

**AGING, DEATH & THE DUTY OF HUMANITY**  
**Tragic Hope Series - Part 7**  
**Brad Milks**

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

*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.*

*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.*

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

*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days comes and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them;” before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut -- when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low -- they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets -- before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.*

*Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.*

*The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*

Well, we have come to the end of the journey of Ecclesiastes. We have spent the last two months or so diving into the book, and if you have read it and thought it was clear then yes, it was pretty clear, right? That whole passage makes sense.

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Well, what we are going to discover today is a lot of this passage is poetry. What the Preacher was getting at was deeper than what he wrote because of the way he used poetry. My wife and I were talking about this passage over the last couple of weeks, and as we are going to discover this morning, it is about aging, this experience of aging, and the process of death. And as a thirty-four year old I have very limited experience with that process.

And so my wife and I were talking about that, and she is like, ‘*So how are you going to talk about your experience?*’ And I said, ‘*What experience do I have as a thirty-four year old?*’ But here is what I am confident in, the Word of God is true and the Word of God speaks powerfully to every life situation. And so as a thirty-four year old I don’t have a slew of experience with aging and death, but I know that the Bible speaks to us through the power of His Holy Spirit in regards to that. So we are all in a journey on the aging process, and the Word is going to speak through the power of His Spirit to help us in light of this, and to show us His goodness. But before we jump into that, let’s pray.

*Lord Jesus you are good, you are holy, and you are righteous. We thank you for giving us your holiness for those that are followers of you who have been adopted by a good Father and that you indwell us with your Spirit. We pray this in your name. Amen.*

So as we go through this passage, like I said before, there is a lot of poetry. There are a lot of things that he writes that seem to be something on the surface, but then when you dive into it is deeper and different. Today the main point, if you will, is aging and death is inevitable, but life can be enjoyed as a result of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Aging and death are inevitable, but life can be enjoyed as a result of the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

In Chapter 11 and verses 7 through 10 we are going to look at enjoying life in general. Chapter 12 and verses 1 through 7 is poetry on the aging process. Verse 8 in Chapter 12 is the Preacher’s summary, saying everything is vanity. And then verses 9 through 14 there is an editor who adds two conclusions after the Preacher. So we are going to go through this with the mind-set of knowing that aging and death are inevitable, but life can be enjoyed as a result of the person and works of the Lord Jesus.

When Charles Spurgeon started his ministry in London, he was a young man of twenty years old. And as a twenty year old he had certain things he had to deal with. As he matured and grew up someone asked him, “*Charles, what do you think about starting a ministry as a twenty year old?*” And his response was full of wisdom. “*Every life has its own challenges. Every life and every age stage has its own challenges. But youth has peculiar snares. Then you want to look at Jesus as a twelve year old and He is in the temple asking questions and giving answers to the religious leaders, and everyone is*

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turning their heads because of the wisdom that he had. But guess what? As a twelve year old boy he gets to go home and be obedient to mom and dad.” Spurgeon continued: “So youth has its peculiar snares that other ages don’t have.” And we are going to see some of that this morning.

Starting in verse 7 of Chapter 11 it says: **“Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. 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.”** And again remember we are dealing with poetry. He is not saying to go outside and get some Vitamin D; that is not his point. What he is saying is that life is sweet and should be enjoyed, but the days of aging are many. And the word here for ‘sweet’ is also an illustration to honey. Life is sweet; it should be savored like honey is savored, but know that the days of aging are many. That is what he is talking about; remember that the days of darkness will be many.

So in your youth, remember it should be enjoyed. It should be savored, but the days of aging will be many. And then he says that all that comes is vanity. He is not saying that everything in life is vanity that it is meaningless, it is futile, but life is an enigma, it is strange, it is weird. There are certain things we can’t understand.

Then it drops down into verses 9 and 10. And in those verses we are going to see that he gives five commands, but the first command is the primary one and then the other four commands show us how to obey that first command. We have four kids so when I sit down with one of them and say, ‘Hey, I need you to listen and obey. Go upstairs to your bedroom and pick up your bedroom.’ So the primary command is what? It is to listen and obey. And the three ways I want them to be obedient to that is - going upstairs, going to their bedroom, and picking things up.

And that is what is happening here. He has a primary command and the other four commands show the young man how to fulfil that. The primary command is: **“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.”** So his primary command is to rejoice in your youth, rejoice in your youth. And what he means here by **“let your heart cheer you”** is not to use a modern day vernacular ‘to follow your heart.’ That is not what he is saying. You can also translate that as ‘let your mind cheer you.’ What he is saying is do things in life that satisfy the mind and then all other areas of your life. So he is not saying to follow the desires within, but do things that satisfy the mind.

So here is your second command. The first way to fulfil rejoice in your youth is to **“walk in the ways of your heart, or mind, and the sight of your eyes.”** By the sight of your eyes he is saying to carefully observe the world around you, and then make

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decisions with your mind to guide your life. So again, it is not follow your heart or to make decisions on a whim, but to observe what is going on and then carefully make decisions for your life using your mind.

He goes on to say: “***But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.***” So he is saying that as you make your decisions, as you carefully observe, know that there will be judgment. And that is not a bad thing. He is saying though that God will judge the hearts, the motives, the actions and the deeds. So as you live your life do it in such a way with that in mind, so that you can rejoice in your youth.

He goes on to say, “***Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body.***” And those are the second command. Remove vexation, or emotional pain, as well as physical pain from your body. So he is saying we need to remove the things that cause us emotional turmoil, and also pain in the body. Again, why? It is so that this young man can rejoice in his youth.

Some of you might be like me where it is easy to go into anxiety and it is easy to stay within that anxiety, and the next thing you know it is like an hour later, and you don't know how it happened. And so reading this was convicting. It was convicting because the Holy Spirit was saying there were certain areas in my life that I was not willing to remove, such as emotional pain that caused me anxiety because I thought I was better at it. So whether it is emotional anxiety, or physical anxiety, he is telling the young man to remove it because if he doesn't he is not going to be able to rejoice in his youth.

And then he ends it this way: “***For youth and the dawn of life are vanity.***” He is not saying that being young and starting life is meaningless; it is not pointless. There was a famous song that I am sure many of you can sing much better than I can. ‘*I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger.*’ As we mature, and as we grow old, there are certain things that we know now that we can look back in life and go, ‘*I really wish I knew this when I was this old.*’ He is not saying that life is meaningless, but he is saying that just as life is starting, there is much mystery. There is much mystery to life as a youth looking forward because life happens. So though you may think you have it planned out, young man, know that it is still a mystery. It is not meaningless, not purposeless, but know that there is much mystery in life.

We jump into Chapter 12 and it is a wonderful poem that reveals some general rules about aging and the death process. He starts out with this: “***Remember also your Creator.***” There are certain moments in life that I look back and remember. I remember as a child going down a slide, hitting the ground, and feeling a whole bunch of pain in my elbow, only to discover there was glass on the ground. So I get up and run over to my

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mom and dad. They look at it, and then carefully pull the glass out. And I have a scar there to this day, so it is not a fun memory.

But I have other wonderful memories. I remember the first time I met Kristin. I remember looking at her and saying, *'I am going to marry her.'* I remember the day we got married. I remember the birth of all four of our kids. I remember all those moments. But this is not what the Preacher is saying here. He is not saying remember as a memory. The word here for remember means 'to honor, to obey God and to submit to Him as Lord.' So he is saying, *'Young man, remember also your creator. Be obedient. Submit to Him as Lord. He is now owner of your life.'*

And I love how he uses the word 'creator.' Genesis Chapter 1 reveals that in the beginning God created all things in heaven and earth. And as we travel through Scripture we see some of the things we get to realize about creation. John Chapter 1 and verses 1 through 3 reveals that God the Father created all things through Jesus. Colossians Chapter 1 also picks up on this as Paul writes that Jesus created all things whether visible or invisible. So as we travel through Scripture we begin to see in the New Testament that it was Jesus, the Son of God, who created things to the power and the authority of God the Father.

So what he is saying here is that we need to remember God as creator, and submit to Him in the days of our youth. And then here we go into the poetry. Why? Before the aging process starts we are to remember Him as that and to live that out. There is an old tale of a young man who met the grim reaper. And as he met him he said, *'You know what, when you come for me I will gladly go with you, but sent messengers to warn me.'* Weeks go by, months go by, years go by, decades go by, and nothing. Then one day as the old man is sitting in front of the fireplace on the coldest, darkest wintery night, death enters the room, taps him on the shoulder, and says, *'It is time to go.'* The old man jumps up incredulously and says, *'We had an agreement. You said you would send someone, and you have sent no one.'*

Death responds calmly. *'Let's go over to the mirror.'* The old man complied and he walks over to the mirror and sees himself. Right up to the old man's ear Death begins to speak. *'Notice that black hair that you used to have has now become white. Notice that I am standing right next to you talking in your ear because your ears have faded and you are no longer able to hear clearly. And notice that you are squinting when looking into the mirror because your eyesight has gone. I have sent you many, many messages and I am sorry that the time has come, but we must leave.'* Remember your Creator before the days of aging come because as we will see we do not know if we will have that moment to honor, obey and submit to God as Lord.

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Let's continue in verse 1 of Chapter 12. "*Before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them;" before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain.*" He is using this language here to invoke dread and fear of impending doom, or death. And so just as this young man is going to age, the days of hardship are going to be greater than the days of pleasure. Just like the rain storms happen. And then what does he write? "*The clouds return after the rain.*" The days of aging are going to come.

Verse 3 says: "*In the day when the keepers of the house tremble.*" This young man who was once courageous has now become fearful. "*And the strong men are bent.*" The strong men have now become weak and bent over. "*And the grinders cease because they are few.*" Those that used to work hard are no longer able to work and there are just a few left who are capable of working.

"*And those who look through the windows are dimmed.*" Their eyesight has diminished. "*And the doors on the street are shut.*" The doors have closed just like hearing of the ears. "*When the sound of the grinding is low.*" The grinding is teeth, and pictures when your teeth begin to fall out. "*And one rises up at the sound of a bird.*" This young man who was once able to sleep peacefully through the night now is awakened by every noise, including the birds who sing in the morning, and sleep is fleeting.

"*And all the daughters of song are brought low.*" He used to rejoice and sing with the daughters in their songs, but now his voice is gone. It is no longer strong and he can no longer sing. "*They are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way.*" Once again they used to be courageous but they are now fearful. "*The almond tree blossoms.*" When the almond tree blossoms it is pink and then it become white, just like the hair of this old man.

"*The grasshopper drags itself along.*" Have you ever tried to catch a grasshopper? It is difficult. We have kids and we try to do this, and it is very difficult. So that once agile grasshopper has now slowed down. "*And desire fails.*" A literal translation of the Caperberry referred to in this verse says that in ancient literature that the Caperberry was used as a stimulate to bring about appetite. And so, not even the Caperberry is able to bring this man to eat because he is never hungry. "*Because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.*" Man will die and his family and friends will mourn.

So as we read this it looks bleak. We must remember that aging and death are inevitable, but life can be enjoyed as a result of the person and works of the Lord Jesus. He continues, "*Before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken, or the*

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*pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.” All these things break abruptly just as death happens. Death happens abruptly, and he uses this imagery to make that point. “**And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.**” This is imagery that points us all the way back to Genesis Chapters 2 and 3, where man was made out of dust and the Spirit of God breathed life into him. And then after the Fall we see God saying to Adam and Eve, “**You were formed out of dust and to dust you shall return.**”*

And so in light of all of this, we know this is going to happen. And we see throughout the course of history people wrestling and struggling with the aging and the death process. We have been told stories for thousands of years of a fountain of youth, of people desiring to go find the fountain of youth so that they will never have to worry about aging. They will never have to worry about death. Ponce de Leon when he came to America sought to find this, but he never did.

And as people fret and worry over the aging and death process there is one thing that we can stand on - and that is not something that we worry about biblically. Jesus in John Chapter 14 says, “***In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may also be.***” So Jesus reveals to His disciples that there is something beyond this physical life. There is something greater than what we experience in our sixty - seventy - eighty - or ninety years here on earth. There is something greater, and Jesus says He will come back to get us.

Paul realized this, and I love how he writes this out in Philippians Chapter 1. He is in prison which is not a great place to be and he writes the church of Philippi and says: ‘*You know what? I am torn because I want to be with Jesus, but I also want to be with you. My heart’s desire is to be with Jesus.*’ Paul knew that there was life beyond what we experience here on earth, and he wanted to experience the greater glory and the great hope of being with His Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And then the Preacher wraps it up by this: “***Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.***” And that is how the book of Ecclesiastes starts out in Chapter 1 and verse 2. “***Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.***” He is not saying that life is futile and meaningless. He is not saying that at all. What he is saying is that life defies our understanding. Just when we think we have life figured out we grasp it like smoke and it disappears.

We have four kids and as they were growing up to be one and two years old, every time we thought we figured out their schedules, guess what happened? Teething

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happened, or a growing milestone happened, which totally threw off the schedule that we had spent months to figure out. And then we had to start all over again in trying to figure out what that new schedule would be. And likewise the Preacher says, life is like that. Just as you grab it, it is like smoke and it disappears. So he is not saying that life is meaningless. And we know that because of Jesus there is hope in life, and as He says here, if we live within His boundaries, God's good boundaries, we can enjoy the life we have been given by God.

We move into the rest of Chapter 12 where now the narrator behind the scenes provides two conclusions for us. He states something about the Preacher's wisdom and his character and he was wise. If you have ever read through Ecclesiastes you might be thinking, '*That dude is one cranky old man. He has lived life. He has been scorned and he is angry.*' But that is not true. He was a wise man who sought and taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying, and arranging many proverbs with great care.

So when we read Ecclesiastes don't just think he was a cranky old man who threw all his thoughts on the ground and he feels better about himself now. No, he would get proverbs of the day and he would weigh two things - is it truthful and is it worthy? And if it is truthful and worthy we will teach it to the congregation. That is what he did in Ecclesiastes. He weighed everything carefully, and then he arranged it carefully. And he also sought to find words of delight, and he wrote the words of truth.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, said, "*To me the book of Ecclesiastes is a book of comfort.*" I don't know if we would all agree upon that at this point, but when you look at how carefully he put everything together, he did it in such a way that when he was finished he was proud, because of the moral truths that he had written. And aesthetically the poetry fit together. He did that with words of truth. If you noticed this about the Preacher you see that he doesn't pull punches. Chapter 12 proves that. Here are the general rules of aging, hearing loss, white hair, appetite lessening, he just throws it out as the reality of aging. And he does it because it is the truth. He did it because he wanted to bring knowledge to the congregation.

In verses 11 we see one more concluding statement as he says this: "***The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.***" A goad was a sharp stick that they would poke sheep with to make sure that they would get on the right path. Sometimes they would put nails on the ends of the stick which would cause minor pain to the sheep, but it was so that they would go down the right path. That is what the words of the wise are like.

Have you ever had a good friend give you words of wisdom that you didn't want to hear? It feels like sharp nails on your soul. You are hurt, you are offended, but you

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realize what they said was full of wisdom. And though it hurt for a moment, it pointed you in a direction that God needed you to go. And God used those words of wisdom through that person. It may cause minor pain for the moment but it causes us to go in the right direction.

Then he gives two warnings: ***“My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”*** So he is warning the young man, that if he desires to pursue wisdom like the Preacher has, know that it is going to be exhausting. Know that it is going to be hard, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. Wisdom earned is hard to understand. It is not always through the academic world but through the school of hard knocks that we can learn. That is where wisdom is learned. We learn it through the words and we learn it through life's experiences submitted to the words. And he is telling us that if this is our desire, if we want to become a sage full of wisdom like the Preacher, it will be hard, but it is worth it.

***“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”*** He writes, *‘Listen, we have heard everything from the Preacher, but here is the bottom line. Here are two commands that we need to understand. Fear God, honor Him and obey Him, and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man.’* What he is saying is we need to submit to God as Lord, and this is what everyone should do because God is Creator.

Why do we do this? ***“For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*** He is saying we need to honor God, obey Him, fear Him, and to submit to Him because there will be a judgment. One of the things we learn in the New Testament is found in John Chapter 5 where Jesus says: ***“For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.”*** We know that Jesus, the Son, is the one who judges. ***“That all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my Word and believes Him who has sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but is passed from death to life.”***

So we see here that Jesus is the judge. He is the judge. And we also know that those who believe in Him have eternal life. Yes, God is the judge and He is a good judge, but we also see that the judgment has been taken upon Jesus on the cross. So the question that we wrestle with now as we end these verses is this - how then should we live? How then should we live in light of these verses? There is a graphic coming on screen that walks us through how we should live, but here it is in a nutshell. We should submit to God as Lord and Creator. Fear Him and obey His commandments before and during aging.

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And notice that these are all things that the Preacher has gone through in the book of Ecclesiastes. He has dealt with wisdom, he has dealt with labor. We see aging and death today. He deals with pleasure, possessions, justice and accomplishments, but these things hinge upon the center which is a heart submitted to God as Lord and Creator, to fear Him and to obey His commands. And that is how this passage wraps up.

So if we go back to our main point, we know that aging and death are inevitable. The Preacher makes that very clear. He says that these things are going to happen to us as we age, and then death will come abruptly. Mourners will go about the streets and mourn for us. But praise Jesus we can enjoy life as a result of the person and works of the Lord Jesus. Some of you today may be thinking as we have gone through Ecclesiastes that it presents like I said, a brutally honest picture of reality, that there is incredible brokenness in the world. We deal with aging and we deal with death. We deal with all of those difficult things, but that is not how God intended it to be. That was never His intention.

We can look back and know that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and He created humanity within that, and everything was perfect. Humans and God and all creation had a perfect relationship. But Adam and Eve rebelled and sinned against God sending the world into chaos and brokenness as a result of their sin. And there are ways, and we see this in Scripture, that we as people, and as our forefathers have done, tried to make our way back to God on our own. We have tried to do that through careers, through church activities, through relationships, through substances, whatever we can do to try to make our way back to God.

But it never works. We never get back to God in light of those things. But here is what we know. We know that God in His goodness sent Jesus to earth, that He lived a perfect life, and He went to the cross where He died for the sins of humanity. And on the third day He rose again physically proving that He had power and was victorious over sin and death. And then we see in the New Testament, as the gospels continue to be revealed, that if we repent from our sin, if we turn from our ways, and make Jesus the king, that we can be made a new creation and have that relationship with God that He originally intended for us to have. And in that moment God Himself takes the weight of the sin and the wrath that He has poured out upon us because of sin, in the person and in the work of Jesus.

So we want to remember the Preacher's words, to remember also our Creator in the days of our youth. We are all at different places in the aging process, but life can be enjoyed as a result of the person and the works of the Lord Jesus.

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*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*