

## The Conclusion of the Matter

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Rev. Brian Bill

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I want to start with two questions related to preachers.

Q: How do you know when a preacher is lying?

A: When he says, “*In conclusion.*”

Q: What does it mean when a pastor says, “*And finally, in conclusion...?*”

A: Nothing, absolutely nothing.

People joke about the preacher who says, “*in conclusion,*” when everyone knows he’s just warming up.

There is a phrase a preacher can use which is guaranteed to wake up an audience: “*And in conclusion.*”

As we come to the preacher Solomon’s concluding words from the Book of Ecclesiastes, we’ll be challenged to wake up and warm up to what is most important. Let’s give our attention now to Ecclesiastes 12:9-14. Notice how Solomon moves from the first person to the third person in his epilogue.

***Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. <sup>10</sup> The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. <sup>11</sup> The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. <sup>12</sup> My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. <sup>13</sup> The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. <sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.***

We could summarize the Preacher’s final sermon like this: *The end of the matter is to focus on eternal matters.*

Since we’ve been journeying with Solomon since June, I thought it would be helpful to review the summary statements from each sermon. Special thanks to

Marie Guyton for going back over the sermons and putting this list together. Here's how we've been applying the Word to our world today.

- *Because life is fleeting, base your life on what will last forever.*
- *Dissatisfaction is designed to lead us to find satisfaction in God alone.*
- *We will never find our purpose in life if we put the pursuit of our pleasures above God's priorities.*
- *We can't find our worth in our work, but we can worship God by how we work.*
- *Because God has a reason for each season in our life, we can trust His timing.*
- *While we are mired to earth and tethered to time, we are also wired for eternity and will live eternally, in either Heaven or Hell.*
- *Be intentional about connecting with others because we are made for community.*
- *Be on guard when you worship God by drawing near to revere Him.*
- *The love of money will not provide meaning in life.*
- *Your soul will only be satisfied when you surrender to the Savior.*
- *Since God wants better for us, we must give Him our best.*
- *Life only makes sense when we live it for the Lord.*
- *Only personal conversion through Christ, not political conviction, will lead to lasting change.*
- *You are not prepared to live until you are prepared to die.*
- *It's better to go the way of wisdom than to fall into foolishness.*
- *Be oriented for action because life is often uncertain and unexplainable.*
- *Don't waste your life trying not to die; spend your life living for the One who died for you.*

As Solomon nears the end of his existential journey, he draws out four conclusions which have direct application to our lives today.

**1. Reflect on the Bible daily.** I see seven truths about the Bible in verses 9-12. Let's walk through this section phrase-by-phrase.

- **The Bible is to be studied.** In verse 9, Solomon describes how seriously he took the writing of Ecclesiastes: ***“Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.”*** His heart was to teach ***“knowledge,”*** which refers to ***“discernment and insight.”*** Before writing things down, he

**“weighed”** his words, which means he *“pondered and considered.”* The word **“studying”** speaks of *“scouting or seeking out.”* He also **“arranged many proverbs”** which means he *“set them in order.”* A proverb is an earthly saying containing heavenly truth, or a practical word for a complicated world. We know from 1 Kings 4:32 Solomon **“...also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.”**

Since Solomon did this all with **“great care,”** we must study the Scriptures carefully and consistently, pondering the Word so we can live it out in our lives. This makes me think of 2 Timothy 2:15, which is the anchor verse for our Awana discipleship ministry for kids: **“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”** I had the joy of attending Awana this past Wednesday night and saw so many kids filled with joy as they were quoting the verses they had memorized.

- **The Bible soothes.** When we study Scripture, we discover how it soothes our souls according to verse 10: **“The Preacher sought to find words of delight...”** The word **“delight”** refers to *“desire or pleasure.”* This makes me think of Psalms 119:103: **“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.”** For example, instead of just saying it’s important to work as a team, Solomon chose this powerful phrase, **“A threefold cord is not quickly broken.”**

All the preachers at Edgewood work diligently to find delightful words to capture the attention of the listener. We don’t ever want to bore people with the Bible because it’s the most exciting book ever written! I’m sure I’ve put many to sleep in my sermons over the years, but I work hard to keep everyone from dozing off. Having said that, one person said a preacher is someone who talks in other people’s sleep!

- **The Bible safeguards.** In a world filled with excess and error, the second half of verse 10 says the Bible provides truth we can count on: **“...and uprightly he wrote words of truth.”** Another translation says, *“he sought to write words of truth correctly.”* Because we live in an age of relativism, easy believism, and prosperity theology, it’s important to be truthful about sin and compassionate toward sinners. We must reject salad-bar theology where we just pick and choose what is palatable to us. Proverbs 22:21 says one of the results of reading the Bible is, **“To make you know what is right and true...”**

- **The Bible stings.** In the first part of verse 11, we discover God uses His Word to keep us from going wayward: ***“The words of the wise are like goads...”*** A goad is a long wooden rod with a sharp iron point used to mobilize and motivate livestock to get them moving and to steer them in the right direction. These goads were painful but necessary. BTW, this is where the statement, *“Stop goading me”* comes from.

While we like it when God’s Word tastes like honey, sometimes the Bible functions more like a roaring fire or a heavy hammer as we read in Jeremiah 23:29: ***“Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”*** I often think of a phrase when I’m preparing to preach: *“The job of the preacher is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.”* Even the tender 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm uses the image of the ***“rod and the staff.”*** Wise words bring pleasure, and they also bring pain.

Sometimes God prods us and pokes us in places we’d rather not be poked, but it’s always for our good. I wonder what it was like for an animal to be on the pointy end of this tool. Would it hurt? Would it be annoying? Would the animal despise it? The answer to all those questions depends *on whose hands the goad is in.*

Without the pain, there is no gain, and without the prodding, we would go down a perilous path. We see this in Acts 26:14 when Jesus said, ***“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”*** Have you been kicking back when God is prodding you to do something?

- **The Bible stabilizes.** Verse 11 continues: ***“...and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings...”*** This refers to tent pegs which kept a tent from being blown away by the wind. God’s Word stabilizes us when the storms of life are unleashed. The word ***“fixed”*** means, *“to be established.”* We can hold on to firmly fixed truth without wavering because God’s Word is trustworthy. Chuck Swindoll writes, *“A well-driven stake keeps the tent in place. It secures it to the ground.”* Ephesians 4:14 says, ***“So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”***

This makes me think of the lyrics to the song, *“He will hold me fast.”*

*When I fear my faith will fail  
Christ will hold me fast  
When the tempter would prevail  
He will hold me fast  
I could never keep my hold  
Through life's fearful path  
For my love is often cold  
He must hold me fast*

Goads spur the despondent, and nails stabilize us when we're drifting, so we can grow and become grounded in our faith.

- **The Bible is supernatural.** The Bible is no ordinary book because it comes to us from God as we see in the last phrase of verse 11: “...**they are given by one Shepherd.**” The picture of God as shepherd is found throughout Scripture. Isaiah 40:11 says, “**He will tend His flock like a shepherd.**” Ray Stedman writes: “*The fact that the Lord is our shepherd is probably the reason why the shepherds of Bethlehem were chosen to be the first men to hear the wonderful news of the angels.*”

The collected sayings are “**given**” by one Shepherd speaks of the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration, which means the Holy Spirit supernaturally guided the authors of the Bible to the exact words God wanted to communicate. This is stated clearly in 2 Peter 1:21: “**For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**” While God used over 40 different human authors, the Scriptures all come from “**one Shepherd.**” Therefore, the Bible is inerrant, infallible, and authoritative.

As we learned in Ecclesiastes 12:1, God is also referred to as “**Creator.**” Let's bring these two titles together: God is powerful as our Creator, *and* He is personal as my Shepherd. He is awesome *and* available. He is mighty *and* I can say He is mine.

- **The Bible is sufficient.** The sufficiency of Scripture means the Bible is all we need to be equipped for a life of faith and faithful service. Verse 12 warns us about going beyond the Bible: “**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 the favorite verse for students who are

weary of study. I remember seeing this verse on one of the doors in my dorm when I was at Moody. A bunch of us wrote “Amen” under it.

We’re prohibited from adding to the Bible or subtracting from it in Revelation 22:18-19: ***“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”***

Solomon was right when he said there is no end to the making of many books since it is estimated that four million new titles are released each year. We need to make sure we’re not substituting Scripture with a book, with a devotional, a podcast, or even a preacher. All we need to know about God, salvation, and how to live a godly life is found in the Bible. Other books were given for our information, but the Bible was given for our transformation.

That doesn’t mean books are bad. In fact, there are many gospel-focused books which we highly recommend. You may want to swing by the wall next to the Café to see if you’d like to pick up some books for yourself or to give as Christmas gifts. There are some free Christmas family devotionals available at the Café as well.

*The end of the matter is to focus on eternal matters.*

The first lesson is to reflect on the Bible daily. Here’s the second...

**2. Revere God above all.** This is stated briefly and abruptly in the first part of verse 13: ***“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God...”*** Solomon is saying something like this, *“After everything I’ve said, here’s the most important point.”* This is a command, not a suggestion. In our study, we’ve come across the priority of fearing God in Ecclesiastes 5:7: ***“...but God is the one you must fear”*** and in Ecclesiastes 8:12: ***“...I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before Him.”***

Keith Krell points out the Bible tells us to love God and His Word 88 times, to trust God and His Word 91 times, while we’re exhorted to fear God 278 times! During this series, we’ve defined the fear of God as *“reverential awe”* or *“trembling trust.”* We’re not to run away from the Almighty because we’re

frightened and afraid. Rather, out of reverence and respect, we're called to run to a relationship with Him. Sidney Greidanus defines it this way: *"To fear God is to take God seriously, to acknowledge Him in our lives as the highest good, to revere Him, to honor and worship Him, to center our lives on Him."*

In our culture, and even in the church, we've lost a high view of God. A.W. Tozer rightly said, *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."* In his book, *God in the Wasteland*, David Wells writes, *"It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless...the fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common."*

Philip Ryken adds: *"More than anything else, failing to take God seriously is the problem with the contemporary church. We trivialize the holiness of God, so we end up with a trivial view of sin. We trivialize the majesty of God, so we end up with trivial worship. We trivialize the truth of God, so we end up with a trivial grasp of his Word. We trivialize the judgment of God, so we end up with a trivial appreciation for the atonement of Jesus Christ."*

I came across a frightening story this week which illustrates how we have trivialized Jesus. Check out this headline: *"Church in Switzerland is using an AI powered Jesus hologram to take confession."* Here's an excerpt from the article: *"Thanks to technological advances, worshippers at a church in Switzerland can now speak directly to Jesus – or at least to an AI version of him."*

Sadly, at least two-thirds of people who spoke to "AI Jesus" came out of the confessional reportedly having had a *"spiritual experience."* One impressed worshipper said, *"I was surprised, it was so easy, and though it's a machine, it gave me so much advice."*

This is very chilling and makes me think of the image of the beast in Revelation 13:15: ***"And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even SPEAK and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain."*** As we move closer to the return of Christ, we must keep Matthew 24:4 in mind: ***"Be careful that no one misleads you, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will mislead many."***

Instead of seeking wisdom from “AI Jesus,” why not go directly to “Immanuel Jesus?” His name is above all names, He is accessible 24/7 so you can speak to Him at any time. You can go directly into the presence of God Almighty through the finished work of Jesus on the cross, provided you are born again as Hebrews 10:19-20 says, ***“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.”***

You don’t need the artificial when the real is available. You don’t need a hollow hologram when King Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Why choose the hollow imitation when you can have the Holy One known as Immanuel with you always?

Brothers and sisters, we must recapture the fear of God in our lives and in our church. We’ll learn more about this next week. BTW, our December series will be called, “Christmas Contrasts.”

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**3. Resolve to obey right away.** The second half of verse 13 says we’re to fear Him and *follow* Him: ***“...and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”*** We’re to take God seriously and do what He says. Jesus summed up all the commandments with two central ones in Matthew 22:37-40: ***“And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”***

Joshua 24:14 links fearing God with serving Him faithfully: ***“Now, therefore fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness...”*** The word “keep” has the idea of being careful to obey and the “***whole duty of man***” is translated in the NASB as, ***“this applies to every person”*** or more literally, ***“this is the all of man.”*** It could be translated as, ***“this is the wholeness of man.”*** To say it another way, you’ve been made to fear God and to keep His commandments. There really is no other way than to trust and obey. This is the secret of wholeness and finding satisfaction in life.

Speaking of being obedient to God’s call to care for the hurting and to share the gospel, we celebrate that hundreds of boxes were filled for Operation Christmas Child. Special thanks to Jodie Russell and her team for their work as Edgewood

served as a drop off location for the community. We were also able to partner with Samaritan's Purse during our Hurricane Relief trips, and just sent them \$17,555 to assist with their relief efforts. The total giving for these trips came in just over \$82,000 and the money has now been disbursed. In the recent Samaritan's Purse newsletter, they listed some ways they were able to help.

- They mobilized an army of nearly 30,000 volunteers in just the first month.
- They gave out 3,800 generators, nearly 6,000 heaters, 13,000 blankets, and thousands of warm coats.
- Over 225 individuals were saved during the first four weeks of hurricane response.

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**4. Ready yourself for judgment.** We're to reflect on the Bible daily, revere God above all, and resolve to obey right away so we're ready for the coming judgment as stated in verse 14, the very last statement in Ecclesiastes: ***"For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."*** This means that everyone will be answerable to the Almighty for everything, even those things we do in secret because God keeps meticulous records.

1 Corinthians 4:5 says the Lord will ***"bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart."*** 2 Corinthians 5:10 adds, ***"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."***

According to Hebrews 9:27, you and I have an appointment with judgment: ***"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."*** The good news is Jesus absorbed the Father's wrath on the cross, taking the judgment you deserve by exchanging your rottenness for His righteousness. He did it all for you, but you must repent and receive what He has done for it be activated in your life. Once you do, you will live for eternity in Heaven and not have to pay for your sins in Hell.

In the 1930's, an Australian alcoholic named Arthur Stace was converted. During an unforgettable sermon entitled "Echoes of Eternity," he heard a preacher conclude his message with these words, ***"ETERNITY! ETERNITY! I wish I could sound, or shout, that word to everyone on the streets. ETERNITY! Friends, where will you spend ETERNITY?"***

Stace was so moved that as he left the church, he felt an immediate urge to take a piece of chalk and write the word *ETERNITY* on the sidewalk. Here's how he described it in his own words: "*Eternity went ringing through my brain and suddenly I began crying and felt a powerful call from the Lord to write ETERNITY. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and outside the church, I bent down right there and wrote it.*"

He spent the next 35 years going around Sydney writing *ETERNITY* all over the city, doing it an estimated 500,000 times! In 1999, as a fitting tribute to Stace, *ETERNITY* was emblazoned across Sydney Harbour Bridge as part of the new millennium New Year's Eve celebrations.

The final message of Ecclesiastes is not that nothing matters but that everything does! C.S. Lewis wrote about the desperate longing humans feel for God, "*If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.*"

*The end of the matter is to focus on eternal matters.*

You were made for eternity. Will you repent and receive Jesus right now?

## **Invitation**

## **Membership**

Saturday at 5:00 – Mike Davis and Gale Anderson

Sunday at 10:45 – Darryl and Linda Cain, Nick, Dawn and Tre' VandeGeest

## **Closing**

In conclusion, (no, really, I'm just about finished), I close with this prayer written by William Laud.

*Grant, O Lord, that we may live in Thy fear;  
Die in Thy favor;  
Rest in Thy peace;  
Rise in Thy power;  
Reign in Thy glory  
For Thine own beloved Son's sake,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*