

Remember Rightly (Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8)

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[0 : 00] So the Bible reading is Ecclesiastes chapter 11, starting at verse 1 and continuing to chapter 12 and verse 8.

Ecclesiastes 11, verse 1. Ship your grain across the sea. After many days, you may receive return. Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight. You do not know what disaster may come upon the land. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth.

Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant.

Whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things.

[1 : 07] Sow your seed in the morning and at evening. Let your hands not be idle. For you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

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. Ever will become is meaningless. 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, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart, and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

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. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain.

[2 : 35] When 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.

When the doors to the street are closed, and the sound of grinding fades. When people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint.

When people are afraid of heights, and of dangers in the streets. When the almond tree blossoms, and the grasshopper drags itself along. Desire is no longer stirred.

Then people go to their eternal home, and mourners go about the streets. 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.

[3 : 39] Meaningless. Meaningless, says the teacher. Everything is meaningless. Thank you, Vaughan.

Words to live by this new year. Before you get shopped about what meaningless means, and we'll cover that soon, let's pray and ask God to bring some meaning into this passage for us.

Let's pray together. Our great God and Father, when everything does seem kind of meaningless, or when we struggle to find meaning in what's gone on in the year past, help us now focus on your word, and remember rightly our creator.

Would you redeem even our rejoicing this coming year? Would you help us now to sit attentively to your word? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. New year, new you.

Some of us are very glad to see in this coming year, perhaps it means new opportunities, perhaps some revenge travel coming up, perhaps a new venture, a new job, a new position at work.

[4 : 57] But I think some of us, to be honest, have found it really weary coming into the new year, haven't we? Perhaps we look back and we wish it was an earlier time. Perhaps we are not sure

what tomorrow will bring.

Because today is so tough. Wherever you are in, wherever you are placed, this passage speaks honestly to us, doesn't it?

This section of the Bible just seems so raw and honest. And so as we remember rightly, the first day of 2023, I think it's worth listening in on a teacher who's lived through many new years.

The book of Ecclesiastes sits within the wisdom literature of the Bible, which means that it's to give us ways to live wisely.

It's to show us what it looks like to be wise people of God. And this is how he introduces himself, the writer of Ecclesiastes. He says this in chapter 1, verse 12, I, the teacher, I was king over Israel and Jerusalem.

[6 : 08] And now you're wondering, what does Israel and Jerusalem have to do with me here in Pakaranga? Seems like a different world. But yet this teacher says he studied and explored all that is done under the heavens.

I think if this teacher or preacher was living today, he would have a podcast full of life hacks and we would be subscribing to it. But now the way wisdom literature works is that you got to know which book of the Bible it is.

Different wisdom books speak differently, don't they? Just like the book of Psalms is kind of like listening in with the songs that Jesus sang. It's like a Spotify playlist for the year.

And just like the book of Proverbs, it's kind of full of lollies of truth to suck on, right? You take one and suck on it for the month and memorize it, for example. As we live in God's world, the book of Ecclesiastes can seem like watching a sandcastle you built being swept away.

It's obvious from the very first words of this book, because Ecclesiastes starts like this, meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?

[7 : 24] And look, this teacher is no slouch. He, in the early chapters of the book, remembers all the work he has done, right? He tells us, Ecclesiastes 2.8, I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.

I denied myself nothing that my eyes desired. I refused my heart no pleasure. Sounds like this guy's been living the Kiwi dream, perhaps.

And yet when he thinks about it, he realizes everything was meaningless. A chasing after the sun, a wind. And nothing was gained under the sun.

You see, as he reflects on all the achievements he's made and done, he thinks, well, the houses he builds, someone else is going to live in them one day. The fame he gains, eventually no one will remember him.

And maybe the past year has felt like this for you. All pain and not much gain. And you are not alone. There is at least one writer who feels your frustration.

[8 : 35] And look, this word meaningless, actually in the original language, has a broad range of meanings. It shows up again and again in our passage.

This word hevel shows up again, especially in the passage that Vaughn just read. And to translate it meaningless can be a bit misleading. It can kind of make us feel like, what's the point?

Hevel is more than just emptiness or vanity. The original picture here of this word is like breath, mist, dust. Think of bubbles that you blow, and then they pop and go.

Think of a sunset that you watch, and then it soon disappears. If hevel had a sound or an emoji, it would be a sigh.

And life can seem like that, can't it, friends? You make a friend. Maybe you hang out with them for years, and then suddenly they disappear from your life.

[9 : 35] You study hard for uni exams. Perhaps this time last month, you were just going for it, and now no one cares what you were doing with those exams, what grades you got. This can be the Hevel in life that the preacher is reflecting on.

And after 10 chapters of Hevel, we see some of the preacher's most powerful reflections here in chapter 11. And these, I believe, are wisdom words for the heart that can start us off this year.

And so I just want to share two broad points. Perhaps we can sum up these closing sections of words of Ecclesiastes in two phases, all right? I think in verses 11, 1 to 8, he remembers rightly.

And this, from verse 9 onwards, redeems his rejoicing. I'll say it again. He remembers rightly in the first eight verses so that it redeems his rejoicing.

So let's have a brief look at how he remembers rightly here in the first eight verses. There's two things worth remembering rightly, it seems like, with the preacher here on the first day of 2023. [10:43] And one thing to remember rightly is that you do not know. Have a look again in these verses, and you see this phrase, you do not know, come up time and time again. Verse 2, give portions of seven years to eight.

You don't know what disaster may come. Again, verse 5, as you do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed. And verse 6, right?

You don't know which will succeed, whether this or that. Why ship grain overseas, or literally, why cast your bread on the waters? Why put your eggs in some investment basket?

Why be busy with useful things morning and night this coming year? Because, the teacher says, you do not know. You do not know what might happen.

Look, of course, sometimes in life you do know, right? Perhaps you get a message tonight.

Someone messages you with really bad English and says, please, you've won some money.

[11:43] I just need you to send me a little bit of an advance so I can give you a million dollars.

You can be a bit suspicious. You do know in that case, right? But look, if we treat every invitation, every opportunity this year, with that kind of skepticism and suspicion, the Bible says we wouldn't be remembering rightly.

Because you do not know. There are limits to how much we can control and how much we know. Every scammer we shouldn't invest in is contrasted by hundreds of good opportunities worth investing in.

Friendships worth making. People worth greeting. For every visitor who perhaps never comes back to PCBC English, there are others who might become your lifelong brothers and sisters you do not know.

And look, if we are wired for relationships, if that is a deep need in our heart, then perhaps part of our New Year's resolutions is to get to know people. Perhaps one more person more deeply this year.

they may not become your friend for life. But, you don't know, do you? Or if the good news of Christ must be shared, then we have a go.

[13:01] We ask our neighbor what they believe. Perhaps we message a childhood friend and catch up with them and invite them to an opportunity to meet Christians or to hear about the love of Christ.

or we share our testimony with our aging grandparents. All of those opportunities might fall by the wayside. But you do not know, do you?

Often, I get people asking me, well, which job should I take this year, William? Or, how do I know she's the one? Or, look, I need a sign from God and then I'll know what to do next.

It seems like the author here in Ecclesiastes tells us, you don't always know, do you? And yet, you can have a go. You can make a choice out of wisdom.

This is God-breathed Scripture telling us we won't always know, but have a go. Make a wise choice.

And look, when it comes to God's will, Scripture is clear on many things, right?

[14:09] For example, this is God's will. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5.16.

Or what about 1 Peter 2? This is the will of God that by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Or 1 Thessalonians 4.3, this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality.

So many things in our life, we already know God's clear will. And yet, there are many decisions we will make this coming year, where even if we don't get a special revelation, we have God's good wisdom.

when it comes to what serving areas to take up or to let go of, when to travel, when to stay put, which relationships to invest in more deeply this year, these are all wisdom calls.

And where we weigh up our options with God's clear instructions in front of us, and the guidance of trusted brothers and sisters beside us, we can go ahead and choose.

[15:21] So, let's remember rightly this year. We don't always know, but we can, and we are given opportunities to choose wisely. But, in order to make a wise choice, and not a foolish one this year, on all kinds of things, we also need to remember, of course, rightly, that you do have a maker.

We see that, don't we? Here, verse 5 again, as you do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things.

Some of you know that my wife, Cheryl, is 14 weeks and three days, I think, pregnant, with our fifth child. Praise the Lord. Pray for us. And last we checked at the ultrasound, BB5 was five centimeters long, had a heartbeat, arms and legs, working bladder, eagerness to swivel around, as the ultrasound person was trying to capture pictures.

There was a lot we knew, and yet so much about this baby's life was remained hidden from our eyes. In a similar way, we can think of being storm chasers.

I don't know if you've seen some of those documentaries where people go out of their way to chase tornadoes and storms. They can get as close to them as possible, and yet they cannot get all the way in.

[16:46] There are limits to what they can find out. So much about these amazing whirls of energy remain hidden. Because all this comes under the maker's knowledge.

The teacher's not saying ignore science. The teacher's saying there's limits to what we can know because we cannot fully understand the work of God because He, and He alone, is the maker of all things.

and even as we discover amazing discoveries in the body and the world around us, every cause we discover is a step closer to the maker who has no cause.

And if there is a maker who made us, then it goes logically that we, as His creation, are accountable to Him.

We will be judged by Him. That is exactly what verse 9 tells us, doesn't it? Know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. We judge for our time, judge for our thoughts, where we spend our treasures, how we honor this maker.

[17:53] I think too often the bad choices we make come from a bad belief that we do not have a maker. I don't know about you, but if you found yourself over committing, right?

You started 10 new projects last year and you finished 0.5 of them. Maybe you forgot that you had a maker who gives you morning and evening, who gives you a weekly rhythm of work and sleep.

Or maybe you've just found yourself in the past year zombying through hours of screen time on your phones or devices because you've forgotten your maker who made us to reflect His image through screen-to-screen fresh, no, face-to-face friendships, real community.

Or maybe in the past year you have wallowed and struggled and laughed because you've forgotten that you have a maker who made precious people to cherish, not disembodied objects to dishonor.

And you know what? Not to trouble you more, brothers and sisters, but did you notice how troubling actually verse 9 is? Have a look at it again. Literally, it starts off by saying, rejoice, bro, in your youth and let your heart please you in the days of being a bro, right?

[19:09] It's a very unique translation there. I've got, look, walk in the ways of your heart, sure, and in the sight of your eyes, but also know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

I read earlier this week that two secret rooms in every cruise ship, right? A palace of luxury, surely.

Two secret rooms in a cruise ship. A cruise ship always has a morgue and it always has a jail.

Did you know that? Because even in paradise, even on holiday, you can't escape death. you can't escape judgment. And that's a dilemma, isn't it?

When you and I remember rightly, we realize we don't know everything, but not only that, we have a maker that we are accountable to. And if we check our hearts honestly, so many of our life goals have had nothing to do with things.

We've been called to rejoice, but we can't fully because when we ignore our maker, even all our earthly rejoicing only leads to eternal judgment. If you remember rightly, friends, you'll realize that you and I don't know everything and there is a maker we too often ignore.

[20:27] And so all the teacher is setting us up for is this fact. We need a way, some way, to redeem our rejoicing so that it's not this godless, self-centered pursuit that has no reference to the one who made us.

And so, right, he starts off, verse 10, he says, don't follow your heart, banish anxiety, cast off the troubles of your body. But how? How can we redeem our rejoicing this year in 2023?

Verse 1 of chapter 12 tells us, remember your creator in the days of your youth before the days of trouble come. This word creator is very carefully chosen.

In the Hebrew, it's the same word that we actually find in Genesis 1.1. In the beginning, God creates the heavens and the earth.

Remember your creator. Remember the one who spoke the universe into being. This is the way to redeem our rejoicing.

[21 : 31] How shall we take this command seriously? In 2023. I think there's two suggestions I have this morning, this afternoon. One way is this.

We remember our creator, right, by doing what's right here in the passage, by seeing and savoring his creation. None of the teacher's illustrations are theoretical.

They come from observing the real world by getting out there and delighting in God's creation, the maker's majestic work. If you go strawberry picking this summer, you might understand verse 6 better.

Sow your seed in the morning and the evening. Let not your hands be idle. Perhaps if you play with your nieces and nephews, your pets, you'll be wiser about verse 9.

Let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Perhaps if you sit with one of your elderly relatives or a brother or sister in church, you'll be wiser about old age and what the twilight years will feel like, especially even what was described in chapter 12.

[22 : 35] Remember him, your creator, before the silver cord is severed. Perhaps remembering your creator this year might mean getting sweaty on a hike or getting your feet wet.

but the Bible gives you permission to roam about this city, this country, this world, but rejoicing in what the maker has given you by being moved by his great design, being awed by his care for every blade of grass in this planet, every bird in the sky, every flower in the fields.

We love and learn from our creator. But I think another way, a far deeper way to remember your creator must come from outside this teacher's words, from further along in God's big picture.

Because as Christians, we know more deeply than this teacher did of the word who is God, right from creation. We know, we celebrate at Christmas time the creator who became a creature.

We celebrate the true son of God. And so we remember our creator by observing who else but the life of Christ. If you long to hear God's voice today, you can.

[23 : 51] Because in these last days, Hebrews 1, 2 says, God has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom he also created the world.

Isn't that marvelous? mixed through our beautiful creation, though, even though there's constant reminders of sin and death spoiling God's good creation, we can remember the voice of Jesus, our maker.

And if you hear the voice of Jesus, your maker, if you repent from ignoring him and obey his call to follow me this year, if you accept his cry, Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing, if you and I unite ourselves with his death on the cross for our sins, when he cries it is finished, it is true in our lives.

Then Jesus, your maker, becomes Jesus, your friend. He becomes Jesus, your wisdom. Through the Holy Spirit, he becomes Jesus, your advocate, the one who can fully redeem our rejoicing this year.

PCBC English, my hope and prayer, wherever God takes you, is that you would enjoy your life remembering that even in days of darkness, that Jesus, your creator, is your friend, raised from the dead, from David's offspring according to the gospel.

[25 : 24] And so this year, we want to remember, rightly, his birth, born of a virgin, fully God, fully man, able to be our priest, our brother, our advocate. And we want to remember, rightly, too, his temptation and his suffering.

Every flaming dart from the devil, Jesus resists with the Spirit's help through his God-breathed word, does he not? This year, how will you remember the wisdom of Jesus?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the humble, not the proud. Blessed are the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness, not the next food ground.

Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers this year. Blessed are the persecuted. This is the way, is it not, to rejoice rightly with Jesus, our reward in heaven.

And of course, we want to remember, rightly, our Lord Jesus and his days of darkness, his judgment. That will fully redeem our rejoicing.

[26 : 34] Let's remember the punishment he willingly took to pay the penalty our sins deserve before our maker and king. God, can I invite you, if you've never repented from your sin and place

your trust in the Lord Jesus that today is a day for it.

Even a New Year's Day, you can have a relationship worth rejoicing forever, without end. Yes, we rejoice in the good things of our world.

Yes, we are invited to follow the desires of our heart, but only life lived before the face of God is wise. Only life in communion and relationship with Christ can guarantee that our days of darkness one day will end with eternal rejoicing that lasts beyond this life.

This, friends, is wisdom for the heart. So I'm going to pray and then we're actually going to do a bit of remembering together as we remember the Lord's Supper.

So would you pray with me as we commit this time to the Lord? Our great Father in heaven, we thank you that Jesus lived and died for our sins.

[27 : 51] We want to remember him this year. We want his death and life to be at the center of our death and life. So wherever your feet take us, whatever struggles we go through, would you, through the power of your spirit, work in us a deeper affection for the Lord Jesus?

Would you help us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, before and during the days of our troubles this year? We thank you and we ask that you would bless the rest of the service in Jesus' name.

Amen. hearing something love that we must pray with us, we will teach them to name a part of the Gospel