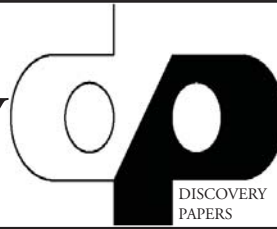


PREPARING FOR THE END: TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

SERIES: SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND



Catalog No. 100704
Ecclesiastes 11:6-12:8
Matthew 7:24-29
7th Message
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This is the last of seven messages which compare two texts of scripture. Here we will consider the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes and the concluding verses of the Sermon on the Mount.

In the final section of Ecclesiastes the author (Kohleth, the Searcher) finally gets to speak from the perspective of faith. Up to this point he has written of an arid world—‘under the sun,’ absent any word from God. And now, like an actor who addresses the audience after the play (having taken off his wig), Kohleth will speak for himself as a teacher of godly wisdom.

Lets turn first to a description of the man in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-11:

⁹Not only was the Teacher [Kohleth] wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

¹¹The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd.

Here we encounter a teacher, not a skeptic, writing now to persuade, rather than to complain. Jesus, similarly, is acclaimed as a teacher at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:28-29). We’ll first learn from the instruction of Kohleth, and then conclude with Jesus’ words.

The Searcher’s insights are firmly driven nails, goads to guide the wayward. Two goads stand out. First, “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth” (v. 1). And second, “much study wearies the body (v.12).”

The First Goad

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8:

¹Remember 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”—
²before the sun and the light
and the moon and the stars grow dark,
and the clouds return after the rain;**

**³when the keepers of the house tremble,
and the strong men stoop, when the grinders
cease because they are few, and those looking
through the windows grow dim;**

**⁴when the doors to the street are closed and
the sound of grinding fades; when men rise
up at the sound of birds, but all their songs
grow faint;**

**⁵when men are afraid of heights and of
dangers in the streets; when the almond tree
blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself
along and desire no longer is stirred. Then
man goes to his eternal home and mourners
go about the streets.**

**⁶Remember him-- before the silver cord is
severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before
the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the
wheel broken at the well,**

**⁷and the dust returns to the ground it came
from, and the spirit returns to God who gave
it.**

**⁸“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the
Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”**

Those who are young can enjoy energy and freedom

from anxiety (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10), but they should also prepare for the future. The most important aspect of preparation is giving attention to God. Change and needed growth become more difficult “when the clouds return after the rain” (v. 2) and days of sunny possibility are few.

Verse two begins a section that many regard as their favorite part of Ecclesiastes. It is a tender, honest, and poetic description of what it is like to be old. Though there is variety in this description, the main image is a broken down house—gates, doors, windows. Alongside are a grinding wheel and an almond tree. The house is beyond repair.

The grinders are few—teeth are missing. The windows are dim—eyesight is failing. Hearing is lost and the libido is no more. A shuffling gait makes walking difficult. The house is not what it used to be and there is no fixing it. Have we prepared for the day when our lives will be diminished like this?

It is common for young people to ridicule the elderly, but Koheleth sees not only the reductions of age but also, for those who have learned well, its beauty. There are many possible metaphors for white hair (eg. ashes or snow), but the Searcher selects an almond tree with beautiful white flowers. He is a bit whimsical about hearing loss. Small sounds cause wakefulness on the one hand, but music is too faint to be enjoyed, on the other.

A long journey in God’s company is winsome. But a long journey must begin early. Don’t wait till later to “remember your Creator.”

It is difficult to retain new concepts when our minds have slowed with age. But truth gained in childhood can be remembered and savored in later years. In addition, we learn to live by faith in conjunction with others who remember the same music, lived through the same history, were taught by the same teachers, and read the same books. It is hard to make serious life changes when our companions are gone and the tide of life around us has become unfamiliar.

The gospel does not change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But different eras emphasize different aspects of the truth and use different vehicles for transmitting it. Some who learned

their faith from the King James Bible found translations in contemporary English to be unsettling (“if the KJV was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me”). Electronic communication has the same disquieting impact on other folks today. But, if God’s presence has shaped our hearts over many years, then a changing world cannot take away anything essential.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to take God seriously at an early age is that grace takes a long time to grasp. Can we be sure that the well of God’s forgiveness will not run dry? We battle to believe that our failure and sin are not as powerful as they seem. For some, pride in personal accomplishment pushes the message of God’s grace to the side. Living in freedom, forgiven and loved, is learned by failing and being restored. It takes time. Start early.

The Second Goad

Ecclesiastes 12:12:

¹²Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them [the words of the wise].

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

The point here is simple. Some pronouncements deserve attention and many do not. We can waste our lives and weary our bodies piling up useless information. In this vein, imagine Koheleth’s admonition offered in an age of email, app stores, blogs, YouTube and spewed opinion on every subject coming from all directions. Words by themselves lead nowhere without a determination to believe what is true, to revere God and to obey Him.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

¹³Now all has been heard;

here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments,

for this is the whole duty of man.

¹⁴For God will bring every deed into judgment,

including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

The book begins with the “utter futility” and ends with a call to fear. We do not live ‘under the sun’ with no word from God. He has uttered commandments and made known His glory. He is due our reverence and calls for obedience. Choices have consequences. The wicked do not ‘get away with it.’ Right and wrong are concepts with real content. Death is not the end of the story—beyond death is God’s judgment of every deed (including the hidden things).

Two important steps are called for: honor God from the heart and obey Him as Lord. These steps begin the journey away from despair, away from a world in which human beings try to fill God’s shoes. But there is more left to learn.

Consider the imagery: nails and goads and duty; all are hard. Koheleth speaks of judgment and fear, but not yet of love. At the end of Ecclesiastes we are no longer in the desert, ‘under the sun,’ but we have not yet come to the “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn.4:14). So we turn to a greater Teacher.

Matthew 7:24-29

²⁴Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” ²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

We will focus on three ideas: hearing Jesus’ words, putting them into practice, and amazement at the teacher.

Lets ‘hear’ again some of the remarkable words of Jesus in Matthew 5-7. He said that blessing—vitality,

life, joy, and happiness—is a gift that is given to the poor in spirit, to those who mourn, to those who make peace, and to those who are persecuted for righteousness. Blessing is not a prize collected by the dominant and the proud.

Further, He said that hypocrites need not apply. He has nothing to offer to the person who will not deal with core issues, who wants to strike an attractive pose or hold to an external standard without a renewal of the heart. He also describes of a new way of understanding God—addressing a heavenly Father (the word is used 15 times in these three chapters). Jesus is the first to use and teach this intimate language for the Lord of heaven and earth. He taught us to pray to a Father who knows what we need before we ask Him, who will never give His child what is not best for him, whose face is always turned towards us.

These words of Jesus should be heard and heard again, and then they must be put into practice.

The practical directives are clear: Let your light shine before men so that they might glorify your Father in heaven. Love your enemies. Do not be anxious. Ask and you will receive. Enter the narrow gate. The combination of hearing and obeying establishes a foundation that can weather the inevitable storm.

Finally, we note with thanksgiving, that Matthew 7 ends, not with instruction but with amazement. Jesus, Himself, is in full view. Those who heard Him were amazed, transfixed by His unique authority. Jesus’ teaching opens our eyes to truth but also draws us to the Teacher. He doesn’t only leave behind a document (as Koheleth did). He continues to beckon us, to challenge us, to bind our wounds. “In Him is life—the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it” (Jn.1:4-5).

‘Under the sun,’ human experience is finally futile. The spoken and written revelation of God opens our eyes and offers us hope. But teaching must lead to an embrace by the Teacher, the one who came that we might have life and have it in abundance.

In conclusion, a prayer written by Dr. William Laud:

*Grant, O Lord, that we may live in Thy fear,
die in Thy favor, rest in Thy peace, rise in Thy
power, reign in Thy glory, for Thine own beloved
Son's sake, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.¹*

NOTES

¹*A Summarie of Devotions*, Compiled and Ufed by Dr. William Laud, Sometime Ld. Arch-Bishop of Canterbvry. Now Publifhed according to the Copy written with his own hand, and referved in the Archives of *Sz. John Baptis's* Colledge Library in OXON.

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