

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 20)

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

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As *Qohelet* wraps up the book of Ecclesiastes, he tells those who are young (that's us) to remember God in the days of our youth. What does he mean when he tells us to remember? A year or two after my mother died, I found hidden in a drawer a note she wrote saying, "Remember me." What was she asking us to remember? It wasn't just to recall facts about her, but rather to lovingly and affectionately long for her. Similarly, *Qohelet* asks us to long for and pursue God. After a lifetime of pursuing and obtaining wealth, knowledge, achievement, pleasure, and women, *Qohelet* found that none of these things satisfied. The only thing that could fulfill is the pursuit of the wisdom, righteousness, and faithfulness of God.

The first important time when the Bible commands to remember God is in Deuteronomy 8:1-4, 11-18. Israel just spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, where they had to depend completely upon God for survival. Through the trials, a generation of Israelites learned to trust God. But Moses warns them that when they experience peace and abundance in Canaan, they will be tempted to forget God. They will rely on themselves and credit all their prosperity to themselves rather than God. This is a temptation we also face. When things are going great we tend to take pride in our successes and forget that everything we have comes from God. So remember how God has delivered and sustained you so that you will not forget Him when times are good.

The second important time when we are called to remember God is in Ecclesiastes 12. But here *Qohelet* is addressing the opposite situation. When we are in times of abundance and joy, we should remember God so that when trials and disasters strike we will not turn away from Him. It's the same message, but for different circumstances. Just as it's hard to remember God when things are good, it's also hard to remember Him when things are very bad. In this sin cursed world, life is a chaotic mix of good and bad. In all the aspects of our lives, whether it be our health, family, careers, or finances, there is potential for disaster. If you are experiencing peace in all these areas, that is the time to invest energy in building a foundation of faith in God. When things go wrong, you won't have the energy to do this, and you must rely on the foundation you built during the good times. This is how our faith can endure such trials. It's just like how Joseph commanded the Egyptians to store grain during the seven years of plenty so they

would be ready for the seven years of famine. Have you built up your spiritual resources when times are still good?

Tragedy is coming for all of us. And the one tragedy none of us can escape is death. This is what *Qohelet* talks about in vv. 2-8. It's the most obvious in v. 7, which is a reference to Genesis 2, when Adam was created from dust and God breathed life into him. When we die, we return to the dust and our spirit leaves our bodies. Verse 2 speaks of darkness and gloom, as the light of life dims and is extinguished. Then v. 3 talks about keepers of the house (male servants who maintain the house), strong men (noblemen, masters of the house), grinders (female servants who grind at the mill), and those looking through windows (noblewomen). They all tremble and stoop in fear at the impending disaster. This verse also can be seen as a reference to the decaying body. As we age we begin to tremble and stoop in pain. We are unable to grind food in our mouths because our teeth are gone, and we can't look through the windows because our eyes grow dim. The sound of grinding fades also because we lose our appetites. We can't sleep so we wake easily at the sound of birds, but their songs go faint because our hearing fades (v. 4). Verse 5 says we become afraid and shut ourselves in our homes. The white almond blossoms are a reference to our white hair, and the lame grasshopper speaks of the loss of our mobility. The caper berry (an aphrodisiac) has no effect because our desire is lost. And ultimately we go to our eternal home, and mourners go out into the street. The silver cord and golden bow, which were once valuable are now broken and useless. The well pitcher and wheel used to pull up the water are broken thus making inaccessible the water below (v. 6). This speaks of the tragedy of growing old, that what was once accessible (our knowledge, our strength, our skill) no longer are usable. And then we return to dust. Verse 8 says everything is meaningless. Our lives are like vapor, ephemeral and fleeting. Before we die, we must make the effort in the time we have now to build a foundation of faith in Jesus, so that our house can withstand the storm. As *Qohelet* warns, don't chase things that cannot satisfy. Instead let us meet and encourage one another in faith as we see the last day approaching. Be obsessed with Jesus, long for Him now in the days of your youth.