10-8-23

Eccleaiastes 11:1 – 12:8

Solomon writes to us in these verses what is actually encouragement. First, we must face the facts: things will go wrong; sometimes we can see them coming and sometimes we can’t, but they will happen. Our tendency is to live hoping that everything runs smoothly; but when things go badly, our hopes are dashed and our joy is taken from us. We can become cynical and despondent.

But Solomon encourages us to open our eyes. Just accept the fact that we live in a fallen world where more things go wrong than right. At the same time, he is not telling us to be morose and pessimistic. He is encouraging us to look forward to the good things we are blessed with and enjoy them. And even more importantly, we have eternity to look forward to with Jesus, where our joy will be made full and there will be no bad days or unfortunate circumstances.

So, as we live this life we know there are going to be lots of disappointments, but we choose to not let them steal our joy in the blessings God provides for us. At the same time, part of our work and joy become helping others to have blessings. In Christ, we can share the good things provided to us by God and become the instruments He uses to provide for others. The amazing thing about God’s economy is that the more we give away the blessings He gives us, the more blessings we receive in return.

Now by this, I don’t mean a prosperity gospel whereby we give so that we can get more. We give because we are followers of Jesus and that’s what He wants us to do. We do have promises in the Bible that we will receive more than we give, as Jesus said in Luke 6:38, “*Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.*” But this is a secondary reason for sharing our blessings.

We must also keep in mind that it is entirely up to the good will and providence of God as to what we are blessed with and when we receive that promise. It may be during this life on earth; it may not be until we receive our reward in heaven. And then, anything we receive during this life is best used by “reinvesting”, so to speak. The more we receive from God the more we share. It is recorded in Acts 20:35 that Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*.” Again, the Kingdom of Heaven works differently from the world: Citizens of Christ’s Kingdom give in order to receive.

These are the basic ideas put forth in our verses for today. “*Cast your bread on the surface of the waters.*” Bread represents a very basic need in this life: food. But it is not limited to that. This is anything we have: food, money, time, possessions, skills. We are to cast them; we are to throw them out there, we are to give them away. Waters in the Bible often represents the masses of the people. You get the idea; we share our blessings with others.

In doing this, it will come back to us. We don’t know when or how or where. It might not be in this life. But this brings us back to the real reason we do these things from a Christian perspective. Our goal is to glorify God and to help build the Kingdom of Christ. When we share our earthly gifts, we hope that people will thank and praise God because that is who the gift came from in the first place. It is also our hope that souls will be won for Christ.

Which brings us to the most important blessing that we have and need to be sharing: the Gospel. This is true bread that we need to be casting out to the multitudes of the people. Sharing the Gospel meets all our goals in Christ. If someone rejects the Gospel, God’s justice will be shown in them; if they accept, His mercy will be lifted up. Either way, God is glorified. When someone accepts the Gospel we share, Christ’s Kingdom is built. And we also receive spiritual blessing in eternity and joy on earth when we are used to bring someone to Christ.

Verse 2 admonishes us to spread our blessings around. Obviously, we can’t give to every worthy cause that comes along. But we are to find a few to support and be ready to help the occasional stray need that arises. And the Gospel is an unlimited gift; we can never run out of it.

Prayer and discernment are necessary for all of this. We are not called to live in poverty and give away everything we have. Remember that these are gifts to us from God such that we can have some enjoyment in this life. We must also have priorities. In Isaiah 58, the LORD tells His people to feed the hungry, give shelter to those who need it, and clothe those without clothing. But He also says to not forget about your own family.

As the full clouds pour out their rain upon the earth, we too share our blessing abundantly when God has given abundantly to us. Not everyone can give the same or has the same opportunities. In the parable of the talents, each servant was given different amounts of the master’s money to work with. He was equally pleased regardless of the return, if the servants worked wholeheartedly with what they were given. We are to work diligently with what we have.

In all this there is still misfortune. This is a fallen world and, very often, things don’t work out the way we want them to. Perhaps we give to a Christian charity and the charity fails; or someone within steals the money. Perhaps we help someone who appeared to need food and it turns out that they were just a shyster. Perhaps we invest time discipling someone who abandons the faith. All these things and more can happen in our Christian sharing of blessings.

This is why we spread our blessings around. Some will work and some will not. Regardless, we must never stop in our work of bringing glory to God and souls to Christ. We continue to help many so that some might be saved.

When a tree falls, there it lies. You can’t change the fact that it fell or go back in time and cause it to fall somewhere else. It happened and it is done. This is how we consider those happenings in life that don’t work out. Whether it is in the area of Christian giving or in our lives in general, when something bad happens, it has happened. Sometimes we can work to change the effects of what happened and sometimes we can’t; but we can’t change what took place.

And here again is where we have a choice: Do we let misfortune and bad characters ruin life for us, or do we deal with the bad and look forward to the times of joy? Do we focus on the current misfortune or do we focus on the eternal joy we are promised in God’s word? That is one of the beautiful things about belonging to Christ; we have a sure hope to sustain us through life and one of the fruits that comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit is joy. This doesn’t mean that we run around happy and laughing all the time, far from it. But we have that peace and fullness that comes from Jesus.

There is another important thing to remember and that is that we don’t know what God is up to. Just as we don’t really know where the wind comes from or how a baby is formed in the womb; we don’t really know all the things God has planned and we surely don’t know how He is going to accomplish His plan. This is a source of peace for the Christian; even the misfortunes of life are allowed by God in order to bring about His purposes. His purposes may be a little rough on us in this life, but we are promised that in the glories of heaven we won’t even remember our trials. Besides, experiencing troubles that will glorify God are worth it.

Do reasonable diligence before sharing your blessings, but then do it. The farmer who is always watching the weather will never do anything. If we try to check out every angle before we give, we will never give. Sometimes our sharing will bear fruit and sometimes it will not. This is life and we share anyway because this is part of God’s plan.

Still, look for the good things is this life, it is not all dreary and sadness. The Lord God made this world and He saw that it was good. Sin and satan have ruined many things, but God has it under control. Enjoy the sunshine. Enjoy a pretty day. We can even enjoy a storm when we are inside, warm and watching through a window.

Good things do happen. Sometimes things work out very well and sometimes we get an unexpected goodness from God. Rejoice in all these things and give thanks to God for them. If the Lord blesses you with a long life, be grateful to Him. A long life gives more opportunities to receive and share blessings from God. Even so, in rejoicing don’t forget that darkness is there and that it will come. Just don’t let it steal your joy.

Verse 9 is very interesting and at first glance it seems like questionable advice from a Christian perspective. But taken as a whole, it is very good. It would be so wonderful if everyone could have a true grasp of what they have in childhood and young adulthood. Normally, this is a time of life to enjoy our strength and vigor. If only everyone would realize that what is described in chapter 12 is coming.

And with that knowledge, give glory to God by living in that strength for Him. The strength of youth is a gift from God and it is good advice to be thankful to God for it.

But what about that next line, “*And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes*.” That sounds just like what we hear in the world today. “Follow your heart!” is what children are told. That’s probably the worst advice you can give someone. Whatever you want just “go for it”. Again, horrible advice. Our hearts are evil and terribly sick, our eyes are full of lust for worldly possessions and pleasures. It is a big red flag when the world gives advice; the world is at complete enmity with God.

The solution is, of course, to read the next line. *Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.* Well, that sort of puts a damper on things. The worldly man will be quite unhappy with this and unfortunately, tend to ignore it. But this is a good lesson on why we can’t rip things out of the Bible without considering the context. So, yes, follow your heart, but only if it is guided by the Holy Spirit and with the coming judgement in mind.

Along with that, there is a change that takes place in someone who has become a Christian and continues to mature in Christ. Our heart’s desire becomes doing what is pleasing to God; our eyes want to see Him glorified and we want to see the Kingdom of Christ increased. How blessed are those who while still in their youth grasp these things and live them.

Another worldly motto is “live in the moment”, and Solomon is preaching against this. It is in our best interest to look to the future. If we are blessed by God with years of life, we will reach the point where the verses in chapter 12 apply to us. They speak of growing old and dying.

Infirmity can set in and it can be difficult to enjoy the sunshine and stars anymore. The watchmen of the house, our arms, tremble. The mighty men, our legs, stoop. The grinding ones, our teeth, stand idle and tend to fall out. And those who look through windows, our eyes, grow dim. We can’t hear anymore and we can’t sleep at night. We feel like that grasshopper dealing with a fall frost when he has to drag himself along. All our physical desires tend to fade. Eventually we die and those who cared for us mourn; but then life goes on.

We tend to avoid thinking about old age and death, especially in our youth. We live as if it won’t happen; then when it does, we become morose and cynical. But no, the Preacher tells us to take joy in the good things we have, to understand that the bad things are simply going to happen, and look to God.

The Christian knows that when we die our body turns back to the dust from which it was made. But it is joyous for us that our spirit will return to God. Death becomes the doorway to everlasting life in a place where we are no longer separated from the God who made us, but we are separated from the sin which made all the darkness happen in this life. Furthermore, in Christ, we understand that our bodies will also be made new and join our souls in eternity.

*“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “all is vanity!”* This is the truth for any who do not follow God through Jesus Christ. It is a sad state of affairs but it is the common state for the people of the world. The Christian has a different perspective. Because of our relationship with Jesus, what we do does matter and the good follows us into eternity. This world is not the end and a glorious forever awaits.

Prayer

Almighty Lord God, there is so much evil in this world; so many simply ignore You or in defiance blatantly shake their fist at You. And for them, all is vanity and a chase after wind. None of the good they do is acceptable to You; only darkness follows them and blinds them to the truth. They miss the point that they will face judgement one day and they will have no defense.

Merciful Lord, thank You for the vision we have in Christ. As our Lord and Saviour, we are able to see in His light. Admittedly, we still see darkly because of sin; but we know our sin is removed and we will see fully when we stand before Him. Our judgement will be a happy one because He has paid the price for our sins. And our good works will be acceptable to You because of His righteousness.

Now Lord Jesus, help us by Your Holy Spirit, so that we do not fall victim to the darkness of this world. Remind us to experience the joy You give us in blessing. Encourage us to share the blessings we receive, knowing that we have received them without deserving them. May we give freely as You give. And may we reflect the light of Christ into this dark and dying world so that more lives may be free from the curse of vanity.

It is in Jesus’ name we pray

Amen