

## INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] My grandfather Levoie is a clown. You somewhat have to be a clown when your parents name you Levoie. But he was a legitimate clown in the Barnum and Bailey circus for many years. Later in life he even taught at a clown college in Sarasota. In his later years, he and my grandmother opened up a salad restaurant. And I have a lot of memoirs growing up of visiting them and spending time in that place. One particular part of the restaurant that stands out was this wall filled with pictures. It'd be filled with circus clowns, places, and friends that my grandfather had met all throughout his life. One of the last years I was visiting before they shut down the restaurant I remember him telling me about all the pictures. Who everyone was, some funny story about them, and where they were now. And he kept mentioning after each one, "Well they are dead now." And after saying this a few times he just stopped and said, "I guess most of my friends are dead now." I remember that moment because it hit me that one day that would be me. That I would stand in some room looking over my life and realize death had taken most of it and would come for me soon.

2. [Need] We come to the end of the book of Ecclesiastes. For twelve chapters we have been repeatedly reminded that we are all going to die and nothing will remain but pictures on someone's wall. The question becomes so what? What is the big conclusion of this book on how we should live? What is the answer to life?

3. [Subject] And the answer is obedience. All of our lives come down to whether or not we will obey God. Because all of us will die. And the only thing that matters is whether or not your life was lived in obedience to Christ or not.

4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 12

5. [Preview]

Our first point in your bulletins is this. **Obey even in evil days. Obey even in evil days.**

Like my grandfather stood in his restaurant and warned that death was coming,  
So too, Solomon stands and warns us that death and evil days are ahead.

Verse 1 **"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"**

This warning should be especially heeded by those of us here who are younger.

We must remember our Creator.

The call to remembrance is ultimately a call to obedience.

It is a call to recognize that you have been created.

The fact that you are a creature obligates you to your Creator.

And we should obey Him when we are young.

Why? Because you don't suddenly start doing things just because you age.

If you are not following Jesus now in your youth,

    You probably won't suddenly start obeying Him later.

It is like any habit.

If you are not eating healthy now,

    Then you might have a hard time changing your diet later.

But we obey not just because old age is coming, but evil days.

The reality is that some days are easier to follow Jesus than others.

Some days you wake up filled with joy and other days you are grumpy.

Some days you can't wait to read God's Word and other days it's boring.

Some days you are patient and caring, other days you feel like everything is making you angry.

The disciples loved following Jesus when they got to heal the sick and see miracles,

They had a harder time following when Jesus was arrested.

But some days are not just harder to follow Jesus than others.  
Some days are evil days.  
There are days that we do not enjoy.

The text even seems to say that there are evil years.  
I don't think it's necessarily helpful to go through history and decide which years are evil and which are not.  
Most of them since Jesus came have been evil in one way, shape, or form.

But the primary command and conclusion here is that we are to obey.  
Obey even when the days are evil.  
Even when the years are evil.  
We still must remember our Creator and follow Jesus.

In recent years I have repeatedly heard Christians refer to the days as evil.  
And some have said, "Well the days are evil, so we don't have to obey right now."  
The political climate is too important, so we don't need to love our enemies anymore.  
My boss is just toxic and terrible, so I don't have to submit to them and work as unto the Lord.  
People are leaving churches in mass, so we don't have to operate how Christ has called us to now, we can just do what we think is best.

Listen to me.  
The days being evil does not exempt you from obedience.  
The disciples didn't get a pass to abandon Jesus just because He was on trial.  
We cannot tell God that we will obey Him when the days are good only.  
Because much of your life will be lived in evil days.  
And if you only obey and follow Jesus on easy good days,  
Then you probably aren't truly following Jesus.

Now all the rest of verses 2 through 8 are a poem.

It is a long poetic description of evil days.

I am reminded of studying poetry in high school and college.

I always struggled because my teachers would "what do the blue curtains mean?"

And I would guess, but could never discover the right answer.

I think this poem has a couple of possible interpretations.

The poem could be describing old age.

So the evil days are the evil that comes with slowly aging.

The keepers trembling are legs and strong men are your back as it bends.

The grinders are teeth that fall out and break down.

The windows dimming is a reference to eyesight as it gets worse.

And the doors are ears as it gets harder to hear.

You might not hear, but you will struggle to sleep and wake up easily.

As you get older you don't climb as many ladders or get on tops of roofs anymore. Regular life is more treacherous than it used to be.

Your hair grows white like the white blossoms of an almond tree.

You shuffle along as life gets more difficult and you don't have the same desires that you used to.

There is a lot of this poem that fits aging and getting older.

Getting older is not for the faint of heart.

And it's evil because we were not created to age and die.

It is a consequence of sin.

And it can be hard to follow Jesus as you age.

There are many who get bitter and angry as they grow.

The pain and difficulty of chronic pain break them and they give up.

But I think this passage is not just about aging, but also other circumstances that make it difficult to obey.

Verse 2 **"before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,"**

We have had more gloomy days lately.  
I don't know about you, but I get tired when it's gloomy.  
It makes me want to sleep and read books.  
And some of you might especially be affected by winter weather and it sends you into depression.

But it is not just when the weather is dark.  
When the atmosphere of the age is gloomy,  
When the very air feels like the sun has faded,  
Then it's hard to obey.

Verse 3 **"in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed,"**

These seem like grim circumstances for a community.  
People are afraid and trembling even inside their homes.  
The strong men who are supposed to protect the town look weak.  
No longer are they keeping the enemy at bay, but their shoulders droop.  
No one goes out to grind grain because they are afraid and most are dead.  
People are scared to even peek outside their windows.

Verse 4 **"and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— 5 they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way;"**

If you picture that as a community it describes evil days.  
Much like the days would be during war or during a siege.  
When the enemy armies are close and everyone is afraid.  
People are just staying inside and hoping that it all blows over.  
Maybe picture some of the war-torn cities in Ukraine.

People are afraid because they don't know when the bombs and missiles may fall.

Verse 5 continues **"the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—"**

The grasshoppers may be fat from eating all the almond blossoms and dragging themselves on the ground.

Or even the grasshoppers are dying because they ate everything.

But primarily here we see that death has come.

The only people in the streets are the funeral processions.

Verse 6 **"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."**

Everything dies and fades.

Even the most precious metals.

All of our stuff and money.

Even our bodies and all of our family and friends.

We all fade into the dust.

It's hard to obey and follow Jesus in days of death and darkness.

But we are commanded and expected to obey.

Listen, if everything is vanity and vaporous,

Then what matters is whether or not you obey.

Your political party winning and achieving all of its goals is vanity.

Your company or family meeting all of their dreams is vanity.

Everything is vanity.

We all are going to die.

So, why do we disobey our Creator in order to achieve dreams made of dust?

No Christian should ever say, "The days are evil so I can sin."

Or, "This moment is too significant, I'm allowed to sin"

The days will be evil,

You will turn to dust.

Obey Jesus.

Even on evil days.

**[Transition]** But we are not just to obey on evil days.

Point number 2 **We should obey God always. We should obey God always.**

This is the entire point of the book of Ecclesiastes.

And this is a book filled with wisdom.

It can seem dark and depressing at first,

But most of this book is super practical and applicable.

Verse 9 **"Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care."**

Solomon was the wiser man who ever lived.

And he worked hard when he put this book together.

He weighed proverbs, wisdom, and everything others had written.

He did not just sit down and start making up things.

What we have been studying was carefully arranged to be helpful and applicable in our lives.

Verse 10 **"The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth."**

It might sound strange to associate delight with this book.  
But if you rightly understand this book, then it should lead us to delight.  
The wisdom of God's Word always leads us to true delight.  
And if we understand the truth of our death and our life,  
Then we will delight rightly in obeying God in all of our lives.

But most importantly the words in this book are the truth.  
This is one of the books in the Bible I would recommend to non-believers.  
Because there is truth found in these pages that even the spiritually blind  
could recognize.  
This is not just the complaints of an ancient depressed king.  
These are words of true wisdom.

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."**

The words in Ecclesiastes are goads.  
A goad is like a cattle prod.  
It was a long stick you used to goad the cattle to doing what they should.  
In a similar way the book of Ecclesiastes goads and pokes us into  
obedience.  
It pokes us when we get materialistic and obsessed with money.  
It pokes us when we desire adoration and love from others.  
It pokes us to remind us that we are all going to die.

And we don't always like being poked.  
But we need it.

And the sayings are firmly fixed and nailed because they are true.  
They are unchanging.  
When you forget the words you can come back and read this book again.  
And you will find that it still pokes and its words are still true.

Solomon also reminds us that these words are not ultimately his.



They are all the words of **"One Shepherd."**

That shepherd is the Good shepherd.

These are the words of God.

It is a reminder that this is not simply man's opinions,

This is God's Word.

Verse 12 **"My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh."**

It is strange to have another warning near the end of the book.

Especially a warning against wisdom.

But Solomon is reminding us that God's Word is sufficient.

We do not see to go and seek wisdom beyond this.

Every year there will probably be hundreds of new books about how to live a meaningful life.

You would break your brain if you tried to read them all and apply their advice.

Study this too hard and you are going to wear yourself out.

I have studied a lot.

I spent 10 years doing college and seminary in master's programs.

I bought a stack of books for this sermon series to help me study this book

And all that study was wearying.

You don't need to do all of that.

Don't check out every book from the library.

You just need to read Ecclesiastes.

Be careful about going beyond it.

Besides what is the point of all of this wisdom?

All of the proverbs across Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

All the wisdom that Solomon has put together it all comes down to these last two verses.

This is his conclusion and his thesis.

Verse 13 **"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."**

What does it mean to fear God?

It means to obey God.

It means act like He is God.

I spent a couple of months as a substitute teacher.

I received some justice for how I acted towards substitutes growing up.

Because the substitute teacher does not receive the same amount of fear and respect as the regular teacher.

And this was even in a private Christian school, where we know all the children are good and godly and saved from outside influences.

But what's the point?

My point is that we often treat God like He is just a substitute teacher.

We act as if we do not recognize His authority.

We do not care if He can see us being disobedient.

We do not fear His discipline or punishment.

Christians, this should not be so.

Fearing God does not mean we stand terrified of Him.

We don't shake at our desks in fear.

But it does mean that we treat Him with the respect and honor He is due.

We act and we live like He is God.

And you act like God is God by **"keeping His commandments."**

We obey what He asks of us.

We do what He commands no matter the circumstances.

No matter how we feel.

No matter how evil the days.

No matter how much we do not want to.

Because this is our duty.  
It is our job assignment as Christians.  
Jesus did not ask His disciples to believe in Him  
and then go back to their lives and do whatever they wanted.  
Jesus asked them to follow Him.

If you call yourself a Christian you are obligated to obey Jesus.  
It is not legalism,  
It is what it means to be a Christian.

But it is not just the duty for Christians,  
This is actually the whole duty of all mankind,  
This is our entire destiny.  
This is what we were created for.  
The culture tells us to follow our hearts.  
That we are meant to follow our designs and be our most authentic selves.

There is a kernel of truth in there.  
Which makes it attractive,  
But it is deceptive because it isn't the whole truth.

The truth is that your heart was meant to fear God and obey His  
commands.  
You were created to follow Jesus.  
You will never find your most authentic and fulfilling self apart from Christ.  
Jesus does not just make us a new Creation.  
He remakes us what we were always meant to be.

The lie of the enemy is that we can find that outside of the commands of  
God.  
God's commands are not just arbitrary rules written by old men.  
They are not the commands of a tyrant who wants control.

They are the instruction manual from our Creator who wants us to live like we were designed to.

And when we fear God,  
When we obey His commandments,  
When we do our whole duty,  
Then we become what we were meant to be.  
We find what our innermost being has always longed for and never found.

Your truest self,  
The authentic person you are meant to be,  
It is found in Christ.

And we must do this not just because it helps us be ourselves, but because of verse 14

Verse 14 **"For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."**

In all this book we hear "vanity, meaningless, vaporous."  
So what is the point of life?  
It's obeying God always because one day you still stand before Him in judgment.

Every single deed.  
Everything you have ever done.  
Every secret thing.  
Every private thought you have had.  
Every private moment.  
Whether good or evil those will all be before God's eyes.

It will be like He has a recording of your entire life.  
Not just videos of all your actions,  
But transcripts of all of your thoughts.

On one hand, this should slightly terrify you.  
It should make you realize how sinful we are and how desperately we need grace.

It should also motivate us to fear God.  
He is watching.  
So we should obey always.

But I also think that this is encouraging.  
This means that God sees and recognizes every small ordinary moment of obedience.  
He sees it and He will reward it.  
For Christians who live their lives towards God,  
God sees.  
It matters even if the entire world seems to ignore you.

**[Transition]** But there is a problem here isn't there? We can't obey always.  
We are not able to do this on our own.

Point number 3 **The gospel empowers us to obey. The gospel empowers us to obey.**

Our problem is not that we are sinners who do not obey.  
Our problem is that we cannot obey even when we want to.  
And we do not want to obey as much as we should.

But God does not leave us alone.  
The message of Jesus and the Gospel is not just "obey because you are going to die and you had better try harder and stop being such a disappointment."

The message of the gospel is that we cannot ever obey enough.  
But Christ saves us anyway.

We need the gospel because we cannot be good enough with Him.  
We just need grace and salvation.  
No one will stand before that judgment seat and survive without the forgiveness of Jesus.  
Then after saving us He empowers us and gives us the ability to obey.

Let's look at Ezekiel 36:25-27 **25 "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."**

Look at verse 25 first. He sprinkles clean water on us.  
This is a reference to being washed in the blood of Jesus.  
The only thing that can clean us of all of our sins.

This is why we are baptized in water.  
It is a physical reminding and acting out of the washing that Christ's blood accomplishes.  
All of our disobedience and failure is completely washed away.

But Jesus does not just wipe our slate clean so that we can try again.  
This washing is our motivation.  
When I get out of the shower after coming back from the gym, I don't want to get dirty again.  
I am motivated to stay clean.  
In a much greater way the cleansing blood of Jesus motivates us to obey.

But the gospel does not just motivate us, it transforms us.  
Verse 26 "**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."**

We cannot obey Christ without being saved because our old hearts are dead.

But when we put our faith in Jesus we are born again.

The very core of our being transforms and is given new life.

God goes to work like those reality shows where they give an old destroyed house new life and make it look like something you can't afford.

Verse 27 **"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."**

God puts His Spirit within us.

If you are a Christian, then the Holy Spirit dwells within your body.

Your body is a temple.

Whether you are in non-stop pain, or feel better than you ever have.

Your body is a temple because it houses God Himself.

And the Holy Spirit is inside of us to empower us toward obedience.

**"and cause you to walk in my statutes"**

If you are a Christian, then you have probably had moments where the Holy Spirit took over.

Maybe someone asked you for help, or wisdom and something came out of your mouth that have no clue where.

Or a situation came that normally leads you to be angry, but it felt like something took over and you had supernatural patience.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

He works inside of us to cause us to walk in obedience.

And He causes us to **"and be careful to obey my rules."**

This is not something that you have to do on your own.

Because you cannot do it alone.

But God is with you.

God will empower and help you obey Him.

He equips us with what we need.  
The process of sanctification is a slow one.  
It is where the Holy Spirit slowly transforms us bit by bit.  
He gives us the tools we need to dig out the roots of sin in our lives.

And the beauty of this is that God then rewards us for what He did in us.  
Our rewards when Jesus returns are not because we were so awesome.  
We did it with the help of the Holy Spirit.  
Just like I reward my children when they “help” me make breakfast.  
They can’t do it unless I empower them.

We can’t do it without the gospel.  
But God loves to aid us.  
Because we are His children and He loves us.

Too many Christians hear sermons and think they need to try harder,  
Work more,  
Or do more things.  
I mean you might,  
But you cannot do any of that on your own.  
You need the gospel first.  
We have to obey, But we cannot obey unless Jesus helps us.

#### CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] We should obey even in evil days. We should obey always.  
The gospel empowers us to obey.
2. [Challenge] As we close the book on Ecclesiastes and move on I want to you remember this. As a preacher my job is prepare you for death.  
What you must know more than anything is to follow Jesus. Non-believer, give your life to Christ. Christian, follow Jesus!