

A MESSAGE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

BIBLE TEXT : Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10; 12:1-14.

LESSON 378 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10

⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment.

¹⁰ Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth *are* vanity.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

¹ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

² While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

³ In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,
⁴ And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

⁵ Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

⁶ Or ever the silver cord be

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Wise Advice

1. Youth should be a time of joy, but not a time of excess and sin, Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10;

Psalm 119:9

⁹ Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word.

1 Peter 4:3-5

³ For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

⁴ Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you*:

⁵ Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

2. The greatest enjoyment for youth is to remember the Creator, Ecclesiastes 12:1;

Matthew 18:1-4

¹ At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

² And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

³ And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Mark 10:14

¹⁴ But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:15

¹⁵ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

II For Consideration

1. Life often becomes a burden to the aged and distressed, Ecclesiastes 12:1-4;

Job 3:20-22

²⁰ Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter *in* soul;

²¹ Which long for death, but it *cometh* not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures;

²² Which rejoice exceedingly, *and* are glad, when they can find the grave?

Jonah 4:8

⁸ And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is better for me to die than to live.*

2. Man must go at least to his "long home," Ecclesiastes 12:5-7;

Ecclesiastes 8:8

⁸ *There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.*

2 Samuel 14:14

¹⁴ For we must needs die, and *are* as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth

loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

⁷ Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

⁸ Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all *is* vanity.

⁹ And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, *and* set in order many proverbs.

¹⁰ The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and *that which was written was* upright, *even* words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd.

¹² And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is* no end; and much study *is* a weariness of the flesh.

¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.

¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

God respect *any* person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.

Hebrews 9:27

²⁷ And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

III The Final Word

1. The Preacher sought to instruct the people, Ecclesiastes 12:8-12;

Job 28:28

²⁸ And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom; and to depart from evil *is* understanding.

Hosea 14:9

⁹ Who *is* wise, and he shall understand these *things*? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD *are* right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

John 20:30

³⁰ And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

John 20:31

³¹ But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

2. The whole duty of man is: "Fear God, and keep his commandments," Ecclesiastes 12:13;

Matthew 10:28

²⁸ And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Luke 10:25-28

²⁵ And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

²⁶ He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

²⁷ And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

²⁸ And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

1 Peter 2:17

¹⁷ Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

3. God's judgment will test every work of every man, Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:14;

Psalm 62:12

¹² Also unto thee, O Lord, *belongeth* mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

Jeremiah 17:10

¹⁰ I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.

Matthew 16:27

²⁷ For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Revelation 20:12

¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

NOTES:

Having run life's race and having experienced life's extremities, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes gave this treatise to young people. Inspired by the Spirit and recorded in God's Word, the message is a guide to all young people travelling along the pathway of life.

To the Young

The Preacher knew that if any portion of life is a happy time, it is the days of youth. During that period, life is often carefree, buoyant, and joyous. The writer did not decry this time of life, nor did he try to dissuade young people from the lawful pleasures of youth. He did not try to put old heads on young shoulders. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes."

Can that be good advice? Can youth be trusted to that extent? As a safeguard this restraint was added: "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." All depends upon the goal that the young person has set his heart upon as to whether his actions can be trusted. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). When a person's heart is right in the sight of God, his affections are set on things above, and his thoughts and actions are above reproach. (**Galatians 5:22-23** 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.) Thoughts of God's judgment cause the saved person no consternation, because good deeds will bring a good reward. The young person who follows sinful desires into pernicious ways has cause for concern, for his sins will come following after him to the judgment.

Crossroads

The young do not travel very far along the pathway of life before they come to the crossroads of life. One the left hand stands the wide gate, big and beautiful to behold, and overlaid with the glittering gilt of many vain promises. Looking through the gate, the broad way can be seen, lined on both sides with numerous gaities, pleasures, vanities, and deceptions. The broad way appears at first glance to be an easy way to travel, for the incline is slightly downward, requiring little energy to be expended. Many people enter through the wide gate, crowding the broad way. Those who tarry in their decision to enter the wide gate are tempted, lured, pushed, or pulled by the devil toward that way; for the devil is prince and ruler of that way, and he would have as many subjects as possible. But beware! This wide gate and broad way lead only to death and eternal destruction.

On the right hand stands a much smaller gate, perhaps unnoticed at first. Although plain in appearance the strait gate was erected at tremendous cost: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Looking through this wondrous gate one beholds the narrow way. It is an uphill way, and it is apparent that some energy will be required to travel it. Much happiness and many genuine pleasures line this highway, too, but they are invisible to the glance of the casual onlooker. The narrow way is not crowded, for few people enter the strait gate. No one is forced to travel this way, but all are invited to enter by the Voice of the One who stands and knocks at the heart's door of all mankind. Heed the Voice! Oh, listen to the Spirit's call and enter the strait gate, for the narrow way leads to Heaven and life eternal!

The Vital Decision

Which way will you take? The decision is left to the individual, but it is a vital decision that has to be made. Often the first impulse of an awakened conscience is to try to delay making any sort of decision; but God burns the truth into the heart of all, that delay is only decision in the wrong way. The writer of Ecclesiastes knew well the two ways of life, and he went on

record to urge young people to choose the right way while they are young.

Youth starts into life with a clear conscience, which, if diligently followed, will lead to God. Far too often, however, the wrong course is observed and followed. Habits soon begin to form. One deed, like the fine thread of the spider's web, draws after it another. A deed done once tends to be done twice, and the second time it becomes easier than the first time. A man makes a track with difficulty in the deep snow in the morning, but each time he travels it the track becomes a little wider and a little easier to travel.

Generally speaking, the years of life from youth to 25 or 30 are the formative years, casting the pattern and characteristics for the remaining years of life. Youth is pliable and yielding, like the iron that flows from the furnace in a molten stream. In a short while, however, that iron shaped in the pattern of its mould becomes a rigid bar. In like manner the character formed by youth becomes less flexible and more difficult to bend.

Godless Old Age

Seeing that these things are true, there is no wonder that the Preacher called to the young: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." He went on to give a symbolic word picture of the aged man who, without serving God, had lived his allotted time on earth and was waiting for death to take him out of the land of the living. No doubt this man, typical of multitudes of people, had at one time heard the call of God to righteousness, and perhaps then he purposed to serve God in later life; but now he was beyond caring for such important matters.

Every day was a cloudy day during this man's old age; there was no sun, moon, or star to brighten his sky. Natural defence was gone; his eyesight was dim; eating ceased to be a pleasure, because teeth were few and digestion was difficult; hearing became dull; insomnia or sleeplessness was prevalent; high places were things to fear.

The day of death was near, and the mourners saddened by the imminent departure went softly about the city streets. Death took place -- the man went to his "long home." The dust returned to the earth as it was, and the spirit returned unto God who gave it, to be judged according to the works done in the body. Somehow, as one meditates upon the meaning of the Preacher's words, the note of sadness and warning is detected. If the old man had sought God in his youth and served God throughout his lifetime, his last days upon earth would have ended in a happier theme.

In Christ

Death with a less sinister meaning is the lesson that the Spirit seems to be trying to impress upon the heart of the young and old alike. The truth can bear repeating, that if a man lives right, he will die right, whether he be a young man or an old man. The writer, having experienced most of life's vanities and having awakened to the right conception of life's true values, desired that people live right. He taught the people knowledge, writing upright words of truth. Rightly used, the inspired Word will keep a man travelling on the road to Heaven, steadfast and sure in his evaluation of the Truth.

Among the wonderful things in the world is the aged person who has true experiential faith in Christ, Jesus. His natural forces may have abated similar to the symbolic picture, but his life is not a void. His days are brilliant with the hope of soon being with the Lord. "To live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Death holds no terror for the upright: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:55, 57).

Conclusion

This treatise is brought to a close with a very forceful personal application. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." "Fear God," that is, honour and worship God. This is the whole duty of man -- the first and chief business that man should attend unto. Whether a man be rich or poor, high or low in the estimation of men, is immaterial, for these things are a part of the passing scene. The treasures of godliness in a man's heart will last throughout eternity.

To emphasise further the importance of a decision to godliness, the truth of the judgment is again stated. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." If any words would bring a man to his senses, these words should. To persist in sinning is spiritual insanity. The sane-thinking young man or young woman, sure in his knowledge of God's judgment and surely knowing the end of the wicked, can come to only one conclusion of life's true value: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." The present time is the right time to do the right thing; the present time is the right time to begin following Jesus Christ, if that is not your present course.

QUESTIONS

1. What advice was given to young people by the writer of Ecclesiastes?
2. What limit was placed upon youthful pursuits?
3. Why is it best to remember the Creator in the days of youth?
4. Why is death referred to as man's "long home"?
5. What are the different destinations of the body and spirit of man at death?
6. Name the several ways in which the Preacher sought to instruct the people.
7. What was the final statement in this lesson of man's whole duty?
8. What law of God makes this statement so important?