



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Lessons from Mike Black

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10—12:1-8

Lesson 15 of 16

2007-08

“Be Joyful, Be Godly”

TRANSCRIPT

We're in the eleventh chapter in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and we're going to sprint all the way into chapter 12, Lord willing, by the time we finish. Our lesson tonight is divided into two parts, with two subjects. The first subject is to **be joyful**; chapter 11, verses 7-10. And the second is to **be godly**; chapter 12, verses 1-8. Well, let's look at the text together, and I will read it as we progress through. So I'm going to read the first section; and then, as we move into the twelfth chapter, I will read the text at that point.

Light is sweet,
and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.
However many years a man may live,
let him enjoy them all.
But let him remember the days of darkness,
for they will be many.
Everything to come is meaningless.

Be happy, young man, while you are young,
and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.
Follow the ways of your heart
and whatever your eyes see,
but know that for all these things
God will bring you to judgment.
So then, banish anxiety from your heart
and cast off the troubles of your body,
for youth and vigor are meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 11: 7-10

Let us bow before the Lord of the Word for a moment of prayer.

Father, again we thank you for Believers Chapel, and for the teaching ministry that this church has had throughout the years. Throughout the generations this body has been a faithful lamp in this city, in this state, and in this country, in teaching the Word of God in truth. Thank you, Father, for the great faithfulness that is going on in the pulpit and that is going on in the classes here at the Chapel. Bless the teaching ministry of the Word in the days to come.

Bless us all here tonight, that we might be exhorted, by means of the Scriptures, **to be joyful; to be godly**. And we would ask, Lord, that to that end Christ might be glorified always.

Be with those who could not be with us tonight. Bless them, enrich them, and prosper them in every way. And so Lord, it is Your Word that goes forth from Your mouth and never returns void, but always accomplishes the purpose whereunto You send it. So use Your Word again tonight for Your purpose. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we begin, let me ask you to mark two passages that will supplement our study for tonight. The first is 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and the second is II Peter chapter 3. We will make reference to those two texts as we get into our lesson this evening.

We are in the exhortative portion of Ecclesiastes, and 'The Teacher' is going to give us an exclamation of **joy** that extols life. The bliss of being alive, says the Teacher, (vs7a), "Light is sweet...", (and '*light*' is a metaphor for life). Now this opinion seems to be at variance with what he has expressed to us earlier: Namely in chapter 4, verse 2, he wrote, "And I declare that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive." Now what do we make of such a contradiction written by the same man; the same hand? Well, I think that the explanation is in the attitude. He is pointing to the attitude of our mind, here.

If you'll notice your context, in verse 9, the words "young man", "young", and "youth": And in verse 10, "youth". So, his advice here is that we are to live life with an attitude of being '*young*'. And this should permeate our lives from this point forward.

This is the 'spirit of Caleb', who at age 85 demanded of Joshua, "Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard that the Anakites were there, and their cities were large and fortified, but with the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as He said" (Joshua 14:12). That's the spirit that he wants us to tap into; the spirit of the *joy of youth*. This attitude is to be prevalent to the end of our lives. Also notice verse 8: "... let him enjoy them all." So yes, life is difficult; yes, life is hard; yes, life is filled with many disappointments, heartaches and angst. And yet, we are people destined for great blessing. So the Teacher is saying, 'Let that attitude fill you with **joy** every day.'

I can remember Dr. S. Lewis Johnson coming to Oklahoma City, speaking upon 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verses 8-12. And the title of his message: *The Immensities*. I can still hear his voice, ringing in my ears, "Don't be discouraged. Don't cower before those who hold temporary power. But join me in suffering for the gospel." Paul is 'saying' in this II Timothy passage: 'Dive in! Get wet! Get involved in the things of God. Why? Because He saved us, and He called us to a holy life.' So the questions for our consideration: Why did He save you? Why did He pick you out as a brand from the fire? It's because He wants you to be different. He wants to put you on display as a model in this crooked and dark world. That's what He's doing. You are to be different; to walk in this dark society and shine like a light.

Our world today is filled with much sin while we are giving ourselves to constant amusement: As we laugh at our comedians; As we have non-stop sports with the various sports now having seasons that overlap one another. And every night there is some form of entertainment on TV to deaden themselves; people are seeking fervently to preoccupy themselves because they have no peace: For there is no *ultimate joy* in their hearts. Instead they fill their lives with triviality and buy 'things' one after another with their money.

Now: Do you want an example of the type of peace and **joy** that we're talking about in this text? Each of last two Christmases, this one and the one before, found me holding the hand of a dying saint while praying with him: Both soon going to be with the LORD. Ravaged because of health: But with peace and with **joy**. When you strip everything away from life—There you can see **joy** in its most pure form. And we need to know that, because you see, this is where we're all headed. That is what our writer is telling us here. Loss of energy and mental capacities: We're wearing out a little every day. Soon, for all of us—old age and death. The “*darkness*” here of verse 8 is contrasted with the “*light*” of earlier days, (vs7). Furthermore, he tells us, that the dark days are more numerous than the days of physical prowess. And for that reason, he tells us that life is “*meaningless*”.

But remember, this is life ‘under the sun’, and not the entire picture of what you and I know through the truth of the New Testament. So, let's just tap into that New Testament truth and listen to Paul as he speaks to us in stereo, if you will, about the very thing that ‘the man with the powerful mind’ just addressed; the final tumble of life into a grave. Paul said, ‘We don't lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day. For our light, momentary troubles are achieving for us eternal glory that far outweighs them all.’ (2 Cor 4:16-18). See, Paul says, ‘Even though we are wasting away, we are getting better: For we are being purified.’ It all is working to the benefit of the believer. This is reason for **joy**. This is reason for encouragement in this life; whether you are physically young or whether you are quite a bit older. And we can do this if we are in right relation to ‘His righteousness’.

And that's verse 9c. Literally: ‘To walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes’. Now that's the Old Testament version of what the New Testament tells us is ‘Walking in the Spirit’. In other words, for ‘the man with the powerful mind’, it is living life under the authority of the Word of God; the Law, as he knew it back then.

Now, it is of interest that one of the copies of the Book of Ecclesiastes from the Septuagint, (that is the Greek translation of the Old Testament), adds two words in verse 9b. Listen, ‘Walk in the ways of your heart...’; and then the scribes added this

word: Blameless. 'Walk in the ways of your heart *blameless*'. And then they added the words, and not, '...and not in the sight of your eyes'. Now given, this is a much smoother translation of the idea that we would all like to embrace. But here is the problem: It is not what the text says. The scribes added these words, because they didn't want any contradictions in the Old Testament from other places. And I think, probably, that the passage that they were thinking about is Numbers chapter 15, verse 39; where Moses, setting forth the Law, says, "...remember all the commands of the LORD that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes." And the scribes were afraid this to be a glaring contradiction in the Old Testament: And so, they made those changes. But I think that the words that they added are not the inspired reading of the text (9b). So how do we address this glaring contradiction?

Well let's look again at the text. Observe the words 'heart' and 'eyes'. In wisdom literature, both organs are viewed as windows into the soul. Now, you have been studying the Book of Proverbs, and you recall that in the Book of Proverbs you are commanded to "...guard your heart" (Prov 4:2). And your 'eyes are to be straight ahead; looking straight ahead' (Prov 4:25). That would be your protection to live a wise life. That's the idea.

Well, what does our verse tell us then? It tells us that our 'man with the powerful mind' is exhorting us to **be joyful**. That's the context. And why? 'Because our days are meaningful to God (9c): That's the idea. And the wise life, the life with skill, will be refreshed and encouraged by this knowledge. In other words, our Teacher is telling us, 'You want to be **joyful**?' Then: Be wise. This, ultimately, is how you are a **joyful** person. You won't 'have to have'; to fill your life: For you will have inner peace and tranquility that nothing in this world can be a substitute for. That wonderful truth of knowing the LORD.

So verse 10. Here it is: '*Live a joyful life.*' God cares about you. He cares about your life. You are meaningful to Him. He knows the numbers of your hair. He knows the stature of your body. He knows the number of your days. He knows how many times

your heart will beat. Job says in Job (31:4), "Does He not see my ways and count my every step?" How many steps did you take today? God counted them. How many did you take last year? God counted them. How many steps do you take in a lifetime? God counts everyone: That's how close He is to you. Friends: He is closer to you than your skin. He *knows* your life. You're not a number in a phone book to Him. He is intimately acquainted with all of your ways. That's your God. ***Be joyful!!***

Now, let's address the impediments that would rob us of that joy. Verse 10: First, notice he says, 'put away' (in the NIV, '*banish*'); and second, 'turn away from' (in the NIV, '*cast off*'). 'Cast away' from 'the body' (literally: *flesh*). So, we are to remove anger and frustration. Now why does he exhort us to do that? Because, you see, living in this world 'under the sun', you and I are going to be lied to, lied about, taken advantage of, ripped off, and schemed against. This is the life 'under the sun'. We're in a crooked and perverted world. People that pledge their love—break it. Friends go against you. They speak against you. All kinds of horrors, for the innocent believer, are practiced against us. But here's your joy, in verse 9d; and remember this: 'Nobody gets away with anything...for God will bring every act "to judgment"'. And you know what? That's going to lead us to a **godly life**, to be sure. This is our exhortation into chapter 12.

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 men rise up at the sound of birds,
but all their songs grow faint;
when men are afraid of heights

and of dangers in the streets;
when the almond tree blossoms
and the grasshopper drags himself along
and desire no longer is stirred.
Then man goes to his eternal home
and mourners go about the streets.

Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,
or the golden bowl is broken;
before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,
or 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!

Ecclesiastes 12: 1-8

So here is our exhortation to **Be Godly**; and it starts with our focus upon God. The Teacher calls Him, by definition, “Creator”—The Maker of all things”. And we are to think of our Creator: That is what he wants us to remember.

This name, “Creator”, is a bit unique from what he has told us about God throughout the book. Very interestingly he has told us three things, emphatically, about God. Let's note them. The first, Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, verses 10 and 11: ‘The burden of man’. Here's what he's told us: ‘He has set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what He has done from beginning to end.’ In other words, God is a God of Sovereign Providence.

Next, Ecclesiastes chapter 11, verse 5, is the second fact that he has told us about God: “As you do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.” Again, what is he telling us? God is Sovereign, and He rules all through life; in an all wise Providence. With this he has told us about God and His rule, and providence, and sovereignty: And now, very interestingly, he brings in the fact about the life of mankind.

So thirdly, here is what he says about mankind; Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 29: 'God made man upright, but man has gone *after many schemes*.' In other words, God is a sovereign God; a God of providence: But what does man do? He throws it off. He's going to live life on his own terms. He'll make his own way in the crooked and dark environs of this world.

But the wise, in contrast, are to 'remember their Creator'. He says it twice, right here. Verse 1 and verse 6. "May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you..." says the psalmist (Ps 137:6a). God is to be 'front and center' at all times in our lifespan. And that causes an acute responsibility for each one of us.

Here's how he explains it. Notice the temporal clause '*before*'. I see it in our passage three times. Verse 1: "Remember your creator in the days of your youth *before*...". Verse 2: "...*before* the sun and the light...". And verse 6: "...*before* the pitcher is shattered." See, the word '*before*' tells us that we are on a conveyor belt. We are not staying in one place at any one moment. We're moving. We are actually moving...subtly. You're turning gray and didn't even know it. You're losing your hair and didn't even feel it. Your beard grows, and you're not even acknowledging it. And you're beginning to stoop and now come the aches and pains. And they're more frequent. See, the '*before*' tells us that we need to live now—right now: For Him, to Him, by Him, and through Him.

And finally, the text gives us a sense of urgency. Dr. Howard Hendricks used to say to us, "Gentlemen, 'As now, so then'. Don't tell me, 'When I get the money and I get the time, then....' No! You do it now, right now, and start now. Do it while you can, because old age is on its way."

Verse 1 is characterized by evil days—for that is what old age is. And we find out why in the next few verses. He gives us a very literal 'sound' of the aged with the regretful words, "I find no pleasure in them." Before the physical faculties fail we are to give Him your best: Your time, your energy, your mental faculties. The dark days are closing in. Serve Him now!—That's the point.

Verse 2. 'To see the sun; to admire the great moon as it rises out of the east: It's like a second sun, only it doesn't give off any heat'. Today we can admire it. This is the

time to **be godly**, while you can still function—That's the point. The 'light' stands in stark contrast to the 'clouds'. They turn light into gloom and tell us of the somber reality of fading mental powers.

Now let's consider our time down the conveyor belt: Fading faculties and long-time friends and associates no longer with us—gone to their eternal reward. And here we are, still here. You see, it is a shocking discovery when we find ourselves in the final stretch of life to know that there really won't be any improvement from here on.

So, here's the future 'picture' that is facing us; and he's telling us right now so that we're prepared for it. As one grows old, one grows weak with less control over body and mind. The encroachment of old age is closing in. The long chapters of life 'under the sun'. Or, as Dr. Waltke would say, "We are moving to clinical death." What a great phrase: It's not 'death'; it's 'clinical death'; the body dies and the spirit lives on.

Now, in verse 3 and the first half of verse 4, notice the focus of the passage changes. We're no longer talking about fading light in luminaries. Rather, here is a great mansion in decline. "In the days...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..." Observe the four groups that function, or are involved, in the great house. The first two groups are male, and the second are female. The first, the house guards, (or in the NIV, 'keepers of the house'), are male servants; and apparently, as the dark clouds appear of verse 2, they begin to tremble. The second group of males, "strong men" here, notice that they 'bend', (the NIV says 'stoops'). This displays the effect of our coming decline.

The third group are females who do the daily grinding of flour to provide food for the great house. They "cease" their labors, probably because of despair: The great house is in decline or they have just given up. Finally, the fourth group are women who are, literally, looking through the window and can no longer physically discern what they see.

'The man with the powerful mind' has used all of these figures to describe old age; the deterioration of the man, physically. You see, we're all falling apart. Call it allegorical or call it figurative: In either case he wants us to read and understand that these are specific physical functions. None of us are what we once were: And as we age; we become less and less of what we once were.

We had a yard man. He worked for us for 13 years. One day he said that recently he had fainted and passed out, and he went to the doctor and was told he was dehydrated. So I told him, "First of all, ring my doorbell and I'll have you a bottle of Gatorade when you come here. And second, when you get tired, I want you to go sit in the shade and let me know, and I'll come visit with you." Well, it wasn't long before I realized that he was losing weight rather rapidly, and it really wasn't dehydration: It was cancer. When I saw him for the last time, I was in a state of shock. I couldn't even recognize him. We all have stories like that.

With the deterioration of the house, notice, 'the doors are shut' (vs4). Friend of mine, just recently speaking to me of an elderly Christian man that was a great blessing to us both, said to me, "The man that we have known for many years, although he is still alive, is gone. His mind has gone. He's gone. Although he lives, he is just gone."

In the second half of verse 4 the mood and the theme remain, but the method of our study changes. No longer the figure of a house falling apart, but separate and particular metaphors; which call for individual study. The first, 'the chirping of the sparrows that grow faint', is a clear reference to deafness. Notice in your NIV the word "*sound*" is repeated twice. "Sound of grinding": Notice—it "*fades*". Secondly, "the sound of birds": And it is this second expression that causes us a problem. The surface contradiction of the next clause: One "*rises up at the sound of birds*". You see, the frail man can now hear only too well; so well that even a bird disturbs his sleep—in contrast to the loss of hearing to the grinding sound earlier. Well, how do we resolve this apparent contradiction? I think restlessness is in view here; the inability to sleep. The word '*sound*' is not really in the inspired language; rather, it's been added. So, the

phrase 'sound of birds' could be a reference to an elderly man's early walks. Again, the NIV uses the verb 'to rise': Perhaps he walks because he cannot sleep.

Verse 5 continues to add new touches to the picture. First: "...when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets...", the key word here is "*afraid*"; ('Fear'). Unsteady, always slow moving; now no longer desiring to get out into crowds. And while all this is happening to the individual, 'he is rolling down the conveyor'. See, it never stops.

Next, the almond tree, the caperberry (NASB), and the grasshopper; three possible allegorical figures that show us what's happening to an aging man. The white blossom of the almond tree: May represent the white hair, (At least that's the way many commentators have expressed it). Then the verb "*drags*" describes the movement of a "*grasshopper*" which appears to have lost his spring, and now its movement is painful and labored. A scene again alluding to the picture of old age. And the third: "*Caperberry*" (NASB), and its well-known qualities as an aphrodisiac; thus, giving the NIV translators the freedom to include the words "*desire*" and "*stirred*" in the picture.

Here then is the total picture, best described by David's friend, the aged Barzillai, upon David's kind offer for him to return to Jerusalem and to the court after Absalom's rebellion. II Samuel 19:34-35, "But Barzillai answered the king, "How many more years will I live, that I should go to Jerusalem with the king? I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is good and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of men and women singers?"

So our 'man with the powerful mind', after describing old age very vividly by the figures and metaphors he has given us, now speaks to us of our ultimate end: The last service that can be performed by family and friends. Notice (5c), "Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets." This "*eternal home*", we must remember, is found in the context of life 'under the sun'. Therefore, it offers the believer in Christ no real insight into our lives beyond the grave. This is only the picture a life lived 'on the horizontal'; meaning all that we have is the grave. And yet, you and I

are under no such restrictions. And if our 'man' is going to reference an "*eternal home*", let's spend a moment fleshing that out together.

It is for this reason that I wanted you to mark II Corinthians, chapter 5. I want to be as specific as I can be with Paul's own words from the New Testament. II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 1; here is the Apostle speaking to us, "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God..." (Now look at this very carefully) "...an *eternal house*..." he says, "...in heaven, not built by human hands." The Apostle calls this body, that is aged and weakening, only a "*earthly tent*". This emphasizes that there is nothing permanent for the believer here in this life. Everything of greatest benefit to you and me is not here on earth; but there; out there with Him; with the Lord where; '...no eye has seen, no ear has heard...' (1 Cor 2:9); all of the great things that He has waiting for us. It's Christ for all eternity! With the LORD!—What does that mean?—I don't know; it is beyond the human description. But for now, we are here; trapped in time: 24-hour days, 7 days a week, *on the conveyor belt*.

Verse 6. So, let us again follow the command: "Remember Him". "Remember Him (*right now*)—before the silver cord is severed, the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground from where it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." (vs6&7). Man: Made in the image of God, knit together by the hand of God Himself, in the womb, is a thing of beauty. And yet it is most fragile. 'A work of art', says Derek Kidner, 'yet, as breakable as a piece of earthenware.'

Notice here that four metaphors are used to describe our condition. The first (vs 6): 'The silver thread that is snapped'. The second: 'The golden bowl that is crushed'. Notice that in each instance we see objects of significant value destroyed or rendered useless in a moment. Such is this life; Something of great value, and yet, when the life ends we put it away. We bury it; we burn it; we discharge it at sea. It is no longer of any value to any of us. So, death renders us 'under the sun'—worthless. The word '*bowl*' here is found in Zechariah 4: 2-3, where it is used of a *bowl* holding a wick of candles.

The *silver cord*, here, holds the *bowl*. And when the *cord* is severed, the *bowl* comes crashing to the ground. That's the picture.

The third metaphor is the broken jar and the fourth is a wheel. Both are associated with a well or a cistern. The wheel is the pulley that lifts the bucket from the well. In the figure here, the bucket and the pulley are destroyed, thus water, the staple of life, is now unavailable. Death is the end result of such a calamity.

Verse 7. The tragedy of this entire sequence comes from the garden. Don't miss that. The Garden of Genesis, chapter 3:19: The fatal choice of the man and the woman— "You are *"dust"*, and to *"dust"* you shall return". Man, who thinks that, 'He is in perfect control of everything in his life; this 'life under the sun'. Man, who thinks that 'he's got it made': For he has money in the bank, and he can tell you about his future; for he knows what's going to happen tomorrow; next week; next month. He's smarter than other people—'he's got it all figured out.'

Well let me tell you what the Bible says: Death shows you that you're not in control of anything. Psalm 104, verse 29b, "...when you, (*O God*), take away their breath, they die and return to dust." Life, as we go down the conveyor belt, is only moment by moment by moment under His command.

So, verse 8. With the entire book behind us, we come back to his initial refrain; "Meaningless! Meaningless!" Nothing 'under the sun' brings us ultimate satisfaction. Sin has done its number on us. Why just look at us. Look how we're failing and falling apart. Everything that we gain in this life 'under the sun' we will have to give away. It will pass through our hands. We will not be able to keep it.

Time is fleeting. But today we have opportunity: The opportunity granted to us by a sovereign God and His all wise Providence, Who has decreed and declared that we should live in this country; at this time; at this age; at this moment. And yet, when you look at life, it's so "*Meaningless*"! It's so purposeless. It is filled and convoluted with so many distractions with so many pieces that just don't make sense.

So, what are you and I to do in light of this? Well, here it is; and it comes to us from Peter's lips in II Peter 3: 11-12. Peter says, "Since everything will be destroyed...

what kind of people ought we to be...? " And here's his answer. "...You ought to live holy and godly lives, as you look forward to the day of God, and speed its coming..."

What should we do? We should **be godly**. That will create in us a **joy**. It will invigorate us to a youthful view of life; no matter what our age. And it will give us a life of purpose and meaning in a meaningless and purposeless world that amuses itself to death with trivia and 'things' that ultimately do not bring you the peace, the **joy**, the contentment that only comes through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

This book is very stout. It is hard to understand. It is filled with so many mysteries, and dark alleys, and convoluted ways. But here is what we need to remember: This is advice from a man who had it all. And he's telling us to listen and to live accordingly.

May God give us the grace to do just that, as we've heard His Word spoken to us tonight.

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