

12.

YOUTH IS VANITY

ECCLESIASTES 11:9-12:8

A. Rejoice, O youth, in your youthfulness (11:9-10).

1. Yes, let your heart make you glad in the days of your youth (11:9b-9d),
 - a. And walk in the ways of your heart and in the sights of your eyes (11:9c)
 - b. But understand that because of all of these God will bring you into judgment (11:9d).
2. Yes, remove irritation from your heart (11:10),
 - a. And get rid of pain from your body (11:10b)
 - b. Because youth and the dawn of life are vanity (11:10c).

Solomon moved to a tenth topic that he said was vanity. That topic was youth and youthfulness. In verse 9, he spoke directly to young people and told them to enjoy their youth while it lasted. He encouraged them to be glad in their hearts, to practice the things their hearts desired, and to enjoy the sights their eyes liked to see. But he warned them to be cautious about how they enjoyed those days, because God was going to judge them for all the things they did during those days. He wanted them to understand that the actions of their youthful years were not going to pass away and be forgotten. The day was going to come when they were going to face judgment for how they used those years. They were not throw-away days. They were a serious part of their lives, and God was going to hold them responsible for what they did with them.

In verse 10, he challenged them a second time to enjoy their youth. He said they should not let their youth be filled with irritation in their hearts or pain in their bodies. Youth was a good time of life, and it was meant to be enjoyed and used for good. Still they should be careful to enjoy those years in the right way and not waste them. He gave them a second reason for being cautious about what they did with those years. They were not going to last forever. Youth, like everything else human and earthly, was temporary. It was another vanity that was as unsteady like the wind. They were not going to be able to hold onto their youthfulness. All too quickly, it was going to fade away into old age and death, so they needed to use it wisely while it lasted.

B. And remember your Creator in the days of your youth (12:1-12:7)

1. Before the bad days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them” (12:1b).
2. Before the sun and the light of the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain (12:2).
 - a. In the day when (12:3-5):
 - (1) The ones protecting the house will tremble (12:3b)
 - (2) And the strong ones will be bent (12:3c)
 - (3) And the grinders will cease because they will be few (12:3d)
 - (4) And the ones looking through the windows will be dimmed (12:3e),
 - (5) And the two doors on the street will be shut (12:4)
 - (a) When the sound of the grinding will be low (12:4b),
 - (b) And one will rise up at the voice of a bird (12:4c),
 - (c) And all the daughters of song will be brought low (12:4d).

b. Also when (12:5):**(1) They will be afraid of height and terrors on the road (12:5b)****(2) And the almond tree will blossom (12:5c),****(3) And the grasshopper will drag itself (12:5d),****(4) And the caper-berry will be ineffective (12:5e).****(5) Because the man will be going toward his long-lasting house when the mourners shall walk around in the street (12:5f).****3. Before (12:6-7):****a. The silver cord is put away (12:6b),****b. And the golden bowl is crushed (12:6c),****c. And the pitcher is shattered at the spring (132:6d),****d. And the wheel is crushed at the well (12:6e),****e. And the dust returns to the earth like it was (12:7a),****f. And the spirit returns to God who gave it (12:7b).**

Solomon's third word of advice to young people extends from verse 1 through verse 7 of chapter 12. It was to remember their creator in the days of their youth. He was eager that they not take his challenge to them to enjoy their youth as encouragement to live and have fun in any way they chose. They needed to spend those years wisely and not waste them on sinful activities, because youth was not going to last long. They needed to remember their Creator, live for Him, and obey Him while they were young and had the strength and vigor to do it..

Then he described for them what life was going to be like when they no longer would be young. In verse 1, he described old age as bad days in which they were going to say they no longer had pleasure in them. Solomon had seen those days in the lives of many people, and he knew he was drawing near to those days himself. He knew the time was coming to everyone who survived that weakness and sickness was going to weight so heavily on them that they no longer would enjoy their days. Today we still hear people mournfully say they are tired and want to go home to be with God and their loved ones who have preceded them. Their bodies are worn out. They want to be free of the limitations old age and disease have bought on. The hours drag by; the loneliness continues; and the pain seldom ceases, so they no longer enjoy their days and they want to be free to go home. It is not wrong for believers to feel that way, because when a believing person grows older and is weakened it is God's plan for him to go to be with Him in a much better place. God actually helps his children feel

that way to prepare them for giving up their responsibilities here and for going to their reward in heaven. So to young people Solomon said, "Take advantage of your youth and your strength and do something good with it because in a shorter time than you think you will not have the strength to do it."

In verses 2-5, Solomon described why people come to a time when they no longer enjoy their days. It is because of the weakening of every part of their bodies, which prevents them from doing what they want to do. He said old age is a time when the sun, moon, and stars are darkened because a person's eyes grow weak and they cannot see clearly even when the light is bright. Also for them, even after the rain stops the earth seems to be cloudy. Their eyesight will not allow them to see clearly even when the sunlight returns after the rain is gone.

Solomon went on to describe how all other parts of their bodies were going to be weakened in old age. By "the ones protecting the house," he meant their arms, which in old age were going to tremble and shake. By "the strong ones" he meant their legs, which were going to be bowed and wobbly. By "the grinders" he meant their teeth, which were going to cease to be useful because too few of them were going to remain. By "the ones looking out of the windows" he meant their eyes, which were not going to be able to see much anymore when they looked out of the windows. By "the two doors to the street" he meant their ears, which were going to be so dim that it shut them off from the activities of

the street as much as when the doors to the street are shut. Solomon elaborated on the problem of hearing loss, because that disability may be the most distressing and limiting of all the weaknesses of old age. He said their loss of hearing was going to cause the sound of the mill down the street to become dim, and at the same time it was going to cause the sound of a bird to startle them. They were going to hear the bird's chirping, but they were not going to be able to tell what they were hearing. The piercing but unclear sound was going to make them afraid some danger was approaching. They also were not going to be able to enjoy singers any longer because the sound of the voices was going to be too muffled and unclear. The weakening of all of their senses was going to make life a chore instead of a pleasure.

Solomon then described some disagreeable conditions that they were going to experience in old age. They were going to become afraid of heights and of dangers in the road, because their weakness was going to make it easy for them to fall and difficult to get out of the way of traffic. Their hair was going to turn white like the blossoms on an almond tree. Instead of being able to hop about like a grasshopper as they used to do, they were going to be able only to drag themselves about. And their sexual ability was going to decline, so that the caper-berry, which was a much used aphrodisiac in that day, no longer was going to be able to help them function. All of those weakened conditions were going to be leading toward the day when they were going to go to their long-lasting house in the ground and people were going to go about the street mourning their death.

Then in verses 6-7, Solomon stressed that their old age was going to end in death. Probably he did so because he knew young people seldom think about death, and he wanted them to recognize that they should think about it and to be aware that they needed to prepare for that day to come. He gave six descriptions of death, the first four of which were symbolic descriptions. He compared death to a silver cord that is worn around the neck but that has been put aside and desired no more. He also compared it to a golden bowl that is treasured for its beauty and value but that has been bent out of shape and has lost its value. He compared it further to a

pitcher that is used to catch water at a spring but that has been shattered and useless. Finally, he compared it to a wheel or pulley that is used to draw water from a well but that has been cracked and is unable to hold water any more. Those descriptions meant that life eventually becomes broken and useless and has to be cast away.

After those symbolic descriptions of death, Solomon described death in literal terms. He said their bodies were going to return to the dirt from which they were made and their spirits were going to return to God who gave them. Though Solomon was warning young people to prepare themselves for the loss of their youth because death was coming, he gave a remarkable description of his concept of what happens at a person's death. He knew a person's body was made of physical elements taken from the earth, and he knew that after death it gradually decays and returns to dust. That insight was not remarkable. Believers had been aware of that reality ever since the Garden of Eden, and they had seen it happen many times over again.

What is more impressive is that Solomon said a person's spirit returns to God who gave it. It had been known by Jehovah worshipers ever since God breathed life into Adam at the Creation that a person's life was much more than dirt. It was made from God's own breath. Anyone who thought seriously about God's creation of humans was able to understand that, if the spirit of a man was made in God's likeness, it could not return to the dirt. Since God breathed His likeness into man, that spirit made in His likeness would have to return to God who breathed it into him. Solomon recognized that reality and declared it. The good side of old age and death is that a person's spirit returns to God. It does not decay and pass away. It returns to God to give an account and to receive His decision on what will come afterward.

Though Solomon was warning young people that death was coming, he did not end his description of death on a note of despair but on a note of hope. Surely the reason he challenged young people to remember their Creator in the days of their youth was to encourage them to be ready for their spirit to return to God when the day of their

death would come. He wanted them to be prepared because remembering, trusting, and serving God is

the only action a person can take in his whole life that is not a vanity of vanities when death comes.

C. “Vanity of vanities,” says the Proclaimer. “Everything is vanity” (12:8).

Solomon closed his discussion of youth with his now familiar refrain. Youth also is vanity. He proclaimed the same message about youthfulness that he had proclaimed about every other aspect of

life he had mentioned. Youth does not last. It turns to feebleness, and it ends in death. It too is a vanity of vanities.