

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] Napoleon Bonaparte was shown a demonstration of a submarine. He declared that boats would never be able to go underwater. They do. Bull's General Manager drafted Michael Jordan in 1984 he said that he wished Michael was taller because he would never turn the franchise around especially since he wasn't good enough on defense. Michael would win 6 championships. A United Artists executive rejected Ronald Reagan as the lead for the film *The Best Man* because he didn't have a presidential look. He went on to win the Presidency in two of the biggest landslide victories ever. Darryl Zanuck, a movie producer, in 1946 said that television won't last because people will get tired of it. Now most people have multiples TV's. A Boeing engineer, said "There will never be a bigger plane built." That was after the first flight of the 247, a twin engine plane that holds ten people. They have gotten much bigger. Alex Lewiyt, the president of a vacuum company predicted in 1955 that in ten years "nuclear-powered vacuum cleaners will be a reality." We don't. Life can be unpredictable.

2. [Need] None of can predict was is around the corner in life. But that doesn't stop us from trying. The only certainty in life is death. And trying to live in this unpredictable life can be difficult. It can make it hard at times to function and make decisions. I remember as a child getting decision paralysis even from simple things. My dad would ask if I wanted to go to work with him today, or if I wanted to stay home and go to the store with mom. And I remember several instances of just breaking down crying. Because I could not predict which choice would be more enjoyable. I had no way of knowing and it overwhelmed and terrified me! Maybe other parts of life make you anxious. The unpredictability of elections right around the corner, the economy, the moral state of our culture, or maybe you are facing an uncertain circumstance in your life.

3. [Subject] In our passage today Solomon gives us some instructions on how to live based on the unpredictability of life. On what we can do even when life is unpredictable and the way forward is not clear.

4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 11

5. [Preview] Solomon gives us a few things we can do in response.

Point number 1 **Because of the unpredictability of life, be generous and work hard. Because of the unpredictability of life, be generous and work hard.**

Our preacher, Solomon, starts in such a strange place.

Be generous.

You would think his advice would be about preparing for unpredictability.

Telling us how to invest our money.

How we should save and make sure to have a 6-month cushion.

But he does not do any of that.

Instead, his caution is not to save our money, but to give it away.

Verse 1 **"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days."**

Some don't like these verses.

So they attempt to interpret them differently.

They think this must be about investing in sending grain across the Mediterranean sea, and the next verse must be about investments.

After all, the main lesson in Ecclesiastes is that you are going to die so you have better earn as much money as possible in diverse investments. That is what makes life worth living!

I don't think this interpretation is given in malice.

The passage is vague and slightly unclear.

I just think we find the Bible so offense that we have to change it to fit our assumptions.

I don't like that the Bible is telling me to be generous, so it must mean something else.

So what is this metaphor?

After all, what could be more wasteful than throwing bread in the ocean?

Even if that bread floated back to me I wouldn't eat it.

Take your daily bread and throw it down the river.
Hand it out to the ducks, the poor, the disabled, the widow and orphan.
And paradoxically, it will return to you.

And not just throw a little of our daily bread to others.
But we should be generous and keep passing it out.

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

He says, "Give it to seven people, or even to eight!"
The idea is to continue in generosity.
Go above and beyond.
Like you are to forgive seven times seven.
Give beyond seven.

And notice the reasoning behind the generosity.
"For you know not what disaster may happen on earth."

Typically we would say the opposite.
Since you don't know what disaster might come, hoard and save!
But God's Word says, you don't know what will happen so give.

After all, you might lose it all anyway.
Disaster could come and steal all of your savings and wealth.
Recession or depression could drain that retirement account.
Or you could die tomorrow and not need it.

So, be generous.
Give it away.

Or give it all away because you don't know what disasters might come to face others.
They may desperately need what is of little consequence to you.

Or that extra meal at a restaurant for you this month might put food on their table.

This morning we mentioned someone in our church that is in need. Gives you a chance to practice generosity.

And we are generous because in verse 2 **"you will find it after many days."**

The question is what are we finding?

I don't believe this is the prosperity gospel.

It is not saying to put \$100 in our offering box in the back so that you can get \$1000.

I think this is a reference to the life to come.

I don't think Jesus will evaluate our generosity based on how good of a return we go.

I do not believe that generosity given to charities that do awesome work will be rewarded and that generosity to bad charities will be punished.

I do think that we should be wise and not be wasteful simply because we are foolish.

But, I think that this means even if your generosity seems wasteful.

Like giving money to someone who squanders it.

Jesus sees.

And the reward is in the life to come.

After all, some of the poor that you have been generous too are angels.

And some of those you have ignored and judged were angels too.

Now life is unpredictable, but there are some things that we can predict.

Life seems random, but we are not in a random universe with no laws.

Gravity stays the same.

Math is a constant, at least at my level of math.

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

He tells us that sure the weather can be unpredictable to a point,
But when the clouds fill up with too much moisture, they are going to rain.

And when trees fall, they stay where they fall.
They don't stand up like ents and go for a stroll.
Even in an unpredictable life, there are things we can count on.

And he says this because we need to not be paralyzed by unpredictability.

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

The picture here is a farmer who is paying special attention to the weather.
But not just looking at the weather.
Because any farmer or rancher would pay attention to that.
This is a farmer who is waiting for the perfect conditions before they plant their crops.
They don't just need a nice day to harvest, but it needs to be exactly 72 degrees Fahrenheit with 20% humidity and a slight breeze.

I tend to do this with mowing my lawn.
I wake up early and the grass is wet so I need to wait.
Then it's dry, but now it's too hot so I want to wait till the sun goes down.
But then I don't have enough shade, or it's still too hot.
And before you know it I never mow and my grass keeps growing.
So if you ever drive by my house and see my grass is high,
Just know that I am just observing the weather.

This is why Solomon says knock that off.
Just work.
Work hard.

Mow the lawn.
Sow your seeds
Reap your harvest.

Yes, life is unpredictable, but you still need to do something.
We don't understand life,
We don't understand how God works.
But we should work hard.

Verse 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."**

He uses the example of the miracle of conception.
The wonder of how children grow inside the womb.
How does it go from what appears to be simply cells,
 But as believers we know is life,
How does that slowly transform into a child.

And in Solomon's day, they didn't see that.
Only recently have we gotten ultrasounds and the ability to see inside the womb and the mystery.
From their perspective you are just looking at a stomach knowing that something is happening.

Life is much that way.
WE can only see the outside,
but God is at work.
He is doing things you cannot imagine and that you cannot see.
So because God is at work, go to work.

Verse 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."**

Work in the morning and work in the evening.

Because you don't know what God is doing.

God is unpredictable.

Not because He is wild or changing, but because His plans are mysterious and incomprehensible to us.

So we should work hard because we never know what God will do.

Be honest in your work even though it might be costly.

Speak up when you see something that's wrong and not right.

Audition for the play, write your novel.

Be willing to share the gospel with that friend you have,

Or even just invite them to come to church with you.

Because you don't know you might be successful or you might not.

We do not know what the future holds in this unpredictable life,
but we do know the one who holds the future.

So let's follow Jesus and let's be faithful in our lives.

Let's be generous and let's work hard.

And whatever it is God has given us to do.

Big or small.

[Transition] So we should be generous and we should work hard. But our lives aren't meant to just be a to-do list. The point of following Jesus is not just that we have to do things and accomplish something. Point number two.

Because of the unpredictability of life, enjoy life. Because of the unpredictability of life, enjoy life.

We are also called to just enjoy life.

We do not need to be paralyzed by indecision.

We do not need to be overwhelmed by the grim reality of life.

Yes life is painful.

Life is really hard some days.

I'm sure that many of us have had days where we didn't know if we could keep going.

But the reality of Darkness does not diminish the light.

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

Life is dark, but it is also light.

The presence of Darkness can actually make the light much sweeter.

When is it most pleasant to see the sun?

Usually at Sunrise or sunset.

When you get to see the contrast between the darkness and the light.

The times I have most appreciated the beauty of the Sun has been when I been awake all night and darkness.

There are times that we've driven through the night to visit family.

And the middle of the night when it is dark is the hardest.

Not just because I'm exhausted and tired but because I can't really see anything.

But it gets better as suddenly the darkness starts to shift just a little.

And the black starts to get a little brighter.

And then all of a sudden I see the orange sunlight start to peek through.

There's something beautiful and wonderful about light.

We get distracted by so much in life.

Our daily stresses, conflicts, or responsibilities.

We can get distracted by our technology and our devices or our televisions.

Especially when many of them just tell us about the darkness everywhere and how horrible things are.

This verse is not just particularly about how we need to look up at the Sun.

Because staring at the sun is also bad for your eyes so don't do that be careful.

This is a call for us to look at the beauty and light that is in the world. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, sin and death entered the world.

And so now the world that we live in is broken and fractured. There is no Shalom or peace or wholeness.

But that does not mean there is no beauty.

The curse made work hard it didn't make work evil.

The curse made childbearing very painful, but it didn't eliminate the joy that comes when you hear that babies cry and see its face for the first time. There is sin and Evil, but there is also holiness and righteousness and beauty to be found right now.

Sometimes you just need to wake up early and go watch the sunrise. You need to drive up to the Wildlife Refuge and just look at some mountains.

Sit outside your window and watch the snow as it covers the ground and everything outside.

At night drive outside of the city and do a field or far away from the lights. And just look up at the stars.

Maybe even try to count them.

Verse 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."**

How many years you have, and none of us know how many we have left though we try to guess.

We should rejoice in all of them.

And knowing the darkness.

Knowing that there will be days that are hard to even get out of bed.

Knowing that there will be days we are stuck at the hospital again and they can't give us enough to dull the pain.

Knowing all of that we should still enjoy the beauty that God has given us here and now.

It doesn't mean that we have to ignore reality.

It's not a call for a kind of foolish optimism that pretends everything is fine.

You can acknowledge that there are a lot of days of darkness.

You don't have to pretend everything's okay when it's not.

When someone asks you how you're doing you don't have to say why you can just admit man I'm doing terrible this is one of those days of darkness.

But we can acknowledge that not all of life is dark.

That there is beauty to be found.

All is Vanity in Vaporous.

Vaporous is kind of my favorite translation of that word vanity or meaninglessness.

Because it's a reminder that life is just a breathe.

You blink and it's over.

My sons both had their birthdays and it feels like they were just born.

Those of you with more years than me know how fast they go.

Your life will go by in the blink of an eye,

so just enjoy this moment.

The more you recognize how quickly life goes the better you can appreciate it today.

Verse 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."**

He tells them to let their heart cheerfully enjoy what God has made.
I've learned that children are really good at delighting in ordinary things.
Our dining room table is in front of some big windows.
And we have a bird feeder right outside.
During certain parts of the year there's always birds at the bird feeder.
When there aren't birds there's squirrels climbing trees.

For my young children it's exciting every time.
For me it can be boring.
But they're helping teach me to Delight in to enjoy The Wonder of a bird.
There's a beauty of a squirrel.
Just enjoying God's creation that he's made.
As we get older we can forget.
Or when we are young we are in too much of a hurry to notice.

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

This isn't a call for us to ignore pain or our emotions.
But it's a call to put away anger and frustration.
Life is too short to always be vexed and angry.

Personally I found it most of the times I am angry I don't have the right perspective or the right attitude.
I'm usually expecting a certain thing to happen in a particular way.
I'm expecting my four year old to act like a well-behaved sixteen-year-old.
And then when he does none of the acts like a four-year-old I get angry.
Work when Sinners who don't know Jesus acts like Sinners who don't know Jesus I get angry because how could they do that.

Life's short.
Don't spend it Angry.
Don't spend that constantly in pain.

Look for the little beauty that's around you.
And enjoy it.

I think we saw a lot of this with Jesus.
Jesus knew exactly how short his life would be down to the moment of his death and down to the minute of his Ascension back into heaven.

He always knew how long his life would be.
He always knew exactly what his death would be.
How Judas would betray him.
I wonder you ever looked at his hands a new where those scars would be.

But he didn't spend his life anxious.
The only time that we ever see him anxious is in the garden in the hours before his death has finally coming.

Instead they spent most of his time enjoying life and obeying God.
Even in his mission as the Messiah and the savior.
Even in those short three years of ministry that he had proclaiming the gospel Healing The Sick.
Even in that he made time for children.
He made time for his disciples.
He made time for Sinners Like Zacchaeus
for women
and even for his enemies the Pharisees.

And he spent the first 30 years of his life in ordinary obscurity working as a carpenter.
Being obedient to God and enjoying them in his ordinary regular life.

[Transition] Now if we aren't careful the sermon can sound just like generic wisdom. It sounded different the popular self-help book with a cool title that sold thousands of copies. So we don't need empty encouragement. We need the gospel.

Because of the unpredictability of life's end, follow Jesus. Because of the unpredictability of life's end, follow Jesus.

I don't want you to get the wrong impression.

I want someone to be able to take this storm and apply it to their life, they're generous they work hard they just enjoy the beauty that surround them

and they do all of it without Jesus Christ.

So then they find themselves standing at the judgement seat of God and miss it.

So what is uniquely Christian about this?

What is the gospel have to do with this?

What does the reality of the life death and resurrection of Jesus have to do with enjoying life and all of its unpredictability?

You see it in this key phrase in verse 9

Verse 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."**

Did you catch that key phrase?

"Know that for all these things God will bring you into judgement."

That's the key to this entire Book of Ecclesiastes.

Life is vaporous and quick.

And you were all going to die.

So most of what you want to chase in life will not satisfy you and then you die.

But the most important thing to keep in mind is that all of us will stand before the Judgment seat of God.

And standing before him all of her actions will be meaningless anymore they will be more meaningful than you could have possibly imagined.

Should you not just go and be generous.

Be generous because you were following Jesus.

Lots of people on Earth can give away more money than you could possibly imagine.

They can give it away for tax reasons,

Or to get buildings named after them,

or any other impure motives.

Being generous without following Jesus won't earn you anything except more judgment.

And don't just go and work hard and make the most of your days, work hard because you are following Jesus.

Work hard because you love Jesus.

Work hard as if you are working for Jesus because you are.

Your productivity alone will not impress God at judgement day.

I don't just enjoy life.

Don't just go around with a heart full looking at flowers in nature.

Enjoy life because you love God.

Enjoy life because you are following Jesus.

Enjoy life because you are examining the beauty of his world and it makes you want to worship Him.

From seeing the Rocky Mountains to looking a butterfly.

None of this means do whatever you want.

It means enjoy God and enjoy your life and honor God in how you are enjoying your life.

He gave you your life it is a gift so you should appreciate it.

And we should put away anger and vexation in grief.

Not because they're evil emotions but because we should be guarding our souls.

We should understand that one day when we stand before God we will have to answer for all of our outbursts of anger.

And on that day we will find out that most of them were not quite as righteous as you thought they were.

So do all of these things enjoy life but enjoy them knowing that you will be brought into judgment.

Reality of that judgment is really bad news if you're not following Jesus.

Because the wages of sin is death.

A sentence that God will pass on all who have not given their lives to Jesus its Eternal death.

Not because he is cruel but because he is just.

And when he reached through that rap sheet there will be so much evil and wickedness even Sinners will have to admit that they deserve condemnation.

The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life.

There is eternal life available to us.

But it is a gift.

It is not something that we learn through right living it is something that was purchased for us by the blood of Jesus.

Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins.

God read out all of your sins what they would be before you were ever born and pronounced death.

And Jesus raised his hand and said I will take their sentence.

I will endure their punishment.

I will die so that they can live.

Mercy and Justice collided at the cross.

You put your faith in Jesus you can receive that gift of eternal life.
And if you've put your faith in Jesus and you do not have to fear that judgment today.
But you should live wisely.

Understanding the profound gift that Jesus has given us should lead us to following him and everything that we do.
And it should lead us to doing this now.

Some Christians understand the beauty of eternal life in heaven what a profound gift that we will receive,
but they do not recognize the profound gift that we have been given today right now.

If you follow Jesus you will live forever and he's already paid your sentence there is Grace for you.
But you get to taste that eternal life right now.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] Because life is unpredictable, be generous, work hard, enjoy life, and above all follow Jesus.
2. [Challenge] Don't be like a child who's ignoring their present because they want something else.

My children just had their birthdays and we gave them presents.
And we gave them presents one at a time. They would love the presents, play with it for five minutes, and then ask for the next present.
It would drive me nuts. You don't need another one yet, play with this one!
Some of us as Christians act like that. Jesus, Earth is okay but I really like the life to come can I have that now?
And God says why don't you just follow me here right now. Life is really short. You'll be with me in a few moments. Cast your bread upon the waters do what I've asked you to do today and rejoice in all the years that I've given you because you'll see me soon.