

Life in the Light of Eternity
Ecclesiastes 12: 1-7, 13-14
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When the former President, John Quincy Adams was eighty years of age, he was met by an old friend who shook his trembling hand and said, "Good morning, and how is John Quincy Adams today?"

The retired chief executive looked at him for a moment and said: "John Quincy Adams himself is quite well, sir, quite well, but the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering upon its foundations.

Time and the seasons have almost destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out. Its walls are much shattered in and it crumbles with every wind. The old tenement is becoming almost uninhabitable and I think that John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon; but he himself is well, sir, quite well."

My scripture text is about remembering our creator when we are young, gracefully growing old and going to our eternal home.

We will read Ecclesiastes 12:1-7; 13-14.

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"—² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; ³ 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; ⁴ 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 and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets. ⁶ 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.

¹³ Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. This is the Word of God.

When Solomon wrote these words, he was older and was no longer as strong as he once was. His eye sight and hearing had begun to fade. And as he experienced some of those physical changes, he pleaded with his readers to remember God in the days of their youth.

That is when we are to give the first and the best of our lives when we are active and vigorous. To remember God before our bodies begin to break down. When we are young, there is a tendency to think we are indestructible or as we used to say in the army, there are some youth soar with the eagles in the day and screech with the owls at night.

It has been said, "Youth for pleasure, middle age for business, and old age for religion." But if you think about it, God deserves our most active and healthy years when our minds are sharp and clear, our senses are receptive, and our enthusiasm is at its best. Many of us in this congregation have followed the Lord when we were younger and throughout the years; we have given important service to do.

In verses 1-4, Solomon gives a poetic description to describe advancing age. I will use the New Living Translation.

Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, "Life is not pleasant anymore." ² Remember him before the light of the sun, moon, and stars is dim to your old eyes, and rain clouds continually darken your sky. ³ Remember him before your

legs—start to tremble; and before your shoulders—stoop. Remember him before your teeth—stop grinding; and before your eyes—see dimly.

⁴ Remember him before the door to life's opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades. Now you rise at the first chirping of the birds, but then all their sounds will grow faint.

⁵ Remember him before you become fearful of falling and worry about danger in the streets; before your hair turns white like an almond tree in bloom.

I hope we can look at aging with a sense of humor. When we were in our twenties, we went on our honeymoon to our nation's capital where we walked all around the Washington mall and saw all the important government buildings and the Smithsonian museums. Two years ago, we went back and needed public transportation, frequent rest breaks just to get around. It seemed they moved the buildings further away.

Several months ago, I visited a senior who used a walker to get around and her bed was near the bathroom. As she told me all of her ailments, she kind of laughed and said, "What can you do?"

I am often amazed at some of the people that we respond to in the ambulance who are much younger than myself. Had they not abused tobacco, drugs, alcohol, they wouldn't be in the shape they are in.

On this side of eternity, we are given one body and it is incumbent that we care for it that we can be used for long and useful service for the Lord.

If possible, try to remain active and productive. Spiritually, these can be our best years.

This may amaze you, but John Wesley, founder of the UMC traveled many miles per day on horseback. For 40 years, he

preached 40,000 sermons, and wrote 400 books. At 83 he was annoyed that he could not read or write for more than 15 hours a day without hurting his eyes and at 86 was ashamed he could not preach more than 2x a day. He complained in his diary that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 in the morning.

Verses 5-7

Remember him before you go to your eternal home. When the mourners will weep at your funeral.

⁶ Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken. Don't wait until the water jar is smashed at the spring and the pulley is broken at the well. ⁷ For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

Solomon again pleads with his reader to remember God before this life is over and uses a variety of metaphors to describe end of physical life before we answer to the eternal God.

Now speaking of eternity, Arthur Stace from Sydney Australia was known as Mr. Eternity. With alcoholic parents, he grew up in poverty and was arrested and jailed at age 15 for stealing food. He briefly served in the military and after his medical discharge; he went from job to job. When he was 32 years of age, he heard an inspirational sermon and became enamored of the notion of eternity.

Stace said, "Eternity went ringing through my brain and suddenly I began crying and felt a powerful call from the Lord to write Eternity."

Even though he was illiterate and could hardly write his own name legibly, "the word 'Eternity' came out smoothly. With chalk, he wrote on pavements, railroad entrances and anywhere else he could think of.

He was often stopped by the police on charges of defacing physical property. But he was never arrested or jailed and

always responded with, "But I had permission from a higher source".

For 35 years, Stace left his home 5 am to go around the streets of Sydney where he would chalk the word "Eternity" on whatever he could find. It is estimated that he wrote Eternity around 500,000 times before he died in 1967.

Socrates the ancient Greek philosopher wrote "Do you not know that the soul is immortal and does not perish?" The Roman poet Ovid exclaimed, "For the soul there is no death."

When it comes to eternity, I have used this illustration before. But if we could empty the Pacific Ocean of all its water and all we had was a gigantic hole of 64 million square miles with an average depth of 4 miles. My question is this? How long would it take to fill the entire hole, if an eagle dropped one speck of sand every 200 million years? That is a picture of eternity.

Let me close. Solomon pleads with his readers to remember their Creator in their youth. To live and serve the Lord while we are young. In due time, we will age and go to our eternal home. But it is important that we make certain we are on the right side of eternity and we live our lives in such a way that we do not miss what God has in store for us.

If you do not know the Lord in a personal way, take this time to meet with him and ask him to be Lord of your life. Learn about him in His Word.

God bless.