

STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES (34)

Be Busy Doing Good

Ecclesiastes 11:1-8

We have devoted considerable time to the study of this book about the meaning of life. Some see these last 2 chapters as wrapping up the writer's observations. We do find summarizing thoughts in these two chapters. I estimate 4 lessons (including this one) to complete this book. Today, we notice some more general observations, though these more specifically deal with our outlook of life. So let's get started.

I. Cast your bread upon the waters (1-2)

- a. This is a challenging saying because it seems to be describing a wasteful activity (unless you are feeding fish). And the challenge is seen in multiple interpretations as to its meaning. One source listed 3, which we here note (World Bible commentary):
 - i. This is talking about benevolence. This is the most commonly held view. As such this verse is telling us to be charitable, even in uncertainties about its benefits (cf. Hebrews 13:2, Matthew 6:1-4, Luke 6:35 – do good, expecting nothing in return, etc.).
And clearly, we are to be benevolent people – Galatians 6:10, James 1:27, 1 Timothy 6:17-18, etc.
And such would accord with what Solomon has said about dealings with others (especially in the Proverbs).
 - ii. It is dealing with trade, which would literally involve transporting bread (flower) over the seas. This would involve some risk of either failure or reward.
Thus the message is, be willing to take some risks. With this you can think of the principle of trust.
The challenge to this interpretation is that it is out of place – nothing else is mentioned about this type of commerce.
 - iii. It is simply an admonition to do things that may seem irrational, or to take a chance on something. This would be the same results as the other, only not as focused and understanding that it is better to do something not knowing the outcome, than to do nothing at all.
And this too could fit the context of Ecclesiastes as the writer has continually addressed uncertainties.
- b. The results is found in vs. 1b & 2 and it depends on one's interpretation. Consider the three examples above.
 - i. In dealing with benevolence. "You will find it after many days. You do not know when (or if) it will be repaid to you.
Vs. 2 notes to give a serving to seven or eight – diversify. Don't make your giving a one time or one person event. Distribute as you have opportunity. For in diversity, if for some reason you fall upon hard times (the evil that will be on the earth), you are more likely to be helped by those you helped.
 - ii. Concerning trade and shipping – you send off merchandise, and trust that you will receive back other and different merchandise.
As to the 7 or 8, one might say a fleet of ships lends a better likelihood of a good return, because there is always the potential for disaster.
 - iii. Concerning one just doing something, even if it seem irrational – again, there is the potential for a good outcome. One that will ONLY happen if you are willing to take that chance.

As to the 7 or 8, this might be about caution and ensuring that you are not overly frivolous (your eggs are not all in one basket). This is responsible conduct with what you have beyond your necessities (just like an investor is encouraged to diversify).

II. **There are things you cannot control (3-5)**

- a. Full clouds bring rain, and fallen trees stay where they are at (3).
 - i. As we consider life, we are once again reminded that there are things we cannot control. You cannot control the weather, nor can you remove a giant felled tree in the woods.
 - ii. IF you link this to the previous point, the observation to make is – DO NOT let uncertainty keep you from acting. While we must certainly proceed cautiously (cf. Matthew 10:16), we should not do nothing.
 - iii. This comes back to learning to trust God no matter what. Proverbs 3:5, trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding...
- b. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap (4)
 - i. Here is one who lets anything keep him from doing what needs to be done. The POSSIBILITY of rain or wind, keeps him from planting a crop or going out to harvest. He puts off what he needs to do waiting for ideal circumstances. This is the excuses of the fearful and the lazy - That is NOT the productive way to live. If it “looks like it is going to rain”, work and be prepared if it does. But keep working as if it has not rained.
Proverbs 22:13 says, *The lazy man says, “There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!”* He finds excuses to not work.
Proverbs 13:4, *The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.*
 - ii. Keep busy – I see this as Solomon’s point. Even if you CANNOT predict with certainty what is going to happen, that is no excuse to do nothing. Recall the words of Solomon earlier, Ecclesiastes 9:10 noted that *Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might...*
 - iii. This is a key to both wisdom and happiness in life. Again recall, Ecclesiastes 5:12 – *the sleep of a laboring man is sweet.*
- c. God is in control (5)
 - i. Here Solomon notes you do not know the way of the wind, OR how bones develop in a baby in the womb.
 - ii. Realize that there are things about life that we simply do not know, and likely some we will NEVER know. But that is ok. Just do not let it keep you from doing what you can do.
 - iii. Deuteronomy 29:29 notes that the secret things belong to the LORD our God.
It was this powerful observation in Job 38-41 where the LORD challenges Job with numerous questions about life, some of which are still mysteries to this day.
- d. Be busy some more (6) –
 - i. Vs 6 continues the challenge to keep busy. Here it is noted, be busy in the morning as you sow your seed and stay busy even in the evening.
 - ii. This is also describing someone who is industrious. And the point is you do not know which, or if both, efforts will turn out for good.
But scripture does declare that it is the laborer who partakes of his crops – 1 Corinthians 9:10-11, 2 Timothy 2:6 – the hardworking farmer is first to partake of the crops.
 - iii. THIS is, at least part of the answer, to facing the vanities (emptiness) of this life.
Learn from the example of Jesus who kept busy (John 9:4, Acts 10:38).

III. **Expect dark days (7-8)**

- a. Finally, Solomon observes how sweet the light is, and pleasant is the sun.
 - i. The day is when we can see clearly. It is when we are busiest being productive. It is when we can appreciate the beauties God has provided for us to see. It is when we can find the needy and help them.

- ii. Of course there are times at night when we can do all these things, but the NORM is that such happens during the day.
- iii. Light (and day) is associated with goodness, both in the Old and New Testaments.
 - 1. Jesus is the light of the world - John 9:5;
 - 2. Ephesians 5:8 notes that we are to walk as children of light.
 - 3. We let our light shine in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Philippians 2:15).
 - 4. 1 Thessalonians 5:4-we are sons of the day and light. In that light we live soberly.
- iv. In our text, Solomon's point is live, doing your best and APPRECIATE what you have. Appreciate the sun, with its warmth, brightness and healing powers. Friends: We NEED the fresh air and sunlight. ***How many in this pandemic have locked themselves in their homes and deprived themselves of the beauty of the sun, and productive lives?***
- b. But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all – here Solomon is describing one who truly has lived a blessed life. Sadly, not all are raised in such environments, but MOST have some power to control it.
- c. Yet let him remember the days of darkness.
 - i. Even the best of lives and situations have bad days. We CANNOT ignore these.
 - ii. If you are to live life to its fullest, learn to accept the thorns along with the roses. Just like Paul had a thorn in the flesh that he pleaded with the Lord 3 times to take away. God did not take it away but said, "My grace is sufficient for you." (2 Corinthians 12:9) Note Paul's attitude, "*Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)
 - iii. The times of darkness – sorrow, sufferings, disappointments, trials, etc. – if properly managed, can help make you better. They remind you of the frailties of this life – recall how earlier Solomon spoke about going to the house of mourning – Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 – that is the where the heart of the wise is. Moses in Psalm 90:12 said, *So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.*
 - iv. ALSO, remember what Solomon said here, "*they WILL be many*". Do not bury your head in the sand to the possibility of troubles. Realize they are coming and to the best of your ability, prepare for them during the days of light. Do not be caught off guard! Jesus warned His disciples, "*A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.*" John 12:35-36
 - v. Times of darkness help us appreciate the times of light – IF our attitude is right.
- d. All that is coming is vanity – some 38 times in this letter, Solomon as appealed to vanity (futility, emptiness, etc.). This is the 35th usage in this letter, and according to one of my sources, the 20th "vanity". Just a simple reminder that life is more than just the material realm we are now living in.

So, be charitable, be busy, be wise and trust in the LORD. That is Solomon's advice in this text. Think about it!