

# Enjoy Life While You Can

Ecclesiastes 11:7 – 12:8

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## **Introduction:**

Last time in Ecclesiastes, we looked at Ecclesiastes 11:1-6.

- In that passage, we saw that we are encouraged to sow bountifully—
  - to pour out our lives for others and for the Lord even when it looks like we will get nothing back.
  - It is like casting bread on the water, even when we have no idea if it will really do any good.
- God promises that it will come back to us—
  - He will reward us, if not in this life, then in the life to come.
  - Solomon encourages us to sow with great diligence.
    - Remember that we are only here on the earth for a short time, so it behooves us to make the most of the opportunity...to do all that we can.
    - The sermon was entitled, “Sow bountifully while you can.”

Building off of that title,

- I have entitled this sermon “Enjoy Life While You Can.”
  - That may seem like an odd thing for a preacher to say, but hey, it’s the message of our text today!
  - We have inherited a little too much from some of the early church fathers who drank a little too deeply of Plato.
    - The effect of their influence is felt everywhere, though in many churches today the reaction has been toward worldly instead of godly enjoyment of the good things of this life...
      - You don’t have to look far to see all the immorality and narcissism in the church today.
      - There are many who look at life as nothing more than a personal playground.
      - The enjoyment of this world is meant to be a holy enjoyment for God’s glory, not sinful, selfish, worldly enjoyment.
- We need to learn to enjoy the blessings that God has given us in this life in a godly way.
  - We will not always have the ability to enjoy the good things of this life because if we live long we will age and eventually we will all die.
  - So Enjoy Life While You Can!
    - That is what is commended to us in Ecclesiastes 11:7 – 12:8.

Please give me your attention as I read this passage to you, for it is God's Word, given to us for our good.

- Ecclesiastes 11:7 and following...

**Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8:** Truly the light is sweet, and *it is* pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; <sup>8</sup> but if a man lives many years *and* rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming *is* vanity. <sup>9</sup> 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 in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. <sup>10</sup> Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth *are* vanity. <sup>12:1</sup> Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them”: <sup>2</sup> while the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain; <sup>3</sup> in the day when the

keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow down; when the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows grow dim; <sup>4</sup> when the doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low; when one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low; <sup>5</sup> also they are afraid of height, and of terrors in the way; when the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets. <sup>6</sup> Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well. <sup>7</sup> Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. <sup>8</sup> “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “All *is* vanity.”

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

Despite having shown us all the frustrations of life and the vanity of life, Solomon declares here in verse 7 that...

**I. Life is good—God has made us with the blessed ability to be engaged in the things around us.**

A. In verse 7, Solomon speaks of this as the light of life—

- the light that we have when we are alive.
  - **Ecclesiastes 11:7: Truly the light is sweet, and *it is* pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.**
- 1. With these words, he refers to life in this world—under the sun.
  - We have eyes that enable us to see and enjoy the light—to see the sun and everything that is under it.
  - God Himself is light, and in Him there is no darkness...
    - Light enables us to see things and to understand things and to enjoy them.
    - God created us with this ability.
  - John opens his gospel by declaring to us that the Son of God, the Word or the Logos, enlightens every man that comes into the world.
    - He gives light—discernment—the ability to see things—
    - He gives this to every person that comes into the world!

2. And truly it is a very sweet thing to be engaged with all that is around us...
  - a. We are able to know what is going on...and to interact with it.
    - To sense things and to enjoy them.
    - To experience friends, conversations, music, laughter, celebrations—and even mourning and sorrows and pain.
    - We are able to see the beauty of God’s creation and to feel and hear the waves of the sea washing around our ankles.
    - We are engaged and involved in a world that is full of interesting things, and it is very sweet and pleasant.
    - We are able to build things and move things and rearrange things and invent things and cook delicious food.
    - We are able to play sports and watch other people who can do it better than we can.
  - b. I love the way Philip Ryken describes this blessing...he says:
    - “Many things in life are sweet, like the taste of golden honey or the soft fold of skin on a baby’s neck or the sound of the sweet spot on a baseball bat when it connects for a homerun.”
    - “Many things in life are also bright—the first shaft of morning sunshine over a shimmering sea, a full rainbow against dark clouds, a blazing campfire on a warm summer’s night, the twinkling lights of home after a long journey.”
    - “How sweet life is and how bright are its many blessings.”
  - c. There is so much good in life, so much to be enjoyed.
    - We see our Creator’s goodness even though this world has been cursed and spoiled by sin—
      - The goodness of God shines through all around us and it glorifies Him for us to enjoy it all from His hand.

TRANS> Solomon, the same one who has been telling us incessantly that life is vanity, tells us that it is also sweet and pleasant.

B. He even tells us that some people go through life relatively unscathed.

1. In verse 8, he speaks of a man who lives many years and rejoices in them all.
  - Job seems to have done this until the day that the LORD decided to test him...
    - Satan said that God had put a hedge around this man so that no harm ever came to him.
    - There are people who make it through life like that...
      - They die in happiness.
      - It is possible—
2. Though there are many unhappy people in this fallen world, and though suicide is increasing at an alarming rate as we grow more and more godless...
  - most young people would rather be alive than dead...

- There is so much to see, so much to enjoy...so much before them...
  - And this is also true of the middle aged and even with elderly person as long as they are able to be engaged.
    - It is only the very elderly who are generally ready to die...
      - Most people will do what they can to prolong their lives because life is sweet and pleasant—as long as we have light...
- C. But in all of your prosperity and your youth, you need to remember that the days of darkness **will** come to you.
- You especially need to remember this if you are one of those who has lived in prosperity for many years—or if you are still young...
1. Verse 8 gives this warning to the one who has had a long and prosperous life under the sun...It says:
- **Ecc 11:8: But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.**
    - a. As we have seen in Ecclesiastes, vanity especially refers to that which is not lasting—that which is transitory and will soon vanish away.
      - The word is *hebel* in the Hebrew and it refers to a vapour—that is its primary meaning—a vapour such as you see on a cold morning when you go outside.
        - That breath is nothing—it is not substantial—here and then gone.
      - And in comparison to what we were created to be and in comparison to the LORD who is eternal,
        - It makes this life (by comparison) *extremely* fleeting...
          - We are meant to live forever—not just for 70 years or so!
          - While we need to accept this, we ought not to accept it as though we were created this way—but as one is to accept a punishment.
            - It is rebellious to act as if a punishment is just the way things are.
            - It is something that ought to cause remorse and that ought to humble us and stir us up to seek a remedy from the LORD and to rejoice in the remedy that He has provided!
      - So you see, although it may be *good and pleasant*, it simply does not last!
    - b. Solomon is telling us that the vanity of life is something we ought to *remember*.
      - *Remember* in the Bible means a lot more than just know it as a fact...
        - *Remember* means that you are to take it to heart so that it influences you—influences you in the way you think and the way you live.
      - In this case, the thing to *remember* is actually something future to you...
        - When things are going well, it is easy to be deluded into thinking that they always will go well.

- But the truth is, they will not
    - We are all going to die.
    - All of us will only be here for a short little time.
2. As the passage continues, Solomon addresses young people...
- a. It is their tendency to think the same way that the one who has had many years of prosperity thinks...
    - to suppose that they will be able to be engaged in the things around them—the things under the sun—forever!
    - to forget that the days of darkness will come to you sooner than you think.
  - b. To the young, death seems very far away—it is not a reality that has much bearing on how they live...
    - Solomon reminds all who think this way that days of darkness will come and that they will be many!
      - Indeed, most people spend more time in the grave than they do living under the sun!
    - You need to keep it before you that your days in the light are few!
    - The days of engagement in the light of life are precious, but they numbered.

## II. How ought it to affect you to know that your days in the light are few?

- A. Well, it ought to fill you with great rejoicing in such days!
- Does that seem odd?
    - Well think about this...
1. They are a precious commodity that ought to be cherished and enjoyed because they won't be here for long!
    - a. Yes, the scriptures are commanding you—as they often do—to rejoice!
      - Look at verse 9 and see for yourself...
        - **Ecc 11:9: Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth;**
      - This is something like we read in 1 John earlier...
        - Where John tells the young men to rejoice because they are strong and have overcome the wicked one...
        - It is a great blessing to have the energy and alertness of youth—a measure of the light of life!
          - It is a wonderful gift to be cherished and enjoyed.
          - Be very glad and rejoice that you can be engaged in living!
    - b. It is very sad thing to see young men, strong of body and spirit, who are dull and disengaged...
      - So much strength and so much potential—wasted...

- Spent on frivolous things—deadened with drugs and drunkenness and late night escapades...
  - Wasted like a disengaged zombie!
2. Instead, young people, take all that vigour and all that strength and engage it to live with zeal!
    - a. You have sharpened senses for learning and understanding and much strength for growing and serving—
      - Rejoice in this—put your heart into using this strength—use it for the LORD!
    - b. Verse 9 tells you this...
      - **Walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes;**
      - Don't deaden your zeal—make the most of it!
      - Engage that youthful strength—all of it—for living life!
        - It is definitely something to rejoice in because you won't have it forever!
  3. And let me add here that this is not just for those under 30...
    - Whatever strength you have is to be cherished—
      - Even if you are on your death bed and only have strength to pray a little... or to hear the voices of those around your bed...that is not to be despised...
      - But how much more should you rejoice if your strength is great and vibrant!
- B. And let God's judgement motivate you to use your strength well...to regulate what you do for God's pleasure.
1. God is watching you—
    - He is watching you to see how you use your strength—your ability to engage in the things of the world...
    - He is watching, and He is evaluating if it is good or bad...
      - He is not like our foppish society that refuses to distinguish between good and evil—
        - He absolutely makes that distinction and He is evaluating you!
        - You will stand before Him in judgement one day for all that you have done whether it be good or bad.
  2. Knowing this should act as a great motivator to do what pleases Him!
    - a. You only have your youthful vigour for a time and you dare not waste these days!
      - You dare not have all that strength and not use it—or engage it in frivolous things...
    - b. Your desire ought to be to do that which makes your heavenly Father smile!

- Jesus was so motivated by this...
    - He said that He always did those things that pleased the Father...
    - He said it was His food and drink to please Him.
  - That is where your heart needs be—
    - that is where those bright young eyes are to be looking.
  - c. But you will say—How can I make the Father smile?—I am a sinner...
    - Of course you are, but you can come to Jesus and He will pardon you and give you His Holy Spirit...
      - Then you will be forgiven for all your sin—
      - Then you will be given the grace to live for God!
    - Jesus tells us that if we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit and that the Father will be very pleased with us and our fruit!
      - You can't bear good fruit unless you abide in Christ, but you most certainly can do it as His disciple!
        - Do you know Him?
        - Are you following Him?
        - Is your strength engaged for Him?
- C. Oh young people—rejoice instead of complaining like an old geezer...
- You are too young to do that!
    - It is wrong for the old geezer to complain too—but at least he has some grounds for complaint—you don't even have a legitimate cause!
  - 1. In verse 10, Solomon tells you to remove sorrow from your heart...
    - That's right—remove—you are supposed to be enjoying what God has given you—not lamenting!
    - But the word translated *sorrow* is really much broader—it is too narrowly translated...
      - The translators used *sorrow* to contrast it with rejoicing—and it is indeed to be contrasted with rejoicing...
    - But they put the *vexation* in the margin...
      - That is more the idea...
      - Remove *vexation* from your heart!
        - Don't use up your strength being vexed about the life you are supposed to be enjoying!
        - You are not a shrivelled up old man or old woman.
  - 2. There are so many young men and young women that waste all their wonderful vigour and strength on vexation...
    - a. They feed their sorrow—almost as if they are always looking for something to be disappointed about...

- They are vexed with excessive worry about what people think of them,
    - vexed about what someone said to them,
    - vexed with fear of what might happen to them...
  - They are vexed with anger at their parents,
    - vexed with bitterness toward their siblings—pouring their wonderful strength into being angry and defiant...
  - This does not glorify God and it does not do you any good either!
    - Let it go my friend—enjoy life before your God—let vexation go!
      - Esau was swallowed up by bitterness!
      - The fellow in the parable of the talents was swallowed up by fear.
      - King Saul was swallowed up by vexation with David.
      - Absalom was controlled by vexation with his father and had no pleasure in life.
    - It is so pitiful and useless to live this way!
      - Just think of all that precious energy that is wasted!
      - Think of how displeasing it is to God!
      - And what do you get for it?
        - Only more sorrow and more misery...
          - You might as well be a shriveled up old person who is *unable* to enjoy life.
          - You would be better off if you were because then you would have a reason to be disengaged!
- b. Look, you will be vexed with diminishing strength soon enough...
- 1) Don't waste your time being vexed when you are strong!
    - Don't you see?
      - The days are coming quickly when you will no longer be able to able to enjoy what you can enjoy now
      - Don't act like a shriveled up old man or woman now!
        - It's not time for that!
  - 2) Childhood and youth are vanity...they are a vapour!
    - They are here and gone just like that—and once your strength is gone—it is gone for good!
    - So rejoice in whatever strength you have!
      - Cherish every ounce of it
      - Use it for the LORD!
      - You won't have it forever...

TRANS> Solomon wants to drive this home to you, and that is what he does in chapter 12.



### III. He urges you to remember your Creator while your strength remains!

- In 12:1-5, he tells you to remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the difficult days come...
  - And in 12:6-8, he tells you to remember your Creator before you die!
- That is excellent counsel—
  - let's look at each of these two points in more detail...
  - Let Solomon bring home to you the reality that you will not always have the light of life under the sun that you now have...

#### A. First, let Solomon bring you in touch with the reality that your life in this world will unravel if you continue into old age...

1. He tells you very frankly that though you may be young and prosperous now, difficult days will come.
  - a. Days when you will no longer be able to rejoice in all of the good things that you enjoy now...
    - Days in which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."
    - Do you see that in verse 1 & 2 of chapter 12?
      - These are sad words.
  - b. The way it is now, you see the light of the light of the moon and stars...
    - In your youth, you have light within you—vitality—that enables you to engage with all the things around you...
    - You can enjoy the light—because it not darkened—but one day it will start to grow dim...
      - the sun and moon and all on which they shine will grow dim to you and less perceptible.
      - This is not the way we were created, but this is the curse of God upon us for our sin!
  - c. And look at what he says about the clouds...at the end of verse 2...
    - As it is now, in your youth,
      - **the clouds do not return after the rain;**
    - What does this mean?
      - It means that when the storms of life come, they end.
      - In your younger years, you may go through seasons of darkness, but you rather expect that the clouds will dissipate...
      - The storm will pass and the sun will shine again...
        - And it usually does!
    - But when the years catch up to you, one storm is followed by another—
      - When you are young, a friend may die here or there, but then there is a long period when none of your friends die...
        - but when you are old, you lose one right after another!

- And with your health—
    - In your youth you get sick or injured, but you rather expect that you will get over it—but when you are old,
      - you know that another sickness or affliction will follow...
      - One cloudy day follows another!
2. Solomon goes on to paint a dismal picture of old age that you can almost feel if you will let yourself...
- Take a look with me at 12:3 and following...
- a. 12:3: In the day when the keepers of the house tremble,**
- The keepers of the house probably refer to your hands which do so much to take care of you—but now they are no longer steady...
    - It is hard to get dressed, hard to put on makeup or shave, hard to even put food in your mouth without spilling it.
- b. And the strong men bow down;**
- Perhaps the legs that no longer hold you up the way they did...
    - You can't get out of your chair and have to have help...
  - Walking across a parking lot or even going to the washroom is a challenge.
    - These days are coming brothers and sisters!
- c. When the grinders cease because they are few,**
- That obviously refers to the teeth—
    - And yes, there are dentures, but what use are they when the gums underneath are sore?
- d. And those that look through the windows grow dim;**
- That speaks of the eyesight—
    - Even in your 40s, all the sudden the fine print is no longer visible—it's hard to read a label—hard to see where the splinter is in your finger (or if there is one).
    - It gets more difficult to see at night—and more difficult to see in the bright sun...
    - Colours are not as vivid and details are not as sharp.
- e. 4 When the doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low;**
- Perhaps the idea here is that you become less aware about what is going on around you—
    - You don't notice things or pick up on them and have to be informed.
    - You don't even discern that someone is grinding flour to make bread—
      - You say, "Where's Betty?"
      - And someone says, "Can't you hear? She is grinding grain to make bread."
    - More and more you are "out of it."

- But don't be out of it when you are in the prime of life!

➤ Solomon goes on with his description...

**f. When one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low;**

- *Rising at the sound of a bird* may refer to not being able to sleep,
  - but it could also refer to not knowing what the sound is...hearing something lovely, but not being able to enjoy it...
- And the daughters of music are perhaps your own vocal cords which no longer allow you to sing—
  - And your voice is no longer strong or lovely.
  - The old man who had a rich baritone voice now has a high voice or a husky voice...
  - And the woman's sweet voice turns raspy.

**g. 5 Also they are afraid of height, and of terrors in the way;**

- As elderly people lose control and lose their senses and the control of their bodies, they become more fearful of things...
  - They fear heights—falling is always a concern and it is much more painful than it used to be...
  - And there is fear to go outside—perhaps fear to go out at night.
    - Perhaps they will get lost, perhaps they will not be able to get up the stairs...

**h. When the almond tree blossoms,**

- The grey hair that for a time was a sign of dignity now turns white and is joined by drools and twitches

**i. The grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails.**

- The grasshopper, so agile, so mobile, is now unable to hop....
- There is a loss of interest in things—a lack of desire...
  - Literally, it says that the caper berry fails—
  - The caper berry was an aphrodisiac—the Viagra of the day...but it no longer works—
  - **1 John 2:17: And the world is passing away, and the lust of it;**

TRANS> This is so vivid—it is what you see at the nursing home...

- Solomon told you that you need to remember that these days will come...
  - He has presented this to you to help you remember that days of darkness will come...
    - Again, as we saw earlier—
      - That you might rejoice in your youth...
      - That you might pour your heart and flesh into serving God...
      - That you might remove vexation from your heart—you are young!

- But brothers and sisters, this is not all...
    - Not only will your strength and youthful vigour soon start to fade away...
    - The day will come when your lamp will be completely extinguished...
      - You will completely cease to be engaged in this world.
- B. In verses 5-8, Solomon brings you in touch with death...
1. At the end of verse 5, there is a plain declaration and a vivid picture...
    - a. The declaration is that *man goes to his eternal home*.
      - You will leave this world and you will be judged and you will never be able to come back and live again—never again!
      - You will enter eternity with whatever you have done—
        - You will either be in Christ or not in Christ...
        - Full of fruit or with very little fruit...
        - Nothing will be able to change that once you depart from this world.
    - b. The vivid picture is that mourners are seen going about the street!
      - One day, people will be at *your* funeral, talking about how they will miss you and about what you were in life...
        - They will be standing by the graveside and watching them lower your body into the ground.
        - They will be there for you!
  2. You are urged to remember your Creator before those days come!
    - a. Verse 12:6 says,
      - *Remember your Creator* before the silver cord is loosed or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher shattered at the fountain or the wheel broken at the well...
      - Whatever these are, they all represent things that have become completely worthless in this world...
        - What good is a broken lamp that can hold no oil?
        - A broken pitcher is no good for drawing water,
        - And so a broken wheel at a well...
      - This is what becomes of every person born into this world...
        - Sooner than you think, your life comes to an end and your days of active engagement with this world are over and gone...
    - b. Verse 7 describes the ultimate humiliation for sinful man...
      - We were made from the dust of the ground and given dominion over the whole earth,
        - but because of sin, the earth takes dominion over us!
      - Verse 7 says:

- **Ecc 12:7: Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.**
- Two very significant things here...
  - First, the humiliation of having your body return to dust so that all your vigour and all your ability to be engaged in this world are taken away...
  - And second, that you will be presented to God who is, as we saw in 11:9, the One who will judge all our works...
    - He will either cast us out of His presence...
    - or He will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant—enter into the joy of your Lord.”
- 3. You only have a short time here!
  - **Verse 8—“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “all is vanity!”**
  - Our rebellion and fall has changed us from immortal creatures to creatures whose life is *hebel*...
    - Vanity—only a breath—only a vapour—here and then gone!
  - Yet, our spirit lives on—it immediately departs to be with God, and at the last day, the bodies of the just and the unjust will be raised...
    - and we will all stand before the LORD to be judged for what we have done in the body—whether good or bad.

### **Conclusion**

The whole point is that we must not live as though our strength is forever!

- The majority of people more or less do that...
  - If you ask them, they will tell you that of course they know that they will die...
  - But they live as if there is nothing beyond this life.
    - They do not rejoice in their strength while they have it and put it to good use for the LORD.
    - They try to avoid the thought of growing weak and of dying—especially the thought that they must then go to stand before God.
- Oh my brothers and sisters—this is the only time you have to bear fruit for all eternity!
  - Use the strength that God has given you to enjoy God’s gifts!
  - Don’t waste your life on worthless things like complaining—being vexed...
    - You don’t really have any reason to be vexed—
    - There are much better ways to use your youthful vigour.
      - Enjoy your strength and use it for the LORD.
- You can only do this in Jesus Christ.