

**Be Satisfied in the Lord Always:
*A Sermon on Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:1***

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Introduction: The Beauty and Power of Light

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid” (Ps 27:1). “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105). “The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned” (Matt 4:16; cf. Isa 42:7). Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

In a world scathed with darkness, light is powerful gift from God. The more extended your time in the night, the more you appreciate and hope for light. Light also etches the mind, helping us remember our way when night casts its shadow. This very morning at dawn there were fresh divine mercies (Lam 3:22–23), which the psalmist tells us have pursued us into this room (Ps 23:6). What a good Shepherd we have—both in the green pastures and in the valleys of darkest shadow. He will never leave and never forsake.

Turn with me to the book of Ecclesiastes as we meditate on the power of light and the gift of sight as we live in a world where the days of darkness are many. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes is one who had tasted the bigness and beauties of God and who, in 11:7–12:1, supplies tangible help for those of us who know the Lord and yet who cannot fully grasp his ways in this crooked and confused world. The preacher declares:

Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. 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.”

Our passage has two units: 11:7–8 identifies the need to be satisfied in the Lord always. Then 11:9–12:1 clarifies how to remain satisfied in the Lord always. We begin in verse 7.

The Need to Be Satisfied in the Lord Always (11:7–8)

Seeing Light is Sweet (11:7)

Verse 7 asserts, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.” Like the sweetness of sleep after a long day’s work (5:12[11]), the sight of light is tasteful, beautiful, delightful. The Preacher lived in the days of shepherds’ fires and oil lamps, when the dark of night was really dark, and when evening travelers were often guided only by the light of the moon. In those days, the sun’s sweetness came in the way it let people function effectively, setting the rhythm of sleep and work and seasons and years and identifying times for both celebration and burials. In the first work week of Genesis 1, the day did not end in the dark, for “There was evening and there was morning, day one” (Gen 1:5). According to God’s timing, light always triumphs, as night gives way to sight and dawn gives rise to noon. But when you are living amidst the darkness, our souls need the Lord’s tender reminding that morning will dawn because God’s Son has risen. In our world, the Preacher says, “The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises” (1:5). Morning light always triumphs over the darkness of night, and in the midst of the blackness, the sun is already hastening to the place where it will rise again.

This book uses “light” and “darkness” metaphorically. When it says, “Light is sweet,” it is using a general truth to speak about spiritual realities. Within this book, while “it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun,” most in this world are dwelling in darkness without eyes to see the goodness of God that is all around them. Consider 2:13–14: “Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.” Though the fool lives under the sun, he lives his life blind to the goodness and faithfulness of God. Elsewhere in the book we read that stillborn baby goes in darkness, having never seen the sun (6:4–5), and for all in this world death will come—when “the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain” (12:2). But of the fool we read—“All his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger” (5:17). There are dark days for both the one who fears God and the one who does not, but it is ever night or spiritually dark for the fool. The fool never appreciates the common graces in a way that moves him to praise. Therefore, it is

the wise who alone can say, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun” (11:7; cf. 7:11–12).

We can assume from the words that the sage counts himself among the wise, for he is speaking from personal experience. But his wording is also urging his students to not take lightly glimpses of grace. I assume that Jesus has moved most of you from darkness to light, meaning that you have tangible memories of having tasted and seen the goodness and beauty and faithfulness of God. You have experienced his closeness, he has spoken to you through his Word, you have rejoiced at his declaration of no condemnation. You’ve sensed his strong presence amidst pain and loss, and you have felt the relief of deliverance and the hope of eternal life. You know that “light is sweet,” for you have lived in the darkness and have seen the end of the tunnel come.

But the reality is that once the clouds of past pain dissipate, for the believer greater storms await. And the wise sage of our text wants to urge us today to not forget past grace, for it will fuel our hope in future grace. Past glimpses of God’s mercies help true saints maintain their satisfaction in God when trials test our faith. Having experienced the joy in the day, believers gain a hope for dawn and noon that can carry and guide them through the night. Look with me back at 11:8.

Why Seeing Light Is Sweet (11:8)

Why is seeing light sweet? 11:8 supplies the reason why. The ESV opens v. 8 with the conjunction “So,” but I honestly struggle to see how this translation is possible. Both the NASB and CSB translate with “indeed,” which is closer. The Hebrew conjunction is the normal one for expressing the basis for something, and I think that v. 8 gives the reason for why v. 7 is true (cf. the same Hebrew construction in 4:9–10; see also 5:19–20; 8:15). Light is sweet “*for* if a person lives many years, he should rejoice in them all; and he should remember that the days of darkness will be many.” Let me repeat that: “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun, for if a person lives many years, he should rejoice in them all; and he should remember that the days of darkness will be many.” According to this text, the reason light is sweet is not because of what it gives us in relation to our past but because of what it supplies us in relation to our future. It is pleasant to see the sun because it gives us fuel for maintaining our satisfaction in God always, even through extended seasons of darkness. Glimpses of God’s goodness in this age are God’s gifts to help us endure, for they remind us of his worth and beauty and give us confidence that he will deliver again.

Notice first that, if God grants that we live many years, we are supposed to be a people who “rejoice in them all.” It is like Paul, who told the church in Philippi, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!” (Phil 4:4). Or again, to the church in Rome, “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings” (Rom 5:2–3). Or, as Dr. Johnson reminded us last week, James commands believers, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (Jas 1:2–3). There is “a time to be born, and a time to die”; between these poles, the Preacher calls us to rejoice. In times of planting and plucking, killing and healing, weeping and laughing, we are to rejoice. Through mourning and dancing, embracing and refraining, seeking and losing, we are to rejoice. In times of silence and speaking, loving and hating, war and peace, we are to remain satisfied in all God is for us. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the sun” (3:1). But in all our many years, come what may, we are called to rejoice.

And light is sweet because of the way it helps us maintain God-conscious joy, even when storm clouds darken our perspective. Notice the next statement, “It is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun because ... every person should remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity” (11:8). Even the wise, who fear the Lord and have been declared right with him, even the wise will not always see the rays of God’s goodness. Indeed, for us in this room, “the days of darkness will be many.” Fellow saints, here me today: you should expect extended seasons of suffering and trial in this life. Paul identified that we are “fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17). “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29). “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). “If we endure, will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us” (2 Tim 2:12).

And these realities are what makes seeing and savoring the shining of God’s goodness all the sweeter. If one lives many years, many days of these years will be filled with darkness, filled with times when God’s goodness seems distant. So memorialize the moments when you know God to be true, when you have seen his power and savored his mercy, and let those glimpses of grace and goodness sustain you when darkness strikes. Seeing the sun of God’s goodness reminds us that light always wins, that morning always comes, that darkness will dissipate, and that God will continue to be faithful to carry us into a new day. I am reminded of Paul’s words to the Philippians:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:4–7)

With every dawn comes the promise of fresh mercies, so light is sweet because of the way it allows us to use every past glimpse of brilliant and warm grace to heighten hope for something beyond the night. Past encounters with God create hope for more showers of mercy, so nurture gratitude for God’s past faithfulness, as it will fuel steadfastness amidst trial.

Being satisfied in God should not be bound to our circumstances. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes was not a pessimist. He was a realist and a godly sage. “The wise person has his eyes in his head” (2:14), and for this one, “Light is sweet” (11:7). If you entered into this room weary and worn ... if you feel dry and distant from God ... if you feel burdened excessively by the cares of this world, pause today and pray that God will remind you of his past mercies in order to heighten your hope that he will act for you again. In Christ, our God is for us. And “he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things” and through those things empower us to be “more than conquerors through him who loved us”? (Rom 8:32, 37). Nothing in all creation “will be able to separate us from the love God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39).

How to Be Satisfied in the Lord Always (11:9–12:1)

11:7–8 stressed the need to be satisfied in the Lord always. Now 11:9–12:1 supply us some pointers in how to do this. While unclear in most translations, beginning in v. 9 we find a progression of six conjoined imperatives: “Rejoice ... and walk ... and know ... and remove ... and put away ... and remember! These six commands operate together to clarify how you and I can remain satisfied in all God is for us. I have grouped the six conjoined commands into four steps. How do we maintain our satisfaction in the Lord:

- Step 1: Rejoice always (11:9ab).
- Step 2: Run wisely (11:9cd).
- Step 3: Remove your cares (11:10ab).
- Step 4: Remember your Creator (12:1a)

Step 1: Rejoice always (11:9ab)

Step 1 in retaining satisfaction in God is to choose joy: “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth” (v. 9ab). Whether college student or seminarian, this day you are setting patterns for the type of man or woman, the type of businessman or minister or spouse or parent you will be. What is the object of your delights today? What has captured your affections? What is mastering your soul? Is it your image before others? Is it your ease, so that storms really ruffle you? Are you grounded on a rock and resting in the refuge of Christ, or are you inhabiting a tent on sand? Often our reactions more than our actions reveal what is truly in the heart, and it is often through loss that we realize we were finding our hope or identity in something other than God.

Choosing to rejoice is easier when days are bright, but God’s worth is displayed all the more in the night when our baby will not be consoled, when we learn that our dad lost his job, or when melanoma reaches stage 4. Our joy can look like laughs and smiles and praise reports when we finish two grueling weeks of boot camp, win our first basketball game, or have success on a test. But joy can also look like dependent cries to God when you hear that your spouse has just been in a car accident or that your child has a chromosomal deformity. This book suggests that *to rejoice is to delight in God and his gifts amidst both prosperity and adversity*, and delight takes numerous forms, depending on the circumstance. Rejoicing is something greater than mere happiness, for when our souls are not happy, we can still be satisfied in God. In Paul’s words, we can be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:9).

Step 2: Run wisely (11:9cd)

Step 2 in remaining satisfied in God is to run wisely. Look at the second half of v. 9: “Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” A preacher really has to know his audience if he is to tell them, “Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.” Back in the Pentateuch Moses characterized his audience as “stubborn, unbelieving, and rebellious” (e.g., Num 14:11; Deut 9:6–7, 23), and because of this he charged them in Num 15:39 “not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes.”

Here, however, I suggest that the context is very different. The rest of Ecclesiastes strongly clarifies that the wise king is by no means commending an unrestrained, worldly pursuit of pleasure. In 11:7–10 he is addressing the wise man and not the fool. He said in 11:8 that “it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun,” and

in 2:14 he observed, “The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.” Only the wise see the sun as a manifestation of God’s goodness and grace (7:11–12). So, what do we know about the wise in this book? 8:5 tells us, “The wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.” Similarly, 10:2 stresses: “A wise man’s heart inclines him to the right, but a fool’s heart to the left.” So, if the wise person’s heart is bent Godward, knowing the just way, it makes sense why the Preacher would call him to “walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes.” These will be the ways of God.

If you are among the wise today, among those who have tasted and seen that God is good, part of the way you nurture satisfaction in God is by delighting in his good gifts. In the words of 9:7, “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.” Paul told Timothy that requiring professing believers to always abstain from marital sex or certain foods was a teaching of demons, “for everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim 4:4). Similarly, the godly sage in this book frees us to have a merry heart, “for God has already approved what you do” (Eccl 9:7). Delighting in the gift provides a channel for us to rightly delight in the Giver.

Yet there is a stated caution. We must be sure to make every step, every decision, every click of the mouse, every purchase, every glance knowing “that for all these things God will bring you into judgment” (11:9). Because life and work are gifts (5:18–19[17–18]) and because God alone brings joy (2:24–25), we are accountable to how we engage in our daily pursuits. Earlier in 3:16, the Preacher bemoaned, “I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.” But then in 3:17 he took solace knowing that “God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work” (cf. 5.2). The Lord will hold us accountable for every word and every deed, and this fact must color how we pursue joy.

At the core, what the Preacher is calling for is a daily ethic grounded in the fear of God, and he was convinced that those who lived in fear would reap benefits beyond the grave. 8:12–13 really capture this well: “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God” (cf. 3:14; 5:7; 7:16–18). The final verses of this book declare: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every

secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:13–14). You and I ought to eat Chipotle and drink sparkling water for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). We can delight in pastries and places and people, but we must do so with God and the final judgment ever on our minds. God’s gifts are means for nurturing our satisfaction in the Giver.

Step 3: Remove your cares (v. 10)

Step 3 in sustaining God-conscious joy is remove your cares. 11:10 reads, “Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.” The verbs to “remove” and to “put away” identify that finding joy at all times—even in the days of darkness (v. 8)—requires that we decide not to allow the burdens, confusions, vexations, and troubles of this life to wear us down. The Preacher is not calling us to act as though life is a party when in fact it’s pain. No, he recognizes that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (3:4). We don’t ignore human troubles, but we must not allow them to consume us. This can be so hard, but we must fight the lies of Satan and embrace the hope God gives.

Jesus commanded, “Do not be anxious about your life.... Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matt 6:34). Similarly, Paul asserted, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6). Knowing that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble,” Peter exhorted, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties upon him, because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:5–7). Because youth and the dawn of life are filled with confusion and enigma, “remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body” (Eccl 11:10). That is step 3 in how to maintain God-conscious joy.

Step 4: Remember your Creator (12:1)

Finally, there is no higher way to remain satisfied in God than to remember our Creator: “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.’” (12:1). What 11:8 called “the days of darkness,” 12:1 calls “evil days.” None of us are free from suffering. If you are still young and have yet to experience much, you have an opportunity now to store memories of God’s

kindness and faithfulness that can help sustain your faith long-term. Furthermore, you have the opportunity shape within your heart convictions that celebrate God's bigness and your neediness, that nurture God-dependence and battle self-reliance. "Remember your Creator!"

The Preacher in this book believed in a massive God who creates everything, both the good and the bad. Notice 11:5: "As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything." Don't think of God as someone who only created in the past but is now distant and separated. No, he is right now making ... right now upholding all things by the word of his power—moment by moment (Heb 1:3). If he stops speaking, you and I stop living. We have a "God who makes *everything*." And the Preacher meant, "Everything."

In 7:13–14 we read: "Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: *God* has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him." We are ignorant; we are small. And God is in charge. His purposes are not being thwarted through the surprising death of a parent or through an extended search for a house or ministry post. He was at work in your illness during boot camp, and he is sovereign over the car accident, the home sickness, and the night terrors. The Lord was on the throne before the cancer struck, and he is on the throne now! He is the Creator, and we are aided when we take our eyes off our problem and direct them toward the only one who can produce a solution. We cry, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

If all the power of God that we cannot contain and if all the power of God that we cannot explain is nevertheless working for us, we need not fear those who can only kill the body but cannot kill the soul. We gain boldness to leave houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and lands for Christ's sake and for the gospel (Mark 10:29). We need not falter in our faith when we fail an exam or when a marriage suffers challenges. Oh, God, keep us believing; keep us trusting. Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world. He is stronger; he is higher, and because of this we have hope. Remember your Creator and that this Creator is for you—a good guide through the darkness who will both protect and provide.

Conclusion

In conclusion, find rest today remembering your Creator and celebrating that he has given you eyes to see his light. Rejoice always, run wisely, remove your cares, and remember your Creator. And as you do, embrace every glimpse of

God's goodness shown ultimately in and through Christ, so that you can have fuel to persevere to the end.

Jesus is the light of the world who has opened our blind eyes. It is the Spirit of Christ in us that produces within us sustained joy. It is Jesus who embodies every bit of ideal wisdom found in this text, and it is his substitutionary death and imputed righteousness that allows God to work for us and to empower us to live satisfied in him. The Queen of Sheba "came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matt 12:42). Jesus is the ultimate one who will judge the earth, and through him the Lord can justly take our cares. Jesus promises, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). And Jesus is the One by whom "all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:16). He is the one who said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Let your heart be satisfied in the Lord today. Rejoice always, run wisely, remove your cares, and remember your Creator. And let the certainty that God has worked for you in Christ supply you all you need to persevere through the darkest of days unto the time when there will be no night.

Now, may the God of peace himself satisfy and sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it (1 Thess 5:23–24).