

Hope PCA Sermon: August 15, 2024
“Time for Rejoicing” (Ecclesiastes 11:7–10)
Rev. Martin Hedman

This morning I wanted to continue in Ecclesiastes. We are slowly approaching the end of this book. This morning we will look at chapter 11 verses 7-10. And if you would stand as we honor the reading of God’s word, if you are able to, please do so. Again, Ecclesiastes 11 verses 7–10. This is God’s Word. Let us be attentive to it this morning.

⁷ Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

⁸ So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

May God bless to his glory and to our understanding his Word for us here this morning. Please be seated. Let me pray for us as we come to the Word.

Father, this is your Word. We pray that you would speak to us this morning. Teach us, guide us, lead us, give us insight. And may your promise come true this morning. that your Word goes out and does not return to you empty, but instead accomplishes everything that you’ve purposed and planned for it. Lord God, we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, there’s an old saying. Maybe you’ve heard it. Maybe you’ve said it. “Youth is wasted on the young.” Youth is wasted on the young. The older we get, and hopefully the wiser we get, the more that old saying seems to resonate. Sometimes I can’t help but think, and maybe you also, “Man, what could I do, knowing what I know now, if I had the body I had when I was 20?” You ever think that way? Man alive. Of course, there’s the other point of view often expressed by the young, captured in that old classic rock song, “Hope I Die Before I Get Old”. Everybody wants to be young. The old want to be young. The young want to stay young. The old want to be young again.

Youth, though, is wasted on the young. They don’t know what to do with that gift. In our country, in our society, we have an obsession with being young. We have an obsession with appealing to the young. Being young, we obsess. There’s ad after ad, appeal after appeal, how to get rid of wrinkles, how to get rid of gray hair, how to get rid of baldness. various kinds of surgery to make you look or feel younger. This technique, that technique. Our obsession with being young. What kind of supplement can I take? What kind of workout routine can I go through that will keep me young and vigorous? Have the body of a 20-year-old. Or we appeal

to the young. People don't want to grow up. We've talked about it around here. I've talked about it elsewhere. What happened to the 20-year-old who actually looks like they're approaching adulthood? 30, 35, and still acting like kids. We don't want to grow up. But we all also want to be relevant, especially to the young. We want to show them we get the same kind of music, we speak the same kind of slang. And conversely, we don't respect our elders. And those of us who are older, we don't act different, we don't dress different, we want to look young.

Because youth is seen as virile, it's active, youth is better-looking. Older people, they're just getting old. Not so active, not so attractive anymore. Now, not everybody feels that way. Some people do embrace getting older, but often do so in reaction to getting older with a kind of cynicism or sarcasm. I had a coworker years ago who used to say, "When I get old, I just want to be a lovable curmudgeon". If my youth can't be maintained, let me embrace one of these stereotypical pictures of an older person. Think of the old people that we laud or respect, especially in the entertainment world. Betty White, at the end of her career, became a wacky old lady and built a career off of it. Several years ago at the Academy Awards, a great actor named Jack Palance won an Academy Award, went up there and did one-armed push-ups. I don't know, he was 70 years old or something. Another crazy old guy showing off his youth and vigor. But where is the older person in our society today who's respected for being older and wiser, with more experience of life? It seems like they're few and far between. It's the younger people. We've got very goofy ideas about youth and about aging.

And what the preacher does in these verses, I would argue, is he sets us straight. He's told us in chapter 10, in those Proverbs there, "Don't be foolish, don't be fools", showed us what the wise life is like in verses 1 to 6 of chapter 11. It's the life of faith. And now he moves, I would argue, to showing us the fruit of that life of faith. What does that life of faith look like? Well, simply, enjoying life at whatever age you happen to be. He instructs us here by telling us twice to rejoice. Once in old age, and then again in youth. And he gives instruction about growing older and about how youth itself is fleeting. I want to explore those things this morning and some thoughts about what they might mean for us.

Well, he begins in verse 7 with a short little proverb: "*Light is sweet and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun*". Now, over and over in this book, Ecclesiastes, that phrase "under the sun" has been found to be about the vanity of life. It's pointless, it's futile, it's frustrating. Life under the sun is vanity. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. And as such, we might begin to think the sun has a bad reputation. But we need a helpful reminder. Light is a good thing in Scripture, in God's Word. And so is the source of light, the sun. Light is associated with what is good and what is right. Remember when we were in Ephesians a while ago, we were called upon to walk in the light and to walk as children of light. And so this proverb is a reminder that there are good things in this life under the sun, and that's an echo of these little interjections we've had in this book from time to time, the exhortation to enjoy the good things that we have in this life as good gifts from our Heavenly Father, a good God. And this little proverb sets up what follows.

Again, up to now, we've had this command to enjoy what is good, and we might (because it only happens sporadically in the book), we might think good things only happen sporadically

in life, every now and then. Maybe something good happens, and when it does, boy, we're to be thankful for God. But I think what the preacher is setting us up for in verse 7 is what follows in verse 8 and 9: that all of life has a sweetness to it, and therefore is to be enjoyed. It's a different attitude from what we often hear. Another old saying, "Life is hard, then you die". Very cynical. That's not the Christian attitude. That's not the preacher's attitude. He wants us to have a right, honest, healthy perspective on life, and in doing so, to enjoy, to truly enjoy life.

So he moves in verse 8 to speaking to the older among us, the person who lives many years: "*Let him rejoice*" — let him rejoice in them all, all those years. I don't think it's an accident that he speaks to the older person first. It's a mark of respect, of honor, the proper order of things. But it's also that those who are older, just practically speaking, they've lived longer. They've experienced more of life in this vain, pointless, empty life under the sun. They've seen more of frustration and irritation, of injustice and pain and sorrow. And so older people do, too often, become curmudgeons. And not enough of them are lovable. They're just curmudgeons. They're cynics. They're complainers. They're critics. They're surly. They're sour. They're unpleasant to be around. But the preacher says, "Don't act that way. If you've lived many years, rejoice in them all".

First idea in that verse, then: every year that we are alive is a gift from God and therefore in itself something to be thankful for. Every single year of life is a gift from God. And then he gives a reason for this that might surprise us a little bit: "*Remember that the days of darkness will be many,*" and they will. There's vanity in this life under the sun. What does it mean, "darkness", that he uses here in this verse? Well, he uses it twice before in this book. In chapter 5 verse 17, darkness is calamity, difficulty, troubles that come along. He says, "The person who toils for riches eats darkness in much vexation all his days." Calamity, difficulty, trials. The other way he uses the word "darkness" is back in chapter 6 verse 4, when he talks about how a stillborn child goes right into darkness, death. So when he says here that all the days of darkness will be many, is he talking about calamity? Is he talking about death? And I think probably he's referring to both. Life is full of dark days. There is calamity, there is vexation, there's trouble, there's sorrow, there is pain. We have had these in a frequency, in an abundance.

I can't remember at all, in at least my adult church life, we have had dark days in our church in the last couple, three months. They're real. There is great sorrow. There's no reason to minimize those or ignore them or push them off and just have a stiff upper lip. And we can look around the congregation even this morning and notice who isn't here and what they're going through that's causing them not to be here. The deaths that we know have happened in our circle, in our families, among our friends, among sister churches. Calamity, death, the end of life, the end of our days under the sun. Death is a source of dark days for those who are still alive. We mourn. We are in sorrow, and it's appropriate that we should be.

So the preacher's instruction here should be taken to heart. Those days of darkness are many. There are many days of vexation while we are living. But those days of vexation, those days of darkness, are worse, much worse, for those who do not know Jesus Christ. Their many days of darkness and sorrow are endless eternal days of God's wrath poured out upon them.

Again, we saw in the prior section, that the person who lives a radical life of trust in God, of an extravagant kind of faith that casts that faith out like bread upon the waters, trusting that it will return to him. These are the kinds of people that can enjoy whatever days God has given him or her, whatever darkness, whatever calamity in this life under the sun. And that's the second thing I think implied in this verse.

First, just enjoy every year that you have that God gives. Second, only a person of faith in God, only a person who has faith in God, can truly live in true enjoyment of life in the midst of all the garbage that goes on in this life under the sun. Remember, I believe this book is an Old Testament version of driving us to something better than this life under the sun. The law drives us to Christ. This book drives us to consider that there must be a God in heaven. And as the preacher tells us, "There's a time and purpose for everything under heaven". There's a good God who rules. There's a good God who gives good things. And he grants faith and hope for something better. Only a person of faith in God can truly enjoy this crummy life, this futile vain life under the sun.

Next, in verse 9, the preacher speaks to youth. And he tells youth, "*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth. Let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart.*" Remember verse 7, "*it's pleasant for our eyes to see the sun*". If a youth is going to walk in the sight of his eyes properly, he will be walking in the light of the sun. In other words, this isn't cavalier, do what you want, live the way you want. It's a call upon the youth to walk in enjoyment of the truly good things that God has given in this life under the sun. Not in the dark things. Not walking in darkness, which is a metaphor so frequently in the Bible for sin. Walk in light, not in darkness. Again, life under heaven intrudes into vain life under the sun. So this is not, as some commentators on this passage want to say it is, some sort of a cynical instruction from the preacher to eat, drink, and be merry, because otherwise life just stinks. No, he's saying walk in enjoyment, walk in the light of your eyes, walk in the light of what God has given to you that is good and right and proper. Walk and live a life of thankful enjoyment for the good things that God has given.

And what does God give youth, right? Strength, vigor, energy. All those things that our culture idolizes. But that worship is false because it doesn't understand where that comes from or who gives it. It's God who gives the youth strength, gives them vigor, so that they may fully enjoy and appreciate what God has given to them, so that they may serve him with strength and with vigor. Are you still young? Do you feel young? Don't waste your youth. Again, that old phrase rings true: "Youth is wasted on the young". Don't let your youth be wasted. Don't waste it on frivolous pursuits. Live that faithful life that's described in verses 1 to 6 of this chapter: extravagant, energetic faith that shows our gratitude for what God has done in Christ Jesus.

But he also gives a warning to young people. Be careful, because how you live your life is going to be judged. Literally in the text it says, "*God will bring you into the judgment*". Not just general judgment, "the" judgment. So it's likely a reference to the final judgment at the end of all things. How you live your life now will be judged by God. And that's a contrast to the way too many people think: "Well, let me have fun now, let me sow my wild oats, let me get it out of my system, and then someday I'll settle down and things will be okay." As if the

indiscretions and foolishness of my youth will be overlooked. But here's the thing: God sees, and God does not forget. God does not overlook these things. Wasting your strength, your energy, your vigor on the sinful dark living will be judged by God. And that judgment is not good. A lot of good works later do not outweigh the stupidity of youth. Because God demands perfection. He always demands perfection.

So youth, of course, need the same remedy as those who are older. Old or young, we need Christ Jesus. We need the perfect Savior who obeyed perfectly and who offers that perfect obedience to all who repent from their dark ways of sin and turn to his light in repentance and faith. The One who died to pay the penalty for those dark sins, so that the days of darkness for all eternity can be avoided, and we might live in His light.

And then in verse 10, how do we manage growing older then? The preacher has some practical advice, a couple ideas. First, take care of your heart. Second, take care of your body. *"Remove the vexation from your heart, Put away pain from your body."* Take care of your body. What does it mean to take care of our hearts? What does he mean when he says remove vexation from your heart? Well, why do we get vexed? What is vexation? Well, it comes via things in life that make us angry. Maybe even things that grieve us, make us sad. Maybe just from the general frustrating grind of the repetitive irritation of life under the sun. What he's saying here is, "Don't let that vexation, that frustration, don't let it take up residence in your heart." He's not saying, "Don't let it into your heart. Life is going to be hard." Again, things will make us angry and sad and irritated. What he's saying is. "Don't let it stay in your heart. Don't let vexation be a squatter in your heart." Go in, remove it. Be sad, mourn, sorrow. And in Christ and in faith, move on.

And we might say, "Great. Great, preacher. How am I supposed to do that?" Well, I think from what he's been telling us. This book is like a sermon in some ways. Again, in recent sections, chapter 10 (you may want to reread chapter 10): how not to be a fool. That's practical advice. verses 1-6 of chapter 11. Be wise. Live a profligate, extravagant life of faith. But as he said over and over in this book (and you might even want to reread Ecclesiastes up to this point): do be thankful and do enjoy whatever good things that God has given you in this life under the sun. You ever know someone? Maybe you know someone right now who's just constantly vexed about life? Maybe you are that person. Hopefully you're not. These are people who focus on the wrong things. Focused on the vanity of life instead of the gifts of God. Especially again, we cannot ignore God's greatest gift. the greatest distraction from the cares of this world, who is his very own Son, Jesus Christ. You can't fix a vexed heart with feel-good, be-happy attitudes and approaches to life. You can't fix the vexation of your heart from ministers or teachers or lecturers who are nothing more than life coaches, whose only message is, "Well, believe in yourself. You can do it." How can we focus on Christ, contemplate him and his person and his work? How can we meditate on who he is and what he's done if we're constantly vexed, thinking about things that irritate us? Something has taken up residence in your heart, in your mind. And it's in danger of driving out Christ Jesus. May that never happen.

So how do we do this? How do we remove vexation from our heart? Look to Christ. Contemplate him, his person, his work. Think about, meditate upon who he is and what he's done for you and your salvation. How can you do that and remain vexed? I challenge you. I

might even triple dog dare you. See if you can focus on Christ and stay irritated. Can't be done. The old hymn says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face." I think the hymn is right: "The things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." And what light is sweeter? What light eclipses even the light of the sun? It's the light of Christ. the light of the good news of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, not by works, not by striving, effort, sweat, tears, endless chasing after vanity of vanities. Let that light shine in your life. Remember Christ, study him, read his Word, worship him, pray to him, spend time with his other children. You cannot stay vexed. You can't. Take care of your heart.

Also take care of your body. Our bodies are important. Paul writes to the Corinthians in his first letter, chapter 6 verses 19 and 20. Very practical advice. Don't have sex with prostitutes. Why? Because your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are not your own. Your body, you and your body, have been bought with a price. Therefore, he says, glorify God in your body. Preacher puts it this way, "*Put pain away from your body*". Take care of it. Here's the preacher as doctor. It's simple: eat well, exercise, take medication that you need. The Christian life is not a life of extreme excessive denial or asceticism. Neither is it a life of excessive indulgence. Both are harmful to the body that is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Rather take care of that body. Why? So that we may live long and enjoy all the days that God has given to us. First aid isn't possible if we don't take care of our bodies. We can't live many years and rejoice in them all if we don't take care of who we are. But also that we're fit and able to serve God and to serve our neighbors. The preacher's not saying you're going to be young forever. He's not saying you need to have the body of a 20-year-old, whatever age you happen to be, but have that strength, have that vigor that's appropriate for your age.

Youth is vanity. Youth is vanity. All the days of the dawn of life, "*youth and the dawn of life are vanity*," he says. Youth is wasted on the young. And I think "vanity" here has that primary meaning of being a vapor, something that vanishes, something that doesn't last. Youth does not last. It can't. We get older, that's the way of things. Youth ends. You can't preserve it or imitate it with surgeries and treatments and goofy things that we do. Preacher has simple instruction: just take care of your body that you may serve God and others.

Two mentions of vanity here in this passage: the one about youth, but also days of darkness that come that are vanity. Calamity, death. Death brings eternal darkness, and that eternal darkness is the vanity of vanities. Preacher's calling us to something different, to an alternative. It's again an extension of that argument that he's been making since chapter 10. Don't be a fool. Be wise, live a life of extravagant faith, and so enjoy the life that God has given to you. All of it. That's basically what he's been saying since the beginning of chapter 10. A wise man puts his faith in God, and therefore lives with gratitude, thanksgiving for God's good gifts. Especially, again, that gift of salvation in Christ Jesus the Son.

What the preacher's doing here again, I think, is just a general way of anticipating the teaching that's going to come in the New Testament. True faith (we talk about this all the time), true faith results in right living. Right thinking results in right living. True faith results in thankful, grateful living. True faith in true faith We can avoid days of darkness that will last for all of eternity. And we know that that true faith is the faith that is in Christ Jesus and no one or nothing else. The one who offered himself as a ransom for many. We know that all who

believe in him will live in his light for all eternity. In fact, it gives us this picture. There will be no need of the sun because he himself will be our light. What does verse seven say? *"Light is sweet and it is pleasant."* What light is sweeter? What light is more pleasant than the eternal light of God for all time in the new heavens and the new earth? So he comes to a conclusion we've seen already in this book. He reinforces it here again. Have you received good gifts from God? Then be thankful. Be wise. Have faith. Enjoy the life that God has given to you. And if you haven't experienced this, if you want to receive and to know these good gifts, then you must come to God in Christ Jesus. And you must do it now. And my friend, you will rejoice. Hey, triple dog, dare you?

Let me pray.

Father, we thank you for your love, your mercy, your grace to us in Christ Jesus. We do ask, O Lord, that you would remove vexation from our hearts, that we might turn all of our attention to you, to see the beauty of you and what you've done for us, to see the glories of your majesty reflected in the beauty, the wonder of your creation, to see your image in the face of every person that we meet, and to have the hope of eternal light in Christ Jesus, our Savior. We thank you for your good gifts. We thank you for the good gift of Jesus. And we offer up this prayer to you in his precious and wonderful name. Amen.

www.HopePresChurch.org