

“Making Peace with Mortality” (Ecclesiastes: The Meaning of Everything – Pt. 3)
(Ecclesiastes 7:1-4)

- **Thy Word Is A...Cattle Prod?**

- Does anyone know what this is? (**Pic – Goad**) This is a *goad*—an ox good, we’d call it a **cattle prod**. It’s a tool as old as farming that’s taken many forms: basically, a large stick with pokey-points on the end, used to *encourage* large livestock to *move* when they feel like standing still at the wrong place or going the wrong way. It may look harsh, but ultimately, it’s for their safety.
- At the end of Ecclesiastes, the author says this: **“The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd.” (Ecc. 12:11)** Now, I’ve heard, *Your Word is a lamp unto my feet; Your Word is more precious than gold, sweeter than honey; Your Word is living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword.* But I’ll tell you what, I’ve never heard, *Your Word...is a Cattle Prod!* These teachings in Ecclesiastes are uncomfortable, even painful, but they’re necessary to get us moving in the right direction, moving towards *Life*, because we all have a propensity to get stuck, and lost. We need this message.
- You’ll want to keep this image in mind for *today’s topic*. Welcome to week 3 in *Ecclesiastes: The Meaning of Everything*. So far, in this *highly positive and encouraging book (wink)*, we’ve touched on major themes in Ecclesiastes: first, the *meaninglessness* of life apart from God; next, the myth that we can be satisfied *if we just have more*. Today, the big theme is: *Death*. Namely, *Making Peace with Mortality*. Here’s our main passage: **“A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.” (Ecc. 7:1-4)** And on that note, *how about we pray before we dive in.*

- **Trying to Beat Death**

- Last year, Netflix released a documentary called, *Don't Die: The Man Who Wants to Live Forever* (**Pic – Don't Die**). It's about 48-year-old Bryan Johnson, a tech "centimillionaire" who spends about *2 million dollars a year* on meticulous, experimental, *obsessive* anti-aging and age-reversing regimens. After selling his company to *PayPal* in 2013 for about 800 million, Bryan fell into a deep depression and struggled with his mortality. Instead of reading *Ecclesiastes* and accepting his fate, he was motivated to start *Project Blueprint* and the "Don't Die" campaign. Bryan is trying to mathematically optimize his body, taking 100 daily supplements, tracking 100 different biomarkers, waking up every day at 430am and going to bed at 830pm in a perfectly isolated sleep chamber, consuming exactly 2,250 vegan calories per day strictly between the hours of 430am and noon, and all sorts of other stuff. At one point, he even infused himself with his 17-year-old son's blood plasma. Bryan claims that while his chronological age is 48, his biological age is closer to 18, at least that's the goal he's targeting. He believes human death can be a solvable engineering problem. At one point in the documentary, he says, **"My mind is incompetent to decide what to eat, when to sleep, and how to live. So I fired my mind, and I let an algorithm run my body."** *Uh-huh*. It's the stuff of science fiction, but in 2026 it's reality. The sad thing about Bryan's story is watching how a man who so desperately wants to keep on living seems to be forgetting how to *really live* with the little time he has. Obviously, he's an easy target for ridicule and mockery; but the truth is, he's acting out of fears and desires we all experience. Maybe we don't (or can't) go to such extremes, but collectively, our culture does a lot of things to avoid *aging* and *death*. How much money is spent on anti-aging, plastic surgeries, fashion? How much worrying is wasted on avoiding the inevitable, just to push it off a few more years? Our whole society seems to revolve around keeping us in a comfortable, sterile space under the illusion that we can just go on living like this forever—until we can't.
- **Making Peace with Death**
 - *So here comes the cattle prod*. Listen to what *Ecclesiastes* says about death: **"For the wise can see where they are going, but fools walk in the dark. Yet I saw that the wise and the foolish share the same fate. Both will die."** (Ecc. 2:14-16)

NLT) ***“For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die.” (3:1-2 NLT) “For people and animals share the same fate—both breathe and both must die. So people have no real advantage over the animals. How meaningless! Both go to the same place—they came from dust and they return to dust.” (3:19-20 NLT) “For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” (12:7 NLT)***

- It's because of this bleak, inescapable reality of natural life that Ecclesiastes, or *Qohelet*, the Teacher, says what he says in our main passage from ch. 7. Hear it again in another translation: ***“A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born. Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies—so the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us. A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time.” (7:1-4 NLT)***
- Check out the Message translation: ***“A good reputation is better than a fat bank account. Your death date tells more than your birth date. You learn more at a funeral than at a feast—after all, that’s where we’ll end up. We might discover something from it. Crying is better than laughing. It blotches the face but it scours the heart. Sages invest themselves in hurt and grieving. Fools waste their lives in fun and games.” (7:1-4 MSG)***
- Ok, so Ecclesiastes is saying, although we want to avoid death, and struggle, and *everything hard*, there is actually *more value* in facing these things than in the good, easy stuff. It's *better* to meditate on the *fragility* of life and the *unavoidability* of death, than to numb and distract yourself with frivolous, trivial, vain pleasures (which is exactly what modern life in our culture causes us to do). It's *better* for your heart, *better* for your life, *better* for your soul—it will make you *wise*. Facing *death* will lead to a *better life*. This is the *prickly goad* of wisdom.
- And you'd *think* that doing this could lead you into the abyss, pull you into darkness and terror—but kind of like jumping over the edge of that high dive, it's scary

walking up to it, but once you take the leap and splash in the water below, it's freeing and exhilarating, it wakes you up to this *fleeting, precious, beautiful life*.

- It's not that we should think death is a *good thing*, or develop a morbid fascination with it, or live in the dark shadow of it all the time. Death is *not good*—it was *not* the original plan. Our hearts were made for *Eden*, for *Eternal Life*, Ecclesiastes says *He has set eternity in our hearts*. Death was a consequence of the Fall, death is the wages of sin. Christ came to *defeat it*. So no, we don't contemplate death because death itself is good—we face death, meditate on our fallibility, accept our mortality in this earthly life because *it's wisdom*. Making peace with it, coming to terms with the *end* that we're all coming to, will make us *live better today*. Accepting our mortality will keep us from foolishly trying to save ourselves and lead us to the only One who *can save us*.

- **Memento Mori**

- Think back to the example of Bryan Johnson, how all these practices—these habits, rituals, beliefs are forming him as a person, and compare that with a very different set of practices from the Middle Ages. The concept of “Memento Mori” which translates to “*remember, you must die*” became a core part of monastic life in many places. Monks would carefully tend to the remains of their brothers who had passed on, eventually clean the bones, and some actually kept the skull in their study, where they could see a constant reminder of *reality*. This wasn't a morbid fascination of the dark ages, it was *soul care*—reminding them of the essential truth that *this life is a vapor, therefore we must build our lives on what is Eternal—we must spend our lives preparing for death so we can be ready for what lasts forever*.
- American pastor Jonathan Edwards, a prominent evangelist in the colonial era, famously adopted daily resolutions for his life. One resolution was to “think much on death”—on all occasions of his own dying, and the common circumstances which attend death. Another was the “one hour rule”—to never do anything which he wouldn't do if he knew that in less than an hour the Lord would return. And another resolution was to live in such a way as he would wish he had lived when he came to his deathbed.

- One of the best things you could do is to *seriously think about your death*. When you come to your deathbed, what will you think about your life? What will you wish you had done? What will you wish you had poured your life into? What will you wish you had become? How do you want to be remembered by the people who matter most? How do you want to be welcomed by the Savior and Lord of your life? Think seriously about your funeral, it's even a good idea to *plan it out*—what music, what scriptures, what messages do you want people to hear at your funeral? (Makes my job easier!)
- ***“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.” (Ecc. 7:4)*** Think seriously and frequently about your death, so that you can live this life *abundantly in Christ*, and so you can be prepared for the *coming Life that never ends*.
- **Death to Life**
 - Because *we cannot beat death*—it's coming for us all. But *we can know the One who has conquered death*, and His victory changes *everything*. Don't waste your life trying to avoid the truth—accept the truth and spend your life living in the freedom and hope of His victory!
 - When Paul talked about the coming resurrection of the dead at the renewal of all things, he shared these famous words, which I often am privileged to share at gravesides: ***“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:54-55)***
 - And when he was contemplating the victory of Christ in His death and resurrection, he shared some of my favorite words of the New Testament: ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth,***

nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:35-39)

- This world tells us to *live so you can avoid death as long as possible*. Jesus tells us to *die to ourselves so we can live forever in Him*. Have you accepted your earthly mortality and that of your loved ones? Have you accepted that *all of this* is one day going to end? Have you accepted that there is only One who can actually save you from death?
- Let your awareness of death *prod you* toward eternal life in Him. Amen.