

Jason Upchurch - Ecclesiastes 2:12-17 - How to Have A Great Mid Life Crisis

Over the next two weeks we're looking at death in Ecclesiastes. And just like everything else we've seen already, Solomon gives us the typical view of pagans as they consider death.

How do we know he's talking about death? Because he's talking about the man who comes after the king. The king's successor only took the throne once the king died. He's talking about the same event that happens to the wise and fool which is death. He's talking about remembering those who have died.

So this whole section from here to the end of the chapter is about death. And really it's the pagan view of death.

Now, we'll get to our passage, but buckle up because I've got a little bit of a longer introduction and I think it's important to set the stage here.

Because one of the most unique features of the Christian life is our view of death. The Christian view of death is one of the most profound aspects of who we are and the hope that we've been given in Christ.

I remember talking to an unbeliever years ago about the Star Wars movie Rogue One - it's my favorite of the series. And they asked why and I said it's because - spoiler alert - at the end everyone dies. Really, I like it because everyone sacrifices for the greater good. But this unbeliever actually said that was the reason he didn't like it because it forced him to think about death his their own mortality which he didn't like.

Same story, same death - two reactions.

And even though that's just a silly movie, how Christians think about death is pretty striking especially to unbelievers. I think we often don't appreciate how different our views are until we're face to face with someone at a funeral or someone who talks openly about death.

Let me talk a little bit about death because we need to be able to think about it soberly as believers.

1) First of all we know that death is the enemy. Death all on its own is not a good thing. It's not natural in the sense that humans were not designed to die. We were always designed to have eternal life. We were to have eternal life, in these bodies, eating from the tree of life, talking with our grandparents Adam and Eve and Abel and Enoch and Noah and Boaz and David and all of them. We were designed to live forever.

But sin brought death and so now death is the enemy. In fact it's the last enemy that Jesus will destroy at his second coming. But death is not a good thing. There's a lot of liberal radicals that think death is a good thing. Less children is a good thing, so abort them. Less old people is a good thing, so euthanize them. Less Christians, so kill them. Basically everyone gets to die except those who are convicted of high crimes that should deserve death.

But we know that death is the enemy. There is a certain and right grief that comes with death because it tells us the world is not how it should be. And although we don't grieve like the world does when a Christian dies, we still grieve. Even Jesus wept when Lazarus had died.

2) At the same time, our greatest hope in the world comes because Jesus himself died. The death of Jesus is our source of hope. He died so that I could live - that's the whole idea of sacrifice. Someone lays down their life for another. He endured the wrath of God I deserved so that I could experience the love of God that he deserves.

This is why so many of our songs talk about the death of Jesus. I mean we do it all the time, but if you just step back, what a weird thing to do: sing song after song about a person who died.

We Sing:

The Old Rugged Cross

The glories of the cross I cannot comprehend

Nothing but the blood of Jesus
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

These songs about death give us joy and hope and encouragement.

And if that weren't enough, we also take a meal every week reminding us of the death of Jesus. Even the elements themselves are a testimony to how Jesus's body was treated. His blood poured out just like a lamb sacrificed on the altar in the OT. And his body was crushed - just brutally broken. And even the traditional Matzo had piercings and stripes in it which went to the manner of his death.

And if that weren't enough we have symbols of Jesus's death everywhere. You enter this building passing under 2 crosses only to come into the building and stare at a cross. I've got a cross necklace on and many of you do too. A cross is an instrument of death. It's the way people were executed.

It would be like having a symbol of a gun for a firing squad, or an electric chair for the death penalty. We glory in the death of Jesus on the cross in our place for our sins.

Now of course for Christians it's not enough that Jesus died. We also celebrate his resurrection. The fact that when he rose he defeated death and sin and Satan. Death could not hold him and so he conquered death and rose and ascended and now sits at the right hand of God from whence he shall come to judge the living and the death.

But our whole religion - our whole hope and faith - revolves around God becoming man to die for his sinful creatures.

So death is the enemy, but the death of Jesus is also part of the reason we praise God.

3) We also know that death is the way that believers go see Jesus.

Jesus says to the thief on the cross: today you will be with **me** in Paradise. It's not just that the thief gets to go to a nice place and walk the streets of gold and see the gates of pearl and escape suffering and visit with other believers. The thief - who was justified by faith alone - gets to be with Jesus.

Paul talking about dying says in **Phil 1:23** that he wants to depart and be with Christ. The moment a believer dies we can say that they are with Jesus. They're not in soul sleep. They're not in Purgatory. They're not blinked out of existence. They are with Jesus.

Which is why a few verses before that in **Phil 1:21**: for me to live is Christ and to die is what? Gain.

Guys, I love this world, I love my family, I love life but when God calls me home I'm not looking back. No one who is experiencing heaven right now is bummed out that they're missing a graduation or wedding or a Super Bowl or some vacation. It's all gain because we're with Jesus.

2 Cor. 5:8 says that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. I think there's a lot of pessimism about the world, especially from our dispensationalist friends and so they're always talking about how much worse the world is than it used to be.

They usually do that while typing on their iPhone from an air conditioned 2500sf home with running water and power eating popcorn they made in the microwave. And so we can poke fun at them a little bit.

But I want to remind you guys - and especially some of you post mil guys - that have a more positive outlook on the world, that our true home still really is in heaven with Jesus. It's not here. We want to be a blessing here and encourage our families and friends in the Lord. But home is with Jesus in glory.

When we take vacations, for the most part I have about 1 week in me. I can't go much longer than that because what I really want is home. I want the smell of my home, I want my things, my bed, my shower, my green grass, my dinner table and my family with me. Because it's mine. My home.

But for the believer death ushers to a place that is truly home. Something we can't even fully understand until we're there because we've never experienced our true home.

Remember Jesus said in **John 14**: In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you? And if I go prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Think about that. Jesus describes 2 things. First, he describes a home. A big massive home - the old KJV said mansion - that he is building for us specifically. He promises us this home, this huge lavish amazing house.

But it's not just an empty home. He says I'm going to go there and bring you to myself. The home that we go to is a home is amazing but it's also the place where Jesus is. Don't ever forget that. It's a home with Jesus in it.

I came home this last week a little early. I had a lunch appointment so I thought I'd get home early to hang out with the wife and kids. I walk inside and...there's no one there. It's quiet. No one outside. No one downstairs. Lights on.

If I were a pre trib rapture guy I'd think it was the rapture, but I know better. Where'd they go? They all went to the pool. So I went to the pool too. I don't want to sit in a home all by myself - what good is that? I want to be with my family.

In the same way, heaven isn't just a nice house with nice amenities and gold streets. It is those things in the most lavish sense. But it's also the place where Jesus is and has been preparing for us - you and me - a place to stay with him.

That's why the psalmist says in **Psalms 116:15**: Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints.

What a weird verse. God is happy when believers die? It's precious to him? What kind of God are we serving here?

We're serving the kind of God who actually wants to see face to face the very people he's redeemed. Yes he wants to bless us here and now, yes he rewards us with long life for obedience to him. Yes death is a curse and the enemy. But he wants to see us. And this side of the return of Jesus there's only one way that happens. We have to walk through the door of death.

John 17:24: Jesus says I desire that they may be with me where I am, to see my glory that have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

The Father wants to see us, the Son wants to see us, the Spirit in Revelation says "come." There's a fullness of God we'll experience in heaven that we can't even imagine now and God himself wants us to be with him so we can experience that glory in full force.

So death is the enemy, the death of Jesus is the means by which we praise God, death brings us to Jesus.

4) Death will be destroyed. When Jesus comes back, death for us is no more. That's what we're waiting for. The Christian hope is not just to die and go be in heaven forever. It's that we die, we go to where Jesus is for a while, and then when Jesus returns we come with him, he raises our body from the grave as he recreates the universe in the New Heavens and New Earth. It's the newer and better Garden of Eden, the newer and better Jerusalem, the new Earth where there is no death or night or sickness or disease anymore. Where the bodies we have are made perfect and powerful and eternal filled fully with the Holy Spirit.

Paul says in **1 Cor. 15:26** at the coming of Jesus the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For Christians we die once - physically - and we live twice. We live now, die, and live forever in glory with Jesus.

For unbelievers they live once and die twice. They're alive, they die physically, and Jude says they undergo a punishment of eternal fire.

The Christian doesn't need to fear death or hell in any way because we've been rescued from that and been given grace.

Now, I mention all of that because that serves as my introduction for what Solomon is talking about here. Because the Christian's understanding of the future keeps us balanced in this life. It keeps us from despair.

When you miss that eternal perspective then you start getting into weird perspectives. And frankly as we read this section it sort of reads like someone who is having a mid life crisis.

A midlife crisis is someone who realizes that life is short and they're half way through it. Maybe they notice changes in their body or life. They start regretting past decisions they made or should have made. Life seems boring or a trap or uneventful and the future is frustrating so they've got to go make some big changes.

William Tammes: "Midlife crisis is that moment you realize your children and clothes are about the same age." He's not wrong.

You're just going through the motions, not feeling like you're getting ahead, wondering what you're doing.

Keanu Reeves reportedly: "Here comes 40. I'm feeling my age and I've ordered the Ferrari. I'm going to get the whole mid life crisis package."

That's funny but that's pretty common. It's why wives leave their husbands, husbands leave their wives, jobs change, people do radical things. but it's common because people miss the eternal perspective. They have the perspective of Solomon - of life under the sun. They don't have a godly perspective.

So here's what I want to do with our time left. I want to unpack this section sort of tongue in cheek: We're going to look at 4 steps to a great mid life crisis.

1. Have a bleak outlook on the future. Read 12

So here's what's happening: Solomon realizes his mortality, he realizes he's going to die. But the problem is his pessimism about the guy who is going to come next. His view is that the next guy isn't going to get anything done, he's not going to do anything any better than Solomon.

Everything that Solomon has worked for and built and established is just going into the hands of someone else. His pagan pursuit of wisdom and meaning has led him nowhere and his conclusion is that no one can know anything. He's tried and didn't figure it out, so the next guy can't figure it out either.

What's the next guy going to do? The same thing that's already been done.

By the way, this is often the pride of those who are pessimistic. All who have a bleak outlook on life and the future. And you know pessimists because they never call themselves pessimists. You know what they call themselves? Realists.

The two sins of pessimism are lack of hope for the future and complaining. And that's what Solomon is doing. "What's the guy after me going to?"

Remember lady wisdom laughs at the future. There's a joy and hope she has. Solomon has none of that.

And here's the kicker. Think about this: who comes after the king? The king's own son. Thanks, Dad, for the vote of confidence.

Fathers are called to be an encouragement to their kids, here Solomon is pessimistic not only about the future of the kingdom and wisdom, but the future of his own son. Maybe had he actually imparted some of that wisdom to his son things would have turned out better.

You remember who Solomon's son was? Rehoboam. When Solomon died you remember there was a delegation of wise old men who came to Rehoboam and said "If you lessen the work load and taxes, the people will serve you forever." Rehoboam asked advice from his younger friends and they said make it harder. So he did. And the 10 tribes of the north broke off from Judah.

It was a crazy self-fulfilling prophecy. So if you want to have a midlife crisis and be afraid of death, start by having a bleak outlook on the future.

2) Forget about other people. Read 13-15

The second ingredient to a successful mid life crisis is to forget about other people. You forget that your life is connected to other people and your decisions impact them.

Solomon is evaluating whether or not a wise person has any advantage over a fool here. At first he seems to realize that there is an advantage to wisdom, rather than foolishness. There's more gain, there's good things for being wise.

But then he thinks: yeah, but they both die. And what happens to the fool will happen to me as well. So why not live the life of the fool? **Read 15**

This is why I say this is how to have a mid life crisis. And the Keanu Reeves quote is funny, but tragic.

Because what happens is that normally-wise and prudent people start living the life of fools. Fools according to the Bible aren't usually ignorant or dumb. They're not stupid people. They're wicked people who like sinful pleasure. They like greed, lying, murder, sexual immorality.

They're concerned only about their own pleasure and enjoyment and they forget that how they live their life impacts those around them.

Listen, wise decisions and wise living isn't always fun. Nobody likes going on a diet, nobody likes going on a budget, nobody likes living the life of the wise person. At least not in the short term. But wise person lives in light of eternity and that they will one day stand before Jesus.

So if you want to have a mid life crisisL Have a bleak outlook on the future, forget about other people.

3) Try to make a legacy for yourself. Read 16

I remember sitting in elementary school learning about George Washington. And I don't remember what the teacher said, but the thought occurred to me that there many people alive during George Washington's life but we only remember the names of a few. Most of the people alive have been forgotten. And I remember being sad. I knew I would die one day, and that no one would remember me at all.

Here's the reality: most of us are going to go through life and then die and no one beyond a generation or two of our family will remember who we are. Once you're gone - unless you're someone incredibly famous or infamous - no one will remember you beyond your kids and grandkids and maybe some very close friends.

Go to any graveyard and look at the headstone. There's a date they were born, a date they died and there's a dash in between. We're living that little dash right now. And in a hundred years most people won't remember us.

Are you alright with that? Because if being remembered is your hope of immortality I have some sad news for you. It won't happen. Maybe a handful of people will be remember beyond 100 years from now.

You know what gives us hope: whether by my life or by my death I bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't care that anyone remembers me. What I want people to remember is Jesus. That he's the Lord of all the earth. And that whatever good thing I have or had was given to me by him.

I don't need to be remembered - I want him remembered for all generations. I just get in on the good things he's made for me. If my kids remember Jesus, and their kids remember Jesus, and their kids remember Jesus - that's what matters.

Because people much stronger, much richer, much more famous than us get forgotten easily. We have one legacy we want to leave: the legacy of Jesus.

4) Hate life. Read 17

This is the profound epidemic of those who live life under the sun. Life without God, life without an eternal perspective: they hate life. It's boring and tiresome and meaningless.

And this is your average next door neighbor or family member who is slogging away at life without the gospel. Even some Christians adopt this view. They wouldn't say it, but it's true.

I think it was Voice of the Martyr's, years ago, talking about how prison camps in other countries were a place of mental turmoil. In these camps they'd make people dig ditches all day. The ditches had to be long and straight, a few feet deep. And then at the end of the day they'd have to fill them in. Next day: same thing. Over and over. They were required to dig ditches for no reason over and over.

And the story goes that most people went mad and were killed. But the Christians in the camp could endure for a long, long time. Why? Different perspective. And eternal perspective. Because every ditch they dug they did so to the glory of God. They had an eternal perspective that even in the worst place on earth, doing the most meaningless work possible, that God was still there and he still saw their work. That view of the future was peace and grace to those Christians.

Listen, there are times when our lives are hard and maybe it feels meaningless. Feels like we're slogging away and there's no end in sight and there's no appreciation or near term benefit and we can start feeling like Solomon here.

What do we do? Remember the end. Remember death. Remember that nothing in this life goes unnoticed by God. He sees and knows and will reward for faithfulness.

1 Cor. 15:58: Therefore my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Pray