

Ecclesiastes 11:1-10 | Cast your bread upon the waters,
for you will find it after many days.

² Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,
for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

³ If the clouds are full of rain,
they empty themselves on the earth,
and if a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow,
and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

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.

⁶ In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know
which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

⁷ Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn
of life are vanity.

Ecclesiastes 11 | Bold & Joyful

Last week Solomon offered us wisdom for life. Although he stares clearly at the big problems of death and chance, he understands that the ordinary problems of living demand their own solutions. The wisdom for life is a caution against foolishness which sneaks up on you and leaves you in shambles. It is a recognition of the dangers foolishness in high places, and how to avoid the wrath of the king. All work has its dangers.

Kind of makes you want to lay low and stay inside doesn't it? Well this is to take Solomon's advice more narrowly than he has given it. Stay inside? Solomon would ask. A little folding of the hands and you'll devour yourself. You see its very dangerous out there, and it is very dangerous in here. His warnings were not to remove your nerve they were to prevent you from foolishness. Before your first drive alone Dad says, "Buckle up, keep your eyes on the road, remember every other driver is on their phone, and the only people on the road at midnight are drunks and cops." Then he hands you the keys and says get out there. The warnings weren't to keep you at home, they were to send you out. Solomon concludes Ecclesiastes with three exhortations; be bold, be joyful, be godly. The whole book finds its resolution in the third.

1. Be Bold

Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 | Cast your bread upon the waters,
for you will find it after many days.

² Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,
for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

It is a familiar verse although a strange image to our ears. Sounds more like feeding ducks than an investment strategy. It is about the risk necessary for any profit. Bread is a stand in for all goods. In order to receive the lumber from Tyre, Solomon had to send the wheat of Israel abroad in ships. Its a dangerous game to place your wealth in a boat and cast it upon the waters. Out of your hands where you can't control the wind, but the cedars of Lebanon require it to be sent. It is a bold and patient work, full of hope and risk. But if the temple is to be built it must be done.

The next verse heightens the call to boldness with a call to enthusiasm. Give to seven, or maybe even to eight! Why? Well because you don't know what will work. You know if you hedge in sending your ships, you might end up with one ship sunk. But if you send seven, heck if you send eight you might get some through. You not knowing what disasters lie ahead is reason for enthusiasm. Lead from your tows not your heels.

And notice he says give. Is he referring to investment or generosity? I think it is best to take Solomon's ambiguity broadly rather than narrowly. He surely means both and in Solomon's mind I'm sure he considers them not so exclusively as we might. What would you be investing for rather than to be generous or care for your family, or pass along an inheritance. That is to say what would you be investing for rather than to honor God with your wealth. And likewise what would you be giving for rather than to be honoring God with your wealth. Disasters will come, imagine a final disaster coming and you had not given generously to your church? How humiliating.

Ecclesiastes 11:3-4 | If the clouds are full of rain,
they empty themselves on the earth,
and if a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow,
and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

The rain follows its own designs. If the clouds are full it rains, if they aren't it doesn't. If the tree falls then you'll have to deal with it where it lies. There is cause and effect in the world but don't mistake your ability to understand it with an ability to control it. You can't sow in the wind, or harvest in the rain. But if you're waiting for the perfect conditions you'll never sow nor reap. You can always come up with reasons to not begin. There are always costs to the way you're doing it. If you examine all that is not in your hands you'll never sow and you'll never reap.

Ecclesiastes 11:5-6 | 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. ⁶ In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

All that you don't know and can't control is no reason to not make decisive action. Solomon shows us that we already understand this fundamental reality. Having just talked of examining the wind leading to inaction, then he switches to examining the spirit. These are the same word in Hebrew. Both invisible and both undeniable in their effectiveness. We don't know how a Spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child. And likewise we don't know the work of God who makes everything. We know correlative events to where children come from, but finally we know children are from the Lord. And this is true of all things. You don't make things happen, you're always scattering seed, growth does not come from you.

But there is an optimistic note in this, you should take action because you might find they prosper. But your action is always an act of faith. We should hear the New Testament echoes.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

2. Be Joyful

Ecclesiastes 11:7-8 | Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. ⁸ 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.

Having given us the call to be bold in the face of life's uncertainties, Solomon then calls us to be joyful in the face of life's fleeting nature. It is pleasant for your eyes to see the sun is a way of saying that it is a sweet thing to be alive. Soak up the sun, tell everyone to lighten up. So while you're living you should rejoice to be alive. Is this trite. Denial of the realities. No Solomon places each joy he commends next to its opposite. It is clear headed looking at the world. The days of darkness will be many and this life is vapor. Fleeting and going away. It cannot be grasped and frozen. And the days of darkness will outlast the days of your life. So do not think that you with eternity in your heart will reach some final satisfaction in this vaporous existence. But you ought to rejoice in it. Life is good.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 | 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.

To the young man, you ought to rejoice in your youth. You know youth is wasted on the young. Well it doesn't have to be. It is good to have the strength of youth, don't waste it! Your eyes see, that will go away. So the closest the scriptures ever get to telling you to follow your heart is right here in this verse. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.

There are good reasons to do things and bad reasons to do things. And one of the best reasons to do something and often neglected is that you want to. Why paint your wall this color rather than that color, because you want to. Why take off early to get home and play with your kids? Because you think you'll like it. But this advice cannot be removed from its final context. *For all these things God will bring you into judgement.*

Well is this just that vengeful God looking over your shoulder keeping you from following your heart. We've been to long in this book for you to ask something so silly. This is the word of God and he is calling you to rejoice in your life. This is the command of the Lord you should not take that lightly. In order for there to be any true joy in life we must have the judgement of God over it. There is no joy in the human heart at mere frivolity. Solomon has already tested this and found it wanting. There is no satisfaction in satisfying all your desires. You are the type of thing that requires meaning. Eternity is in your heart. Your life must have a final judgement in order to be finally enjoyable.

Ecclesiastes 11:10 | Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

Vanity in this final verse before our conclusion is not negative. It is vapor remember. You know this, all this time is fading away. Therefore remove vexation from your heart. You cannot see the end from the beginning. Try and not have pain in your body. In so far as it is up to you it is a gift of youth. But remember it is fleeting. Enjoy your life now it is the only place to enjoy and take action here.

The final conclusion is coming, live your life under God. In obedience to God and in the promises of God. This is the only way that boldness and joy find their resolution. In God.