

“The Conclusion of the Matter” (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 8–14)(3.26.23)

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (NIV84)

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”—

Ecclesiastes 12:8–14 (NIV84)

⁸ “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.

“Everything is meaningless!”

⁹ Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd. ¹² Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

¹³ Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,

for this is the whole duty of man.

¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“The Conclusion of the Matter”**

INTRODUCTION:

You may know that this week Showtime was free on cable TV. I was looking for a movie to watch, which is very challenging nowadays – though there are thousands to choose from via many streaming services.

There was a one name “Grace and Grit” that caught my eye. Here is the description: Illness and unexpected challenges threaten to tear apart the relationship between philosopher Ken Wilber and the woman he loves. That woman was named Treya and it is a real-life story.

Ken and Treya fall in love in Southern California and get married several months later. Ten days later they find out that she has cancer and they spend their honeymoon in the hospital. This happened in the 1980’s. They spend several years trying every type of treatment they can find, but to no avail. After Treya dies, Ken wrote the book *Grace and Grit*, which the movie is based upon.

Because of the word “grace” and the movie description, I thought this might be about their faith journey, ending in a relationship with God. I was wrong. There was no mention of God, heaven, hell, or judgment. Instead, there was New Age mysticism that was Ken Wilber’s hallmark. There was language like “finding each other over a hundred lifetimes.” I imagine that is a reference to reincarnation, but I am not sure.

At the end of the movie there is an actual clip of Treya addressing an audience who were attending a concert. She was sharing her story. And here is the one sentence that motivated me to share this with you: “Because I could no longer ignore death, I pay more attention to life.”

BODY:

That sentence resonates with the message of Qoheleth, the Preacher and teacher of Ecclesiastes. In these twelve weeks we have been studying Ecclesiastes, over and over again, he established that death is the great equalizer. It is the fate no one escapes. The rich and the poor all die. The wise man and the fool both die. The righteous and the wicked both die.

Yesterday, I was walking the church property picking up trash, and there was quite a bit. Our graveyard has gravestones that are 200 years old. Many are broken. Many are so weather worn that the names and dates and messages are unreadable. That is all that is left...under the sun; under heaven, as Qoheleth would say.

At first there was a gravedigger working at the same time. A tent had been erected over the gravesite. Wimberg Funeral Home arrived to prepare for the burial. Then family and friends of the deceased started arriving, dressed in dark clothing. As they began to gather together, black umbrellas sprang up as it started to rain. Yes my friends, death is an everyday occurrence.

Without God, what does Qoheleth conclude about life? It is meaningless, vanity, vanity of vanities. It is a vapor, a mist, smoke that blows away and disappears. You try to grasp at it and it slips through your hands. There is nothing of which you can take hold.

With God, everything changes. When you realize that your daily eating and drinking are gifts from God, you gratefully find joy in the simple things of life. Your labor and your toil can then also be satisfying. It is God that enables you to find "gladness of heart."

Ecclesiastes 9:9–10 (NIV84)

⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun— all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

The twelfth and final chapter continues in the same vein. The best way to live your life is to start young remembering your Creator. I have cited the statistics to you on previous occasions. After the age of 18, the

likelihood of a person coming to a saving faith in Jesus drops precipitously. It does happen, but not often. People become fixed in their thinking and their living. The trials and tribulations of this world weigh them down. They become immune to the prodding of the Holy Spirit.

The voice changes in verse nine. No longer is Qoheleth speaking, but the author. The teachings of Qoheleth are being praised and recommended to us. The wise proverbs and truths are goads. A goad is a sharp pointed stick that keeps an animal on the desired path. If you are on the receiving end of a goad, it gets your attention. When you start to stray off the narrow road, there will be pain from the point of the Shepherd's goad. Yes, the Good Shepherd guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Notice in the eleventh verse that Shepherd is capitalized. The early readers of Ecclesiastes would have immediately recognized this reference as pointing to God.

Psalm 80:1 (NIV84)

¹ Hear us, **O Shepherd** of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock;
you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth

Ezekiel 34:23–24 (NIV84)

²³ I will place over them **one shepherd**, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their **shepherd**. ²⁴ I the Lord will be their God, and my

servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.

Ezekiel 37:24–25 (NIV84)

²⁴ “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have **one shepherd**. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. ²⁵ They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.

Then Jesus, who came from the line of David, lays claim to the title of Good Shepherd in John 10:11–16 (NIV84)

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and **one shepherd**.”

At the close of the book of Hebrews 13:20 (NIV84) we are reminded, “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the

dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep..." The rod and the staff of the Good Shepherd comfort us. That is why I chose our opening hymn, so we could sing the beloved Psalm 23 – The Lord is my Shepherd.

Next, the author, King Solomon, David's son, says, "Now all has been heard." After eleven chapters of Qoheleth sharing this investigation into the meaning of life, we are given the final conclusion. Qoheleth held up life like a diamond being held up to the light of the sun. He turned it slowly examining every facet. Then he repeats for the fourth time, "Fear God and keep his commandments."

We have looked at the fear of God on several previous occasions. Today, we will consider it from a little different perspective. We are given a few examples in scripture of when a person comes into the presence of Almighty God. This is the Apostle John in Revelation 1:12–18 (NIV84)

¹² I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be

afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

For the sake of time, I won't give you the whole account of the Prophet Daniel's encounter with God, just portions:

Daniel 10:5–17 (NIV84)

⁵ I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. ⁶ His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

⁷ I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. ⁹ Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

¹⁰ A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹⁵ While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless...“I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. ¹⁷ How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.”

The complementary response to fearing God is obedience, keeping his commandments. It seems obvious

that those that do not keep God's commandments do not believe in the wrath of God. They do not think that there will be judgment for every deed, including every hidden thing. Even those things done in the dark.

Now, I argue that love is part and parcel in the fear of God. In John 14:15 (NIV84) Jesus says, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." Notice the parallel structure with fear God and keep his commandments. John 15:9-10 (NIV84)

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you **obey my commands**, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. John 15:13-14 (NIV84) ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you **do what I command**.

The Apostle John confirms in his first letter, 1 John 5:3 (NIV84) This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

Yes, this is our duty. It is a blessing of a duty. Solomon tells us it is our whole duty. A couple of commentators noted that the original Hebrew does not contain the word duty, which most English translations have added. They argue it should read, "...fearing God and keeping his commandments "is the **whole** of everyone." It's not just our duty, it's our *essence*."

And there is judgment, make no mistake about it. Have you ever wondered how people get struck by a train? Deaths and injuries related to train crashes continue to

happen every single day at grade crossings. In fact, the number of drivers going around lowered gates has spiked in recent years. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration crash data tells us:

- Between 2014 and 2018, 1,538 drivers went around a lowered gate and were struck by a train, accounting for 14% of all collisions; 798 people died attempting to cross tracks during that time period
- In 2018 alone, 99 people (a 10-year high) were killed because a driver went around a lowered gate

The danger seems obvious. There are clear warning signs posted. And yet, there is something within people that compels them. Scripture too gives us clear warning:

Revelation 20:11–15 (NIV84) *The Dead Are Judged*

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

But, there is NO condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus. John 5:24 (NIV84) Jesus promises,

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

CONCLUSION:

Throughout Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth wrestles with the vagaries of life. He asks the questions that nearly everyone asks. Why do bad things happen to good people? What do the wicked prosper? If God is love, why do people suffer?

He does conclude that blessings and adversities both come from God. God is sovereign. We are not. Who knows the explanation of things? Even the greatest minds of humankind cannot fathom God in all His fullness. The future cannot be known.

There is a great lyric in the song “Miracle Power” sung by the group, We The Kingdom: “I may not know what a day may bring , but I know who brings the day.” Do you? Do you know who brings the day?

Genesis 1:3–5 (NIV84)

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. {pause}

Remember your Creator. Amen and amen. Let us pray.