

Defining Moments:
Discovering God's Plan for My Life
Ecclesiastes 12:12-14

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May 3, 2015

Text Introduction: We are in a series of messages that we are calling "Defining Moments." Our lives are sprinkled with defining moments—moments that shape the rest of our lives, moments that are so important that the rest of our lives hang in the balance of these moments.

We have talked about such topics as our births—both our physical births and spiritual births, baptism, and marriage. We even talked about how historical moments are defining moments (wars, hurricanes, etc.) On Easter Sunday we talked about "The Most Defining Moment of all of History"—the resurrection of Jesus. We have since been trying to isolate other defining moments.

We are recognizing our High School graduates this morning. Please be praying for this group of fine students who are making a major life transition. You could definitely say that this is a defining moment for each of them. Think of all that will be happening for them in the next years of their lives.

Text: But beyond these, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wears the body. ¹³When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this is for all humanity. ¹⁴For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

Introduction:

Do you remember graduating from high school? You might have found yourself asking a simple question: "Now what?" When I think about that question of "Now what" I think about a story I heard about a wealthy man. He invited a large number of people to his home. At one point in the evening, he brought them outside to a pool and said, "I want to give a brand new BMW to the first person who can swim across this pool. There was only one problem—the pool was filled with very large alligators. For a while no one moved. Then all of a sudden there was a splash and everyone watched this frantic young man swim as fast as he could from one side of the pool to the other. Coming to the other side of the pool, he jumped out unharmed by the gators. The host of the party was there to greet him with the keys to his brand new car. The host said, "I can't wait to see you in your brand new BMW." The man who had just come from the pool said, "I can't wait to get my hands on the person who pushed me in the pool!"

The truth is, in a manner of speaking, graduating from high school or college (for that matter) is like being pushed into the deep end of the pool, and the pool is filled with very large gators.

One of the safest statements that I can make today is that Ecclesiastes is an unusual book. To that everyone agrees. Beyond that, not everyone agrees to the meaning of the book of Ecclesiastes.

One of the best summaries I know about this book comes from my great friend, Rick Byargeon, who is now with the Lord. He was recognized as the premier scholar in Southern Baptist life on this book, Ecclesiastes. Rick used to say, "The book of Proverbs is God's Orientation to Life. This is how life is

supposed to be. Job is the Disorientation to Life. Sometimes, all the wrong things happen, even to people like Job, who feared God. Ecclesiastes is the Reorientation to Life.”

At times the book sounds rather pessimistic for one who ought to be otherwise trusting God. At times, dare I say, the book sounds rather contradictory of other Biblical passages and even at times the book of Ecclesiastes itself. These kinds of problems have led many to not read the book of Ecclesiastes. As I see it, the problem with understanding the book is that we often don’t treat the book as a whole. We read a snippet from here or there and it causes us trouble. However, when we read the book as a whole unit (which is the obvious way to read any Biblical book), the message makes perfect sense and dare I say it, is a pretty simple message. It’s that simple message that I want to share with us this morning as we think about our graduates. (But, it is a message for all of us.)

That defining moment of life when we discover God’s purpose for our lives can come at any moment.

Have a Big Perspective

As in the book of Job, one could really get confused about the contents of Ecclesiastes if he did not consider the book as a whole. Primarily, the book makes two points. First, without God, all is vanity or meaningless or futile. “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” (1:2) The second point that the writer makes is that in light of the first point, the conclusion is to “fear God and keep His commandments.” (12:13) You remember writing term papers in school. Perhaps, you remember having to have a thesis. After you state your thesis, you are asked to support your thesis. Finally, you draw a conclusion. In much the same way, the preacher in Ecclesiastes has done exactly this.

The Thesis: Again, the preacher’s pessimistic thesis about life is that all is vanity. Life can leave you feeling rather empty.

The Proof of the Thesis (Much of the Body of the Book) Most of the book is devoted to illustrating the preacher’s thesis. He gives example after example of how life is meaningless.

- (1) The vanity of pleasure (2:1-3)
- (2) The vanity of human wisdom (2:15-16)
- (3) The vanity of human labor (2:19-21)
- (4) The vanity of human purpose (2:26)
- (5) The vanity of envy (4:4)
- (6) The vanity of greed (4:7-9)
- (7) The vanity of fame (4:16)
- (8) The vanity of wealth (5:10, Also 2:4ff.)
- (9) The vanity of coveting (6:9)
- (10) The vanity of silliness (7:6)
- (11) The vanity of recognition (8:10,14)
- (12) The vanity of life itself (3:19)—We all will die

The list could go on and on. We will be tempted with much, but it all leaves us empty. God reveals these truths not to bring us pessimism, but to bring us perspective.

The Application of the Thesis

This list of vanities is loaded with application. Don’t spend your time focused on these things, or else life will be meaningless. To the youth, don’t spend so much focus on trying to be popular. Don’t get involved

in the pleasures of this world like alcohol (2:3). Many have tried these routes, but in the end find them to be meaningless. To the young adult, don't spend needless energy trying to amass your fortune. Many try, but in the end discover that wealth is meaningless. To the senior adult, don't spend needless time or money on endless measures to keep yourself from dying. In the end, God designed us all so that we would die.

Have a big perspective.

Have Few Priorities

Discovering God's plan for life means discovering that life will have relatively few priorities. In fact, the writer of Ecclesiastes is able to condense those priorities down to two. Fear God. Keep His commandments.

Obviously, the preacher's view of life is pretty pessimistic. However, as pessimistic as it sounds, without God, the preacher has analyzed correctly the nature of life upon the earth. Yet, in a relationship with God, we can enjoy life and are even instructed to enjoy life.

- 3:22 "there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot."
- 5:18-20 "Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart."
- 9:9 "Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun."
- 11:8 "However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all."

God intends that we enjoy life. He commands us to enjoy life. He has given us the freedom to enjoy life. He just insists that we keep that life in balance with the priority on fearing Him and keeping His commandments.

Have One Purpose

Glorify God with our lives.

Let us hear the whole matter. Your life will be measured. Our lives will not be measured by the things of this life; our lives will be measured by what lasts for eternity.

Know for sure that we will give an account for all that we do. How does this Scripture make application in your life? Are you confused about the sinfulness of any area of your life? An easy way to answer that conflict in your life is to simply ask yourself if you would be willing to stand before God and give an account in regards to that part of your life.

To all of us, let us know that we have not taken our last exam. There is a final exam at the end. The good news is that as a Christian, Jesus takes the exam for us.

You find your purpose, then, in a life lived for Christ.