

A Call to Live by Faith

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[0 : 00] One of the realities of living in a fallen world is that life is filled with uncertainty and risks. And we have to accept and deal with that reality.

But for many people, uncertainties and risks lead them to worry. And in some cases, it produces inaction and even procrastination.

Now, some of life's uncertainties, we can actually respond to in practical ways. For example, we can take out insurance to cover buildings and protect them from loss in disasters like hurricanes and fires.

Or we take out insurance to cover expenses during sickness and even to cover the event of death. But for those of us who follow Jesus Christ, we are called to do more than practically respond to risks through protective measures like hurricanes, like insurance.

Sorry. We're called to do more than just do these practical things. And this morning, as we continue our sermon series in the book of Ecclesiastes, we come to a passage that directly addresses the reality of risks in a fallen world and how God's people are to respond to these risks.

[1 : 32] So if you have not yet done so, please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 11. And this morning, our attention will be confined to verses 1 through 6.

Ecclesiastes 11, verses 1 through 6. And as we consider these words, let us consider the care of God in caring for this church.

This sermon series would have been planned more than a year ago. And here it is. We are this morning in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. And God is addressing us from his word in a very timely manner.

Ecclesiastes chapter 11, starting in verse 1. Cast your bread on the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth.

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.

[2 : 56] 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.

Let's pray. Father, we're so grateful this morning for your evident care for us. We thank you, Lord, that your word is both timeless and timely.

We thank you that you've used it to speak to countless generations over the generations. And, Lord, you're using the same word to speak to us this morning.

Cause us to hear as we ought to hear. Lord, there are some of us who need to hear this word right in this moment and apply it to our lives.

[4 : 11] And there are others of us who need to hear it, but the day of application is in the days ahead. Lord, help us to hear as we ought and then to apply it as we ought.

And once again, I ask for your grace to faithfully preach your word and to faithfully care for these who are gathered this morning.

We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. For those of you who are joining us for the first time this morning, we have been in a sermon series in the book of Ecclesiastes since February.

We're winding down and concluding that series. We've taken small breaks along the way, but we've been in Ecclesiastes since February. And the author of Ecclesiastes identifies himself as the preacher.

Throughout the book, he refers to himself as the preacher. And throughout the book, he is addressing life in a fallen world. He is looking at life in a fallen world, the world that we live in. [5 : 21] And his overall point is that life in a fallen world is meaningless without God. That's the point of the book. That's the point of the preacher. Life in a fallen world is meaningless without God.

And so what we see is throughout Ecclesiastes, the preacher, makes this honest and brutal assessment of our fallen world. And along the way, he addresses issues like disaster and calamity and failed investments and untimely death.

So much so that some people view Ecclesiastes in a very negative way. They see it as a depressing book. But Ecclesiastes is not a depressing book.

Instead, it is a realistic book. It is a realistic book that evaluates this fallen world in which we live in a manner that we can all identify with.

But whatever we think about the book of Ecclesiastes on the whole, what is clear as we consider the letter is that starting in verse 1 of chapter 11, the preacher begins to make his conclusion.

[6 : 33] The preacher is now going to end what he is saying, and that's very clear in these verses that we've just read this morning.

And what I believe the preacher is doing is, in light of this uncertain picture that he has painted of the world, he is helping us to take that into account as we live life in this world.

And here's how I would summarize the point that the preacher makes in these six verses as he concludes the book. In a world that is filled with risks, believers are called to live by faith and trust in God.

That sounds a bit simple, but that really is a very profound truth when we understand it in the context of the message of Ecclesiastes and the reality of the world.

In a world that is filled with risks, believers are called to live by faith and trust in God.

[7 : 43] One of the realities of the Christian life is that God will ensure that we live by faith. It doesn't matter how much money you accumulate in the bank, if you don't have to worry about money, God will ensure that you live by faith in some other area of your life.

The just, Martin Luther said, will live by faith. He was speaking about justification, but in a very practical way as well. We will live by trusting and depending on God.

That is the way that God has ordained that his people should live. Now, in our remaining time this morning, I want to consider the first part of the preacher's concluding counsel.

And I believe that what he says can be broken down into two statements. And the first statement is this. Take risks. It's the first thing the preacher says in these concluding verses.

He has painted this picture of this uncertain and risky world. And as he's concluding, he says, take risks. To state it more fully, in light of all that the preacher said up to this point in the book, what the preacher is saying to us is, as you live this life, take risks.

[9 : 09] That's the point that he makes in verses 1 through 4. Now, the preacher is not calling us to be risky people who live risky lives. He's not calling us to be gamblers, people who engage in unnecessary and foolish risk because they are greedy or needy and desperate.

Instead, what we see is that the preacher is acknowledging that the normal course of life has risks. And he's calling us to embrace those risks and wisely take those risks.

Notice that in verse 2, he refers to disasters that might happen on the earth. And for us, we have a very fresh, vivid example of disasters in mind.

hurricanes, in particular, Hurricane Matthew. For six months of the year, we are exposed to these very destructive weather systems.

Other people in other parts of the world are faced with other things. People who are in zones that are prone to earthquakes. Some are prone to severe drought and severe flooding.

[10 : 24] These disasters exist. Increasingly, there's the threat of terrorism, which is a disaster in another form in terms of it being man-made.

Notice in verse 3, he talks about rainstorms and falling trees. And in verse 4, he talks about the wind and the threat of rain and how they can affect a farmer's decision-making.

So the point that the preacher is making is he's addressing the normal, natural risks of life that we face every day about which we make decisions as we live.

He's not calling us to gamble and to live our lives in a risky kind of way. But having said that, let's look more closely at what the preacher is saying in verse 1.

Starting in verse 1. He says, cast your bread on the waters and you will find it after many days. I think it should be immediately clear to the youngest child that the preacher is not speaking literally. [11:36] Any one of us who has any knowledge about water and bread would know that if you take bread, I don't care what kind of bread it is, it could be hard bread, doesn't matter.

You take it, if it's truly bread and you throw it in the water, it's not going to come back to you after many days unless you imagine it, it came back to you.

But that is going to disintegrate over some time and it's going to just be dispersed in the currents of the river or in the sea.

It's going to become soggy, it's going to break apart and it's just going to dissipate. Instead though, the words of the preacher are kind of proverb. They were understood by his original audience in a way that we don't exactly understand.

But what the preacher was saying to them as we try to make sense of it in context of these six verses, the preacher is saying something to them of this nature.

[12:39] Take risk. He's simply saying to them, take risk. Now, here's how I believe you can see that. Bread or food is the ultimate bottom line for which we work.

The preacher makes this very clear. I've shown the book in Ecclesiastes. He says that it is our appetite that drives us to work. The bottom line, most important thing that our labor produces for us is bread or food.

The most basic necessity. And so this call to cast our bread on the waters is a call to take risk with something valuable, something important.

And when you think about it in the preacher's day, this would have been someone who would have labored very, very hard and they have bread, something that is so precious because there could have been a drought and crop failure and other things and they don't get the resources to have that back.

But he says to them, cast it on the water. Cast your bread on the water. And the principle is that you will not lose it. The principle is that it will somehow in the scheme of things come back to you.

[13:52] This is a spiritual proverb or a spiritual principle. This is a principle that would not make any sense to a person who doesn't have a sense of spiritual awareness of a God who is over all things.

So this is a call to take risk. It is a principle that the preacher opens his concluding remarks with and he says, cast your bread on the water.

And after many days, it will come back again. If that seems vague to you, I believe that verses 2 through 4 will make it clearer. So let's consider what he says further.

In verse 2, the preacher says, give a portion to 7 or even to 8 for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. The picture here is one of diversification, of spreading our risk.

And I guess the preacher first uses the number 7 because it's a number that we see in Scripture that represents some kind of a perfection when God was making the week. He chose 7 days to show a completed week.

[15:01] But the preacher is, he's calling, now notice, in verse 1, he is saying, take risk, but now he's speaking about being aware of those risks and diversifying and spreading the risk.

and he says, divide it in portions, in 7, or even go further and do 8 to be a bit more careful. And notice why he says to do that.

Since you don't know what disaster may happen on the earth. In other words, because you don't know, spread your resources out and diversify because you don't know what disaster may come on the earth.

The way we would say that today is don't put all your eggs in one basket. Spread out the risk so that that basket drops, you don't lose all the eggs.

So again, while the preacher is calling God's people to take risk, the preacher acknowledges that there are some risks that are beyond our control, like disaster.

[16:05] You don't know what disaster may come. And he says, we need to diversify. In light of it. In other words, take steps to minimize the risk if disaster hits so that all will not be lost.

Now notice in verse 3 the common sense logic of the preacher. His common sense approach to the risks of life. Notice how he says, he says, when the clouds are full, rain's going to fall.

And wherever a tree falls, whether it falls to the north or the south, there it's going to lie. These are just normal things that happen in life and the preacher says they happen.

Cows get full, rain falls. A tree falls, where's it going to land? Well, it depends on where it falls, north or south. During the hurricane, there was a, well, there are many trees next to our property in the other lot, but one of the trees that is on the eastern side of our property fell on the western side. So it's right now over my fence and I've not moved it yet. But that's what happens. He just says these things happen. Where the tree falls, there it's going to lie.

[17 : 31] These are realities that we all face. There's nothing we can do about them to prevent them, so we need to prepare for them by doing our best to minimize the risk.

And then notice in verse 4 the preacher points to another reality related to risks. The reality of inaction due to fear. He says, he who observes the wind will not sow and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

Now in the preacher's day most people supported themselves by sowing crops. They were tied to the soil and they grew things. And so the preacher's illustration to them was very vivid and very relevant.

And he's saying if you are overly preoccupied with observing the wind, you won't sow your seed because of the fear that as you toss the seed on the ground the wind will come and blow it away and the seed will be lost.

And he's saying if you pay too much attention to the clouds as they are darkening and showing the possibility of rain, you will not harvest your crops that are ready for harvest and your crop could end up staying in the ground and rotting and you'll have nothing to eat.

[18 : 56] So when we consider these verses it is very clear that the preacher is not calling for reckless abandon or refusal to use common sense. His is a common sense approach to diversification of risk and he's not calling us to ignore the wind.

He's not calling us to ignore the threat of rain. No doubt there are some very strong winds that a farmer should not try to plant sow his seed in and there are some big rainstorms that are threatening that he should not go out and try to harvest his crop.

But even if the wind is blowing you can still get some seed in the ground. And even if you see the rain threatening you can start to harvest and when the rain comes you simply stop and you've gotten that harvested and when the rain holds up you're able to continue and go on with the harvesting.

But what you have been able to harvest is now in your barn and that is able to sustain you. So when we consider these verses together the preacher's point is as you live life take risks.

That's the point that he's making in verses 1 through 4. Now I know that we live in a very different world from the preacher's world.

[20 : 29] There's no one in this room this morning I am absolutely sure who is a farmer and your livelihood is dependent upon you putting seed in the ground and reaping the harvest and that's the way you actually live.

Some of us may do that as a hobby on the side but we don't live in that way. So we don't face and consider natural disasters as they did worried about losing our crop or not being able to put seed in the ground.

We're not concerned about the specific threat of wind or rain that will make us indecisive. Do you know what? Even though we have those differences we are actually held back by the very same thing that held people back from taking risk in the preacher's day.

And that one thing that we are held back by is a single word and it's the word fear. We fear failure and we fear the unknown.

And for most of us when we really consider the failure that we say we fear what we fear beneath that is we fear people. What would they think about us?

[21 : 46] How they would see us? In our decision or if we fail. And so our fears keep us from doing things like changing jobs or changing careers or going into business or going back to school or accepting that transfer or applying for that job because you don't have one or two of the qualifications that they are asking for or expanding your business and the list goes on.

And figuratively speaking when we do that what we are doing is we are observing the wind. We are regarding the clouds and we are refusing to take risk and we end up doing nothing because we are fearful.

Fearful about what we don't know. Fearful that it may not work. Fearful that we will fail and fearful that people will look at us and say oh they failed. But the words of the preacher are not a rebuke.

The words of the preacher are really an encouragement. And the preacher's encouragement is especially seen in verses five and six. Which brings me to my next point and he simply is saying he is encouraging us to trust God.

He says to us trust God. First take risk. Second trust God. He is saying to us as you live life in verses one through four take risks and then he's saying to us in verses five and six and as you take risk trust God.

[23 : 36] Let's consider how he says that. In verse five the preacher says God is the one who makes everything. He says that to the latter part of verse five.

God is the one who makes everything. And so he identifies all of the activities on the earth that he's just referred to as having been made by God.

Disasters, wind, rain clouds that produce fallen trees, wind that brings the fallen trees, all of that, God is the one who makes them.

And what we have from the preacher here is a God-centered view of life. And brothers and sisters, this is what we need. We need lenses that when we look at life, we see God.

We see God in all things. take, for example, hurricanes. Hurricanes are not of the devil. We don't need to rebuke the hurricane. God is the one, read Job chapter 30, God is the one who authors, 38, sorry, God is the one who authors all of these things.

[24 : 48] And even though hurricanes bring destruction, you know hurricanes produce a lot of good in the earth, ecosystem and all the stuff that it does. Look at the yard in about three or four months and just see how the restoration is going to be.

Hurricane serve a very good purpose. They're part of God's creation. And we should see them as such. The preacher says God is the one who makes all things.

I want you to notice though that the preacher is very important to see the preacher is not talking about God as creator. The preacher is not saying that God is the one who created all things.

If he was, he would have been speaking in past tense, but he's not speaking in past tense. He's not saying God is the one who created all things or made all things.

No, in verse five, he refers to God as the one who makes everything. Present tense, who makes everything. And so what the preacher is doing in verse five is he's connecting the uncertainty of the unknown to our fears about taking risk, and he is essentially saying that in some way, the things that we don't understand, we don't understand how God makes life.

[26 : 19] That's what he says in verse five, as you do not know the way the spirit comes into the bones of the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

We still have children, right? We don't know them, we don't understand anything about them. We marvel about human life, how God does that. So, not understanding, not knowing everything should not hold us back.

from living life and taking risk. At the end of the day, it's all in God's hands. So, what's the point? The point is this, take risks, and as you take risks, trust God. The preacher's not saying to us, well, take risks, close your eyes, and cross your fingers, and hope that things work out for the best. He's not saying that at all. He says, no, take risks, and trust God, who makes everything, even though we don't know and we don't understand his work. And see, this is why the preacher gives the counsel that he does in verse six.

[27 : 34] In the morning, sow your seed, and at evening, withhold not your hand. In other words, sow your seed, whether it seems favorable or not. Most people don't sow at night.

It's just not the normal thing that people would do. They do it in the day when they can actually see. But his point is that we don't need to be living life in a fearful, timid kind of way, refusing to take risk. Instead, we need to be living our lives normally, seeking to be productive, mindful that there are risks, the risk of rain, the risk of wind, the risk of natural disasters, the risk of falling trees, things we don't control, and we don't know with certainty whether this effort will prosper, that effort will prosper, but he says, do it and trust God.

Do it and trust God who makes everything. Do it and trust God who controls everything. See, we don't know, but God knows.

And this is why we need to depend on him and it's why we need to trust him. So it's not enough to take risks and sow not regarding the wind and harvest not regarding the rain and live life not being paralyzed by natural disasters.

[29 : 10] We need to also trust in God. If we don't do that, if we don't trust in God, we're simply reduced to bold-faced gamblers. People who just are audacious, people who just have a lot of courage and we just take risks and we do things.

But when we do the normal things in the scope of our lives, the risks that we come to, and we take those risks, and we humbly trust in God, that is what he is calling us to do.

And so when we consider the bottom-line issue that the preachers are addressing in this passage, what we see is first, we see the reason we don't take risks is because of fear of the unknown and fear of failure.

And second, and most importantly, we see that the reason we fear the unknown and the reason we fear failure is we don't trust God. that's the bottom-line risk.

That's the bottom-line reason we don't want to take risk, and we fear the unknown. We don't trust God. We don't believe that he is indeed the one who makes everything, who controls everything, that all things are in his hands, both success and failure, and he uses both in our lives for good.

[30 : 35] good. He uses both in our lives for good. You study the life of anyone who has lived long enough to attempt any number of things, and you would find failure along the way in their lives, and failure that benefited them, and failure that God used if they belonged to him.

God uses both success and failures for our good and for his glory, and therefore we should not be afraid to take risk and trust God in the normal scope of our lives.

He's not calling us to go over there and do something risky to say I did something risky. No, he's saying live your life normally. And when you come to those moments, those junctures in your life where there's risk involved and you're wondering what should I do, he's saying take risk and trust God.

The outcome is in his hands. So I want to ask you this morning, where in your life do you need to take calculated risk and trust God with the outcome?

Where in your life do you need to cast your bread on the waters and trust the Lord to bring it back to you again? Where do you need to acknowledge the risks that you face and protect against them, giving a portion to seven or even to eight because you don't know what disaster may come on the earth?

[32 : 13] And where are you allowing the dark clouds that are building, showing the possibility of rain, or the wind, showing the possibility of a tree that may fall to cause you to be indecisive, cause you to be inactive.

I try to be careful not to say, oh, this is one of the most important messages I've ever preached, because after a while, all of God's word is important and you can sound like a scorched record, but there's a sense in my heart, as I was preparing this, as I was preparing to walk from that chair up here, that this is a word that God is speaking to us as a people, but to some of us in very specific ways, in very, very unique and specific ways.

And I encourage us to hear this message this morning as God's word to us, to knowingly take risks and to consciously trust God.

Because whether we succeed or not, we're in his hands. It's quite interesting when we consider what the preacher says in verse seven, in verse six, sorry, he says, 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.

Clearly, the preacher indicates the possibility of failure because he says you don't know which will prosper this or that. And obviously, we know that it could be both could fail.

[34 : 02] But the preacher highlights the positive element of it. And what he says is we don't know whether this one or that one will prosper or whether both will be good alike.

You would think in a pessimistic book like the book of Ecclesiastes, he would say you don't know which one will prosper or whether both will fail. He doesn't say that. He says you don't know which one will prosper or whether both would be good alike.

So we don't know the outcome. But we do know the outcome is in God's hands. Early on in his ministry, Jesus told his disciples who were following him that following him involved more than a risk.

He said it involved a cost. See, a risk may not be realized, but Jesus didn't say if you come after me, it'll be risky. He didn't say that. He said if you come after me, it's going to require a cost.

He said you're going to have to die to yourself. If you're going to come after me, if you're going to be my disciple, here's how Matthew records it in Matthew 16, 24 through 27.

[35 : 26] Then Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Friends, although there's a real possibility opportunity to serve in Christ, God is going to die to die to them. As almost 2,000 years of church history have shown, Jesus is calling disciples to die to themselves.

He's not calling us to physically die, although that's a real possibility and church history has shown us that. He's calling us to die to ourselves, to die to our own desires and our own passions and our own agendas and to live for him.

[36 : 47] And he promises that if we lay down our lives and totally surrender to him, that they will be given back to us richly and purposefully as we serve him. And those who are not following God, those who are serving and pursuing their own agendas, trying to preserve the life that they think is best for them, Jesus says, you're going to lose it.

You won't attain it, you will lose it. And for those of us who follow Christ, even if the worst should happen to us, even if we should lose our very lives, we need not fear death.

Because the one who has called us to take risk and serve him and follow him and die to self has also promised that if we were to die, there's a future resurrection that awaits us.

He said these words at the grave of Lazarus when he declared, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. and the question that Jesus asked Martha, I now ask you, do you believe this? Do you believe this?

[38 : 10] Do you believe that as you live your life for God and death comes to you, that your death is not an eternal death, that there is a day that's coming when you will be raised to a glorious resurrection, never to die again, and to enjoy eternal fellowship with God and the people of God.

And if we believe this, then we should take risks, in particular risks that bring an eternal reward. We should reach out to lost family members and friends.

We should share the gospel, being aware that we may be rejected, being aware that they may scoff at us and they may laugh at us and they may mock us, but also being aware that God uses the gospel to open hearts and that there may be those who would receive Christ and we can enjoy with the angels the joy of harvest, the joy of seeing gospel fruit.

When men, women, boys, and girls turn to Christ and trust him because we took the risk to share the gospel with people who we felt would reject us.

Friends, let us trust God knowing that even if death is our lot, we will long to Christ, will not die eternally, but he will indeed raise us up at the last day.

[39 : 56] if you hear us unbelieving this morning, you're quite the opposite. You're on another road. Every one of us is on one of two roads.

Jesus says there's a narrow road and there's a wide road. The narrow road leads to life. The broad road leads to destruction. Every one of us is on that road, on one of those roads, and we're taking, quote, unquote, the risks that relate to those roads.

Those of you who are on the broad road, not serving Christ, you're taking the greatest risk of life. It brings no return. It brings no good.

It brings nothing of value other than despair in this life, an eternal separation from God in the life to come.

But the good news is that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The good news is that he lived a life that none of us could live.

[41 : 03] He fulfilled the law perfectly. And then he went to Calvary's cross and he was a perfect sacrifice. And the Bible says he took the place of sinners.

We sang about it this morning. He died a sinner's death. And all those who put their faith in him, all those he receives and he forgives.

And they're reconciled back to God. And so I encourage you today, trust Christ. Turn from sin. Sin is an empty way of life.

The only life that is worth living is one of serving the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who makes and keeps promises.

That's pretty.