

FREE MASONRY 12

SOLOMON'S SERMON The Twelfth Chapter of Ecclesiastes

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Portions of the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes are recited in Masonic lectures. This is pure symbolism written by King Solomon, who took the role of preacher, and depicts human life in its three principal stages -- youth, manhood and old age.

The philosophy of this portion of Scripture is applicable to a Masonic life as portrayed in the three Craft Degrees, wherein the Entered Apprentice represents youth, the Fellow Craft, manhood, and the Master Mason, old age.

Reversing the order - wisdom, strength and beauty - it is a kind of parable or similitude in which he compares man to a house with its surroundings and furniture.

Once it stood fair and stately, with keepers or guards around it, trees to shade it, and birds singing in their branches; golden lambs in its halls, suspended by silver cords; a fountain playing in its courts, supplied by a wheel at a cistern; in fact, a palace - a king's palace with all its riches and glory.

Now it is a decaying house. The owner who, in his youth and manhood, completed it, and who had built a magnificent temple dedicated to the worship of Jehovah the God of his fathers, has allowed the influence of great riches, costly jewels and robes, glittering lights, sparkling wines, the admiration of kings, queens and princes and heathen alliances to induce him to build shrines and temples to other gods, and degrading forms of worship, thus violating the first law of the Hebrews, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

In his old age he remembers his sins and relates that the Kingdom which his father, David, built up out of the tribes of the Hebrew people would be divided, that the palaces and temples which he had set up would be destroyed and the people scattered on account of his turning away from the God of Israel. So, in his sorrow, he begins his preaching by saying "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king. I gave my heart to know madness and folly - all is vanity." He then cautions the youth not to forget God, and begins to preach one of the most vital discourses ever delivered by mortal man, one of the most important pieces of philosophy in the whole range of human thought:

"Remember now thy Creator in the
days of thy youth"

Why in youth? That is the time of habit-forming, as spring is the time of sowing and planting. We reap what we sow. The harvest depends very largely on the seed. If the seed is not clean and carefully selected there will be tares among the ripened grain or a poor quality kernel.

If we are too late in planting, the fall rains or early frosts will ruin the crop. Therefore he says:

"REMEMBER Now, while the evil days come

not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt
say, I have no pleasure in them, while he sun,
or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not
darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain."

Youthful days are hopeful. In the spring, warm showers refresh the fields, giving promise of a good crop, daylight is increasing and life is pleasant. Careless youth gives little thought of the evil days when the hours of daylight will become less. Ambitious youth is looking to the time when he will have grown to manhood and acquired wealth and position; old age is far off, and he is only thinking of the good time he is going to have when he has graduated from school and has taken his place among the men of the world.

The preacher cautions him that there will be evil days and for these he should prepare, by remembering his Creator in the days of his youth.

He arrives at manhood; the summer sun is shining; the golden grain is ripening; the fondest dreams of youth are being realized. He revels in pleasure, and glories in his strength, forgetting the rock from which he was hewn and the instruction given by those who had gone before him.

He makes a law unto himself, and worships other gods than the God of his father, and falls upon the evil days which the preacher warns him of.

"In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble."

When the hands and arms will tremble with the palsy of weakness of old age. When "The strong men shall bow themselves"; the legs supporting the body become bent and tottering; "and the grinders cease because they are few" - the teeth, representing the women grinding the corn, are few. "And those who look out of the windows be darkened"; the eyes, the windows of the soul, become dim and sight is obscure. "And the doors shall be shut in the streets"; the ears become deaf and all the senses by which he communicated with the outer world are closed. "When the sound of the grinding is low"; the former sound of chewing with good teeth is reduced to a mumbling sound. "And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird"; old people sleep lightly and are easily wakened, even the voice of a singing bird will rouse them. "And all the daughters of music shall be brought low"; the aged lose the former powers of the vocal chords and cannot produce musical notes as in youth. "Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high": youth can climb cliffs and look from tower heights; the old man's legs are weak and his head dizzy when looking from high places. "And fear shall be in the way"; old people fear street traffic and crowds, and cannot ward off danger as in youth.

"And the almond tree shall flourish"; the white hairs of old age are here compared to the blossoms of the almond tree. "And the grasshopper shall be a burden"; the old man can no longer combat the ravages of locust upon the growing crops so common in the East. "And desire shall fail": the natural desires of youth and middle age no longer appeal to the aged. "Man goeth to his long home"; the grave is the long and last home of the human body. "And the mourners go about the streets"; in Solomon's time and, in very many places yet, mourners are hired to publicly proclaim the demise of a citizen.

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken": the silver cord and golden bowl are symbolic of light or life, when the spinal cord is loosed or severed, the nervous system is destroyed, the golden bowl, which is life itself, is broken. The golden bowls in the halls contained oil by which the palace was illuminated. These were suspended by silver cords. When the cords gave way the bowl fell and the oil spilled and the light extinguished. "Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain"; the pitcher at the fountain in which the maid carried the water for the wants of the household is no longer required. "Or the wheel broken at the cistern"; the water wheel drew the water from the well and supplied the fountain; it, too, is broken, and the house is destroyed. The King is dead; all human activities, as far as he is concerned are at an end. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit return to God, who gave it"; Mother Earth supplied the sustenance which built up the physical frame; she receives it back again; the spirit, the life, that magnetic fluid which no mortal can understand, return to its mysterious source.

But the preacher said man goeth to his long home. Can the grave be considered a home, where the body becomes disintegrated and returns to dust? Did he refer to the spirit when he said man goeth to his long home? We think he did. The idea of the immortality of the soul seems inherent in the mind of the whole human race, and is symbolized in the final drama in Craft Masonry.

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