music entertainer. In fact, he had his own TV show for a while.

In 2011, he and his wife decided they wanted to do one last concert tour. At the age of 75, they decided they were going to do one last tour across America, but a few weeks before they started, Glen was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

It's a devastating illness that attacks your mind first before it begins to take hold of your body. The doctors recommended he hang up his guitar, but he said, "*No. I'm going to do it.*"

So, what was supposed to be a five-week tour turned out to be 151 concerts, ending in Napa Valley, California in 2013. A documentary about this last tour was made. It's called, '*I Will Be Me.*'

What made it special was that it chronicled Glen's journey with Alzheimer's, not his concert tour. In that documentary, the last song he recorded was, *'I Am Not Gonna Miss You'*.

It's a strange title for a song, but it actually had to do with Alzheimer's. If you've ever known someone with this disease, you know these individual gradually begin to forget things and gradually that person kind of goes away.

In Glen's family's case, their father, husband, or friend was no longer there. Although they missed him, he had gotten to the point where he couldn't miss them at all.

The sad irony of Alzheimer's is that you can only miss what you remember. When you can't remember somebody, you don't miss them.

As the disease took hold, Glen could no longer speak for himself. His family had to speak for him.

So, as we begin to explore today's passage in Ecclesiastes, though it doesn't address Alzheimer's, it does speak of the devastating effects of aging on the body itself.

Slide 2

We know that Solomon was probably very aged when he wrote Ecclesiastes, therefore he had a lot of wisdom that comes with age, plus a lot of experience which he shared.

In this particular passage, he's directing his wisdom towards the youth and the importance of remembering their Creator while they're still young.

Ecclesiastes 11:7-8, *“Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.”*

This is an interesting passage because he’s basically saying enjoy life. Based on our understanding of Solomon, we know that Solomon had a bit of a melancholy, an Eeyore-type personality.

If you were here last week, we learned that one of his conclusions, and really his conclusions throughout the entire book, was about the meaningless life, and how we should at least try to enjoy it.

That’s basically what he’s saying here. We shouldn’t just enjoy a part of life; we should enjoy all of it. The good and the bad because the bad days will come. In fact, the sun may go away forever.

This is why he’s directing this primarily towards the youth. We know that because he says this in the first part of verse 9.

Ecclesiastes 11:9a, *“You who are young, be happy 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.”*

This probably isn’t one of the passages that parents of teens really want to share. It’s like telling them, *“Whatever you want to do, just go do it. Follow your desires.”*

In fact, if you’re not careful, your teen could use this passage against you. If you’re getting a little too restrictive on their comings and goings, they could say, *“Listen mother, Bro. Oscar preached on this passage last week and I am just doing what he said.”*

We know that Solomon wouldn’t get any best parenting awards because it seems like he’s encouraging a life without boundaries.

Especially if you just read this as an isolated text, which some people often do.

But if you notice, there's a comma at the end of this sentence, and what follows the comma is the qualifier, "*But know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment.*"

Solomon's saying when you're young, enjoy life. Dig yourself into life because it's going to get harder when you get older. Enjoy life, but do it responsibly.

We hear the phrase drink responsibly. He is saying live your life responsibly. Even though you may be away from home and your parents can no longer judge you, there's a Creator out there that's very capable of judging you.

He's encouraging us to enjoy the gifts we've been given, the wonderful gifts of life, but do it with moderation. Know when to say yes and when to say no.

If you grew up as a Christian, you have a built-in lie detector. Our culture calls it a conscience, but we call it the Holy Spirit.

It allows us to make good decisions, if we're willing to consult the Spirit to determine when to say yes and when to say no. But, unfortunately a lot of young people make decisions based on how they feel.

How do you feel about this? What's it going to do for me? How is it going to affect my feelings and my desires and my passions?

What happens is children follow their passions and if they continue to make decisions based on their passions, they're going to hit a wall. It's just a matter of time.

A passages in the Bible that I believe every student should take with them and remember, when they go to college, is Proverbs 16:25, *“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”*

Have you ever been in a situation where it just seemed so right, how could it be wrong? It’s because the Devil is basically telling you it’s right.

He wants you to screw up. He wants you to make decisions based on your feelings rather than on the Word of God.

Solomon’s speaking of the idea of enjoying your life but enjoying it with a sense of responsibility.

Slide 3

Then he shifts focus and moves from the enjoyment of life to remembering our Creator.

Ecclesiastes 12:1, *“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.”*

This passage isn’t saying just enjoy your Creator in your youth and forget about Him when you’re old. We’re to constantly remember our Creator, but the bottom line is we have short memories.

We have the Lord’s Supper, not just because it’s an ordinance of our church, but because we need to be reminded of the most central event in all of history: the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But what Solomon’s suggesting here is that there’s something about being young that, if you remember your Creator or learn about the Creator when you’re young, it’ll carry over into adulthood.

There's a statistic, I don't know where it came from, but apparently 80% of people come to Christ before they're 18.

I don't know about you, but when you start hitting your 30s, 40s, and 50s, you're pretty much set in your ways. Older people don't like change.

How many of you senior citizens here are saying, *"I want some change this week? I really want to do something crazy."* No. You don't.

It becomes difficult, as you get older in life, to accept change or accept anything new, including a new faith.

Remember in the Gospels when the people were bringing their little children to Jesus and the disciples started shooing them away saying, don't bother Him. What was Jesus' response?

Luke 18:16b, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*

What did he mean by that? He meant that children are naturally receptive to God where adults aren't. Adults have so much junk in their brains that they can't think about God things.

This is why Vacation Bible School is so important. We know if we can get the children to hear the basic stories and capitalize on that receptivity to God, before the world gets ahold of them, then when they grow up and get older, they're going to stay with God.

They're going to have Jesus as a lifelong companion. Proverbs 22:6, *"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."* Now, this isn't a guarantee, it's a wisdom Proverb.

It's generally true that if parents raise a child in "*the way he should go,*" he won't depart from it. But, if he does depart, there's a good chance he's going to come back.

That's what he's talking about here. When Solomon says to remember your Creator while you're young, he's not just referring to remembering your Creator while you are a little child.

He is referring to that strange, weird generation or demographic known as the 20-somethings. The age range of these 20-somethings is between 18-32. They're a hard generation to figure out.

These 20-somethings are still in a developmental period of their life. Their spirit is being formed and shaped either by the church or by the world.

When our children get out of high school and are released into the world, they're still developing. Then, all of a sudden, their off to college.

When you talk to them on the phone, you ask, "*Did you find a good church home yet?*" Regardless that they up in the church their whole life, they say, "*I'm just not interested in it anymore. Church isn't for me.*"

What do you do? You panic. What's going on here? But you don't have to panic.

If you've allowed those seeds to be sown in your child, when they were young and in their teens, through youth group and everything else, you can pretty much be certain that those seeds will someday sprout.

But they're going to sprout on their terms, not yours. I don't know a 20-something that would sit and listen to a felt board presentation about Jesus and take it all in like a sponge.

They're not going to do that. You must change your methods. The 20-somethings are basically taught to question everything, including God.

If we create a safe place, where the kids that are interested in coming back to God, can ask all the questions they want knowing they're not going to be slammed if they have a hint of disbelief, then they may come back to faith.

Then, when they come back to faith, whether it's at 20, 30, 40, or 50, their faith will be stronger because it's going to be their faith.

Not their parents' faith. Not their family's faith. Not the church's faith, but their faith. They had those seeds sown in them.

Even though they've rejected traditional church, for the most part they haven't rejected God.

So, when they're out there expanding their wings and trying to experience life, and all of a sudden, they start getting hit by all the realities of life, there is a good chance that they're going to seek the church.

They want some kind of stability, like the stability that comes from a solid church family. That's what they want.

Slide 4

Solomon then shifts from remembering the Creator, before trouble sets in, to speaking about the trouble that's often associated with the aging process.

Ecclesiastes 12:2, "Remember your Creator... before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;"

When you get older, you have a storm cloud come into your life and it isn't always followed by a sunny day, another cloud may come in, then another period of rain over and over again.

Then he goes on and does some very creative imagery. He uses about 10 or 11 images to describe the aging process that are like a decaying house.

He says, "*Remember your Creator... before the days of trouble come... when the keepers of the house tremble.*" What part of your body is the keeper of the house? What part of your body maintains your house? What part of your body builds the house? Your hands.

Anybody try to build a house or maintain a house when your hands are trembling? Has anybody's hands gotten shaky as you've gotten older?

"And the strong men stoop." What's this? Your backs. Your body and legs not being able to carry the weight of your body anymore.

"When the grinders cease because they are few." Teeth. Anybody missing a few teeth out there? If anything, this is a very good case for flossing while you are young.

"And those looking through the windows grow dim." Eyes. Instead of being able to use those glasses off the shelf at Walmart, you have to pay \$700 or more for a pair of bifocals or progressive lenses.

Then he goes on to say, "*when the doors to the street are closed.*" What are the doors to the street? Think about your body, it's your ears. You hear the noise from the outside.

Pretty soon you can't hear much noise and that's when you have to buy a hearing aid.

“When men rise up at the sound of birds.” Any of you light sleepers? You may not hear all the noises outside, but if a bird ends up on your windowsill and starts chirping, you’re wide awake.

“But all their songs grow faint.” This suggests what happens when you age, your vocal cords tend to stretch out so you can’t hit the high notes anymore. It accounts for the raspy voice some people get.

Then he goes on to say, *“when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets.”* Anybody afraid to climb a ladder because you might fall.

Dangers in the streets wasn’t referring just to bandits, but walking down streets that weren’t paved. Where you might trip over something and not be able to get up.

“When the almond tree blossoms.” Grey hair. From a distance, the almond tree looks like a man with a white head of hair.

“And the grasshopper drags himself along.” That has to do with the energy level. You don’t have that excitement and vitality of life anymore.

He closes by saying, *“Then man goes to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.”* Obviously, that’s referring to a person who has died.

In Biblical times, they would pay people to go out in the streets and wail, especially if they didn’t have enough friends or relatives to do that sort of thing.

Then he begins to wrap up this whole idea of remembering, by saying, *“Remember him – before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and 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.”*

A lot of imagery. What he’s doing is equating life to a lamp, an expensive gold bowl that would be filled with oil and hung from the ceiling by a silver cord.

If the cord broke, the bowl would fall to the ground, breaking the bowl, and spilling the oil, which is basically the source of their light. He’s equating that to death.

The other imagery was a pitcher used to fetch water. You’re going to the well and before you get there or on the way back home you drop the pitcher, and it breaks. You’ve lost another source of life.

Or when you go to the well, and try to use the wheel, you find the wheel’s broken. You can’t draw up that living water.

What’s interesting is this last little bit about dust in verse 7. It says, *“And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”* He’s basically suggesting that death reverses creation.

In Genesis man was formed out of dust. The spirit of God was breathed into the person. At death, the man returns to dust and the spirit goes back up to God.

It’s a vivid picture of the sadness of death. It demonstrates a reversal of the created order.

Slide 5

Conclusion

Solomon presents a pretty depressing case. But his idea was not to depress us but to motivate and encourage us; to encourage us to remember our Creator while we're young.

Then he ends this passage the same way he began it in chapter 1. He says, *“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless!’*”

At this stage in his life, Solomon had a very melancholy view on life and death. But as bad as death was, we get the sense that he still thought life was better. He still wanted to hang on, if he could, to this particular life.

We might ask why, as we have eternal life, but Solomon didn't understand God the way we understand Him today.

Solomon saw the afterlife as a shadowy, strange no-man's land type of existence. You just kind of hung around.

He didn't see it as a paradise. He didn't have the advantage and the view we have when we think about aging and dying. He didn't have the benefit of the cross.

Everyone here is aging and experiencing all of these things. Yes, there are a lot of painful things to go through, but we know what's on the other side. We know to what it's leading.

That's why strong Christians don't sit and bemoan the aging process. They become like Paul.

Philippians 1:21, *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”* Those are hard words to say when you're aging.

But I suspect if Paul were here today, and we were able to ask, *“You’ve lived life under the sun and over the sun, which do you prefer?”*

He would definitely say, *“Life over the sun with Christ, and you know what, I don’t remember much of that old life.”*

I think, like Paul, what’s going to happen is when we get to the other side some day, we’re going to have a very limited memory of this time of life, if at all.

If Solomon were alive today, and had the advantage of seeing things from the perspective of the cross, I suspect he might end his book a little bit differently.

I suspect he might add post script to it, *“‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless! P.S. I’m not going to miss you.’”*

What’s there to miss from this life? We get to the other side and there will be nothing to miss because we’ll be in the presence of God.

This is pure speculation, but I actually think it’s part of the reason that, as we age in life, we forget things and our memory fades. I believe this is intentional because the only memory that we need to carry into eternity is the memory of God.