

Ecclesiastes: Memento Mori: In Praise of Sadness

Oct. 14, 2018

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: In Christ Alone by Keith Getty/Stuart Townend

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day,
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save.
'Til on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the pow'r of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.

Icebreaker

What two questions would you most like God to answer for you and why?

Text for Discussion: Ecclesiastes 5:18-20, 7:1-6

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

We are going to die – every last one of us. This isn't morbid; it's a healthy reminder that can provide proper perspective for our lives. Reflecting on our mortality frees us from our vain anxieties, our busyness, and our obsession over how our life measures up. It's a path to freedom and finding joy in our lives. But, we don't want to think about death. Or talk about it, for that matter. Not until it intrudes and lays us low.

When it does, we no longer worry about the same things. Suddenly, conclusively, we find ourselves grateful for all the good in our lives. Big things like cherished relationships and family. Small things like sharing a cup of coffee with a good friend or watching the sun set into the Pacific. Once we're personally acquainted with death, there's more sadness for those lost, but also more gratitude for the present moment. The veil of our busyness has been ripped away, which now seems fruitless, even empty. And what we're left with... is wisdom.

So much unhappiness comes from unmet expectations. So much of life is complex, messy, unfair, beyond figuring out, and beyond our control. But we don't live as if this were true. We stuff our lives with busyness, hoping it'll bring significance and contentment. But these ambitions never really add to our lives. Instead, they distract us from being present in the present moment. Our life is slowly being dragged away because we're too busy to live it.

Ecclesiastes yearns to wake us from this – to rescue us from a wasted life. Remembering and considering our mortality offers this freedom. Its certainty brings sharp focus to our priorities, goals and ambitions. And because of Jesus, we face death very differently. We still grieve, yes. God put eternity into our hearts, so there will always be something profoundly wrong about death.

But Jesus defeated death. In Him, we are worthy, significant and loved. We no longer need to fear God's judgment because we have nothing left to prove. Death is no longer a terror; instead it's the door to receive all that Christ has won for us. With faith in this truth, we can live more wisely today, praying "God give me the ability to enjoy what you have so generously given me."

Lament can lead us to love and life. It can heal us and enlarge the joy we experience each day. It can be a path to contentment and deep gratitude. So: What are some healthy, practical ways to remember our mortality?

Memorize Scripture... so that when anxiety creeps into the pit of our stomach, we can take up the shield of faith by rehearsing God's promises, reminding ourselves of our place in creation and that God is our Father.

Practice Compassion. Just as we can exercise our bodies, we can practice and develop compassion, which allows us to go beyond empathy to a place where we suffer with those who are suffering.

Let Yourself Feel Sad. This is not permission to romanticize sadness; there is nothing to praise about being swallowed up by it. But the opposite can be just as destructive. The modern "cult of positivity" blinds us to real people and real problems, cutting us off from life. Instead, we should let ourselves feel and express our feelings. Grieve when we need to. Sadness is essential to experiencing the richness of life; it's the necessary prelude to the joy we were built for. When we can lament the big things, we'll know how to laugh at the small ones.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How does Memento Mori (Remember, thou art mortal. Remember, you are going to die.) help us to reset our perspective and expectations?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- How have you understood that the Teacher of Ecclesiastes' intent is to not depress us but to set us free from the vain anxieties of life?
 - What helps your understanding from Ecclesiastes 5:18-20?
- Why do you think the Teacher says that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth in verse 7:1?
 - Because of Jesus how do we rightly read this verse? See 1 Corinthians 13:12 and Philippians 3:20-21.
- Verse 7:2 tells us that when we go to the house of mourning it should remind us of our mortality. Why is it important to live with the understanding that we will die one day?
 - How would you live differently if you knew that you only had a short time to live?
 - How does Memento Mori (Remember, thou art mortal. Remember, you are going to die.) help us to reset our perspective and expectations?
 - How does Memento Mori help us keep an eternal perspective as we experience the ups and downs of everyday life?
- Verses 7:3-4 tell us that good times teach us less than bad times. How is the heart made better by sorrow?
 - Tell how you, someone you know, or a person in the Bible grew in wisdom, joy, and gratitude as they experienced tragedy.
 - Do we have to go through bad times to learn spiritual wisdom, joy, and gratitude? What other ways can we learn?

- Name some practical ways you can practice Memento Mori by 1) memorizing scripture 2) practicing compassion 3) letting yourself feel sorrow rather than using distracting painkillers (food, drink, work, tv etc.) Ask someone in the group to check in on how you are doing each week.

Prayer

It's our responsibility to ask in prayer: God give me the ability to enjoy the life you've given to me. Help me to always live life ever mindful of Memento Mori. Thank you Jesus that you rescued me, freed me, and want me to delight in my lot in life.

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Reflect on your mortality. What do you want your last day to be like? Who do you want to be at your funeral? What do you want them to say? How do you want them to feel? What difference do you want to leave after you are gone? Journal your reflections. Has this experiment made a change in your priorities?