Preparing For Eternity

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[0:00] If we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, this morning if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 11.

Ecclesiastes chapter 11, and we're going to walk through this chapter, but if you just take as our text the words of verses 7 and 8. Ecclesiastes chapter 11, and verse 7.
Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all. But let him remember that the days of darkness will be many.
All that comes is vanity. Thank you. As you know, over the past couple of weeks, we've had the pleasure of having an Australian couple with us.
They've been visiting with us. They're with us for a month. And they've come a long way. And it's been lovely to see Kenny Roach and Catherine. They're not with us today. They have other commitments. But you know, it's always nice to see them.
[1:15] And I'm sure many of you have been delighted to see them. But you know, I was thinking the other day, and I can say this because I know they're not here. I was thinking the other day about, well, the sun and the sea and the sand that Kenny and Catherine enjoy in Australia.

And it's so unlike Lewis. But you know, it got me thinking about the most famous Christian in Australia who lived during the 19th century.
His name was Arthur Stace. And I've mentioned him before because Arthur Stace, he changed the face of the Australian capital with one word, the word eternity.
And that one word was written by a man who had spent most of his life in and out of prison. Arthur Stace, before he was converted, he was unable to free himself from the web of poverty and addiction that he had spun for himself.
And he even pleaded at times for the police to lock him up and keep him away from alcohol. Arthur Stace's life was a mess. Until one night, Arthur Stace, he stumbled into a church hall where an evangelist called John Ridley was preaching.
[2:25] And during his sermon, John Ridley said, I wish that I could shout the word eternity throughout the streets of Sydney. And John Ridley in a sermon, he repeatedly said the word eternity, eternity, eternity.

And that night, Arthur Stace was converted. He committed his life to following Jesus Christ. And so Arthur Stace, when he came out of that church hall, he felt this powerful call from the Lord to kneel down and write on the ground the word eternity.
And so Arthur Stace, he put his hand into his pocket and funnily enough, he found a piece of chalk. And so he took the chalk out of his pocket and he kneeled down and he wrote the word eternity.
He couldn't even write his own name. It's the amazing thing. He couldn't write his own name. And yet he wrote the word eternity in beautiful handwriting. And from that moment on, Arthur Stace devoted his whole life to writing this one word, eternity.
And what's remarkable is that every spare moment this man had, for the next 37 years of his life, he walked through the streets of Sydney, writing with a piece of chalk, one word, eternity.
[3:42] And everywhere people went throughout the streets of Sydney, there would be this single word and its solemn reminder of where we're all going. Eternity.

And you know, although it was only one word, it spoke a thousand words. Because it reminds us all about the shortness of time and the length of eternity.
And as we've said before, that's what Solomon is doing here in his sermon called Ecclesiastes. Solomon's sermon is all about the vanity of living your life without God.
And he says that we need to look at life. We need to love life. But we also need to live our lives with an eternal perspective. And Solomon's plea to us in his whole sermon is, Don't waste your life.

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Don't waste your life living for yourself and living for the pleasures of this world. Because as Solomon has reminded us again and again in this sermon, he says that what's of the utmost importance and what's of eternal value is your relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
[4:52] But what we see as we come to chapter 11, is that as Solomon begins to bring his sermon to a conclusion, He gives us advice in order to prepare for eternity.

He gives us advice in order to prepare for eternity. And there are four things Solomon says. There are four words of advice that Solomon gives in order to prepare for eternity.
He says, Be alert, be active, be attentive, and be aware. Be alert, be active, be attentive, and be aware.
So we're going to look at this advice that Solomon gives. So look first of all at be alert. Be alert, he says. Look at verse 1. He says, Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.
Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth. And if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.
[6:07] And in these opening verses, Solomon's advice to prepare for eternity is to be alert to your opportunities. Be alert to your opportunities. And Solomon emphasizes the need to be alert to your opportunities by giving the illustration of a ship going to sea.

Because when Solomon says, Cast your bread upon the water, he's not talking about feeding ducks. He's talking about commercial trade. He's talking about ships that would go on these commercial voyages across the world to trade their produce.
And what's interesting is that, as the king of Israel, Solomon, at that time, had his own fleet of ships. They were called the ships of Tarshish. And the ships of Tarshish, they only returned once every three years.
Because as you know, there were no satellite navigation systems in the year 1000 BC. And there wasn't really any maps either. And so ships, they would sometimes sail all these oceans, and they would keep sailing until they came to land, and then they would trade their goods.
And those farmers who had loaded their cargo onto these ships to be sold in other nations. These farmers, they might have to wait months, maybe even years, before they would receive any money for their produce.
[7:30] And this is what Solomon means here in verse 1. Cast your bread upon the water, for you will find it after many days. But putting produce onto a ship that was going to keep travelling towards the horizon, you could say that it was a bit of a blind exercise.

They didn't know exactly where they were going, but they knew that they would eventually reach land at some point. And they had to trust that when they got there, they would be able to trade their goods, and then return home safely.
As one commentator describes, he says it was a venture of faith. It was a venture of faith. And you know, that's the point that Solomon is trying to get across here.
That entering eternity, it's a venture of faith. It's a voyage into the unknown. Because none of us have been to eternity.
None of us have seen what's on the other side of death. But without hesitation, Solomon says, you need to be prepared for eternity. You need to be prepared for that voyage that you're going on into the great eternity.
[8:42] And Solomon says that the only way to be ready for eternity is commitment. The only way to be ready for eternity is commitment. And I say this because the word cast that Solomon uses here, it refers to total commitment.

Cast your bread upon the water, for you will find it after many days. He's talking about total commitment. And so the only way, he says, to be prepared and prepared for this voyage into eternity, the only way to be prepared is to be totally committed to Jesus Christ.
And as many of you know by now, the word commitment is my favorite word. Because commitment is what separates the person with head knowledge of Jesus from the person with heart knowledge of Jesus.
Total commitment to Jesus Christ is the difference between being saved or being lost. Total commitment is the difference between being in Christ or being out of Christ.

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Total commitment is the difference between being a Christian or not being a Christian. It's the difference between spending an eternity in heaven with Jesus or spending an eternity in hell without him.
[10:00] And what Solomon is saying to us is, if you want to be prepared for eternity, then you need to be committed. You need commitment. You need to cast yourself upon the mercy of the Lord.

You need to look to him by faith. And you need to trust in the Lord with all your heart. And you need to do it, he says, now. You need to do it now.
Because as Solomon says in verse 2, give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on the earth. In other words, you don't know what a day nor an hour will bring in your life.
You don't know how close you are to eternity. You don't know when you will be taking that voyage into the great eternity. My friend, you have no idea when death will leave you and judgment will find you and eternity will hold you.
And for you as someone who is not yet prepared to meet their God, you must commit your life to Jesus Christ. And you need to do it today.
[11:11] You need to do it today. Because what Solomon is reminding you this morning is that you need to be alert to your opportunities. Because you will not always have them.

And for some of you here, you have had many opportunities. You've had many opportunities to prepare for eternity by committing your life to Jesus Christ.
But sadly, you've wasted all these opportunities. And you can't get them back. Once they're gone, they're gone. My friend, you've had many opportunities to prepare for eternity.
And all you have to do is think of the times that you've sat in church under the preaching of the gospel. Think about the amount of times that ministers or preachers have pleaded with you to commit your life to Jesus Christ.
Think about the Christians around you in your home, in your family, your friends, your neighbours, your work colleagues. Think about the many times that they've spoken to you about your soul or asked you where you're at with Jesus.
[12:18] Think about all the reminders of the frailty of life and the closeness of eternity. Think about all the warnings that you've had, maybe through illness or through accidents or even death, seeing death itself through a family member or a close friend.

And yet all these things, the Lord has spoken to you. But the Lord has kept you. The Lord has protected you. The Lord has helped you through these things. Others have entered into eternity. They have taken their voyage into the great eternity. But you, you have been given more time. You have been given more opportunities.
You're still on mercy's ground. But my friend, Solomon is saying to you today, be alert to your opportunities. Don't waste them. Take your opportunity to commit your life to Jesus Christ and make him your Lord and Saviour today.
Take your opportunity now because you just don't know when you have experienced your last opportunity. And that's what Solomon says in verse 3.
[13:28] He says, If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth. And if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

And what Solomon is saying there is that you can't prevent anything in this life. When you look up into the sky and you see the clouds, that they're full of rain, you know that you cannot prevent that rainfall.
But instead of doing nothing, what do you do? You take shelter. You prepare for the coming rain. And in a similar manner, says Solomon, if you know that eternity is coming, you will prepare for eternity.
You'll commit your life to Jesus Christ and you will know him and love him as your Lord and Saviour. My friend, if you know that death is coming into your experience and judgment is drawing near and eternity is just on the horizon, Solomon says, you will be alert to your opportunities.
Because as Solomon says, where the tree falls, there it shall lie. And of course, what Solomon means by this is that when you are cut down like a tree and your life is just taken from you, he says the position you fall in, it will determine your eternal voyage.

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[14:53] You will fall to the north or to the south. You will die, he says, in Christ or out of Christ. You will die saved or unsaved.

You will die lost or found. You will die and spend an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell. My friend, you need to be alert to your opportunities and you need to take them while you have them. Because when the tree falls, there it shall lie. And so Solomon, Solomon, he's giving to us this advice in order to prepare for eternity.
And it's good advice. It's advice we need to listen to. The second bit of advice that Solomon gives us is be active. Be alert.
Be active. Be active. Look at verse 4. He says, He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.
[15:59] As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who is making everything. In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand.

For you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. And in these verses, Solomon reminds us that that inactivity is a waste of time.
Doing nothing is pointless. Because if you do nothing, then nothing will happen. If you don't make a move, then you'll go nowhere.
And it's an obvious point to make, but it seems to be a necessary point to make, because there are far too many people in here. I'll be honest with you. There are too many of you in here who have heard the gospel all your lives, but you do nothing with it.
You do nothing with it. I think you've heard the gospel again and again and again, and it just seems to wash over you. It doesn't seem to have any effect. It doesn't make you move.
[17:11] It doesn't make you come and follow Jesus. It doesn't make you commit your life to Jesus Christ. You have heard this good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. You've heard it so often, but you seem to do nothing with it.

And it just seems that you're waiting for a more convenient season in your life. And you know, that's exactly what Solomon is describing here. He said in verse 4 that the man who looks to the wind will not sow his seed.
He won't throw his seed into the wind just in case nothing happens with his seed. He won't throw his seed into the wind because he fears that no good will come of it.
But on the other hand, Solomon says that you have the man, and when it comes to harvest time, he doesn't reap what he has sown because he sees the weather.
He does nothing with the veg that is grown in his vegetable patch and it's ready to be reaped, it's ready to be eaten, and it's ready to be enjoyed.
[18:15] But Solomon says he just leaves it there in the ground to rot. And you know, verse 4, it's an interesting illustration because it's all about the fear of commitment.

It's all about the fear of commitment. The man who is to sow his seed, he's afraid to sow his seed because he doesn't know what will happen.
And the man who is to reap his produce, he's afraid to see what has been growing beneath the ground because he doesn't know whether it's good or bad. And Solomon's point is that sometimes becoming a Christian, and committing your life to Jesus Christ, and coming out on the side of the Lord, whatever you want to call it, sometimes it's a scary thing because you just don't know what it'd be like.
You don't know what changes will take place. You don't know what people, how people will react or what people will say. And maybe there's all these questions and worries and concerns that people have.
Maybe you have them. Maybe you're worried about what it will be like if you become a Christian and what will they think and say about you. And these are genuine concerns. But sometimes these things make you want to put it off until another time.
[19:34] Until a more convenient season in your life. Where you know what you have to do. And you know what you need to do. But because of worries or doubts or fears, you want to just leave it just now.

Leave it just now. But you know, I love what Solomon says in verse 5. As you do not know the way of the Spirit, the way the Spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

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And what Solomon is saying is that you don't need to know how a baby is formed in the womb in order to know that the baby is real.
You don't need to know about all, how all the bones of that baby are formed together and how the heart starts beating and how the baby is fearfully and wonderfully made.
You don't need to know all these things about the baby in order to believe that God created the baby. And in a similar manner, Solomon says, you don't need to know the future in order to be a Christian.
[20:43] You don't need to worry about the future in order to be a Christian. You don't need to wait until you're older in order to be a Christian. You don't need to wait until you're a better person in order to be a Christian.

Now my friend, he says, what you need to do is actively seek the Lord with all your heart. You need to be active in seeking the Lord. Because doing nothing will lead to nothing.
Doing nothing will leave you in the lost, hell-bound state that you're in today. Doing nothing will not save you. My friend, to sit and to wait and to do nothing, it will be fatal.
And you know, I've said this before, there are some people that have this fatalistic view of salvation. They excuse themselves from committing their life to Jesus Christ by becoming a Christian and they excuse themselves by hiding behind the doctrine of election.
They have this perverted view of God's sovereignty in salvation. Where they say, well, if I'm going to be saved, I'll be saved. And there's nothing I can do about it.
[21:55] If I'm in the elect, I will be saved. And you know, those who say these things, those who think like that, those who sit and stay where they are and do nothing until they die.

My friend, let me assure you today, when they die, they go to hell. There is no question. And they go to hell because the Bible never, ever tells us to sit and stay where we are.
The Bible never says sit and do nothing. Well, the Bible, beautiful book, it's a divine invitation and it's full of divine imperatives.
It's full of commands in which the Lord is saying to you in His Bible, in the book, this Word of God, listen to me. Incline your here.
Here and your soul shall live. Look to me and be saved. Take up your cross and follow me. Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find.
[23:03] Knock and it shall be open to you. Call unto me, He says, and I will answer. Come unto me and you will find rest. They're all divine imperatives.

And not one of them says, if you're in the elect, stay where you are. Sit and do nothing. Wait for something to happen. No, they all plead with you. They earnestly plead with you to respond to the divine invitation of Jesus and come to Him and find rest for your soul.
And this is what Solomon is saying to us. He says in verse 6, in the morning, sow your seed. Do something. And at evening withhold not your hand.
Go and reap it. For you do not know which will prosper. This or that or whether both alike will be good. Solomon is saying don't wait for a more convenient season.
Don't put off seeking the Lord. Don't stay away from Jesus because you think you're not good enough and that you have doubts and that you lack assurance.
[24:07] My friend, it's the fact that you're not good enough that you need to come to Him. My friend, in order to prepare for eternity, you need to be alert to your opportunities.

You need to be active in seeking the Lord. And then you need to be attentive to God's Word. You need to be attentive to God's Word.
That's what we see thirdly. Solomon, he's giving to us advice in order to prepare for eternity. Be alert, be active, be attentive. Be attentive.
He says in verse 7, Light is sweet and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all.
But let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. And as Solomon, as he continues to give us this good advice about preparing for eternity, he says, you need to ask the Lord to open your eyes.
[25:14] He says, truly the light is sweet. It's a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun. And needless to say, we all love the sun. We all love when the sun comes out.

We all love sunny days. We all love the longer nights. We all love the light that the sun gives. We love its warmth. We love the sun. That's what Solomon is saying here.

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Truly, the light of the sun is sweet. But you only know that the light of the sun is sweet if you can see it.
If your eyes are closed or if you're blind to the light of the sun, then you're in darkness. And if you're in darkness, you don't know where you're going.
You're without direction. If you're in darkness, you're lost. without light, say, Solomon, you're lost. And that's the point he's making.
[26:10] We need to be attentive to God's word because God's word is light. And God's word is light because God is light.

And in him there is no darkness at all. And so, my friend, God's word, the Bible, it's a light to those in darkness because this book that you all have before you, it illuminates the mind and the soul of those in darkness.
This book, it gives direction to those who are lost. This book, it gives clarity to those who are uncertain. And that's why it's good to read your Bible.
That's why it's good to be in church because this book gives light to those who are in darkness. And you know, that's what we were singing about in Psalm 119.
Psalm 119 is a psalm that praises God for the Bible. And in Psalm 119, the psalmist, he confesses, he says, you probably know this verse, thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.
[27:19] But that confession from the psalmist, it came because the psalmist asked the Lord earlier on in the psalm, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. And friend, the reason you're still in darkness today, the reason you're still not a Christian, the reason you're still lost, the reason you still haven't prepared for eternity, it's not because the Bible isn't giving you direction and clarity and light.
It's because your eyes are closed and you need them to be opened. You need to ask the Lord to open your eyes. You need to ask the Lord to make you see. You need to pray like the psalmist prayed.
Open my eyes. Lord, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. And the promise is that when you ask, you will receive.
When you seek, you will find. Because Jesus says, I am the light of the world. He who believes in me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
[28:37] my friend, you need to be attentive to God's word. Because if you refuse to ask for your eyes to be opened, you will remain in darkness for all eternity.

And that's what Solomon says in verse 8. If a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all. But let him remember that the days of darkness will be many.
All that comes is vanity. And you know, the darkness that Solomon mentions, it's what Jesus affirms when he describes those who will spend an eternity in hell.
Because hell, it's described in the Bible as outer darkness. The place where there is no light. And in that place, Jesus says, there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.
My friend, you need to prepare for eternity. You need to prepare for eternity. You need to be alert to your opportunities. You need to be active in seeking the Lord.
[29:44] You need to be attentive to God's word. And you need to be aware of the judgment. And that's what we see lastly. Solomon is giving us advice in order to prepare for eternity.

Be alert, be active, be attentive, be aware. Be aware. look at verse 9. 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. Remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.
eternity. And so in these closing words of advice in order to prepare for eternity, Solomon says that you need to live your life with an eternal perspective.
You need to remember that the moment you enter eternity, you will be standing before Jesus. You will be standing before the judgment seat of Christ.
[30:54] And the Bible solemnly reminds us that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. God and give an account of our lives. God made us.

This is what we are saying to the children. God made us. God loves us. And so God will ask us what we did with the life he gave to us. He will ask us to give an account.

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And that's what Solomon is saying. He is saying that far too often life is lived without a thought towards Jesus. Far too often life is lived without a thought towards God's eternity.
Far too often he says life is lived without a thought towards God's judgment on our sin. And in your youth he says you think that eternity is so far away from you that you can live your life any way you like.
But he says when you're old and when you know that eternity is that little bit closer and you know as Solomon says God will bring all these things into judgment.
[32:04] My friend you need to be aware of God's judgment because you know every Lord's day you sit here in front of me you sit and you begin another week hearing the gospel and sometimes you walk out of here unchanged.

The reality is you might not be here next Lord's day. I might not be here next Lord's day. And if you're not prepared for eternity then next Lord's day you might be in hell.
And you know me by now you know I don't see any of this lightly. You know I speak with a genuine concern for your soul and a desire to see you saved.
But you know that this is the truth. And not being here next Lord's day is a possibility. And at some point in your life whenever that will be it will become a reality.
you will enter eternity and you will spend eternity in the place you have prepared for in this life. My only plea and you know what I'm going to say to you make sure you don't spend eternity in hell.
[33:44] Make sure you don't spend eternity in hell. And this morning Solomon has given you the best advice in order to prepare for eternity.

He says be alert to your opportunities. Here is another one. Be active in seeking the Lord. Seek him now. Be attentive to God's word.
Ask him to open your eyes. Be aware of the judgment because it's coming. Be alert. Be active. Be attentive.
Be aware. My friend please prepare for eternity. Please prepare for eternity by committing your life to Jesus Christ.
May the Lord bless these thoughts. O Lord our gracious God give to us the prayer of the psalmist where he said open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.
[34:56] And Lord that we might see in thy word today the greatest advice that has ever been given to sinful man to be ready for that moment when death calls and judgment comes.

Help us Lord to see Jesus not only as our judge but as the great saviour who has loved us and gave himself for us. Help us Lord to commit our lives to him.
Help us to love him each and every day. To walk with him. To know him as the friend and saviour that he is. And to trust in him with all our heart. O Lord bless thy word to our souls we plead.
We ask that we would not leave here the same way that we came in but that we O Lord would seek thee while thou art to be found. And call upon thee while the word near.
Go before us and we ask and do us good for Jesus' sake. Amen. We'll bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 86.
[36:04] Psalm 86 again in the Scottish Psalter page 3-4-1 Psalm 86 we're singing from verse 11 three verses down to verse 13 teach me teach me thy way and in thy truth O Lord then walk will I unite my heart that I thy name may fear continually O Lord my God with all my heart to thee I will give praise and I the glory will ascribe unto thy name always because thy mercy toward me in greatness doth excel and thou delivered hast my soul out from the lowest hell these verses of Psalm 86 to God's praise Amen Amen.

Amen. Amen.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.
Amen.

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