

YOUTH'S SUPREME PRIVILEGE

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them!" Ecclesiastes 12:1.

For various reasons this is an attention-compelling and interesting verse of scripture. It was written by Solomon, a man of genial temperament, strong appetites, and great capacities for pleasure. He had given himself to numerous indulgences and had drunk deeply of every stream of pleasure.

This verse teaches us that every person has a Creator. It also definitely implies that a person may forget his Creator. It is easy to remember one's Creator in days of adversity, but people are prone to forget Him when they are enjoying the best of health, when the members of their family are well, when they have good incomes, when they have adequate checking accounts, and when they are blessed abundantly. Blessings and prosperity often cause people to forget God, but in times of sickness, adversity, and reverses they can remember Him very easily.

Our text not only tells us that we have a Creator, but also that we ought to remember Him. This reminds us that one of the great blessings that He has given us is that of memory. Memory has to do only with that which is known. We cannot remember anything of which we do not have knowledge. Memory is a kind of diary in which we write every day. When a day is gone we turn over a leaf and begin a new page. The turned-over leaf we call the past, and the page on which we are now writing we call the present, and the unwritten blank pages ahead we call the future. God has given us the ability to turn back and look at the pages we have written, thereby bringing the past to remembrance. However, we are powerless to change that which we have written.

God has commanded us to remember Him because He is worthy of being remembered, and because we cannot be happy without doing so. God wants us to remember Him by thinking of Him, by reflecting on His character, by acknowledging His goodness, by meditating on His precious Word, and by loving, obeying, and serving Him.

Remember God's right in you as your Maker. It is recognized by all who have a sense of propriety and fairness that one has a right to that which He has made, and for another to take it and use it without his consent is a kind of robbery. In the huge Patent Office in Washington, D. C., are hundreds of thousands of little models of all sorts of devices and machines made by inventors, and these models are kept there to protect the makers from others who might rob them of their rights by taking their inventions and using them as their own. Likewise, God has a patent right in you and in me. He made us and we belong to Him. He has a right in us, and we ought not to rob Him of it. Just as the machine should be used by the inventor, so our bodies, minds, and souls should be at the Lord's service and disposal always. You cannot truly remember your Creator without trusting, loving, obeying, serving, and praising Him.

God wants you to remember His love for you -- how He has created you, how He has cared for you ever since you were born, how He has sustained you and kept you alive, and how He has given you all of the good things you have.

Solomon made the sad mistake of failing to remember his Creator. When he was approaching the end of his life, he thought about the way that he had lived and then remarked, "Vanity of vanities, ... all is vanity." The word "vanity" in that verse has the same significance as our word "bubbles." When Solomon saw the rainbow colors on the life that he had lived, he remarked, as we would say today: "There is nothing to it."

Among the colors in Solomon's life bubbles was the scarlet glow of fame. Solomon built himself a great reputation. People came from throughout the known world to see him in his splendor and to hear from his lips the epigrams and proverbs of worldly wisdom.

Kings and queens brought him great gifts, but after a while the taste of flattery and adulation became insipid to his palate, and he decided that a great reputation was like the white of an egg without salt on it. Another color on the bubble of life as Solomon blew it was the golden glow of fortune. Solomon was the richest of all the kings of Israel. He built up a tremendous fortune for himself, like that of some modern millionaire, but he discovered that riches did not satisfy and fortune had fading glories.

Then Solomon found the brilliant tint of success on the bubble of life. He accomplished what he had set out to do. He ruled over an undivided kingdom. More women loved him than any other man who ever lived. He had great wisdom. He was an author, statesman, business man, poet, and philosopher. Then Solomon gave himself to the pursuit of pleasure. He walked often and long in the days of indulgence and the gratification of desire. As he approached the end of life, he warned all young men: "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

Robert Burns, the poet of Scotland, one day looked down upon his native heath from some bonny hill of Scotland, saw the fields filled with poppies in their golden beauty, and wrote these lines:

"Pleasures are as poppies spread;
You seize the flower, the bloom is shed.
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment seen, then gone forever.
Or like the borealis rays
That flit ere you can point the place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Vanishing amid the storm."

No stage of life is more interesting than youth. Then the senses are keen, the limbs are agile, the imagination glows with bright visions of the future, the heart is susceptible to the most tender impressions, and the intellect is thirsting for knowledge. Youth has the commendable qualities of frankness, strength, enthusiasm, adventure, optimism, and trustworthiness.

It is doubtful if many young people properly evaluate and rightly appreciate their youth as they should. Many of them are so impatient because they are so young. They feel the limitations that beset them, and quite frequently they resent them. They look around them and see that the better positions are filled with those who are older, and they wish they were old enough to obtain them. Because they do not know and appreciate the value of youth, they are wishing that it was gone. Many young people are eager to be done with their youth.

Youth is a period that soon passes. How quickly it flits away! It is merely a matter of days. It is the brief period during which we stand on the shore preparing for the voyage across the ocean of life. It is the brevity of this period that is emphasized in the expression, "in the days of thy youth." The days of youth are so brief in their duration and so rapid in their flight.

There are two great tests of life with which young people have to grapple and struggle. There is the pull of pride and the lust of the flesh. Young people have an urge to have their fling and to throw everything out of the way in order to realize their desires. In his "Frederick the Great" Carlyle referred to the licentious conduct of a youthful prince in the following manner: "Bright young soul, with its fine strengths and gifts, wallowing like a young rhinoceros in a mud-bath. Some day it is wholesome for a human soul. Not we!"

Any wise person will consider the end of the journey upon which he embarks. A cartoonist portrayed a large field and a road running through it, and a boy running down the road. Under the cartoon were these words: "Don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way." Don't you think that is a silly way to travel? A negro boy was frightened and running away when a friend called to him and said: "Where are you going?" The boy answered: "I ain't goin' no wheres, I is just leavin' the place I is." Unfortunately and tragically multitudes of young people are like that today; they have no idea where they are going or what they are going to do. One can spend his whole life like that and never accomplish anything worthwhile.

Let me remind each of you young people that there is one person with whom you must live all your life, and that is yourself. To a large extent you will determine the kind of person you are going to be. The story of your life is your autobiography, and you write it yourself. Whether it is excellent, mediocre, or poor is left up to you.

The days of youth are those in which the foundations of manhood and womanhood are built. Youth is the time when the habits of life are formed. Your manners, culture, and habits are being formed now. With very few exceptions, the young people who are slovenly when they enter college remain slovenly throughout life, the filthy remain that way, and the industrious are industrious to the end of their days. Your present habits are good indicators of what you are going to be and do twenty years from now. Illustrations: boy going down street with guitar strung around his neck, attempt to look like a bettle, etc.

It is in the days of youth that enduring friendships are formed. Of course, we make friends after have passed our youth, but they are not likely to be so intimate and enduring as those formed in youth. One should be very careful in the selection of his friends. Next to God and our parents, our friends affect our lives for good or evil. If you know a person's intimate friends, you can form an accurate opinion of him or her. "Birds of a feather flock together." "They that lie down with the dogs get up with fleas." Old proverbs, you say? Surely, yet they are just as true as they are old. One's friends help to make him or break him. True friends of the right sort are invaluable. The mere knowledge of what your friend expects of you spurs you on to high endeavor.

"I would be true, for there are those who trust me,
I would be pure, for there are those who care."

If you will remember your Creator in the days of your youth, it will save you from bitter regrets in later life. J. B. Gough, the famous temperance orator of the nineteenth century, lived a terrible dissipated life between his eighteenth and twenty-fifth years. Then he received Christ as his Saviour and his life was transformed. But the sad memory of those misspent years never left him. One simply cannot escape his past. In his old age Gough was addressing a vast audience of young men when he cried: "Young men, keep your record clean." Then he paused longer than usual and the audience wondered what it meant. He regained his voice, then repeated more feebly, "Young men, keep your record clean." Then followed another and still longer pause. Again he cried, in a wavering voice, "Young men, keep your record clean." With that he fell in death.

Since your every heartbeat is under the control of your Creator, be sure that you remember Him both in the days of your youth and throughout the rest of your life. Such appropriate remembrance of Him will not only be a great blessing to you, but it will be a tremendous blessing to others. If you have any desire or intention of achieving the highest and best in life, be sure to cultivate an intimate friendship with Christ in the days of your youth, and spend your life in serving Him, and in doing the things that are worthwhile, beneficial, and enduring. Don't waste your talents and time on trivialities.

In recounting the marvels of the judges of Israel, the writer inscribes these remarkable words in Judges 12:13-14: "Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts."

Visualize that scene! Seventy young men of royal blood riding on little donkeys! The historian comes to chronicle their lives and careers. What notable event can he describe? What great victory has been won? What tremendous achievement has been performed? What heights have been gained? None! Here is the greatest event in the lives of these seventy young men: they rode on seventy donkeys. This is the most outstanding thing these young men ever did. Think of it -- they had the vantage ground of being in the royal family, but the height of their ambition was to ride a donkey in the style of the day and to the admiration of the crowd.

What was the trouble with those young men? What brought them to this comical and miserable condition? Was it just because there were no opportunities for achievement, or no challenge to greatness? No! In every age there is opportunity and challenge. There was much to challenge those young men, even as there is much to challenge every thinking individual today.

These seventy giddy young men riding on their little donkeys illustrate the tragedy of a low aim in life. They set their sights too low. They failed to see a vision, a surpassing purpose, a thrilling objective which would draw forth from them the best they had. James Russell Lowell was right when he said: "Not failure, but low aim, is sin." To set one's sights low, to be content with the second-best and the mediocre in life-- this is the surest recipe for failure. For even if you succeed in attaining what you aim for, yet you have failed.

These seventy young men of royal parentage reached their objective. They became noted for their ability to ride little donkeys. But what special honor is that? Is it the fit mark of distinction for a king's son or nephew -- this fad, this passing folly, this bubble on the tide? In their finer moments do you think they were satisfied that their place in history had been secured by remarkable donkey riding?

Some time ago there appeared an article in the daily papers that the world's record for eating raw oysters had been broken. After long training and preparation, a man had eaten several dozen raw oysters at one sitting. What an achievement! Sound the trumpets! headline the newspapers! The world's raw oyster eating champion is here! So what? Setting an aim for oneself and achieving it is not enough. The aim must mean something. It must be high enough to challenge the best that is in you.

King Saul hated David and determined to slay him. David had an opportunity to kill Saul, but he refused to do so. Instead he followed him out of the cave and said, "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea?" The king of Israel was chasing a flea, and it was a worthless pursuit even if he caught it. He was prostituting his great authority to ignoble ends and wasting great energies in cheap trivialities. He was dishonoring himself with cheap littleness, seeking to capture a flea. Saul is a type of all who use their physical energies, mental endowments, educational advantages, and spiritual privileges in seeking those things that matter so little. He is a type of all who are slaves to small anxieties, small ideas, and small ambitions.