

Rejoice in Your Youth (1)

Rev. C Hanko

Ecclesiastes 11:9 "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

The days of your youth are happy days. Although the text speaks only of young men, young women are included. You may be confronted with many duties, various disappointments and problems that arise in your life, yet when you stop to consider, this phase of your life is indeed a happy time. Years later you will look back and realize that this was in many ways the happiest time of all.

There are various reasons for this.

You are maturing. When you were a child, you spoke as a child, you thought as a child, but now you have put away childish things. You sense your vitality. As a young man you are strong, muscular, capable of tasks expected of adults. As young women you have taken on the grace and attraction of bud unfolding. A sexual urge has awakened, and you are aware of and even attracted to the opposite sex.

Mentally you have matured. You are an individual. You begin to think for yourself and to form your own opinion of life. The things you learned as a child take on new meaning. You see life through more mature eyes, hear and speak like an adult. Life becomes extremely interesting.

But also psychologically you have changed. You face some tremendous decisions that determine your entire future. If you are going on to college, you must decide where and what courses to take. You ask yourself, what is my future role in life, what occupation do I choose? You begin to think about choosing a life mate. Last, but certainly not least, you take your place in the church as a confessing member.

Exciting, isn't it? You are filled with the exuberance, the joy of living.

For that reason Scripture tells you: Rejoice, O young man, O young woman, in your youth! You are young only once.

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes tells you, according to the picture language of the original, to "cause the brightness of your heart to radiate upon your face and your whole person." The idea is that the joy of your heart (which is the source of all our outer expression) should shine on your faces and be experienced in all your activities.

You are urged to do that by walking "in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes." Your inner joy must become evident in all your thoughts, words, actions and deeds, wherever you are and in all your associations with others.

There is an implied warning here that you must not ignore. To do so can have bitter results.

Your perverted nature dictates an entirely wrong view of life. It tells you that black is white, wrong is right, sin is fun, the only real enjoyment of living. You cannot have a good time unless you give in to the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. You want to get out of life all you can, in spite of the advice of your elders, who are too old and narrow-minded to understand.

The world round about you takes on a special appeal. The TV offers entertainments that you know are wrong, but your urge is to watch them. Movies do present a lot of perverted sex

and crime, but they are exciting. The “crowd” tends to go too far in the wrong direction at times, but you do go along. Your closest friend entices you to sin; you would rather yield than be a “prude.” It is so hard to say no, and so easy to travel the road of least resistance. Besides, you don’t want to be laughed at.

The urge to follow the dictates of your sinful nature becomes a powerful, irresistible force. It is so “natural,” so appealing, to give in to sinful lust and pleasure. “I’ll enjoy life now and settle down later. I have complete control of myself. I know how far to go and when to stop.” Famous last words.

Beware, sin is a seductive and destructive power. At the moment it seems perfectly proper, even necessary to yield, even though you know that you would condemn that act in others. Your conscience retreats to the background, you imagine that you can sin and get away with it.

We are reminded of Eve in paradise, discussing with Satan God’s command concerning the forbidden tree. Why is it so wrong to eat of that tree? It cannot hurt; I won’t die. The tree does produce appealing fruit that makes my mouth water. By eating I can do my own thing, I can be like God in the sense that I decide for myself what is right or wrong, what I will or not. Now her hand goes out irresistibly, as it were, to the forbidden fruit. She ate, gave to Adam, and he ate with her. That’s where it all started. And we follow in their footsteps.

Sin is like a poison adder that strikes and kills. It is only after the sin has been committed that the conscience awakens and you realize that he who sins becomes sin’s slave. As God warns us, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.” (We might excuse ourselves by saying, This is my weakness, I can’t help it.) “For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death.” (James 1:13-15)

The Preacher warns: “But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”

Judgment begins already in this life. We only fool ourselves when we imagine that there is joy in sinning. Lend an honest ear to the wild, off-beat music and singing of the world. It reminds you of the wild dances of the aborigines in the jungles. Take a serious look at the faces. Do you see any real happiness radiating from them? And notice the misery of those who seek their refuge (their pleasure) in wild orgies, drinking, drugs, gambling, stealing, murder and suicide.

The first step seems so innocent, yet it becomes a snare. And think of the secrecy, the deceit involved, the guilty conscience, the fear of being discovered, and of the consequences. Consider also how your sin hurts your parents and your family, and brings shame on your church.

Still worse, what follows is a life-long, bitter complaint: “Sins of youth remember not.” For the sin may be forgiven, but the scars and damage remain. Marriages can be tainted and spoiled, distrust aroused before the vows are spoken.

There is also the inescapable fact, that there is a final judgment when all our life is exposed before our consciousness. And, unless there was a heartfelt repentance, in hell there is only an endless remorse. God says, “Son, remember.” You had your good things, that is, you had what you wanted. (Luke 16:25)

(to be continued)

Originally Published in:
Volume 53 No. 5 May 1994