

“Mind Your Maker” (Ecclesiastes: The Meaning of Everything – Pt. 4)
(Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, 13-14)

- **Ancient Ruins**

- We made it to the end of June—and the end of *Ecclesiastes*. I don't know about you, but I have thoroughly enjoyed learning about this Old Testament book of wisdom! Yes, the teachings are *challenging*, but the perspective is *life-changing*. Let's begin with prayer...
- To get us ready for the conclusion of *Ecclesiastes: The Meaning of Everything*, I want to show you some pictures—which you will find really cool if you're a *National Geographic* kind-of-person (*and why would you not be?!*). Here are some of the largest *ancient ruins* in the world today: Angkor Wat (**Pics 1 & 2**) of Cambodia takes the gold, spanning over 400 acres. Built as a Hindu Temple in the Khmer dynasty in the 1100's, nearly 1 million people lived in the city around it, but it was mostly abandoned by the 1500's and the jungle started to swallow it up. Here in our hemisphere, you've got *El Mirador* an ancient Mayan city deep in the jungles of Guatemala (**Pics 3 & 4**). Home to one the largest pyramids in the world, this city once hosted up to 200,000 residents and the world's first stone “superhighway” system. People lived here for over a thousand years, starting around 1000 BC. Now, only a small part of the city is excavated, most of it is overgrown with dense jungle. And one more, just to hit the classic Greco-Roman stuff of your European dream vacations, the city of *Paestum, Italy* (**Pics 5 & 6**). *Look at those columns—I can hear my high school Humanities teacher now!* Founded in 600 BC, it has some of the best-preserved Greek temples. This thriving coastal city sat in ruin for almost 1,000 years before being rediscovered during road construction in the 1700's. You can spend *hours* cruising Google or paging through your dad's Nat Geo magazine collection: ancient ruins are all over the world. They are beautiful, fascinating, impressive, and 100% consistent reminders of the fact that no matter how high we rise—*what goes up must come down, what begins eventually ends*.

- **One Last Reality Check**

- The reason I share these images with you is that this is the same image Ecclesiastes points us to at the end. With a poetic flourish fitting for a grand conclusion, Ecclesiastes, or *Qohelet* in Hebrew, draws our attention to a city in decline, headed to ruin. Only most biblical scholars agree, he's not just talking about a city—he's talking about *your life, and mine, and life in general*. Using the allegory of a fading fortress, he describes the fading strength of an aging body: arms and legs trembling, back stooping, teeth falling out, vision and hearing fading, hair turning white, desires and passions growing cold. Listen to the end in Ecc. 12 and see if you can picture it: ***“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’—before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; 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; 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. 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. ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless!’” (Ecc. 12:1-8)*** If you remember week 1, he ends where he began: *meaningless*. Then we get these final words: ***“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. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (12:13-14)***
- Now that everything has been said and he's explored all facets of “life under the sun,” Ecclesiastes has one last reality check for us: no matter how strong and

vibrant someone looks today, no matter how vast and impressive a civilization seems right now, *it's all headed to the same place*. No matter how invincible this moment seems, one day, it's all going to make it into the ancient history section of the Nat Geo magazine. If the Lord tarries, and this earth remains another couple hundred years, or a thousand years, or couple millennia—one day, this (**Pic 7-Freedom Tower**) is going to look like this (**Pic 8-Ancient Ruins**). One day, this, (**Pic 9-Mt. Rushmore**) is going to look like this (**Pic 10-Ancient Pyramids**). One day, this (*gesturing to self*) is going to look like... well, *let's not go there but you get the picture!* You and I call it, “*getting old*.” Scientists call it, “*the law of entropy*.” Biblical theology calls it, “*the law of sin and death*.” Gen. 3:19 says, “*From dust you were made and to dust you shall return.*”

- **The Conclusion of the Matter**

- Ecclesiastes looks at everything and he reminds us one last time, *all of this is a vapor*. The Voice translation says, “***Life is fleeing; it just slips through your fingers. All vanishes like mist.***” (12:8 VOICE) We’ve heard this already throughout the series—as you read the book, after 12 chapters it’s like, *Enough already, Old Man, we get it, we’re all gonna die, just let me enjoy my ice cream!* But with this perspective, he reaches this all-important conclusion. Because this is how things are in this fallen world, because *all of this* is where *all of us* are headed, here is the point: “***Remember your creator in the days of your youth...***” (12:1) *Before that slow-fade, before that castle becomes a ruin, before that fortress becomes a forest, mind your maker!* “***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.***” (12:6-7)
- *Everything under the sun is vanity, smoke and mist, here and gone, therefore, the meaning of everything is this—the last 2 verses:* “***Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.***” (12:13-14) The Message simplifies it to: “***Fear God. Do what he tells you.***” Or the Voice, “***Worship in reverence the One true God, and keep his commands.***”

- *Remember your Creator. Don't live as if He's not your Maker and you're not His creature. Don't pretend you're god. Remember Him, reverence Him, do what He says.* This is the meaning of everything. And this is *covenantal language*—when God made Covenant with Abraham, and his Family, and the Israelites out of Egypt, the Old Testament repeatedly uses this language of *Remember*: it speaks of God remembering His covenant and fulfilling His promises; it speaks of the people being called to *remember* their covenant with God; it speaks of God *remembering* their moments of faithfulness as well as their moments of rebellion.
- It's like this ring I got on my wedding day: I look down and I remember that I stood before a crowd of witnesses, before God, and in one moment my life changed forever; I remember I made vows to be faithful to one person, exclusively, until I breathe my last breath. Not just to be faithful, but to care and love in a particular way, through good times and bad. *Remember.* And what's the universal symbol of infidelity? That ring gets *forgotten*, it comes off, gets left behind on the night stand or hidden in the drawer.
- **The Only Opinion That Matters**
 - On the whole, the human race doesn't have a great track record of faithfulness, in relationships with each other or with God: we forget, life gets complicated, mistakes get made. But still Ecclesiastes says, *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* This is the voice of wisdom. Don't wait till the end when there's no way out, when everything is falling apart, when darkness descends—*remember your Creator NOW, while the sun is still shining.* This is where you find meaning, this is wisdom, this is the secret to the good life. Because in the end, there is One Judge we must all face, for every deed, for every hidden thing. *One opinion that matters.*
 - We live in a highly digitized, highly visible, highly public, scrutinized, self-conscious world. We live remembering the opinions of the world, weighing the costs of every decision, every step of allegiance we take for or against the current spirit of the age—we remember that constantly, but do we *forget* the One Opinion that really matters? In the end, it's not the opinion of the crowds, the fans, the public, the friends, even the family that counts—*it's only what the Judge says.*

- We don't like to talk or even think about Judgement today. But if the Bible is to be believed, if Jesus Himself is trustworthy, then it's an inescapable part of reality. In the end, everything as we know it will end, and we will face the Creator. The Creator who is also *the King*, the King is also *the Savior*, the Judge is also *the Judge*. We will stand before Him and give an account. What does the Apostles' Creed say about Jesus? **"On the third day He rose again. He ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead."** Just as Ecclesiastes says, *God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, good or bad.*
- So, are you going to live your life like that's what's coming? Or are you going to pretend there is no accountability for every deed and every hidden thing in your life? Are you going to live like it depends on you, are you going to trust *your own track record* when you face the Ultimate, Perfect, Impartial Judge? Are you really going to trust that your life would balance to the good if you were placed on those scales? That's a choice. But here's the other choice: you can believe the Gospel, that Jesus gave His life in exchange for yours, that He took the judgement we deserved, so that we can stand at final judgement not in our own righteousness, but in His righteousness, imparted to us by grace, through faith.
- If that's the end all of us must face, if that's where all of this is headed, *we don't have to fear anyone or anything today.* We don't have to worry about what *any one else thinks*. We can live for an *audience of One*. His judgment of us, His opinion, is all that matters! *Remember your Creator today—if you're still alive, whether young or old, it's not too late!*
- In the spiritual classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas A' Kempis wrote these words, as if Christ is speaking to us: **"My child, do not mind if others think ill or say unpleasant things about you. Think of yourself as much worse than they imagine, and regard no one as weaker than yourself. If your inner life is strong, you will not pay much attention to trivial words. When attacked by evil, the wise stay silent. They turn their hearts to Me and are untroubled by the judgements of others. Do not let your peace depend on what other people say about you. Whether they speak well or ill of you makes no difference to**

what you really are. True peace and joy are to be found in Me alone. Those who are neither anxious to please, nor afraid to displease, enjoy real peace. All unrest of heart and distraction of mind comes from distracted feelings and groundless fears.”

- **Crowns Down**

- We live for an Audience of One. So, listen to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes: *Mind your maker—Today! Don’t wait another minute!* I love seeing people live this out in all sorts of ways. It’s especially compelling when you see someone with a significant platform, on the biggest stage, giving glory to God. You know what stage is really big right now? Yes, *the World Cup!* You might not care about soccer (and if so I don’t judge you, I do pity you!) but I’m sure you’ve seen the buzz. Australians are discovering the treasures of America on TikTok, Japanese fans are cleaning the trash in stadiums after games, Scottish fans are *literally draining the bars* in Boston. But what I have loved, besides the amazing goals and Team USA’s performance, is the athletes from across the world platforming their faith in Christ.
- Social media channels like “Ballers In God” are spotlighting how these world-class footballers are sharing their faith. **(Pic 11)** After the USA games you could spot the entire team and staff circling up, with Mark McKenzie (Bear, DE native!) kneeling in the middle leading the prayer. Or my favorite story, German Midfielder Felix Nmecha, a top soccer player from a top soccer nation, scoring the opening goal in Germany’s opening game (which they won 7-1). For his goal celebration, Felix ran to the corner flag, took a knee, and made the motion of taking off a crown and setting it on the ground **(Pic 12)**. It’s a viral trend called “crowns down” and it represents laying down every achievement at the feet of the King. The entire world was watching.
- These kinds of things are becoming normal at this World Cup. These guys are *living the dream* and they’re using the platform God gave them to tell the world the same thing Ecclesiastes has been telling us: all of this is meaningless apart from Christ, you don’t need *more* to be fulfilled, you only get one life, and there’s only One whose opinion really matters.

- Whatever life God has given us, whatever platform we have, we get to share the same message, and we get to live the same truth. So take this precious, beautiful, fleeting life *and surrender it back to God*. Live today *with the end in sight*. Mind your Maker, remember your Creator, *lay your crowns down*. This is the meaning of everything. And *today* is your only guaranteed chance to make sure your right with Him, and living the life you were made for.