

Part 11 - The End of the Matter

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Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 00] All right. Thank you, Ellen. How's everybody doing this morning? Good to see all your faces. All right. If you are new with us, man, so glad you're here. And you're probably thinking, man, I'm catching the very end of this Ecclesiastes series. You might be bummed about it. Go talk to somebody who's been here the whole time. They might tell you like, man, this was the best time to come, you know? I'm just kidding. It's been actually an amazing series and Ecclesiastes it just, man, it runs at the difficult tensions of life, the difficult things and everything you could be living for, everything you could put your hope in. It reminds us that, you know what?

It's all going to burn one day. It's all going to be gone. And it's to an irritating point. It reminds us again and again and again, we're going to die. And yeah. So having said that, you should, if it's your first time, you should go back and listen to the rest of the series on the app and on the website. That was my sales pitch. Yeah. So right at the end, we're in the last chapter.

And what's interesting about this chapter, actually, it takes this interesting twist. It begins by addressing a particular demographic, which it hasn't done so far. And so teens, 20s, I want you to listen up because you're in the crosshairs on this chapter. All right. But if you're older than that, sorry, that's me. A lot of us in the room, don't check out, pay attention because it speaks to us as well.

Okay. So verse one, it starts out this way. Remember also your creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and years draw near, of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them. Um, man, we think about being young. There is something so all of us who are older, we look back and man, there was something magical and fun about being young. No back aches or dieting or pills or anything like that. Right. I remember the days when I used to eat like two Oreos and it wouldn't affect me. Don't get to do that anymore. Right. Um, I remember the days when there was more hair on my face than on my back. It's just like this life's rough as you get older. I'm just saying, um, young people enjoy this time in your life. Make the most of it. Us old guys and gals, we look back on our youth with fondness. We had more energy than more time on our hands than more passion. We, yeah, there was, there was so much of the world. We were so naive and we didn't know it, but there was like, man, there was so much to explore and experience and learn and create, finding out who we were and what we wanted to be. And on top of all of that, there was just very little responsibility. And I'll say again, in your youth, enjoy it because it won't stay that way.

[2 : 56] The days are coming when you will lose the pleasure and passion of your youth, it says here. And it goes on to describe it in a very winsome and funny way. I have to say, it talks about enjoy your youth because this, look, look at what happens when you get older. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain. In the days when the keepers of the house tremble, which is a euphemism, the keepers of the house are your hands. So the days when the keeper of the house tremble, your hands start to shake and the strong men or your shoulders are bent.

Your hands are shaking and your shoulders are hunched over. The grinders cease for they are few. Talks about your teeth, right? Need we say more? Those who look through the windows are dimmed. It's talking about our eyes. We don't see as well. The doors in the street are shut. We don't hear as well.

When the sound of the grinding is low. And check this out, all right? People, old people back in the day also used to wake up at 4 a.m. and eat dinner at 4 p.m. One rises up at the sound of a bird and all the daughters of song are brought low. They are afraid also of what is high and terrors are in the way.

It says the almond tree blossoms and almond trees blossoms are white. It's talking about our hair turning gray. And then something, guys, that's particular to us, the grasshopper drags itself along

and desire fails. Yep, he went there. Because man is going to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets before the silver cord is snapped or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain or the wheel broken at the cistern and the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity. Young people, hear that and feel sorry for us. If you wonder why we get old and cranky, go and read those verses again.

[5 : 09] Joking aside, this is very true. I'm in the middle of my life now and I'm identifying with this more and more. And I have to say, man, as you get older and things change and your body's broken down and breaking down and the shoulders are hunching and you're losing your teeth and your sight and all that stuff. You're getting thicker and thicker glasses or contacts and hearing aids or whatever it may be.

And man, it really takes some intentional thoughtfulness to focus and remember that life is good. Which is why, man, intentionally like thinking and praying to God and praising God and remembering what is good about life and the gifts that he's given, it's so important to remember how good he is and the blessings he abundantly bestows on us. And man, okay, despite what's going on with my body that's breaking down, there is a lot to be thankful for. But when I was young, man, I took all those things for granted. How many of us were like that when we were young? We kind of just take that for granted. And anyone younger than me in this room, I want you to hear this and speaking to you, use the days of your youth wisely. Be thankful for what you got. Be thankful for the health that you have. Use the days of your youth wisely. If you talk to an old Christian and ask them what they would change about their life, most of them would wish they hadn't squandered their youth. The world tells us that youth is this time to go and sow your wild oats. Live it up before you're 18 or 21 or whatever. Go on your sin world tour. Just have a blast. And that's the conventional wisdom of the day. That's the narrative, the storyline that the world is saying this is the way to enjoy life and make the most of life. But you speak to anyone wise and they won't give you that advice. If I could get a mulligan on life, it would be having my years 13 to 21 back. So much wasted time pursuing vain, empty things. What would I do differently? Well, a couple of simple things. I'd take my studies more seriously, which I didn't. I'd have used my money more wisely than I did. But more than all of that, I would do exactly what it says here. Remember your creator. That's the thing I could wish I could have back from those young years.

Just, man, pursuing God. I wish, and I grew up as a pastor's son. I knew the gospel. I knew Jesus. I knew those things. But man, I squandered those years running after worthless things. I wish I could have them back.

I wish I would have lived remembering my creator, not just every once in a while, but living that life. And so what this thing is telling to us and what it's compelling us to do, and you as young people, it's saying this. Leverage your time. Leverage your youth by putting God and his kingdom first.

[7 : 58] All the Christian OGs in the room should be getting really Pentecostal right now, saying amen, right? Those of us who have been following Jesus a long time. Man, we want you to know, young people, in the room, you matter. You guys matter. You matter in the kingdom of God. You don't have to wait to graduate high school or college or get married for God to use you. You matter right now. You know, one of the biggest missionary movements of the last 150 years was among students, and that happened in America.

Happened on our shores, in our land. It started with Dwight Moody challenging university students in the late 1800s to leverage their lives for Jesus. Use this time. Use this moment. Use this life that you have for Jesus. And they did. They responded, and that movement grew and grew and grew. And over the next few decades, man, tens upon tens of thousands of students said no to the American dream and yes to the kingdom of God. Leveraging their lives, evangelizing America, evangelizing all over the globe as a matter of fact. And you know what? They're not around anymore. Those students gave their life to Jesus. Some of them died on the mission field. Some of them, yeah, they gave it all. But you know what? That movement is still making an impact today. We're living off of that. Young people, you are poised for something great. You are poised for this. You are poised to be used by God. You can use this part of your life and channel it towards something bigger than the American dream. Man, I want to say what this passage says. Do it while your hands and your shoulders are strong. While you still have teeth in your head and a full head of hair, do it. Man, grab hold of it. Grab hold of the kingdom of God and all he has for you. In Ronald Rolfsheiser's book, Sacred Fire, he talks about youth and following Jesus. It's this unique stage of

discipleship. I want to say, man, if you're a parent or if you are a youth leader, whatever it may be, it is a book worth reading. But he says this, we are always struggling and doing battle with something. But the forces that beset us change with the years when we are young and still trying to establish an identity. These forces are very much embedded in the chaotic, fiery energies of restlessness, wanderlust, sexuality, the quest for freedom, and the sheer hunger for experience.

The struggle with these energies can be disorienting and overpowering, even though they are the engines that drive us and propel us into adult life. See, it's in this stage of our youth, it's in this disruptive stage that we're coming out of the safety of our younger years when we're, you know, we're in our home and our parents have created this like nest where everything's kind of controlled and we're harbored and there's this refuge and then puberty hits us. And it's like God's purpose for this stage of our life because so much gets overthrown and it's this driving force that makes us to want to get out of our homes more and more and more and go on our own adventure and go on our own and start to create our own story. It's at this stage of life that we often most identify with the prodigal son in that parable, you know, so much passion, so much interest in the allure and the vanities of life's pleasures. They're always pulling at us. And here's the thing, guys, there are two plans for this stage of our life. Satan's got a plan and God has a plan. But have you ever thought, I'm just stepping back for a bit, have you ever thought why God chose puberty to happen at the time that it did? And it seems like it's a setup for failure. It's when our brain is going through all this significant development and change. We're both growing in knowledge but also trying to figure out who we are, what makes us unique, wanting to be loved, who's my peer group, where do I find value, all these things. And in the midst of that, it's like, man, God thought it would be a good idea to just throw in like this like hormone change as an interesting cocktail, you know. Our emotions are heightened, our sexual drive is on full-blown afterburners. We have all this energy and drive and angst and turmoil going on inside of us.

This stage of life is both wonderful and it's terrifying all at the same time. Probably for parents, it's mostly terrifying, right? But guys, here's the tragedy.

In the 10 to 12 years when youth need us most, oftentimes we become passive and we pull away from them. And this void is damaging to them and their future. And while every parenting and mentoring role is important, the data is saying that in this time particularly, men have a very important role in life, in their lives, in the life of youth. And Satan knows this and he's done this work. [13:13] He's done his work by tearing down the role of the father, the role of like older brothers and mentors in the faith. And we look at kind of society over the last few decades, probably even longer than that, and we see that, man, we've dropped the ball time and time again as men. And this dad void is hurting our sons and daughters. In his book, *The Boy Crisis in America*, Warren Farrell, he's a PhD, he's a sociologist, he writes this, dad deprivation stems from the lack of father involvement.

And secondarily, from devaluing what a father contributes when he is involved. Whether our children become financially poor or become financially rich or poor or emotionally rich or poor depends increasingly on whether they grow up dad rich or dad poor. Moms, you are so important. I'm not discounting that. But man, Satan's getting it right in America. He's creating more and more, he's won by creating fatherless generations. And unfortunately, that's going in the wrong direction. And we need to win that war back. And man, guys, I feel like the church is poised for that. We as men can rise up and step in, in some of these gaps, where these kids need fathers. Or if we are men with kids in this church, man, we need to be dads. We need to be fathers. We need to be present. We need to be in their lives. That's what they need. It was an interesting story a while back in African game park.

Just opened up and they needed some male elephants. So they called two adolescent bulls from another game park. And suddenly, these adolescent bulls became very aggressive. They started to exhibit dangerous behavior, which is very uncharacteristic for elephants. And so this wise old game warden, they were trying to figure out what's going on. This wise old game warden, he knew what to do.

So he brought in two older bull elephants. And immediately, the behavior problems corrected. Isn't that interesting? See, men, the problem is that we think disciplining the next generation isn't a good use of our time. Our job is to pay the bills and leave the praying to the women.

And man, that's a lie from the pit of hell. Young people need our involvement. They need our direction. They need our guidance. Fathers, our role, whether you're a father who has his own kids

or you're just a spiritual father or both, man, our role is to pray, to play, and to preach to the kids that God's put into our lives, to make a difference into their lives. And I'm not just talking about on Sundays. The next generation, it needs more from us, not less.

[16:20] Verse 9 says, Besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs of great care. The preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly, he wrote words of truth. The next generation can't thrive unless we get involved in their lives.

I remember when my dad taught me how to, the mechanics of a jump shot in basketball. I was, I was 11, a jump shot, I didn't even have one. Didn't know how to do it, and it looked really ugly, and it was really bad. And he came out, and he spent time with me, and he, he taught me the proper mechanics, and he taught me the timing of it, and he encouraged me to practice, and he got, you know, over and over and over again, because, and it was, it was hard to do, and he didn't let me, he didn't let me just quit at the first time of it being difficult. And the more I practiced with him, the more my muscles got stronger, and my form got better, and my range grew. And that was time, it was, that was time well spent with my dad. I remember those things. They're fond memories.

Most of my fond memories is my, is my dad teaching me stuff, like how to change the oil filter in a car, getting underneath there, and how that works. He taught me just good life stuff, you know. But the best stuff, the stuff that I most value today, the stuff that I always thank him when I write him a Father's Day card, is that he taught me the Bible. He took time to do that. He took time to sit with me, and read the Bible to me, and pray with me. Those are the things that I cherish. As I get older, those are the things I cherish more, and more, and more. One old grasshopper teaching another, teaching a young grasshopper. But here's the thing, my dad could do that, because he was a student of that book. And you can only teach what you know. Some of us think, man, we look at that, we just like, ah, I'm going to take my hat out of the ring. I'm not going to put myself out there to disciple. I'm not wise like Solomon, but man, you don't need to be a published author, or a theologian to disciple people. You don't have to study the Bible two hours a day, and learn Greek or Hebrew. There's an old saying, that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, right? You don't have to be a scholar, but you do need to be a student. I mean, check out the description of the apostles in Acts 4.13. Now, when they, now they are the scholars, the people that knew the Bible the best. They actually went to school and studied it. It was like their full-time job. When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. Why? They recognized that they had been with Jesus. Make time to be with Jesus. Man, prayer in the Bible, make it a part of your life.

Make it a part of your routine. A little bit of time with Jesus goes a long way. And we see this, and how Jesus, we see from this how Jesus set this pattern of what discipleship looks like, right? He got into their lives. He taught, and he trained, and he modeled ministry, did life with his 12 disciples. And then those 12 guys, they turned around and repeated his example, right? Paul had Titus and Timothy. Peter had Mark. They spent time with those dudes.

[20:01] They mentored them. We read in Titus how the older women are supposed to teach and train the younger women. Now, before anyone's feelings get hurt, it says older women, not old women, right? My wife, she benefited from relationships with older women in her life, modeling a life of how to be a wife and a mom and a disciple of Jesus. And some of them were old, but some of them were just a couple of years older. They just had a little bit more experience, right? They had one eye open in some places where Haley had both eyes closed. And I benefited from the same thing. There was people that came alongside of me in my life and my walk with Jesus, and they opened up their lives and their homes for me to be in there and talk through things. I could ask questions.

They weren't mega gurus about anything, but they just realized like, hey, this guy's blind. I have one eye open. I can really help him and teach him something. The point here is that community is key because that is where truth is lived out. Think about this, okay? Truth is amazing, but man, when you put it on display and you see it tested in real life and you see the fruits of it and it's good, well, that's a game changer. We want to see that. We want to see if truth holds up. People write lots of books about new ideas and theoretical truths that are untested, and it's easy if you think about it for professors to spout ideologies from a podium. But all the while, they keep their lives hidden. Their students really don't know what's going on. And so they can stand up there and just look like gurus and be, listen to what I say. I got the goods, but we don't know if their lives are falling apart. Man,

I'm not interested in reading a book on parenting if I find out that the author has all of his kids are in jail, right? I mean, we would think automatically like, I don't think this guy has any good perspective for me to glean from, right? Why? Because the fruits of his life, the fruits of the truth that he chose to live out in his parenting didn't pay the kind of dividends anybody else would want.

Our lives, our lives together, our lives in community, living out the truth is going to be the greatest apologetic for truth. It's the greatest apologetic for our faith. Our lives should proclaim and demonstrate the gospel. That's what the young people need to see in our lives. We both teach them and we train, but we model our faith.

Our words and our deeds, our life and our proclamation, they have to line up. And if they don't line up, guess what? Man, they're going to say like, man, what you have to say to me, I need that like I need a hole in the head. It says here in verse 11, 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 wariness of the flesh. People are going to measure the gospel through our lives more than our words. The young people around us, watching us, our kids, they're going to measure the gospel through our lives more than our words.

[23 : 38] They're going to be thinking, they're going to be looking, and then their minds are thinking, what fruit is that truth bearing? What fruit is it bearing? Do I want that? It says in verse 11, the words of the wise are like goads. Kind of an old school farming, ranching term, like nobody like throws around like, I don't know the last time you were in a conversation and somebody brought up goads.

Probably not very recently, right? A goad is a pointed stick, and farmers and ranchers, they use it to move cattle or sheep, whatever, whatever they're, you know, they're, they're ranching, and whatever the herds or flocks are, and what they're doing is, is they're using it to drive them where they need to go. It's giving them direction. It's guiding them along. It's making sure they don't get themselves into dangerous, dangerous places. The, the modern goad is the cattle prod, right? That stick with the electric shocker on the end. You know, they use it because any animal going in the wrong direction or a dangerous direction or an unhelpful direction, out comes the goad, and it changes their mind. They're like, oh, I'm going to stop going that direction. I'm going to go in a new one. How does this relate to us? Are we, are we cattle? Are we sheep? Well, actually, the Bible likes to call us sheep a lot, right? And here's the thing, and it's okay to be offended by this at first. Sheep aren't very smart animals.

Don't worry, we're all in this room of sheep, so it's all good. I'm not like talking down at anyone. I'm a sheep too. We always seem to be heading in the wrong direction. Check this out, man. A couple of decades ago, in a rural Turkey, a newspaper, a newspaper article reported that while some shepherds, because people still be shepherding over there in the Middle East, while shepherds were taking a lunch break, their whole flock walked right off a cliff and died. Not joking.

Yeah. What did they need? What did these sheep need? They needed a shepherd. They needed a wise shepherd with a goad leading them away from danger, and that is what the Bible does. It guides us.

That's why God doesn't just say, hey, you know, here's some suggestions for you to live by. No, he says, man, I'm giving you some commands to follow. His commands guide us away from the danger of sin and death, because we like sheep. That's what we do. We just start wandering away right off the cliff, and that's the main thing. That's the main thing we have to realize. Verse 13, it says this.

[26 : 20] The end of the matter. In conclusion, after we've read this whole book and studied it, after we've heard it all, here's the main point. 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. Solomon, guys, he's saying here, this is the final analysis, guys. Life is chaotic. It's unpredictable.

It's unsafe. It's crazy. It's full of paradox and mystery. We can't figure it out. There's no simple code to crack it. So what are we to do? Remember God and live and surrender to his will.

That's the main thing. That's what it looks like to follow his commands. And this brings us full circle to the very beginning of this chapter, where it said, young people, in the days of your youth, remember your creator. We don't move away from that. The whole duty of man is to remember God. Fear him, right? Don't forget him. Fear him. We can't fear what we've forgotten. Remember

who God is.

And what he's done. Again, this is good advice for the young and the old. One of the ways that we do that is we remember God through communion. We're reminded that Jesus came, fully surrendered to God, God. And he died for our sins. Communion is a time, and we're going to get to it in a little bit here.

[27 : 58] It's a time to remember and stand in awe of God's grace and justice. It's a time to remember and recommit ourselves to following Jesus. The band comes up. And as we close, I want to have some of you in the room. I want to ask you this question. If you're not a Christian, communion is a reality check because it's a sign of judgment.

We just read how God knows every single thing we've done. Every single thing. Even the stuff nobody else knows about, all the secret stuff, all the hidden stuff, all the stuff that's in your, just trapped away in your heart. He knows all of that. And you know what? There's going to be a point where you're going to stand before him. You can try to forget him all you want now. You can try to think like, well, I'm just going to push that off. I'm not going to remember God. Everything is going to be cool. Everything is going to be kosher. But one day, you're going to stand before him, and you will give an account for every deed and every action.

All of it's going to be judged. Now we hear this. We say, gosh, that doesn't sound very nice. I thought your God was a nice guy. I thought your God was a God of love. And we want God to be a God of love. And this idea isn't a very popular picture, right? But saying that like, man, isn't God a God of love? It's kind of a really poor way of saying that we would prefer for God to be soft on our sin.

But here's the thing, guys. God is just. He is a God of love. He is a God of mercy. And he is grace. But he is just. And he won't let any sin go unpunished. God has never been, nor will he ever be soft on sin. Justice is what God is. God doesn't have justice. Justice is who he is. He doesn't have these moments when he just feels just. He is just. He is justice. And he's not ever going to change that. For him to change that or deny himself justice or deny justice in any way is for him to become imperfect and unholy. And then he ceases to be God. But the good news is, guys, is that just, that Jesus came to die for our sins. Jesus came to satisfy God's justice. He took our punishment on the cross. By faith in Jesus, I want to offer it to you today. Those of you who are here that wouldn't call yourself a Christian, that meant by faith in Jesus and his death and resurrection, you can be forgiven, you can be justified, and you can be accepted into the Father's love. The Bible says this simply, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that he raised him from the dead, you will be saved. So we're going to come to the communion table now. And I want you, all of us in the room, Christian, non-Christian alike, I want you to think, how is God calling you to respond today?

Man, for those of us in the room, I want you to just, man, man, the justice of God satisfied on Jesus. Oh, that is so good. That is like, man, I can live in freedom. I can live in grace. I can live knowing that he doesn't count any of my sins against me. And we're reminded when we come and we partake of that. And I also want you to think, man, if you're in this room and you call this church home, man, I want you to think about what we were talking about.

[31 : 51] Man, the youth, the next generation, man, they need us. They need us. And it is a wonderful thing, a wonderful call of God to be, to make disciples. And the next generation needs us in their lives, helping them, coming alongside them, being good big brothers and big sisters in the faith and fathers and mothers in the faith. They need that. We need to step up to the plate.

For some of you in the room, you need to think about what communion is saying to you. If you're not a Christian, what is it saying to you? And respond with repentance. And if you pray today for salvation, man, I'd love for you to come and tell me after the services that you, man, I would love to know that.

I'd love to know that because, man, we walk together. This thing is a community project. We can't follow Jesus on our own. We need each other. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you. We thank you for your word, which is true, which is good, which is wonderful, which points us to you, ultimately, Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray for the youth in the room. I pray for our teens and our 20-year-olds, Lord, those that are, man, they are just in a wonderful season of their life. And it's both wonderful and difficult. Lord God, we think of them and we're reminded, even like looking back on our youth, some of the struggles and the things that we faced in those times. And we don't want to belittle them, but we want to come alongside them, Lord God. And we want to say, man, you

guys are valuable.

You guys are needed. You guys are so wonderful to have in the kingdom of God doing the Lord's work. And we get to do this together. Lord, help us to be good fathers and mothers to these young people, good older brothers and older sisters to those in their youth, still in their youth, Lord. And we thank you that you don't call us to isolation. You call us to community by your grace, Lord God. I pray for those in the room and wrestling with maybe this, should I, should I surrender today, man? Jesus, make yourself real. Make yourself real.

And I pray for those who are just struggling right now to give and surrender fully to Jesus Christ.

[34 : 31] And Holy Spirit, come on them. Open the eyes of their heart to see you. To see your grace, to see your mercy, to see your love, to see your justice, all those things, Lord God.

Overwhelm them. Amen.