

Dec 17, 2006 • "Ecclesiastes, Part 16; To the Young and To the Old" Matt Chandler

What do you say we finish up Ecclesiastes tonight. If you have your Bibles, grab them. We'll start in Ecclesiastes 11, and we'll just finish up with the book. Ecclesiastes 11, we'll start with verse 7, "*Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.*" Solomon's just unpacking that life is and can be very, very, very beautiful. He's referencing those days where you wake up and everything works. Like you wake up five minutes before your alarm goes off, you can breathe through both of your nostrils. Remember what that was like? Your bum back's not hurting, your legs aren't hurting, your relationships are just working. In fact, it just feels like you've fallen into rhythm in terms of where you stand with the universe. And I think we've all had that day where the music just sounded better and we just wanted to roll down our windows and just everything worked. And so, Solomon goes, "There are days that life is unbelievably sweet and the sun feels good to your skin." Like the majority of the time, you're not even aware of the sun, you're not aware of how nice it is. But he's speaking of those instances when you have this moment of clarity and life is deep and it's good and you love it. But remember, we don't like Solomon and he'll prove why in the next verse. He's like, "Life is great. Isn't it? Now I will ramble on about death for the rest of my time with you. Verse 8, "*So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all;...*" So while you and I have breath, while you and I have this opportunity for sweet life and the feel of the sun, let us pursue life because, look at what he says next, "*...but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.*" He's going, "Chase life, chase Jesus, chase it to the fullness, but the truth is most of the time, you're going to get one nostril at best. And your back's going to hurt, if not now, eventually. And your knees are going to creak, if not now, eventually. But as much as you can help it, enjoy life deeply." Look at his next line, "*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.*" Okay, so here's what he's saying, "Do your 'want to's.'" If you were here last week, we said there's a big difference between wanting to do something and wanting to be something and actually doing that and actually becoming that. The majority of people are stuck in the "want to's." They want to be godly men and women, they want to be godly husbands, they want to be godly mothers. They want these things, but few ever do anything to try to attain it. They just sit in the want until the wants fade away into "I wish I would have's." An what Solomon is saying here is, "Hey, don't miss out on your opportunity with this one life that you've been given to become all that Christ put in your heart to become." "Follow your heart," is what he says.

And then, the next verse is where it gets interesting. Verse 10, "*Remove vexation from your heart...*" A lot of what we'll talk about today will make everyone who's 35 and up say, "Amen," and if you're under 35, it might puzzle you or offend you. I'll be as quick and to the point as I can. Solomon says, "Deal with your junk when you're young, because the older you get, the more it will cost you." You know what the worst part about being a preacher is...besides seminary? Here's what I know. I mean, this is bona fide fact. There's 20 year olds in here right now that are getting eaten up by lust. They can't control it; it just owns them. But no matter what I say and how I plead with you, pride will just...you're just not going to listen. You're absolutely going to have your first marriage disintegrate on you. And it doesn't matter how hard I preach or how much I plead, you'll have to have life kick the trash out of you before you'll ever hear what is absolutely the truth. Do you know how agonizing that is? And there are some of you, you've got such abandonment issues, daddy issues, call them whatever

you want. You can't stay in any relationship for long, we don't have friends for very long, we don't date for very long, we don't do anything for very long. And Solomon goes, "Man, let's work through that now. Let's not wait until it costs us more than it would right now." Remove while you're young, vexation from your heart. Deal with your junk now. And not the lame attempts that most of us do. The thing about deep roots is that they never come up on the first pull. I'm not even a farmer, I just know that.

Alright, look at this next line, because there's this other line here too. "*Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.*" I've noticed some interesting things happen as I've gotten older. Now, I'm still a young man at 32, but I can still do what I used to be able to do but it feels a lot different when I'm done now. And so, there are these changes that have begun to occur, and there are new thoughts in my mind that up until this point, I have never thought in my life. I've never had the thought, "If I do that, there could irreparable damage done to my physical body." I have never had that though, it's just been like, "Jump." Or usually, it's been somebody going, "You can't jump off this building and live," and I'm like, "Oh yeah?!?" And now, all of a sudden, I'm going, "Man, I can hurt myself beyond repair." And young people in particular have this way of living where they don't respect their body and don't respect the fact that their knees are the only knees they'll ever have and their hips are the only hips they'll ever have and their body's the only body they'll ever have. And Solomon says, "Hey, you might want to take care of that thing. You might want to put pain from your body." I think this is him talking about good stewardship of your own body. Put away pain from your body. And Ecclesiastes 12:1, "*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them';...*" There's two things about this text that I found very interesting. First, Solomon is an old man at this point, and he is pleading with young men and women to not forget about Jesus in this small window of your life that will affect the next thirty years. He says, "Not now. Don't forget about your Creator now. Not now. Now when you're choosing husband and wife, not when you're choosing a job, not when you're choosing future, not when you're choosing college. Don't forget about Jesus now, because how you handle the now is going to play out in the next 20-30 years." Now, maybe in 5 or 10 years, I'll change my mind in this, but it's been my experience up to date that old miserable people were at one time young dumb people. Do you know how much time we spend pleading with our young single women to wait for a godly man? You can go to church all you want, and you can be as godly of a mother as you want. In the end, boys are going to look to daddy and little girls are going to learn to love from daddy. Now listen, I come from a home where my mother was the spiritual leader, so if you're going, "Oh, we don't have that. What are we going to do?," that's where grace and Jesus and all these beautiful things can occur. Because I had a really absentee father who didn't have that much to do with me and a mom who just prayed her guts out and cried a lot for me. And I think she won. So, you make these choices now that play out for the next thirty years. So, Solomon's pleading with you, "I've already lived it. Please, listen to me. Don't forget about it now. Don't not pray now. Don't run from the Lord now. Press into Him now. If ever there's a time, young man, young woman, now, press in now. And then, he throws out this really crazy line. He says, "because there's coming a day where you won't want to be alive anymore." Now, that's hard for me to even get in my head. There's coming this day, for all of us, if we live long enough, that we're going to wake up and go, "Aaagh! I woke up again." There's coming this day where we'll have no pleasure in being alive. We'll just want to die, and it won't seem to be coming quick enough for us.

And then he goes on to describe the aging process. *“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;...”* Notice that the aging process and initial death is called “evil” according to Scripture. Death was never the plan of God. Sin brought death into the world. So let's watch this, *“...before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened...”* Him talking about light here is a reference to mental vitality. You and I have creativity and we have memory and we have wit and we have sharp minds. And Solomon says, “As the aging process grows, the mind begins to fade, and the creativity that was once there goes away, and the sharp wit that was at one time there begins to go away, and the memory begins to go away.” And then all of a sudden, we can't find our car keys ever, and we're taking this herb that's supposed to increase our memory, but we don't really remember what it was called. And the mind begins to fade, and where it once was sharp, it starts to become dull. And so, Solomon says, “When you have your mind, when it's creative and full of wit and it's sharp, let's chase after Jesus and live life deeply.

Look at what he says next. *“...before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,...”* This is reference back to childhood. He's saying that as you came into this world, you leave this world. I don't put this to you except be really honest. My infant son eats, sleeps and goes to the bathroom; if you live long enough, that will be your day. I'm not trying to make a joke. If you live long enough, that will be your day. You will eat, you will sleep, you will go to the bathroom. That will be your day. So, Solomon says, “While you can move, while you can think, while you're still alive, live deeply and chase Jesus.” Let's keep reading. Verse 3, *“...in the day when the keepers of the house tremble...”* This is a reference to the arms and the hands. The older you get, the arms and hands, the keepers of the house will betray you, and simple tasks like putting on your watch or buttoning your shirt will become more and more difficult until it become impossible. And what has kept your house will betray you. Your arms and your hands will begin to shake. Let's keep going, *“...and the strong men are bent,...”* This is a reference to our legs. *“...and the grinders cease because they are few...”* What's he talking about there? Teeth. *“...and those who look through the windows are dimmed,...”* What's he talking about? Eyesight. *“...and the doors on the street are shut.”* We live in a time period where we have more things at our disposal than they did back then. Like, you can get dentures and you can get contacts and still at the end of the night, you've basically got to dismantle a car. But before there were dentures, what would happen was as you teeth fell out, your top lip and your mouth would drop and you would get a pursed look on your face, pushed forward. And that's what means by “the doors are shut.” You'll have this pursed look on your face. Let's keep going. *“...and the doors on the street are shut--when the sound of the grinding is low,...”* That just means that you're not going to be eating corn on the cob. *“...and one rises up at the sound of a bird,...”* This is a reference to how difficult it becomes to sleep, the older you get. You'll go to bed very, very, early at night and you'll get up very, very early in the morning and you will wake up several times in between. And this one's a hard one. *“...and all the daughters of song are brought low.”* This is a reference to hearing. No longer can we hear like we once did. No longer can we enjoy. Verse 5, *“...they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way;...”* This is the fear that accompanies getting very old while the rest of the world as it appears to you is getting faster and faster and faster. Your body cannot move as fast, you are not as quick to see, so driving the car on the freeway or even walking in large crowds of people becomes very, very terrifying. And so you have a tendency to stay inside. *“...the almond tree blossoms...”* The thing about an almond tree is it will go white and the wind will carry away the blossoms. This is a reference to hair or the lack of hair, either one. Look at this, *“...the*

grasshopper drags itself along...” This is a reference to the difficulty in movement as we get older. It becomes more and more difficult to move, to function, to run, to jump. It becomes more and more difficult, and then he says, “...and desire fails...” This is a reference to sexuality. And he says, “Eventually, not interested in sex anymore.” And I also find it interesting that Solomon, who loves women, put that dead last. So, Solomon actually has got no teeth, he can't move, he can't see, he can't hear, and then, he's not interested in sex anymore. So I thought it's very last on his list. I'm going to move forward before I get in trouble. “...because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.” Okay, so let's go back to what he said. Don't forget about God in your youth. So according to the text, all of us find ourselves to be young. So, here's what he's saying. Do you like fishing? You won't always. Do you like hunting? You won't always. Do you like music? You won't always. Do you like art? You won't always. Do you love your family? Live long enough and you won't even know your family. So, we've got this day today. We've got this one life, this one pair of teeth, this one set of knees, this one set of shoulders and arms and legs, this one sharp mind, the ability to see, the ability to hear, the ability to drink deeply all that Christ has gifted us. Let's experience them all deeply and pursue Christ wholly. But some of us won't get to be that old, so he wants to include us in on the fun tonight. Ecclesiastes 12, starting in verse 6, “...before the silver cord is snapped...” That's a reference to the spinal column. “...or the golden bowl is broken...” That's your head. “...or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain...” Your heart. “...or the wheel broken at the cistern...” That's your circulation of blood. “...the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” Here's a really interesting idea in a culture that prides itself on individualism, that apparently your soul and all that is in it was given to you, loaned to you and will one day be required back by it's owner. It's an interesting thought. Look at verse 8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.” He says, “A life lived out without ever understanding why it's here is futile and meaningless and a waste.

He's going to shift gears here. I find this next part interesting. Look at verse 9, “Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” This is important. Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing teaches like life. It's why if you come across a 20 year old who seems to understand what a 30 year old normally understands, you say he's wise beyond his ears. And if you have a 30 year old who seems to operate on the wisdom of a 40 or 50 year old, you say that he's wise beyond his years. And so on and so on and so on. It's because you can read all the books that you want, but life is the ultimate teacher. And so, what Solomon says here is that those who have lived well and those who have lived long and those who have experienced life now have a duty to impart the wisdom learned to a generation behind it that is prone to make the same mistakes as it. So why is it that we can never seem to get those two groups to cohabitate? So, I'd say about a year and a half ago, we started getting older around here. I think a year and a half ago, the average age was 13. It would always just sound like there were all girls in here while we were singing. And we started getting this massive influx of 40 and 50 and 60 year olds. And man, I almost wept, I was so excited about that. And we got these mature, Jesus-loving believers in Christ, and they were all excited about the opportunity to help pour into young men and young women. And for whatever reason, it just hasn't panned out like that. So, what we've got here is we've got a bunch of 40, 50 and 60 year olds who get together and they talk and pool their collective knowledge together and then you've got a group of 20 and 30 year olds who get together all the time and

pool their collective ignorance. And don't get offended by ignorance; I just mean you don't know because you haven't lived yet. So what ends up happening is every week, you've got this massive amount of 20 and 30 year olds who get together and they feel overwhelmed because they don't know it's not always going to be like that. So, they just went from having one baby to two babies and have had to switch from running zone to going man to man. And it's confusing and they're shifting and someone's always left wide open in the flat and it just goes bad. Or they've got a third and don't even know what defense to run anymore. And they don't know how to stay healthy. Like, we've got the same flu that's been going through the house for three years, God help us. And they don't make much money. And so, they've got three kids and they're trying to figure out how to do life and they're probably in debt. And so, when you've got a bunch of kids and you've got debt, all of a sudden, marriage becomes very difficult and intimacy begins to wane it feels overwhelming and it feels like the world's about to collapse in on you. Or you're single and you can't seem to find a godly woman, you can't seem to find a godly man. You know you're supposed to be steadfast and okay with your singleness, but it just seems to war on you and it's not what you really want, but in church and in group you say that's what you want because someone has lied to you and told you that as soon as you become content, that's when you'll get the other deal. And so, they feel overwhelmed.

And then what you've got on the other side is this massive amount of 50 and 60 year olds here at the Village that are going, "Remember when we had teenagers? God, I'm glad we survived that. Remember when we saw that lady in the church dragging four kids, looking like death? I remember when that was us." And so, what ends up happening is this group remembers what it's like to be in the fetal position, not knowing if they're going to survive, while this group stays in the fetal position, not knowing if they're going to survive. And it's pride and ignorance on both sides. You've got the pride and arrogance of youth that loves to pretend that they don't need help despite the fact that their world's burning down. You've got this Americanized, self-made stuff that makes you think like you're just supposed to know how to do life. You know what I've learned? There are really guys out there that just don't know how to love their wives in ways that the wives receive it. They're not wicked people. They're not mean guys. They just don't know that she doesn't want to go to a tractor pull. They thought that that was a good idea. They just don't know that a budget's a good way to go. They just don't know those things. No one ever taught them. We live very much in a fatherless generation. And so, what ends up happening is this group, the 20 and 30 year old group, like to pretend that they don't need any help at all. And for some reason there's this really interesting thing that happens. It's almost this, "We've earned this time of being able to do this." Or another thing that I've seen is that if they find anybody who lives life differently than they live it, they feel like that's an indictment against they way they lived it. Or there's this third thing, and I've seen it in myself. When I got in to high school, I'd see 7th graders at the mall, and I'm like, "Punk kids." And when I got into college, I would see high schoolers and go, "Punk kids." And when I got out of college, I would see college kids and go, "Punk kids." And now, I'm in my mid-30's and I'll see early 20's and I'm like "Punk kids. You need to get a job, that's what you need to get." And I know that there are some of you out there looking at me going, "Punk kid. You don't know what you're talking about." But it's okay, because there's a 60 year old behind you going, "Punk kid." And the funny thing is, there's a 90 year old going, "I hate everyone. All of you are punks." I'm just saying, these are things that I've seen. I wonder how much better our marriages would be here if we could let these generations collide. I wonder how much better it would be for our kids. I wonder how much vitality it might return to those in the last quarter of their lives. Now, don't get me wrong, golf's a great game. But did you know the book of Titus commands older men to seek out

younger men? It doesn't suggest it, it commands it. And for younger men to be recipients of that. It commands the same of older women. Seek out younger women and teach them godliness. So, I've got a couple of ideas. I'm not trying to guilt you into anything, I'm trying to shame you. It's completely different. What if, for those of you who are in your 40's, 50's and 60's, and I want to make this asterisk, who know Jesus and the Scriptures well, what if you stayed in the home group that you enjoy so much. But what if you also just gave it one more night and you opened up your home and let a group of 20 or 30 year olds just use your home? You don't even have to teach it. You can just sit in the middle of that group and every once and a while, go, "Um, could I say something here? That might work, but there's no chance that will ever work. I am 62 years old, and that is the worst idea I have ever heard. I mean, I'm not trying to shame you here, but are you saved?" I'm just kidding. You've got to be more sneaky, more subversive than that, I've found. But could you be that guy that says, "Let's get back to the Bible instead of just talking about what we feel here." Could you be that balancing agent? My favorite thing about the older men and women is just that they'll sometimes sit at dinner with us and they'll laugh and then they'll remind us it won't always be this way. Like some days I need to hear it. Sometimes I'm just tired no matter how much spinach I eat, no matter how many vitamins I take. So, maybe you'll think about that, maybe you'll pray about that. Give a call to Gilbert Montez and say, "I'd love to host...I'd love to even lead one." In just a couple of weeks, we're going to introduce you to Beau Hughes. We've hired a guy who was in Portland, Oregon for several years and went down to Austin. We've hired him to come in and work with our college students. We've historically had anywhere between 400 and 600 students here who we've done little with. We've done just a little bit with Jacob who also had several other jobs here at the Village. And we just finally said, "Let's pour into them." And college kids, they hang out with each other all the time, and it will need to be more than just more hang out time with them. So we'll need older men, older women to get them involved in that. Or we can stay separate, and the 20 and 30 year olds will learn through divorce and pain and the spilling of their own blood. But I like to learn through other people's blood and try to save mine for new lessons. And the Scriptures said, "And the words of the wise man, they come from one Shepherd."

Let's finish up the book. Verse 13, "*The end of the matter; all has been heard.*" So he just said, "Okay, you wanted to know if partying would make your life better. I threw epic parties. You wanted to know if sex would make your life better. I have 700 wives and 300 hookers at my houses. You wanted to know if comfort would make your life better. I'm the wealthiest man in my time period. You wanted to know if people catering to your every whim, if success in business, if leaving your mark on the world would fulfill you. I've done them all and here is my conclusion to the great experiment: "*Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*" Anybody else find it mildly horrifying that even the secret things will be judged by God? I mean it's ironic because there are no secrets. It's like an urban legend. You can't hide things from God. He knows now. Here is the whole duty of man. I can also be translated, "Here's the wholeness of man." This is what man was created for. This is what fills the void in man, that he fear God, that he understands that God is and has placed faith in Him. And then, don't forget about this second part, "...and keeps His commands." This is where wholeness is found, and in the end, this is what you and I will be judged on.

I just think, especially after these last two chapters, it's just so practical and applicable that it would be a shame to just pray and say amen and just rush out of here tonight and eat dinner or go to a movie.

And so, I want to push you though a little bit here and think through and walk through this text with me. Have you removed vexation from your heart? I don't know what vexes you. I don't know what holds you captive. I don't know what owns your soul. Have you done all that is in your power to remove vexation from your heart? The answer's yes or no. It's not, "Well, I want to," because that's not what he says. He doesn't say, "...want to remove vexation," he says "as far as it is up to you, remove vexation from your heart." Are you taking steps, are you moving, are you getting help, are you removing vexation from your heart? Are you in that place, for whatever reason, where right now who Jesus is and what the Scriptures say are just of no consequence to you? Is the thing that you need to deal with tonight the fact that somewhere along the way, religion has taken over where Jesus once reigned? Are you hoarding wisdom? Have you lived life well? Have you, by the grace of God, grasped the Scriptures, submitted your lives to Him? Are you now sitting around a bunch of people who have done the same and rejoicing how well life has played out? Or, on the other side of the coin, are you arrogantly pretending as though you need no help, as though you need no wisdom, as though you need no one to speak into your life?

I can't help but dream for us. Like one of my favorite parts about UNT is, for one it's a commuter school. Which means that for a lot of you, you're not going anywhere. You're going to graduate and you're going to stay in the metroplex. Like, some of us, we've got this shot to do the next 30-40 years together. I wonder what 15 years from now will look like here at the Village if young and old alike will hear Solomon talk tonight. For now, it's just a dream.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women and I think You for the chance just to open up the Scriptures. And I just pray for so many different things tonight. First, I want to pray for life and that we might experience life fully, that we might slow down as we chew our food tonight, that we might experience all the feelings, all the tastes and all the smells and all the goodness that there is under the sun, all the while knowing that there's something beyond it, something that authored it. I pray that You would give us the courage to deal with what vexes us. And I pray that You would create a harmony between older and younger here, a desire to want to receive and a desire to want to give. In the end, help us fear You, and give us the strength to obey You. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."