

Ecclesiastes 11:1–6

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Preacher: Joe Pace

[0:00] Ecclesiastes chapter 11, verses 1 to 6. There it will lie.

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

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.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Well, good morning, and let me add my word of welcome to our service here this morning as we continue in our series in Ecclesiastes, Making Sense of Life.

It was my school's seventh grade music recital. I played the saxophone back then.

[1:41] And on that particular night, I was petrified because I had to walk out and do a solo.

I stepped out into the stage, looked out at a full auditorium, packed with parents, teachers, friends, everybody staring, and I froze.

My hands were sweating. My mind was racing. What was everyone going to think of me? What was everyone going to think of me? What if I squeak on the first note?

What if I squeak on the first note? Am I about to embarrass myself, my family, my school? Will I go down as the worst seventh grade musical performance in history?

Honestly, it felt like it might be less painful to endure the humiliation of just walking off the stage and quitting, rather than to fail miserably with a horrible performance.

[3:00] There I was, locked in the paralysis of fear. When I heard a voice cut through the silence.

No, it wasn't God. It was just my dad yelling these powerful words of encouragement to me from the crowd.

He said, don't just stand there. Do something. And in that moment, I had a decision to make.

I stepped forward. Stay frozen or step forward. Risk embarrassment or risk regret. Ease toward the exit or embrace the unknown.

I stepped forward. And played the hardest version of sweet home Alabama you've ever heard.

[4:23] And now some 50 years and an entire music career later, I'm grateful for that moment of decision.

That moment on a seventh grade stage is part of what the preacher tries to describe to us in our text this morning.

Cast your bread. Give a portion. Sow your seed. Despite the uncertainty, stop waiting for the perfect wind before you set sail.

Think about it. How many dreams have died on the stage of hesitation? How many fruitful kingdom investments never happened because we were afraid of the crowd?

How many callings were ignored because we were unsure of the return? I know the questions. I've had all of them.

[5:31] What if I fail? What if I fall? What if they laugh? What if it doesn't work? Heed the advice from our text this morning.

God is sovereign. God is in control. God knows what you don't know. So don't just stand there. Do something.

Here's the big idea of the text. Faith-filled wisdom takes action despite uncertainty. It trusts God with outcomes we cannot control.

The preacher this morning gives us three fundamental exhortations to bold action. The first exhortation appears in verses one and two of our passage.

It's this. Take wise, faith-filled risk. Take wise, faith-filled risk.

[6:38] Take wise, faith-filled risk. Take wise, faith-filled risk. Verse one, cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Now, this is one of the more famous sayings from Ecclesiastes regarding risk and reward.

It is also one of those sayings about which there is some debate between scholars about its actual meaning. First, logically, you might say, why on earth would I throw a loaf of bread in the water? Even if I did find it after many days, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't want it. Well, obviously, this is a saying or idiom that represents or is symbolic of something else.

There are those who say it refers to generosity and giving to the poor and oppressed. Be generous. Give to those in need and less fortunate, and you will find it comes back to you after many days. Then there are those who contend that this has more to do with commerce and commercial shipping. Take grain and seed from your harvest.

[7:51] Bag it up. Put it on a ship to be traded and sold overseas and wait to see the dividends come back to you after many days. Whatever explanation you subscribe to, I believe we can find some common ground here in this statement that we all can agree on to get the point.

We can all agree that to cast is an action being taken. It's a decision to do something. Release something.

Invest something. Your bread would indicate that this action taken involves something that has some value to you.

We even use bread as a slang term today for money. After many days would imply that whatever the result or return from this investment of something value, it may require you to wait.

Not knowing when it's going to return. However, to find it means that ultimately there is a reward for your faith-filled step of action.

[9:12] Casting your bread refers to the willingness to risk something now in anticipation of the future. Some live only for the here and now.

They take no risk. They leave nothing to chance. They're not willing to wait for anything if there is the slightest possibility that it might not come through. The preacher says that's no way to live. The life of faith.

It may take no risk. It may take some time, but it's a good investment. Look, the most risky thing you can do is to not take any risk at all.

Just holding on, gripping everything so tightly, afraid to let go. Look, you can't see a return on your investment if you don't make one.

[10:34] nothing ventured nothing gained this is important church that Jesus seems to suggest the same thing in his parable of the talents recorded in Matthew chapter 25 many of you know the story Jesus tells of three servants who were given money to invest on behalf of their master two of them took risk invested very well and were commended by their master but the third played it safe buried the money because he was scared and didn't want to take any chances to him the master was incredibly harsh he says you mean to tell me you have nothing to show for what I gave you could have at least gone to see Andy and put my money in the bank in an interest-bearing savings account and gotten something for it yet you did nothing he squandered the opportunity he had to do something with what he was given and was punished for it church don't just stand there do something now remember I said the preacher's first exhortation was to take wise faith-filled risk faithful action cannot be without wisdom the faith-filled person lives by wisdom and the wise person walks by faith the same guy who cast his bread on the waters knows he needs to make more than one sandwich in verse 2 the preacher tells us to use wisdom by diversifying our portfolios not putting all your eggs in one basket because we don't know what disaster lurks around the corner one of my first lessons in diversification was when I was leaving for

college and my grandmother called me into her room went into her purse and I said this is it I'm about to get hooked up she pulled out a five dollar bill she said to me this is just a little something for you to fall back on in case things don't work out at that school just five know that five know that five dollars probably wouldn't have given me enough gas to even get off campus but the point was that I needed more than one ship to put my grain on

I needed to hedge against catastrophe now let me be clear this diversification is not just related to money or finance this is in every field of endeavor some of you in this room switched majors at school because the initial path just wasn't working we let our kids try multiple things growing up my youngest daughter tried dance cheerleading band choir volleyball basketball and art there are entrepreneurs who've had the wisdom to pivot when one venture simply wasn't working you don't know which effort God will bless so don't just stand there do multiple somethings yes you are called to faith field action and investment but not with reckless abandon with sober minded with sober minded wisdom the second of the preachers exhortations we find in our text comes in verses three and four and would simply be this what are you waiting for!

in verse three the freak the preacher first tells us that some things you just can't control so deal with it 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 yes we can make educated guesses about many things in life but the fact of the matter is we can't control most of it it's going to rain when it's going to rain regardless of what the weather man tells you when a tree falls you can't do anything about it and when it does it's not getting back up no matter how much you wish it would the preacher is saying we must learn to accept the fact that life contains unavoidable outcomes and uncontrollable realities but he doubles down in verse four and says but don't let those uncontrollable realities paralyze you and keep you from taking action he who observes the wind will not sow and he who regards the clouds will not reap it's the paralysis of analysis waiting for the perfect time the perfect moment the perfect season the perfect conditions before you do anything the preacher pictures a farmer who keeps watching the winds before he goes out to sow and scatter the seed he's afraid that if he goes out to scatter the seed on his farm when it's particularly windy that the seed will all get blown away and land in the wrong spots he may have to do the whole thing all over again he then pictures another who constantly looks at the clouds checking to see if it'll rain he's anticipating harvesting his crops but he knows it'll be more difficult if it rains so he's watching the clouds now initially you might think this is a good and prudent analysis but notice the preacher's observation he says because they're constantly checking and analyzing analyzing and checking waiting for the perfect moment they never actually sow the seed or reap the crops they won't act they're afraid they're afraid of wasted effort maybe disappointment maybe difficulty they're looking for the perfect sure success risk-free situation before they act

I'm not sure let me check the wind I don't know look at those clouds I've got to make sure it's perfect it's secure it's safe before I go the preacher says don't be like this what are you waiting for? don't wait for conditions to be perfect because that will never happen you won't find a perfect situation your ideal situation only exists in your head because there's never a time when you'll have complete knowledge or surety for action so stop waiting around for this ideal scenario and just act according to the opportunities in front of you yes you're going to face some risk you might end up having to sow the whole field again if the wind unexpectedly picks up you might end up harvesting in the rain if the clouds that are threatening suddenly pour out you can get through that enduring these risks as difficult and annoying and problematic as they are is much better than the risk of never sowing or never reaping at all my friends this morning

[19:19] I ask what are waiting for? what has God placed in your heart that you haven't done because you're waiting for what you think is perfect you're waiting to become a member because you're looking for the perfect church you won't find one you're waiting to volunteer because you're looking for the perfect ministry you won't find one you're waiting to get married because you're looking for the perfect spouse ladies my wife will tell you you won't find one you're waiting to share your faith reconcile a relationship start a business give generously all because you're looking for the perfect time and you won't find one and you won't

find one that perfect risk free sure success time is never going to arrive which means if you're waiting for it you're never going to act if you're waiting for the perfect you'll ultimately miss out on all the good let me say it another way if you wait until risk disappears opportunity will also don't wait until you have spare time more money better health until you feel right or until just the right moment you'll never see results

I need to stop for a moment and say if procrastination cost you opportunities in life imagine what it cost you in eternity the most important most serious procrastination is waiting to give your life to Christ don't wait the Bible says that now is the favorable time for salvation life is too full of uncertainties for you not to give everything that you have right now to lay hold of Jesus by faith none of us are guaranteed tomorrow but what we are guaranteed is that through faith in the gospel we have an eternal reward an eternal life with Christ Jesus and that joy doesn't just begin someday it begins right now church God didn't call us to observe the wind he calls us to set sail and trust the one who controls the wind that leads us directly to the preachers final exhortation in verses 5 and 6 here it is sow your seed and trust God who controls it all sow your seed and trust God who controls it all sow your seed and trust God who controls it all in these verses the preacher first reminds us once again as he has throughout this entire book about the limitations of our knowledge and power we don't know a lot or times even in this text he says it and much of that is out of our control he uses pregnancy as just one example even with all of our scientific and medical advancement and even though there are many beautiful babies brought into this world every year many right here in our church the preacher says there are fundamental mysteries to the miracle of childbirth and pregnancy that we can't figure out and we'll never know what do I mean Dr. Tom in fact the entire incredibly glorious phenomenon of pregnancy itself is an amazing medical mystery why carries half of the DNA from the father meaning it's technically partly foreign tissue and mom's immune system is designed to normally attack foreign tissue and yet the baby remains protected and untouched it's a mystery that's the difference in us and God because God made everything God knows all things he is actively working all things according to his good and mysterious Paul marveled at this mysterious quality of God in Romans chapter 11 Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways here it is if we try to become like God and obtain God like understanding of situations before we act we're doomed to fail why because we ain't God we'll never obtain that God like understanding we are but mere clay in the hands of the potter we can't understand all that he does so though it's good for us to gain basic wisdom and act with wisdom in the world there will always be some risk and there will always be a need to rely on God in the midst of uncertainty of uncertainty brothers and sisters it's true we don't know what God will prosper or what will fail but don't let that stop you from doing for the Christian the unknowable shouldn't paralyze because while we don't know much we do know God and God is good and God is in control so sow your seed in the morning verse 6 get to work in the evening take a risk

God is sovereign and it may just be that he uses something that you do to yield an incredible harvest ultimately we're not in charge of the results anyway we are in charge of being faithful with what God has given us the rest is up to him church let me say this to you collectively what we don't know about the future shouldn't paralyze us corporately either we should be diligent in ministry making disciples crossing cultures proclaiming Jesus Christ to everyone and displaying the gospel everywhere because we don't know who or how many God will save God will use for his glory our job is just to keep!

we keep sowing because the seed that stays in our hand will never become a harvest we keep sowing because the bread we refuse to cast will never return we keep sowing because the risk we never take will never yield a reward the truth is many of the greatest things God wants to do in our lives are waiting on the other side of one simple decision movement some of us today are standing exactly where I stood that night in the seventh grade you're on the stage of decision you know you should do something but fear has frozen you so you stand there watching the wind studying the clouds for perfect conditions passes by while you're standing on that stage but the good news this morning saints the good news from this passage is that God doesn't ask you to predict the future he just asked you to trust the one who holds the future and do something plant the seed cast the bread do something take a risk give a portion do something take a step make a move do something follow

that dream forgive that person do something then one day you'll look back at this moment the moment the moment you were afraid the moment you didn't know how it would turn out the moment you had every reason to stand still but instead you trusted God enough to move you'll look back and you'll realize that the step you almost didn't take became the blessing you almost missed you almost missed trust him with the step leave the harvest in his hands and don't just stand there do something let's pray

[30:06] Father we thank you for who you are for who you are we thank you that you have everything under control you are sovereign you know everything and all you require of us trust you and to move so God give us courage give us wisdom give us clarity give us strength give us boldness step out in faith filled action and do something big for you we give you and we say glory to your name in your son's name we pray amen