



“Holy Recklessness”

(Ecclesiastes Chapter 11)

The book of Ecclesiastes is a very honest book bringing an earthly realism to our “under the sun” lives. That realism can lead to pessimism, unless it is replaced by a spiritual optimism. If life is only “under the sun”, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. But we are reminded that God has set eternity in the hearts of men. So then, in this disappointing and depressing world, what is the advice? Cast your bread!

Wisdom is important, and following true wisdom is vital, but we all know that actions speak louder than words. So what actions are being called for in Ecclesiastes 11? – Christian adventurous, risky, activity.

1. Cast your bread upon the waters

There are some different ideas as to what this refers to. First, it might refer to the sea-faring trader who sets out on waters with bread to do business. His work is risky, but yields profit. The obvious applicatory lesson is that we are to cast forth in our life’s work placing ourselves in the Lord’s care.

The second thought concerns farming and casting bread-corn seed. This seed was sown into the Nile waters when the Nile was receding from its annual flood. Thus casting the seed into the waters at the edge seemed foolish but it actually produced a great harvest. Similarly we are to engage in a measure of risk, yet with a knowledge of the waters around and so confident of the return and profit.

Attempt great things for God

We are called to a holy, risky, boldness of enterprise, even adventure, in the work of the kingdom.

We may immediately see that what is referred to is something of a bygone age and seriously lacking in the church today. The pioneer missionary, and those engaged in real frontline evangelism are few.

The attempting great things for God is something many run away from, and we must ask the question why. Now there are at least two problems preventing us from attempting the “great thing”.

a. Problem: We play it too safe

Perhaps it would be more accurate to simply say, we play at being Christians. We play the religious game, without a serious engagement. It is a war-game, not a battlefield. We have our discussion time, our theological tossings, and strategy, but the game plan is different from the game-play. The war-game is not the same as the warzone.

The modern world is a cold and economic place. In business, facts and figures dictate appropriate actions. Some will enter the high risk stakes, but most play it safe.

Is this the case in the church? Now I’m not talking about a foolhardiness or a rash impulsive infantile enthusiasm. I’m talking about mature, God-fearing, God honouring effort in the “risky” waters of divine providence. Instead we play it too safe!

b. Problem: We may have a warped view of the Almightyness of God to work despite us

Yes, he will! – but a warped theology can make us excuse ourselves and our inactivity. “*Wait for the Lord*” – can so easily become, “Do nothing”.

Is it not the case that God’s way of working, both in scripture, and in history, was to have his people cast forth in faith? Isn’t there something about willingness in the day of His power?

Have you ever cast in faith? Do you remember those disheartened fishermen who had fished all night, and were then told to cast on the other side?

But maybe you’ve hung up your nets; or hidden in the clefts of the rock. Maybe you have decided a policy of non-attack. There will be no taking on the world, no initiative against it. It is too risky. Seeing the risk involved in casting the bread we are inclined to hold back.

We need a renewed faith in God even as the pagan of old had faith in the Nile! We know from our war-game models, and our theological game-plans, that with such a doctrine of God there is no risk! So the widow gave her mite; cast her bread. And the man with the one talent who didn’t cast it, was rebuked, and lost it to another. There are many applications here and you and I need to fill in the blanks, but know this – the risk is no risk with our faithful God.

Now remember that this bread was essential for life. We are not simply talking about a little extra giving out to the Lord’s work, but giving out and giving up that which is essential to our own continuance. We are talking about an all out “risk”. It may involve money. It may involve reputation. It may involve your job prospects.

The world will tell us, “Lessen your witness or it will hamper your reputation”. “Ease off on that morality nonsense for there’s promotion in the air”. Is it worth the risk? The world thinks not. But what does the Word say? – “you will find it after many days”. Is there any risk of loss there?

Now those “many days” may be time of testing, of drawing upon our store of faith. Those waiting days are sanctifying days. But consider it another way. As something is placed in an account it gains interest. Our bread-cast is gaining interest from God. It’s in God’s bank – and his accounts won’t go haywire because of computer bugs or hackers!

Now Ecclesiastes 11 gives us a second piece of advice.

2. Give to seven, yes, to eight

The Scriptures abound with references to godly generosity. Acts 20:35 “*It is more blessed to give than receive*”. Matt. 7:2 “*With the same measure you use it will be measured back to you.*” Gal. 6:9 “*Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*”

The advice of Solomon, and of Scriptural wisdom concerns practical Christian kindness. We are to give, for the good of others.

A greater generosity yields greater returns

In all the non-stop busy activity of 21st century life, people are being overlooked. The pervasive moral mindset is self interest and independency. We therefore need to work doubly hard promoting this spiritual mindset that puts other people first. Hence we are to heed the advice – Give portions to seven

Let us further realise that a portion was not a meagre end piece like the leftovers we give to the dog, but instead it means a sizeable share. Therefore the advice is to give out sizeable shares of your life to seven (representing completeness). In other words – Give to all!

But then that’s not enough. Go the extra mile and give to eight! Don’t be so economic; don’t let cold mathematics dictate your Christian life and therefore if the eighth needs it, give on.

Solomon’s wisdom brings to mind two powerful illustrations.

"If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls ... there it shall lie". Ecclesiastes 11:3

The suggestion is that just as rain clouds fill up and pour forth so also should our generosity. It is easy for us to know that it's about to rain. Dark clouds hang over our heads. Similarly, people ought to see that "ready to pour" generosity in the Christian. How many "dark cloud" Christians do you know? How many people who have received a "fullness" of grace shall pour forth that grace in all forms of giving to seven, even to eight?

But the dead tree lies where it's been cut. Solomon's wisdom thus declares the waste and uselessness of sinful inactivity. Dead trees, simply lying there, are all around us. Many believers have more in common with that inactive tree than the ready to pour cloud. There is so little adventurous godliness; so little holy recklessness. Don't we realise that a time is coming when no man can work – but that time is not now!

3. Sow your seed morning and evening

"In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or that both will be good". Ecclesiastes 11:6

We are all familiar with the Parable of the sower. We know also that good seed, received by good soil, dies and brings forth, in God's time, fruit. Here Solomon is calling us to sow our lives, and this is not something that is to be done in word only, but pouring forth the seed of generous godly deeds.

Furthermore this sowing that Solomon is speaking of, is as in the parable, a sowing indiscriminately. There is to be a hurling forth, morning and evening, in holy recklessness, the good seed of the gospel in word and life.

We are commanded to make the most of every opportunity, and of course we remember Solomon's wisdom in chapter 3 on "time". Time is man's opportunity!

Sow what?

This book of Ecclesiastes has clearly taught us that under the sun, all is empty meaningless vanity. So, in our casting, our giving, our sowing, the most important thing we can bring is full meaningful life – and that is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the times appear empty and meaningless to your neighbour, then fill them with Christ! If their lives are unfulfilled and unsatisfying, give out the Bread that satisfies! If their situation is a disappointing one, give the comfort, the joy of the gospel, and teach them to look up, and beyond to things of eternal significance.

Paul debated with himself on his desires to leave this life, and yet he knew the importance of remaining in the flesh, for a giving to seven, and a sowing morning and evening. His life in the flesh meant fruitful labour.

We are to stir our hearts to a renewed holy recklessness. We are to get out beyond those walls of our man-made security. We are to throw away that security blanket, and step out in faith. We are to be what we say we are, those who live by faith and not by sight.

We say we believe in a God who does the miraculous, but then we live earthed and confined by what we feel we can do ourselves. Is there not some inconsistency there? Small wonder that we are making little impact in this godless day and generation.

Lengthen the cords

The advice is given to cast our seed for we know not what shall succeed. Truly the Scriptures would teach us that one plants, another waters, and wonderfully, sovereignly, God gives the increase. So lengthen the cords in readiness! Not only attempt the great thing, but expect it, and

anticipate it, by lengthening the cords. Act in holy recklessness, or should we simply say – walk by faith?

There was one who cast his life bread on the risky waters of the hands of wicked men. They put him to death. The life-bread of the bread of life, Jesus Christ, was ripped apart. They thought they had destroyed the loaf. The seed was cast into the Nile – he was crucified, dead and buried.

But as the sea of God's wrath subsided on the well-beloved Son, the seed produced fruit – the fruit of a saved multitude of people, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. The abundance of that return is beyond measure. In eternity we shall contemplate the immensity of man's salvation as the throng of the redeemed sing "*Worthy is the Lamb...*"

He gave his all. He gave to seven; and yes, he gave to eight. He truly went the extra mile for sinners. The world looked on and laughed at this foolish Messiah casting his bread in this risky way. But for the joy set before him he endured the cross. Like the dark rain clouds, he emptied himself on the earth and his blood seeded the cosmos.

The casting of Christ is more than exemplary, it is redemptive, and while our casting does not carry such divine returns, yet we may yet see a measured redemption of this sin-loving world as we live spiritually reckless, spending and being spent, walking by faith in the service of our blessed Saviour.

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