

DEATH IS NEARER THAN YOU THINK!

Today's Text: Ecclesiastes Chap. 12

Extracts:

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them.' ...Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. ... Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all, for God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil [Eccl. 12: 1, 6, 7, 13, 14]

Each time I watch on television people escaping from a disaster, I pay attention to what they take away. Whether it is war or fire or flood, whether it is the Tsunami or the hurricane, people tend to take away what they value the most or at worst what they can salvage. In all cases, their priority is to escape ALIVE! That suggests that they consider life more precious than their material assets, such as houses, money, clothes or books. When there is a plane crash, the amount of loss that reporters first flash to the world is how many passengers are killed, not the value of the crashed plane or the passengers' luggage. In deed, human lives are very precious to preserve. But can we really do that?

From the day that we were born, we have been on the road to physical death. Therefore, we are ALL at different stages on the way there. We cannot stop it. We may think that we can delay it by using anti-aging supplements but we are inching closer and closer each new day! I am yet to come across anybody who is not afraid of death because even those who want to go to heaven are not ready to die yet!

Chapter 12 of the book of Ecclesiastes is a rude awakening for us to pay attention to the subject right from our youth, when the probability of death from natural causes is quite low. We are growing older each new day. Our body parts are falling apart one by one. One day, the whole system will collapse and the spirit will leave. At that time, it will be too late to discuss death. Death is nearer than you think and now is the right time to discuss it. Today's lesson takes up the subject.

1. Death begins at birth!

I was admiring my car recently after it had been washed and polished. It smells clean and new, and runs very well, all evidence of good maintenance! It has done less than 40,000 kilometres, and I always assure myself that it will command a good second-hand price should I choose to sell it. However, my wishes apart, I *know* that the car is getting old! For example, the plate number begins with “PBF,” (registered in June 1999) whereas the latest cars bear “PBW.” To rub it in, a popular insurance company here in Trinidad & Tobago, M & M Insurance Services, publishes in the newspapers each day a “Used Car Guide” listing registration sequence from “PAO” in March 1994 to the latest! So, as you drive around town, everyone who sees your plate number knows how old is your car! Also, there is a sticker on my windscreen indicating that, as required for cars more than five years old, my car has passed the smog test. So, I cannot hide the fact that my car is growing older day by day, a process that began from the day that I first put it on the road six years ago.

The human body is very much like that, and before it finally breaks down in old age, it passes through several stages, such as:

a) *Maturation*

Although we start counting a child’s age from the day of birth, the fact is that s(he) is already nine months *old* on Day 1! When we count the new baby’s age, we start putting the suffix, “old,” from the moment of birth. Thus, the child is “three seconds old” or “one year old” or “fifteen years old.”

In order to survive, children spend their first few years on earth developing their organs and limbs. They learn to walk and later run, to talk and later speak, and so on. Before they start teething, their smiles can be intriguing. When they flash their toothless gums at you, they remind you of the toothless smiles of grandparents in cultures where restorative dentistry is not common or popular. Infants may take a long time to grow into children, adolescents into adults, but you hardly notice unless from family albums of birthdays and other events. One day, maybe at around the age of 25, all their muscles and organs would have been fully developed.

During the maturation stage, children exhibit a great deal of strength. If you look at most sports today (tennis, athletics, basketball, soccer, etc), the leading stars are between 18 and 30. Nobody talks about dying except by accident (including HIV/AIDS) or suicide. Interestingly, however, most sports stars also retire before they are 40, an indication of wear and tear. Is that another expression for aging? That is why the Preacher has reminded young people, “remember now your Creator in the *days of your youth*

before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” [Eccl. 12: 1]. Death can strike without any warning and young people may not have the time or opportunity to repair their relationship with God thereafter.

b) *Deterioration sets in*

As we approach middle ages, 40-60, we do not need anyone to tell us that our bodies are changing. The women are reaching their menopause and threatened by weight in wrong places. The men are developing potbellies and slowing down too. How about the snoring? Arthritic pains begin to be felt at body joints, especially in the hands and legs. Vitamin supplements become a vital part of the diet of this group.

Thanks to cosmetic surgery, they can disguise their ages. They can dye their hair and/or re-shape their bodies and faces. Exercise combined with good eating and drinking habits can make people in this group look much younger than they really are. However, like my old car earlier referred to, people are not deceived. For example, in a Coca Cola advertisement during the FIFA World Cup Tournament in South Korea/Japan, 2002, an old man was dancing disco with a group of young people. Viewers loved it because they knew that there was an old man doing what was not expected of his age group!

Death among this group comes in the form of heart attacks, cancers of various forms, among others. Again, most people do not think of death as if it would never come near them. Sooner or later, they will have to think of it because “the days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away” [Ps. 90: 10]. Death is nearer than you think!

2. Here are the road signs of aging and death!

Chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes gives us a very vivid picture of the death throes of old people. It is the direct opposite of a maturing child in that they are losing parts and functions of their bodies piece by piece. Let us examine the critical aspects:

a) *Physical deterioration*

The Preacher says, “the *keepers of the house* tremble and the *strong men* bow down” [v. 3]. The keepers of the house are the hands and the strong men are the legs. Both organs begin to weaken and slow down. You begin to feel joint pains and weaken with the slightest of movement.

The “grinders,” that is, the teeth, “cease because they are few” [v. 3]. Of course, natural teeth become fewer and fewer and dentures may not be able to bite as effectively as the natural ones. The Preacher also talks of the eyes (“those that look through the window”) growing dim and the ears (“the doors that shut in the streets”) becoming deaf while conversation (“the sound of grinding”) becomes low [vv. 3, 4].

The body becomes weak (“the grasshopper is a burden”) and bent over by age (“they are afraid of height and of terrors in the way”). Grey hair “the almond tree blossoms”) can no longer be hidden [v. 5].

A good example of the impact of such physical deterioration can be seen in Isaac knowing the right time to pass Abraham’s blessing to his children. At the time, “Isaac was old and *his eyes were so dim that he could not see.*” So, he called Esau, his firstborn, and said to him, “Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death” [Gen. 27: 1-2]. You know the rest of the story. The important thing here is that he read the tell-tale right and even though he did not know the day of death, he knew that the time had come. Yet, there are many old people who still behave as if death will never come instead of preparing themselves and their loved ones for their own transition.

b) *Emotional/psychological deterioration*

The Preachers says of the old person, “desire fails” [Eccl. 12: 5]. In other words, libido drops and sexual desires and performance fall. A 95-year old comedian was once asked about his sex life. He said that what he now did every night was to shake his wife’s hands and tell her, “see you in the morning!”

The point is vividly illustrated in the relationship between David and Abishag. The king “was old in years; and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm.” So, his servants got him a young virgin as wife in the person of Abishag, a Shunammite beauty, and “the young woman was very lovely and she cared for the king and served him; *but the king did not know her*” [1 Kgs 1: 1-4]. He could not because he had lost his libido.

c) *Physical death*

As old people approach the point of physical death, the whole body system shuts down. The spinal cord (“silver cord”) is loosed, the skull (“golden bowl”) is broken and the circulatory system (“the pitcher”) is “shattered at the fountain (and) the wheel broken at the well” [Eccl. 12: 6]. This is the point where the spirit leaves the physical body (“dust”) to return to God and the dust returns to the earth where it came from [v. 7]. The matter does not end there. The spirit faces God’s judgment “for God

will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” [v. 14].

3. Here comes the heart of the matter!

The Preacher says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the *whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all*” [v. 13]. The whole duty of man is to fear God and obey His *every word*. In other words, our existence here on earth is the only opportunity we have to make eternity in heaven. Therefore, our bodies are not only physical; they are also spiritual. In the end, what counts the most is the state of the spiritual body *at the time of death*. As the physical body deteriorates, the spiritual body should appreciate for “even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” [2 Cor. 4: 16].

So, before your spirit leaves the body to go to God, let us evaluate where you stand right now:

a) *Your spirit is alive!*

If your spirit is alive and well, that is, right with God, then “the Spirit of God dwells in you” [1 Cor. 3: 16], no matter your age, “for you are the temple of the living God, as God has said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them, I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” [2 Cor. 6: 16]. Moreover, because your soul prospers, it impacts prosperity on your health even in old age [3 Jn 2]. For example, at 120 years of age, Moses’ “eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour diminished” [Deut. 34: 7]. Sarah was able to conceive and bare a son at the age of 90 years even when she and her husband “were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing” [Gen. 18: 11].

b) *Your spirit is dead*

The spirit is dead when you live in sin “for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” [Rom. 8: 6]. If at any age, especially old age, you find yourself still seeking worldly pleasures, you are taking a big risk, gambling with your eternity. Get down on your knees immediately and confess your sins to God for “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 Jn 1: 9]. Give your life to Christ so that He can be your Advocate with His Father when you face God’s judgment [1 Jn 2: 1].

4. Conclusion: Get ready for death every moment of the rest of your life!

It is a privilege to be alive and you should thank God for it. The best gratitude that you owe God is to remember Him as your Creator who delights in your keeping

His commandments because that is the whole duty of your existence. Each new day, you are growing older. You are also growing closer to death and judgment.

There are no excuses when you come to God after your death. In the first place, you cannot win that judgment by your own effort. You need to give your life to Christ, the only way to the Father, whose blood shed on Calvary has paid for your sins. When you know and obey Him, you receive the privilege to be called a son of God. You walk the rest of your days here on earth with your head held high. You will be assured that even when your physical body dies, you “have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” [2 Cor. 5: 1].

Death is coming. It is nearer than you think!