

The Church's Young Adults

Ecclesiastes 11:9 – 12:14, 1 John 2:3-17, Titus 2:1-8

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Introduction:

Today in our sermon series on *The Christian in Every Stage of Life* we will be looking in particular at *young adults*.

- By *young adults*, I am referring to those of you who have already professed your faith and become communicant members of the church.
 - You are now old enough and mature enough to take responsibility for your faith.
 - As children, you were members of the church on the basis of your parents' profession and it was your parents' responsibility to manage your walk.
 - But now you are members of the church on the basis of your own profession of faith...the elders have met with you and have concluded that you have a sound profession, so now you continue in the fellowship of the church on the basis of your own profession.
 - That is where the designation of *young adult* begins—but it is not as easy to describe the upper limit of young adulthood.
 - A lot of it has to do with whether you are more or less settled in your calling as opposed to just starting out in it...
 - And by your *calling* I mean both your marital status and your career.
 - Are you just starting out, or are you settled into a status?
 - To put an age to it, we are probably talking about somewhere around thirty.

With the two stages of life that we have considered so far,

- I have identified something that is especially characteristic of those stages—
 - something about them that stands out among the rest of the saints in the church.
- With infants, it was their receiving of God's kingdom—
 - Jesus tells us that infants are in His Kingdom and that in fact they are examples to us all of what it means to receive His kingdom.
 - In Luke 18:17 He said: **“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”**
 - Little children do not put up resistance about coming to the LORD.
 - When the truth is presented to them, they believe it.
 - We all have something to learn from them, and it is, in fact, their duty to set forth this receptivity to all of us as faithful infants.
- Last week we looked at children who are no longer infants, but who are still in the church on the basis of their parents' profession.
 - And we saw that one of their prominent duties at that age is to obey their parents in the Lord—*Eph 6:1—Children, obey your parents in the Lord...*
 - If their parents are indeed commanding them to trust in Christ and to follow Him (and that is surely what every Christian parents *should* do),
 - then their obedience will mean that they will prosper in the kingdom of Christ and continue in it forever.

- Children in the church, more than saints in any other stage of life, are called to show us the beauty of true Christian obedience and submission.
 - This is a feature that stands out in children among the people of God.
- But today we come to *young adults*.
 - What is it that especially stands out about them as God’s people?
 - In what way is the beauty of the Lord to be especially apparent among them when they are walking with Christ?

Let’s turn to our scripture text and see what it says.

- Our scripture text today is 1 John 2:3-17.
- Please listen carefully as I read it to you now because this is the holy word of God.

1 John 2:3-17: Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. ⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. ⁷ Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. ⁸ Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. ⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know

where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. ¹² I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. ¹³ I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one. ¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

May the Lord bless the reading of His infallible word.

I. The great feature that stands out in Christian young adults is strength... strength that is put into the service of Jesus Christ.

A. Notice how John singles out young men in the heart of our text—in 1 John 2:12-14.

1. In 2:12, you see how addresses *little children*.

- This is a label that John uses for Christians of all ages throughout this epistle because we are all little children before God our heavenly Father.
 - You can see at the beginning of chapter 2 how he says, “My little children” in this way that includes all the saints...
 - And in chapter 2 verse 18, he says “Little children, it is the last hour...”
 - And in chapter 2 verse 28, he says, “And now little children, abide in Him.”
 - And at the end of 1 John, he says, “**Little children, keep yourselves from idols.**”
- So verse 12 appears to be a general address that we are all little children who have our sins forgiven, and that he is writing to us because of this.

2. But then in verse 13, John seems to speak of **little children** as a separate and distinct category from **fathers** and **young men**.
 - He uses a different word for **children** here (*παιδίον pahee-dee'-on*) than in verse 12 (*τεκνίον tek-nee'-on*), and it seems clear that he is now (in verse 13) referring to differences in age.
 - He speaks of fathers, young men, and children.
 - And notice how in verse 14, he changes from saying, “I write” or “I am writing” to saying “I have written,”
 - But the only ones he says he *has written* to are the fathers and the young men... perhaps because the children were not yet born when he wrote before?
 - This helps to support the idea that he is distinguishing between saints of different ages.
 3. But the other thing that is of interest to our purpose is the way he distinguishes the young men from the fathers and children...
 - The fathers and children are both said to have known God, more or less the same thing is said of them...
 - But he seems to place emphasis on the young men—
 - For in v. 13, he says of them that they have overcome the wicked one...
 - And in verse 14 that they are strong and that the word of God abides in them, and (again) that they have overcome the wicked one.
- B. So if we are to summarise what he says about the young men, it is that they are especially noted for their strength and victory over the enemy.
1. The focus is on their strength used in service to Jesus Christ.
 - They are strong and so have overcome the wicked one...the very thing that God promised the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, would do in Genesis 3:15.
 - Because He has overcome, these young men have been able to overcome.
 - By the grace of God in Christ, they have been freed from the service of Satan and have been brought into the service of Christ.
 - Satan no longer rules them, but now they are ruled by Jesus Christ.
 - The Word of God abides in them—do you see that in verse 14?
 - That means that both their minds and their bodies are ruled by the word of Lord Jesus instead of by their sinful passions.
 - Sin no longer has dominion over them because they are under grace and alive in Jesus Christ.
 - That youthful vigor that is in all young adults is now infused with grace.
 2. What a beautiful thing the strength of young adults in Christ is.
 - a. Young adults are by nature strong—they have the capacity to pour themselves into whatever they do.
 - It can be anything—some of them are mighty at drinking...
 - Some are the Olympic athletes,
 - They are the ones that can stay up all night partying.
 - But what a show of grace it is when they pour that same strength and energy into serving Christ—when He has taken dominion of their lives.

- b. Godly young adults are a marvellous example of how the strength of all of us should be used.
 - How we ought to delight in it when we see this in them.
 - Of course there are those who have infirmities in this age group, and they can stand out for Christ in other ways—
 - in their patience in trials or their wisdom that they have learned through suffering...
 - but we are looking at what is true of godly young adults as a general characteristic that we can all delight in and that they can seek to cultivate by the grace of God in their young adult years.

II. I want you to consider further (as we move on) that young adults are like rockets.

A. Yes, young man, young woman, this is the time in your life when those rocket engines are propelling you somewhere.

1. You have more power (not authority, but vigor) now than you will probably ever have in your entire life.
 - You have lots of time and you have lots of energy, whether you realise it or not.
 - The fuels are burning now and you are thrusting forward into the future.
 - Did our reading in Ecclesiastes not make that very clear?
 - All of that talk about serving God in your youth is set against the days when you will be worn out and no longer have the energy you do now.
 - Once those rocket engines that belong to you are spent, they will be spent forever—you can't go back and glue them on again.
 - You will never be able go back and refuel.
 - Oh yes, there are 90 year olds that have repented and turned to the LORD.
 - God's grace can do that.
 - But ordinarily your direction, your habits, your trajectory, will all be established in these years.
 - Chances are, you will be living out the rest of your life according to the direction you have set in these years.
2. Besides that, right now, God has put you in the driver's seat of this great rocket.
 - a. When you were a child, you were in something more like a wagon or a cart.
 - Your parents were in the driver's seat.
 - They made decisions and sought to direct you in the ways of the Lord.
 - They corrected you when you erred and endeavoured to keep you on the narrow path.
 - b. But now it is up to you.
 - Now you are steering the great vessel of your life and it is going where *you* direct it.

B. We saw in Titus 2 that you are called to be sober-minded.

- Titus 2:6 says: **Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded.**

1. In other words, you need to *think* about what you doing with your life.
 - You need to think about where you are going.
 - You need to have an eternal perspective, realising that what you do now will have a tremendous effect on what you are not only for the rest of your life, but for all eternity!
 - You are laying up treasure in heaven or pain in hell for a thousand years, a million years, a billion years—for all eternity, right now!
 - As Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, **God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.**
2. So don't be an empty-head—don't be a fool—don't be diverted from the way.
 - Instead be deliberate and focused.
 - Be sober-minded—always alert about what you are doing and where you are headed, always thoughtful and discerning...
 - Not like a fool driving without looking where you are going.
 - Ask yourself, “How is what I am doing right now affecting my relationship with God the Father and with His Son?”
 - “What effect will this have on me in ten years, in a thousand years, in a million years?”
 - It's high time for all of you to wake up to the reality of eternity.

C. Look at what John says about this in our text.

1. After singling out godly young men as strong, as having God's word abiding in them, and as having overcome the wicked one,
 - John says (in verse 15): **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**
 - Do you get his point?
 - If you use all of that rocket strength to pursue the things of the world—
 - If you run after your own sinful desires and after the things you can grab in this world without reference to your Creator...
 - You will attach yourself to things will perish.
 - John tells you plainly here that the world is passing away.
 - But the most alarming thing is not just that you will lose all of this stuff, but that you will perish with it!
 - That is what he says in verse 17: **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.**
 - You will go where the things you attach yourself to go—
 - When you attach yourself to Jesus Christ and walk with Him by His grace, you attach yourself to that will never perish!
 - Those rocket engines are propelling you deeper and deeper into the will or God—or into the perishing world.

TRANS> This is very sobering thoughts—no wonder young adults are told to be sober-minded.

III. Young adults, right now is the day of opportunity for you.

A. Use the strength of your youth to cultivate godliness in Christ.

1. 1 Timothy 4:7-8 tells you to **exercise yourself toward godliness...** because **godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.**

- Do you know what godliness is?
- It is being like God—not the way Satan means it where you have all authority and do whatever you want the way God does...
 - But when you are like God as the one who bears His image...
 - That you are pure and separate from sin—full of love and truth and wisdom and light and purity—
 - clothed with the beauty that serves others and gives to them what enriches them.

2. Notice that it says to *exercise* yourself to godliness...

- That means that you have to use that rocket engine strength of yours, not to pursue dominion in some video game or in the pursuit of fornication...
 - but you have to use that rocket strength to learn of Christ, to learn of His love, to walk with Him, to pray with Him to the Father,
 - to learn how trustworthy He is, to learn what is pleasing to Him, to practice what is pleasing to Him.
 - Not by your own strength, but turning your strength over to Him in faith so that by His grace you are able to serve Him.

3. Yes, learn to use prayer...learn of the power of praying in Christ...

- Not for your own desires, but for godliness—fervent prayer for godliness.
 - Fervent prayer to take your complaining excuse-making heart and to turn it into a grateful heart that is filled with love for Christ.
 - A grateful heart that understands the height and depth and breadth and length of His love.
- As one man said, the one who has access to God in prayer will never lack anything that he really needs!
 - It is true—the prayer for godliness will always be answered.
 - It may come to you through trials and losses, but it will come and it will not disappoint you.
 - You may lose everything, but in doing so, you will gain everything, and what you gain will make you happy instead of miserable.
- If you come to Him in prayer, you will learn of His grace to help you.
 - How you will rejoice in Him, how you will come to know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sufferings.
 - Now is the time to exercise yourself to godliness...

B. And not only that, now is also the time to become rooted and grounded in God's word. Use the strength of your youth for that.

- Did John not describe the Christian young man as one in whom the word of God abides—the word that controls, guides, informs, and shapes?

1. You will probably never have an opportunity to study God's word like you have now as a young adult.
 - Your mind is sharp and clear—it is ready to receive...
 - And you have time...you are not burdened with all the responsibilities that will come to you later.
 - Make the most of the opportunity.
 - Even if you took just one hour that you waste and put it put to the study of God's word, it would make a huge difference in your life.
 2. If you tell me, “but when I read, I don't get anything out of it,” let me tell you that I wouldn't either if I read it the way you are!
 - The reason you don't get anything out of it is because of the way you are reading it...
 - You are just dabbling—like a fellow looking at pictures of food or in the window of a bakery and expecting to satisfy his appetite.
 - That is the way some people read the word.
 - They are not there to eat it—to fill up their life with it—to walk in it—to embrace its promises.
 - There's not much in it unless you're a quirky person that enjoys theology for its own sake.
 3. Young adult, you must employ your rocket energy to read the word.
 - Study vigorously, not as a dabbler, but as a doer of the word.
 - Look things up, meditate on it, think of how it applies to you, memorise scriptures that stand out to you so you can live them, talk of them with others.
 - Pray over it to understand it and to do it.
 - Take the word into you to transform your heart and life.
 4. And don't forget your catechism.
 - Memorise the Shorter Catechism.
 - You need to know what you believe.
 - You need to know what justification and sanctification are, what the commandments are, what the means of grace are...
 - You need to know the doctrine of the Trinity and you need to know about the attributes of God and the two natures of Christ...
 - Don't just skim over it—seriously memorise it.
 - Use your rocket energy!
 - My oldest daughter told me that the catechism helps her immensely as she talks to other Christians who are confused about what the Bible teaches,
 - Or when she talks to unbelievers about the Lord.
 - It is a pattern of sound words that you have been given such as Paul speaks about to Timothy.
- C. This is also a time for you to prepare for your calling. Use your vigour for that!
1. God has given you various gifts and you are to use them to serve Him by serving others in this world.

- Don't waste these years—these days are days of preparation for future service.
 - Choose a career and pour yourself into training for it.
 - Some of you older young adults are well on your way—keep moving forward with gusto, keeping an eye on what you can do for others.
2. And prepare for your calling as a husband or a wife, as a mother or a father, unless you are called to be celibate for Jesus Christ as some are.
- But otherwise, now is the time to prepare yourself as a young man to lead your family in family worship,
 - to lead them as an example of godliness...
 - to learn to lay your life down for others now so you can lay your life down for your wife and your children...
 - to begin laying up wealth for your future family...
 - to learn what your role is as a husband.
 - And young women, you are to learn to serve in the home,
 - As it says in Titus 2:4-5 says, older women are to teach you good things: **that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.**
 - This is not so much a Bible study, but this is learning from older women how to care for your husband and your children.
 - to learn to make a pleasant home for them, a loving home that is full of the savour of Christ.
 - Work on cultivating not merely the fading beauty of fashion, but with the incorruptible beauty of a meek and quiet spirit that is precious in God's eyes...
 - Where you are not anxious and complaining, but where you are resting in God with a settled heart that knows He is in control.
 - Sadly, our world looks at the general calling of women as inferior—as wasting your life.
 - Our world does not know what a happy home is with Mom at the centre of it all and Dad leading the way in godliness.
 - A home with a godly mother who shows what it is to lay down her life for her family and for others—what beauty there is in that!
 - That is what you young women are called to learn in your youth.
- D. And young adults, let me tell you that now are the best days you will ever have for influencing others. Use your youthful energy for that!
1. Your peers are in the same place you are.
- They are in the driver's seat of their rocket powered lives, and they are launching out in some direction.
 - They are making huge decisions that will affect them for the rest of their lives.
 - Will they marry?
 - What kind of person will they marry if they do?
 - What are they going to do with their life?

- Granted, the great bane in our day is that many do not even consider these things—but you can try to stir them up to think about them...
 - And to think beyond even these things to eternity.
2. The truth is, the young adult years are the years when most people come to Christ if they are ever going to come at all.
 - That means that you have a unique opportunity to reach them that you will not have when they get settled into their lives.
 - There is more openness, more curiosity, more time and desire to explore new things and new ideas...
 - Seize upon the opportunity while you have it!
 - A young woman who attended the Moncton church about 15 years ago as a student used to round up 10 or 12 students for church every week.
 - And some of them came to faith in Christ and others who were weak and confused Christians became strong in their faith.
 - I remember as a new believer at university sitting up into the night talking with other students—they didn't have babies to look after or mortgages to pay—there was time to do these things.
 - I remember being able to round up several unbelievers to visit our Bible study or to come to church.
 3. And besides that, you can have a powerful influence on other Christian young adults.
 - Get together and discuss what you are learning from scripture.
 - Get together and ask them what they are learning and help keep them accountable about their walk with Christ.
 - Get together for prayer.
 - Talk of Christ, talk of His grace, talk of what He is doing in your life.

TRANS> Yes, young adults, this is your time of service.

- This is your day of opportunity—
 - What you do now will affect you for the rest of your life.

IV. But do not forget that a day of opportunity is also a day of great danger.

- A. You can pour your all that youthful strength in the wrong direction and become mighty in vanity—in running after the world that is perishing.
 1. The Bible speaks of those who are mighty at drinking—they pour themselves into drinking with their rocket strength.
 - Isaiah 5:22 says: **Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink.**
 2. Some young adults pour all their youthful vigor into entertainment.
 3. Some pour it into fornication—they become connoisseurs of perversity—of sodomy, of adultery—all that rocket energy is turned toward uncleanness.
 4. Others become mighty in boasting—they can talk a great talk—
 - Their youthful vigor is wasted in trying to put a worm on a pedestal—that is what you do when try to gain the applause of others—a sinful worm on a pedestal.

5. But perhaps the most miserable young adults of all are those who become mighty in excuse making and in blaming others.
 - Instead of turning their youthful energy to Christ, they dwell on all the wrongs and all the abuse they have received.
 - But if half the energy spent on excuse making and blaming were spent in pursuing Christ and His will, they would have an incredible life.
- B. And there are other dangers peculiar to young adults...
1. There is the danger of harmful friendships—
 - Proverbs 13:20 says: **He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.**
 - Don't make intimate friends with those who are not friends of God.
 - We all have a tendency to become like those we share our lives with.
 - Special care must be exercised with the opposite gender.
 - Sometimes because of loneliness, young adults will make friends with those who are not godly—and launch themselves into a marriage that destroys or cripples them for the rest of their life.
 2. There is a special danger for young adults of pride.
 - You are enjoying the strength of your mind and your body, but you have not yet had the experience of spoiled dreams that you will have.
 - You can be idealistic and naïve about the hardships of life.
 - And this can make you arrogant and make you suppose that you no longer need counsel from your elders.
 - What do they know?
 - What do your parents know?
 - They used to help you tie your shoes, but now you help them figure out their computers.
 - How many young adults in the church have gone to follow some smart slick new doctrine—
 - someone who seems much smarter than their parents and the leaders in their own church...
 - But by the time such young adults have grown children, the church ends up in complete apostasy...
 - I spoke to a man on Friday whose pastor was a very intelligent man, but he had seen him move from biblical Christianity to one who marches in the gay pride parade—indeed, with much pride and with disdain for all the ignorant and unenlightened Christians he used to walk with.
 - Realise that as a young adult, you do not always see the trajectory of things—where they are headed.
 - You need to the counsel of your elders.
 - Don't be like Rehoboam who preferred the counsel of his peers to the counsel of his elders when he first became king and ended up losing most of his kingdom over it.

- But perhaps the worst kind of pride is that pride that causes you to think that you don't need the Lord's help.
 - Because you are strong, you think that you can serve Christ without calling upon His aid.
 - That is a sure path to destruction—pride really does go before destruction.
 - If you are not praying, it means that you think you can get along fine without God's help.
 - You may not even be a Christian, even though you are doing Christian things.
3. And then there is the danger of laziness...the sluggard...the one who buries his talent and does not serve the Lord.
- What a terrible thing to have a rocket that is ready to be launched and leave it to rot.
 - You will never get the years you waste back...
 - Ecclesiastes 12:1 says: **Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them."**

Conclusion: Young man, young woman,

- God has given you strength.
 - You can use it to engage in beautiful vigorous service to God that will bring blessing to you for all eternity...
 - Or you can use to hotly pursue what will bring you destruction...
- But let all of us in the church rejoice and give thanks for those young adults who pour out their youthful vigour for God.
 - It is a work of the grace of Jesus in them!
 - Let the younger aspire to imitate them...and let the older encourage them and seek to direct them with wisdom.
 - And let us all give thanks for their beautiful service that is like the service of Jesus Christ and that is empowered by Him.
- How short we all come of the standard, but how beautiful our Saviour is—
 - He is the one who has all the beauty of youth.
 - And in Him is pardon and free access to the Father for all who trust in Him.
 - In Him is a life of beauty and fruitfulness.
 - Let the beauty of the Lord be upon us...establish the work of our hands.