

Sermon Preached at Burial Service

for

Opanin Samuel Kofi Asadu (aged 100)

Date: Sunday, 14th June, 2015

Venue: Agogo, Asante-Akyem

GOD, THE PRIORITY OF LIFE

Your Soul Craves for Peace with God

Greetings of peace and love in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to you all dear ones. The congregation you see here singing and praising the Almighty God is the 7th Day Pentecostal Assemblies at Esreso, Kumasi.

We sit gathered here this morning in a solemn mood. We have once again been confronted afresh with the grim reality and cruelty of death. A life – a father, a brother, uncle and friend – has been snatched away from us never to be seen again this side of life.

But even if we mourn, as believers we grieve in hope. We simply mourn the temporary separation, not the eternal destiny of our departed beloved.

This morning one particularly scripture comes to mind:

“If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.

“For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.

*“Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other”
(Eccl. 6:3-5).*

It's a profound, moving read. The stillborn is better than the octogenarian or the centenarian whose soul was not filled with good and who at death had no burial?

The sheer futility of the life of the latter comes to the fore at his demise. He is engulfed in darkness – similar to how he entered the world from the darkness of his mother's womb – and that adds to the pain and all the troubles he had seen under the sun. Never born into the world, the stillborn remains in his darkness without a break—but minus the hard knocks life throws at the living. That's his main advantage, plus he never had the opportunity to make rational choices as to how to fill his soul with good!

The living have a responsibility to make choices which will determine whether or not their soul will be filled with good and therefore whether or not they will have a burial at death!

I am happy to be able to tell you that, although our departed brother died at the ripe old age of 100yrs, he is not the old man in the passage. He has a burial, and by that I mean rest in the bosom of father Abraham!

Because he filled his soul with good, that is to say, he allowed God to fill his soul with all His goodness – the goodness of His word, the goodness of His Spirit and even the goodness of His discipline.

This is what every soul craves for—to be filled with the holy presence of God, to be at peace with God.

King David wrote:

*“I have set the LORD always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.
“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.
“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:8-11).*

So then our brother did his soul good. He devoted his heart to what he prized most in life, a truism the Lord Jesus beautifully articulated in Matt. 6:21, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. And he loved the Lord and served Him and sought Him diligently.

I know Bro. Samuel Kofi Asadu was for a long time an active member of a Pentecostal Church here in this town, but once he discovered the Seventh-day Sabbath truth, there was no turning back for him. For several years, he faithfully worshipped with us every Sabbath until recently when the Lord called him home. It is his life of faith and obedience that we celebrate today. And that’s why we mourn but our singing is louder; our joy drowns out our sorrow. For he sought God and God was found of him:

*“Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb:
“And even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa. 46:3-4).*

He who finds God, because He has revealed Himself to him, is born again by water (repentance) and Spirit into the righteous character of God (John 3:5-6). He thus becomes a child of God, and the promise is that, even in his old age, his soul has deliverance with God. It is called eternal life.

Beloved, you can have this same assurance today at this funeral service. Do your soul good. Don’t be deceived by the deceitfulness of youthful vigour as though the day of death will never come. It will surely come, and you will be powerless to resist it:

“There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it” (Eccl. 8:8).

So what should you do? Let your soul enjoy his God!

Remember your Creator Now!

Life is truly as you make it, as they say. Life is full of choices, good and bad. But it's easy to be dazzled by the glitz and glamour of worldly life to the extent that you are unable to see what is really important in life. Your vision is blurred.

You are drawn by what appeals to the flesh – your senses and heart's desires. But be forewarned. A man who has sampled the best of everything life could offer man under the sun has written it all off!

He was a lover of knowledge and learning; he was a connoisseur of the best wines and food; he enjoyed life with uncountable women of beauty, including princesses, and he had servants and maidservants at his beck and call.

Moreover, he was a profoundly wise man, and he had great wealth to outlast the lifetime of his entire household! But at the end of the day, having reviewed his colourful life and the enjoyments in it, he was unflattering in his assessment of worldly life: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2; 2:1; 4:16). Empty, worthless; not worth a thing!

Rarely do people enjoy the good life to the extent King Solomon enjoyed, but he who saw it all says it is all futile and vexation of spirit.

The true satisfaction of man then must lie outside the offerings of this life. It must lie with his Creator, and the earlier we realize this the better.

Yet it's only a piece of advice from a veteran of the school of life. You can take it or leave it, but whatever you do, know that you are not exempt from the judgment of God. It is as certain as death. It's appointed unto man once to die and after death judgment (Heb. 9:27)!

And so the Preacher, King Solomon, primarily addresses the youth. If as a youth you choose to follow the dictates of your own heart, he says, do enjoy life to the max, but while you gratify all the pleasures of your heart, remember that many dark days are ahead of you:

*"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:
"But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of
darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.
"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.
"Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and
youth are vanity (Eccl. 11:7-10).*

The Fleeting Joy of the Pleasure-seeking Youth

In making out a case for a life of fun, the Preacher seems to agree with some philosophers (especially those of ancient Greece) who hold that the main goal in life is pleasure. But in reality pleasure-seeking is only a natural way for a natural man to live, and the life of youth often typifies it. He's young; he's exuberant; he's strong and has his whole life ahead of him.

This is the time to enjoy life or never!

But how should he enjoy life?

- Let the sun beam sweetness into your life; let its rays delight your eyes at the break of day each morning – it’s the sign of a fresh opportunity for continuing enjoyment of life (Eccl. 11:7).
- Let this be a pattern for all your life (“live many years and rejoice in them all”). See each sunrise as the dawn of party time. Live the Epicurean philosophy: “Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die” (v. 8a; 1 Cor. 15:32).
- But while the sun rises on your life everyday for your enjoyment, let it also remind you that dark days are ahead of you. You will not always see the light of the sun, and those days will be many and futile (v. 8b).

The ideal time to enjoy your life is as a youth. But then realize that, whatever you do, God’s judgment awaits you (v. 9).

- So start early, in your adolescence (v. 9a). Use this time to explore the avenues of pleasure. In your young adulthood you will have become acquainted the fleshpots and other pleasure-seeking ways of this world. This is the time to let your heart be cheerful, the right time to let your hair down. That is to say, give full rein to all the desires of your heart and eyes (1 John 2:16); indulge their every whim (v. 9b). Like the Prodigal son, you are more or less on your own. You are footloose and free from strict parental control. Now is your time. Gratify your long suppressed pleasures!

- Being youth, however, does not exempt you from divine judgment (v. 9c):

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 21:12).

- But never mind. Remove sorrow and worry from your heart, for the meaningless days of youth will soon fade away (v. 10). In other words, live as if there’s no pain in the world. See life through rose-coloured spectacles. Nothing will ever hurt. Pleasure is all there is to life.

Even so, there’s always the alternative. You could approach (your) life in a totally different way, a godly way of life which the (previously hedonistic) Preacher recommends as the only life worth pursuing.

The Ideal Time to Remember the Creator is in one’s Youth

The Preacher now comes to his main point after the purposeful digressions of his discourse on the meaning of life:

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Eccl. 12:1).

It’s an imperative, drawing attention to the urgency of the call.

Remember your Creator *now* while still a youth. Call Him to mind *now*. Acknowledge that you are the work of His hands and that you owe Him a debt of gratitude and worship. You are not on your own. He created you for a reason – that you might seek Him and feel after Him, although He’s not far away from you in space or time. “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:26-28).

It’s by His will and power that you wake up each morning for work or school (Jam. 4:13-15). He is the One who energizes you for your everyday activities. Without Him you can do nothing (John 15:5).

He deserves nothing short of your devotion and adoration.

So turn your life to Him now. Repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; make Him the Lord of your life.

This is the time when you can serve God to the best of your abilities. You are in the prime of life, the most productive time in your life. The time to help spread the gospel; the time to make your life a witness to the transformational power of Jesus; the time to intercede for family, community and nation. It is the time to make a difference in your generation – the time to positively affect your generation and raise the banner of truth and hope in your time.

You can live a worthier life as a God-fearing youth.

Time will not wait for you. Old age is lurking in the shadows ready to creep up on you. And when it does come, life itself will no longer be enjoyable. It will be tasteless; it will lose all its glamour. The parties, the high life, the wonderful night life, the dance, the clubbing, the gourmet food and drinks, the booze and sex – all will become a nuisance. They will no longer hold any attraction for you; they will fail to excite you any more.

You squandered your youth on what never really satisfies. You starved your soul; you starved your soul of its most vital need – God, because you failed to remember your Creator in the days of your youth!

And now old age has caught up with you; the evil days have closed in on you. And the world of sinful pleasures has left you in the cold. It has failed to keep up the excitement. Your body no longer finds worldly pleasures pleasurable; it simply refuses to be thrilled by them. Your senses have grown ‘numb’.

The days are slow and boring. God is indispensable. He is the joy of life (Ps. 16:8-9; Isa. 12:3; Ps. 34:8). But how you wish you had discovered that earlier?

The “evil days” – old age and its attendant troubles – have begun to bite. You failed to remember your Creator,

² *“While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:*

³ *“In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, {the grinders...: or, the grinders fail, because they grind little}*

⁴ *“And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;*

⁵ *“Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:*

⁶ *“Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern” (Eccl. 12:2-6).*

The Body is saying Goodbye!

The body is in a steady deterioration; it has grown limp; it is no longer the agile body of yesteryear. Impairment has set in, marked by the following conditions:

1. The sight is impaired and that is, in the poetic language of the Preacher, the “sun” and the “moon” and the “stars” darkened. In your loneliness, tears (“rain”) are frequent after which depression (“cloud”) takes its toll (v. 2 *Amp.*).
2. The hands and the arms (“the keepers of the house”) tremble; the feet and knees (“the strong men”) stoop; the molar teeth (“the grinders”) cease because they are far and far between, while the eyes (which “look out of the windows”, the sockets) grow dim (v. 3).
3. The lips (“the doors”) are shut in the street. Otherwise the food will drop out. Meanwhile, the sound of the grinding mill (NASB) is low. That is to say, with a few teeth left, the sound of mastication (chewing) is hardly heard. “And one rises up at the voice of a bird and the crowing of a cook.” Sound sleep is gone; here comes sleeplessness! And yet hard of hearing – “all the daughters of music [the voice and ear] ...brought low” (v. 4).
4. The aged is afraid of heights – of tripping over a hill, and even when walking on level ground fears of failing are in the way – this at a time when gray hair (“the almond tree”) is in bloom, and he finds any little thing or distraction (“the grasshopper”) irritating. He has lost all desire for pleasure (v. 5a). Neither sweet nor bitter makes any difference to him. An old man said to King David when the king wanted to return the kindness he had done him: “I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?” (2 Sam. 19:[32-]35).

The end has come. The body devoted to fleshly lusts and pleasure has come to a pretty pass. Now it gives way: “Man goes to his long home and the mourners go about the streets” (v. 5b).

Now, this is a peculiarly African tradition where funerals involve the whole community, unlike Europe and America where funerals are largely private family events. In our local parlance we call it “*samma mo*” – and the people sweep on to the streets in mourning, singing dirges:

“Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus; Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to Wailing” (Amos 5:16).

Our Culture Testifies to our godly Heritage

The communal mourning of the dead is just one example of the Israelite customs our people observe as an expression of ‘African culture’. Other customs include the traditional acknowledgement of the 7th Day as the special day of the Creator, *Otweaduampong Kwame* (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 31:16-17; Heb. 4:9); sunset (not

midnight) as the start of a new day (Gen. 1:5; Lev. 23:32; cp. Dan. 7:25); the spreading of clothes before dignitaries for them to walk on (Mark 11:7-10); the carrying of the king in a palanquin (Songs 3:9); the traditional diet of roasted corn ('nkyewee') (1 Sam. 17:17), among other practices too numerous to recount here due to time constraints!

The culture gives us away as descended from the Biblical ancient Israelites. Why we are here in West and not in the land of Israel is because our forefathers disobeyed the God of Israel for which He decreed their banishment from the land (Deut. 28:63-64; Luke 21:24).

However, eviction from the Promised Land never meant the loss of our Hebrew heritage altogether! For as the Akan sages say, "The culture of a nation cannot be changed."

And so as it took a whole community to mourn the dead in ancient Israel, so it is done today in Ghana and other places in Africa. The wailing is an art form performed by professional mourners to induce a flood of tears:

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come:

"And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters.

"For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out.

"Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation.

"For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets" (Jer. 9:17-21; also 2 Chron. 35:25; Luke 23:27-31).

This is not a funeral scene from Europe but from Africa – from *Asanteman mu* – proving our Hebrew-Israelite ancestry.

Death is so entrenched in human life that it has assumed an institutional cultural life of its own – in our case Israelite in origin! Something that should not only imbue us with a sense of pride but with a sense of spiritual homesickness to seek the God of our forefathers in truth!

Our own cultural practices, including some at this funeral ceremony, testify to our godly heritage passed on to us by the ancestors. So then, if we refuse to repent, our own traditions will testify against us!

Our life – and fate – is not really in our hands.

The Giver of our Spirits will Judge our Doings

It can't be emphasized enough the urgent need to remember your Creator now before it is too late.

As I speak you are ebbing away – we are all ebbing away. In one fell swoop, our breath will be gone. So "Remember your Creator earnestly now, before the silver cord of life is snapped apart, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern [and the whole circulatory system of the blood ceases to function]" (Eccl. 12:6 Amp.).

Life is beautiful (a "golden bowl"); it is valuable (a "pitcher"), but fragile (a "silver cord") – like a flower:

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

The hope of mankind, whose glory is likened to the flower of grass, is the enduring Word of God. Otherwise the bulk of man is dust doomed to rot:

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7).

So don't pamper the body, a biodegradable material which at death returns to the earth, from which it was taken (Gen. 2:7a), *as dust*. But the spirit returns to God, “the Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9), for it is His breath, “the breath of life”, by which man became “a living soul” (Gen. 2:7b).

At death, there's a reversal of the creative process: the spirit leaves first, the body is left lifeless and then starts to decompose back into the earth, whereas at creation man was formed from the earth as a lifeless body and then became a living being by the breath of the Almighty.

So then, the spirit is the engine of our being, the soul is the driver and the body the shell and functional instrument for both. The “spirit in man” is the real man that came from God (Job 32:8) and will return to Him. It is the key element of man – it is that which gives life (John 6:63) – and it can never outsmart its Creator. The spirit of man is Creator's breath, and that breath is in His hands (Prov. 20:27; Ps. 139:7-12).

You are not your own. You will surely answer to God one day, although you may ignore Him today.

So do the right thing. Focus on what is really important (see Luke 10:38-42). Normalize relations with the Creator of your spirit.

Repent of your sins, believe in the Lord Jesus and keep the commandments of God, including the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. That's all God expects of you:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14).

The fear of God expressed by the keeping of His commandments is all that matters. It is the point of all human life – “the whole duty” given to you by the Creator under the sun and the basis of His righteous judgment.

So then, it's good to progress in your career, raise a family, pursue higher education or build a business empire, yet these are all peripheral to the principal duty given to you by your Creator. They are worth pursuing but not at the expense of the commandments of God.

It's only in the keeping of God's commandments that there's life (Matt. 19:16-17; John 12:50) but in transgressing them is death (Deut. 30:15-18; Isa. 66:24).

Death is not a problem to God. Christ “hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10; also John 5:24).

Once you come to Him by repentance and faith, He will put His death-conquering Spirit in you, and you will humble death at the resurrection (Rom. 8:11).

Even as I speak, the spirit of our departed brother is with the Lord, having exited the body (2 Cor. 5:6-8). And he is at rest:

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13).

Death will cease and with it funerals. When the Redeemer returns, He will dry up the whole flood of death-instigated human tears and mourning will fall silent:

“And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isa. 25:7-9). Amen!

May He comfort us all at this time! Halleluiah! Amen!