



Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

"The Path to Spiritual Profitability"

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Transcript

24:55

I'm going to invite you guys to make your way to Ecclesiastes 11 this morning. If you've got your copy of God's Word, I don't know where it's at exactly. If you want to grab one of the Bibles that's in your chair or underneath the chair in front of you, we're on page 686, I believe it is.

25:10

So make it easy for you to find there if you want to follow along. But as you guys are finding your way there, you know, the book of Ecclesiastes has 12 chapters. That means we're kind of coming down the home stretch, so we've got just a couple more messages left this week.

25:23

We're actually going to be looking at a very familiar theme from the book of Ecclesiastes, but it's actually kind of giving us the action steps of, so what do we do with this reality that he's kind of essentially complained about for 10 chapters at this point.

25:39

So we're gonna be looking at that in just a minute, but as we are getting ready to jump into that, I was thinking about the fact that we're coming down the last few weeks of Ecclesiastes. I don't want anybody to be surprised by where we're heading next.

25:52

I figured I'd take just an opportunity to tell you that, you know, in the next few weeks as we finish the book of Ecclesiastes, I'm really excited about what we're gonna be doing, because if you've started to look at the calendar, you start counting out, all right, so what have we got left in the calendar year.

26:09

We finished the book of Ecclesiastes right around Thanksgiving, and that gives us a really cool opportunity for us to do a four -week Christmas series that we're gonna be looking at, what we're calling "the songs of Christmas."

26:22

So if you're familiar with the book of Luke, we studied through the book of Luke, but at the beginning of the book of Luke, we have four different songs that we see in chapter one and chapter two that are all focused on the Christmas story, right?

26:35

We have Mary's song as the angel came and revealed to her that she was going to have a baby. We have Zechariah's song as he hears about this promised Messiah that's coming. We have the song of the angels coming and declaring to the shepherds that the Messiah has come.

26:51

And then we finally have, who's the fourth one? There's another one, Simeon. We have Simeon's song as the baby Jesus is dedicated, as he celebrates that God has provided that he's seen this Messiah that had been promised that would come before he passed away.

27:08

So we're excited about that. And then as we enter into the new year, we're going to be entering into a new study that we're going to look at all three of the pastoral epistles, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, all kind of as one big lump together that we're going to look at and consider what Paul has, instructions he has for Timothy and for Titus, two young pastors as they're trying to lead their churches in a godly way.

27:33

So I think it's going to have good instruction for us as we consider God, what is it that we should be doing as a church? How should we be reaching out into the community? What should be the things that are important to us?

27:45

Well, we want those things to be important to us. So we're going to look at those throughout a good chunk of 2023. So be excited about that, be encouraged. We're going to have a Christmas series. I'm kind of excited about that.

27:58

And then going to launch into something really awesome in next year. So hopefully that was a long -winded way of giving you time to make your way to Ecclesiastes 11. I don't hear any more pages turning.

28:06

So I think that means we're there. We can jump in here. So all throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, you know, we've seen this theme that, you know, the preacher is

complaining about the fact that none of us knows what tomorrow holds. There's all this randomness that we see in life.

28:23

There's all these different things that, you know, if we just sit back and watch the patterns of life, we look at the events, the things that happen day in and day out in a normal person's life, we can get frustrated by the fact that it seems like there's this randomness to things, right?

28:40

You can do everything right and then it still seems like things go sideways for you. People that, you know, made all the healthy choices still end up getting sick. All the, you know, the people that try to control every little detail of life, well, you know, things can still go completely unexpected directions and can completely throw off our plans, what we think should happen.

29:03

So, you know, we've been talking about that kind of... the preacher has been bemoaning the fact that that's kind of the existence in this randomized world that we seem to live in. We don't know what tomorrow holds.

29:15

but he also has observed several times that we do know who holds tomorrow, right? We know that even though we don't understand what's going on, that God is ultimately sovereign, that God is in control of all things, and that nothing happens apart from his control over those events.

29:30

God knows what's going to happen. So how do we deal with the randomness of life? Well, the preacher gives us some suggestions. He gives us some spiritual advice in these verses that we're going to look at this week, but it sounds like some very familiar financial advice that many of you guys may have heard, may resonate with you that you've heard before.

29:49

So in today's message, we're going to consider this useful advice from Ecclesiastes 11, and I think it's going to help us achieve what I've titled spiritual profitability. So I'm going to encourage you guys to read along in your copy of God's words, or you can follow along on the screens.

30:05

We're going to read Ecclesiastes 11 starting in verse one, and we're going to go all the way down through verse six. Starting in verse one, it says, cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

30:18

Give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you know not 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 that tree falls, there it will lie.

30:33

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the way that a 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.

30:47

So in the morning, so 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. These are the words of the Lord. Would you guys pray with me?

31:01

God, we thank you for your word. God, we thank you for the opportunity to gather here together, to be the church, to church together this morning. As we come together as

individuals, God, we're thankful for the opportunity to come and to be committed to one another.

31:16

To come and to encourage one another to share with one another as we've had opportunities over coffee and donuts and standing around in the hallway in the parking lot and God we're so thankful for the fact that you saw fit to give us to one another.

31:31

God that you knew that it would be best for us God that this world that this life was difficult enough on its own if we tried to go out and do it by ourselves but God that you've given us to one another that we would be able to God to encourage and to challenge and and to be the body of Christ together as one.

31:51

So God as we gather together as we sing of your greatness as we just did a moment ago as we humble ourselves before your word this morning in the next few minutes God we pray that God that you would be glorified with everything that we say everything that we do here we pray that that our lives would be a spiritual act of worship like we just talked about a minute ago but God we also pray that that you would speak to us.

32:14

God, that you would use your word to impress upon us what you would have for us this morning. God, we pray that our lives would be changed as we humble ourselves before the truth of your word. And God, we pray that in all of it, that you would be glorified, that it would point people to you, that it would point attention to you.

32:30

So God, we give it to you and we pray for your glory in all of it. And it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen. Well, as we jump in, we look at the first couple of verses that we see here in our passage. I think those two verses are talking about investing for the future.

32:45

Verse one and verse two are talking about investing for the future. So, you know, in a normal outline, we've got the Roman numerals out on the left side, but sometimes you have to break it down a little bit further, right?

32:55

So if we're gonna look at the first verse, just the first verse, I think it talks about this idea of nothing ventured, nothing gained, kind of that familiar business proverb. So as the preacher is talking here at the beginning of our passage, he makes a statement that kind of seems like a strange statement.

33:13

As I started reading through our passage for this week, it stands out to me. He tells us to cast your bread upon the waters. That seems like kind of a curious image, right? One in the world is he talking about to cast your bread upon the waters.

33:25

As I was thinking about that, you know, the first thing for me that comes to mind is my childhood, right? It immediately takes me back to when we were on vacation or whatever, we would always pick up the groceries and we'd pick up an extra loaf of bread or two and we'd go down and we'd feed the ducks or we'd feed the seagulls or whatever it was.

33:42

I always loved doing that. Since doing that as a child, I've learned that that was a bad idea for a couple of different reasons. First off, bread has no nutritional content for those ducks or those seagulls or whatever.

33:53

It's not good for them. In the same way, the bread's not good for us. A lot of it, you know, if you eat too much of it, right? So it's not good for them. But also, you know, when we

had a couple of our kids and we were little, we were on vacation, Kari and I were taking Peyton and Sadie and we went out and we wanted to feed the ducks.

34:10

And so we're out tossing bread to the ducks, but with little kids around that was taken too long for us to rip up the stuff and feed the ducks. So Kari actually got bit by a duck once when we were out casting our bread upon the water because she was being too slow, right?

34:25

So don't feed bread to ducks, the moral of the story for you to take away. But no, as we look at this picture, he's talking about casting your bread upon the waters. There's a few different suggestions, few different views from various commentators, but there was one that seems to fit very closely with everything else that this passage is talking about.

34:47

It seems like the most likely explanation for what this is talking about. So to cast one's bread upon the waters is to engage in trade. Potentially even international trade. If someone were to load up all their resources, their grain, their bread, all those different things, load them up on a boat and send them to go trade internationally, well, they're going to be making a commitment of those resources as they go out on the boat.

35:14

waiting, hoping that eventually profit is going to come back. That that bread is going to come back after many days, that they're gonna receive the reward that eventually comes from that venture that they sent out their investment in international trade, hoping to bring back a reward.

35:32

Essentially he's pointing to this familiar business proverb, nothing ventured, nothing gained, right? So we see that in the first verse, cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it.

35:44

He continues on by, you know, well, excuse me, in those verses he encourages us to handle our business, our spiritual business, in the same way that we would handle our our worldly business. What we invest in the kingdom of God, our time, our resources, the things that we invest into the kingdom of God, those things are never wasted.

36:07

But if we want the blessings that come from investment, if we want the blessings that come at the end of that transaction, well you know what we have to do? We have to be willing to put in, to put some investment in upfront, to exercise our faith.

36:24

Commercial ships come back after a long voyage and, you know, they've gone and traded and made a profit and whatever, but there's some investment that has to happen for those things to be possible. Well, in the same way, our spiritual lives, we have to be willing to give of ourselves before we can expect some sort of a spiritual yield to come back.

36:43

If I were to sit here and say, you know, I have never, I have never had the opportunity to share the gospel with somebody and someone has come to faith. If I were to say that to you, but then immediately followed it up with, well yeah, but I've never actually talked to anybody about the gospel either, well that kind of makes sense, right?

36:59

If I've never had the opportunity to do that because I've never gone and done that, well then it's not a confusing thing, right? It's just the reality of, well I sat around and didn't do anything and, you know, no fruit came from that.

37:14

If we're going to look to make our lives spiritually profitable, well, you know what we have to do? We have to be willing to give of ourselves sometimes. The second thing that we see in verse two, as this passage continues on, is in verse two, we see this warning to diversify, right?

37:32

Verse two, it says, to give a portion to seven or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. You know, verse one is giving us advice about how we should invest our resources and giving us that suggestion, that proverb, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

37:48

Well, then verse two is giving us wise counsel about how to go about doing that investing. As it's been discussed several times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes up to this point, we don't know what tomorrow brings, right?

38:00

We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. We don't know whether this investment is going to go well or going to go poorly. We see that theme kind of alluded to here in this verse. It's talking about how we don't know what disaster will strike, what's going to happen negatively tomorrow, what disaster will come on earth.

38:18

But as we look at this, we also see a wise man's solution to the fact that we don't know what tomorrow holds. He tells us to give a portion to seven or even to eight. You know, anyone with any experience in investing, I look around the room, I know there's some people who, you know, kind of dabble in investing sometimes, some people that kind of have some good logic about them when it comes to that.

38:42

Anybody that has any experience in investing, though, can pretty quickly answer the following question. You know, if you were to take all of your savings, all of your

resources, your retirement, everything that you had, and invested them into a single company, would that be a good investment strategy?

38:58

I see those heads shaking, no. Like, there's risk, right? It's important for us to not put it all on one thing. You don't go and just bet it all on black, right? Why? Because diversifying allows you to spread out the risk that's inevitable in something like investing, right?

39:19

You're able to allow for some of the inevitable failures that are going to happen anytime that you invest without the risk of losing it all. Rather than simply taking our chances with a single bet, we plan for uncertainty, we plan for the unknown by diversifying our investments.

39:37

If we're wise, we invest wisely. And we hope that, you know, if one investment does poorly, well, at least we've got some other investments over here that, you know, maybe this one will be profitable and we'll cancel out the loss on whatever it was that went poorly.

39:52

These are some sound financial principles, but they also kind of apply to the spiritual business of God's kingdom as well. Michael Eaton talking about the same idea in his commentary. He said that the preacher's concern was that the wise man should invest everything that he has in the life of faith.

40:10

And Philip Reichen, talking about this same idea calls on Christians to, as he said, stop holding on to what we have and hoarding it all for ourselves, which is an error that the one man, that the man with the one talent made in the parable that Jesus told in Matthew 25.

40:26

God invites us to be venture capitalists for the kingdom of God, and this is not exclusively or even primarily about money. It's about having the holy boldness to do seven or even eight things to spread the gospel and then waiting for God's ship to come in.

40:41

The preacher here in Ecclesiastes 11, he's offering some suggestions. He's offering what sounds like financial advice, talking about investments and talking about, you know, venturing out and taking risks.

40:54

Those sound like business terms, right? But he's talking about spiritual realities. He's encouraging us that people should not sit around lazily and offer God the occasional morsel. You know, if we give all of our lives that we have to God as a living sacrifice.

41:11

Well, that's going to come out in more than the occasional, once a month, God, I might give you a little something. If we look at our lives and we go, well, no, my career is mine, right, and my family, that's mine.

41:25

And my weekends, well, those are mine because we've got ballgames to go to and there's stuff that I want to make sure I see on TV and whatever it is. If we have all these things over here that we go, no, no, no, God, that's mine, and then I'll give you, I'll give God one, you know, one hour here or there.

41:44

Maybe, you know, God, maybe I'll, maybe, maybe I'll give you this little tiny portion of my life. Well, if that's the attitude that we have towards God, if that's the attitude that we have towards our relationship with Him, well, you know what?

41:57

It's probably not going to be very productive. It's not going to make a huge difference in our lives if we just sit around giving God a crumb here and a crumb there. Christians are called to give of everything that they've got.

42:10

We're called to be living sacrifices. That means everything about my life. I lay it down before God and say, God, whatever it is, it's what we just sang about. Lord, let this be where I die, my life crucified so that you can be the one that lives in me.

42:26

Galatians chapter 2, Paul said, I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

42:41

That is the attitude that looks completely different than, God, I'll give you this little bit over here. Christians should look for every opportunity to do something. To reference a modern proverb, I think what verse 2 is essentially saying, if we were to translate it into an idiom that we're familiar with today, the preacher's telling us, don't put all your eggs in one spiritual basket, right?

43:06

Don't put all your eggs in one spiritual basket. So the first two verses encourage us about this idea of investing for the future, but verses three and four are telling us, don't just sit there, do something.

43:17

Don't just sit there, do something. Verses three and four, they say, 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, and the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

43:30

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As the first two verses have called on us as hearers to invest our lives into God's work generously. These two verses give us an illustration of how we can fail to successfully commit ourselves to that work.

43:49

You know, we wrestle with this reality that we don't know what tomorrow holds, but these verses give us an illustration of a farmer who's standing out in his field. And he's standing outside and he's watching the clouds, trying to figure out whether it's gonna rain or maybe when it's gonna rain.

44:07

Or, you know, he's. and he's watching the wind trying to figure out what the weather patterns are gonna be like. Trying to figure out whether this tree or that tree is gonna be impacted, which way things are gonna go.

44:19

Meanwhile, we see in these two verses that the farmer that's out there trying to figure out what the weather is gonna do, well, he fails to do what he's supposed to be doing. It says that he's out there trying to figure out the weather patterns, but he doesn't actually take the time to sow his seed or to harvest his crops because he's so busy trying to figure out the weather that he's not doing, he's neglecting the things that he's supposed to be doing,

44:42

that he actually can control. If the farmer's watching the weather constantly trying to figure out when the rain is gonna come, yeah, rain is, any of us, I think even people with black thumbs like me that just kill plants all the time, we all know that water's important for crops to grow, right?

44:59

You don't have a whole lot of crops if it doesn't rain. If we don't have water, like they can't grow, right? So it's important for a farmer to try to figure out when the rain is gonna come. But if he spends all of his time trying to figure out the weather and he doesn't actually put any seed in the ground, well, we got a problem then, don't we?

45:18

Probably, I guarantee you he's not gonna grow a whole lot of crops if he doesn't ever put any seed in the ground, as the farmer is watching the weather constantly trying to figure out, well, is it gonna rain today or tomorrow, or maybe next week would be better for me to plant, he fails to actually go do what he's supposed to do.

45:35

He's so preoccupied by the things that he cannot control that he neglects to do the things that he can control. By showing us this farmer, this illustration of verses three and four, I think Ecclesiastes is trying to give us a very practical warning that I think we can apply to a lot of different situations in life, you know, we've talked about this reality throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, but can you control everything that happens in life?

46:03

Of course not, of course not, we know, anybody that has lived any period of time in this life we realize we know that we can't control everything no matter how hard we try we can't control everything so how do you respond when things are out of your control?

46:18

Well some people like this farmer seems to be can be paralyzed by fear can be paralyzed by analysis can be sitting here trying to figure out you know what's the

absolute best way for me to control all the circumstances that are out of my control, but how can I control everything just right so that I can get the result that I want?

46:40

Instead of doing what they're supposed to be doing and trusting that you know there's some things that just we can't control them they're so focused on their fears they're so focused on analyzing the situation and trying to figure it out well that they they actually fail to do the things that they're supposed to be doing. They keep putting things off and putting things off and putting things off and as long as we keep thinking this way well we never accomplished anything in life Right?

47:08

Maybe the weather will be better tomorrow. Maybe if I just wait for the perfect timing for whatever that thing is, well then maybe I'll be able to control it. Maybe something will go wrong. What if I venture out and something goes terribly wrong?

47:24

Well, as long as those thoughts keep coming in and coming in and coming in and we keep surrendering our actions to those thoughts, well you know what? We're never going to yield any spiritual harvest.

47:36

We're never going to yield any physical harvest. If you sit around and never do anything, there are no guarantees in life, right? We've seen that, we know that. There are no guarantees in life. You never know what tomorrow holds, but you know what we can do?

47:50

We can control the things that are in our control today. I can, if I'm a farmer, you know what? I don't know when it's going to rain, but I can go out and make sure that my seed is in the ground, that the ground is prepared, that I've done the things that I can control, and then we see what the inevitability of tomorrow brings, right?

48:11

I think the preacher is giving us profound advice here. He's reminding us, do what you can because you're never going to reap if you don't sow. You're never going to yield a harvest. It doesn't matter when you go out there and look for crops in October if you didn't put any seed in the ground in the spring, right?

48:31

It kind of reminds me of the parable of the talents that Jesus told in Matthew 25 that Philip Reichen was talking about in his quote a few minutes ago. The parable of the talent, if you're not familiar with it, in Matthew 25, let me give you the abridged version of the parable.

48:47

So Jesus was telling this parable, illustrating an important point, and he talks about a master who's preparing to go away on business, and he leaves three servants with resources, these talents, this sum of money that was being referred to in this story.

49:02

So the first servant comes to the master, and he's given five talents to be responsible. four, five portions of money that he's supposed to go and to use, to invest, to go and to make a profit. And while the master's gone, that servant takes the five talents and he earns five more through his hard work, through his investments, through all the things that he did during that time.

49:26

The second servant in that story is given two talents, given two resources that he's supposed to go and to use and to make a profit. And while the master was gone, he took those two talents and he turned them into two more.

49:39

And then finally the last servant, the third servant, was given one talent, but he was nervous and scared that he was gonna lose it. And so rather than going and investing it

with the potential loss that was going to maybe come when he went and invested that resource, he took it and he buried it in the ground because he wanted to make sure that he wouldn't lose it.

49:59

And so he just kind of sat back making sure, all right, it's sitting over here safely. in the ground. But when the master returned, the first two servants were rewarded, right? The first two servants were looked at and were thanked and were appreciated and were blessed because they had gone, taken the resources that they had been given.

50:19

They had put them to work and they had increased their resources. The master returned and blessed them. But for the last servant, the last servant that took the resource and buried it in the ground, well, he was punished.

50:33

He was called by the master. He was called wicked and lazy because he had done nothing. He took something and out of fear of, well, I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring, so I'm just not going to do anything.

50:45

And he was referred to as wicked and lazy and he was punished for not doing anything with that resource that he had been given. I think that parable that Jesus is using to illustrate this point in the New Testament tells us the same thing that we see in Ecclesiastes chapter 11.

51:02

And he's telling us don't just sit around waiting for the perfect opportunity for the perfect timing to come to finally reach out and try to do something for God. If God's called you to do something, it's time to take a shot, right?

51:16

It's time to reach out, to stick your neck out there. Sometimes there's risk in life. We can't control everything in life, but if God has put something on your mind, he wants you to take a shot and do it.

51:29

Don't throw away your shot. If God has put some ministry on your mind, get involved. If God has given you dreams of how you might do something for his kingdom, go for it, right? Step out and do something.

51:43

Make that sacrifice. Have that conversation with a neighbor or with a family member. Share the gospel with someone, because maybe it's nothing. Maybe it doesn't change their life, but you know what? Maybe it does.

51:57

Maybe it does yield spiritual fruit. Maybe it is something that God is going to bless, that is going to bring spiritual benefit in the life of that person or even in your life or who knows what God is gonna do with it.

52:10

Do those things. If God's given you something, has put something on your mind, go jump in and give it a shot because maybe, just maybe, God wants to use that for something great that he wants to use your efforts to impact the world.

52:24

So go ahead, take a shot, and then pray that God would use your efforts to make an impact in the world for his kingdom. As someone once told me years ago, it's easier to tame a wild stallion than to raise a dead one.

52:39

I think that's an attitude for us to kind of hang on to, right? Go give it a shot, go try something because we never know what God's gonna use in our lives to go and to make a difference. But if we just sit around at home in our easy chair every day and go, you know, I hope one day God will choose to use me to do something awesome.

52:57

But if we're sitting at home and we're not ever actually doing anything, I promise you he's not. I promise you he's not. Derek Kidner was talking in his commentary. He said, if there are risks in everything, it is better to fail in launching out than in hugging one's resources to oneself.

53:19

You know, this same principle is echoed in the New Testament, actually, as well. In 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 6, it says that the point is this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, but whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

53:33

He encourages us, don't just sit there, do something, right? And finally, in the last two verses, we see in verses 5 and 6, he tells us about facing the unknown. Facing the unknown. In verses 5 and 6, he says, as you do not know the way that a spirit comes to the bones and the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

53:54

So in the morning, sow your seed, and the evening, withhold not your hand. For you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. In verse 5, he uses an illustration to remind us just how little knowledge we have when we compare ourselves to God.

54:12

This reminder actually sets up his concluding point in verse 6 that's actually basically just restating what we've been talking about already in the first four verses. But in verse 5, he

references, the preacher is talking about how we don't know how a human spirit comes into this little developing body that's alive within a mother's womb.

54:31

You know, we are living in a pretty amazing age right now that we're aware of a lot more of the details of how a baby grows and develops and things inside of a mother's womb than Solomon or David or any of these other Old Testament guys that just saw mama gets bigger and then baby comes out, right?

54:49

That was their knowledge thousands of years ago. But we have some pretty amazing technology and understanding of how babies develop in the womb. Just a few interesting things that I looked up this week.

54:59

Did you know that in the fifth week in the womb that a baby has a heartbeat? Did you know that by the third month in the womb, around 10 or 12 weeks, that a baby has fully formed arms and legs and fingers and toes?

55:14

Did you know that around 19 or 20 weeks that babies actually have developed most of their senses? They are able to hear, they're able to see and smell and touch all those different senses that we use to observe the world around us.

55:28

Those senses are developing inside of a baby as well. We have some pretty amazing things that we were able to figure out and discern and have learned about how a baby develops inside the womb. But you know what we haven't figured out yet?

55:42

We haven't figured out how God takes a mass of flesh and bones and, you know, physical material and puts a spirit inside of that and makes it a living person. And all the things that we've understood and all the things that we can figure out, there's still mysteries that exist in the world where we can't scientifically discover or discern how God puts life into some organic material, some flesh and bones, but it leaves other flesh and bones.

56:14

We don't understand how God does these things. There's things that are still beyond our scientific exploration, that are beyond our knowledge. And so the preacher uses this mystery of the baby in the womb to talk about something that I think still applies to us today.

56:33

He uses this as an analogy for all the things that are beyond human understanding, that are beyond human thought, the mysteries of creation, the providence of God, all the things that we just we don't get to understand.

56:46

We can ask questions all day long, and the reality is that there's many things that we just don't understand practically. Why is it that you take two people that live the exact same way, can be family members, can have the same genetics, can eat the same diet, and one of them gets cancer and one of them doesn't?

57:05

Why is that? Why is it that some people have their dreams go unfulfilled, and it seems like life just beats them down day after day after day? Meanwhile, things just seem to go swimmingly for some people.

57:19

They get everything that they want, meanwhile others get nothing that they want. Why is it that things practically play out the way that they do in life? Well, you know what? We just don't get to have the answers to all those questions, do we?

57:32

There's things that we just simply cannot understand when we look at all these things. Why is it that things play out the way that they do? We don't know. All we know is what verse 5 tells us, that we find ourselves agreeing with the preacher's testimony that we do not know the work of God who makes everything.

57:52

God understands the answers to all those questions. We don't, is the simple way of putting it. But verse 6 tells us that the fact that we don't know all the answers to all these things that the preacher uses the mysteries of God.

58:05

He uses these mysteries as a call to faithful obedience for the rest of us. Verse 6, he says, in the morning sow your seed at evening withhold not your hand for you do not know which will prosper this or that or whether both of them will be good.

58:21

Some people use the mysterious ways of God as an excuse for just giving up. Well I don't know what tomorrow is gonna hold. I don't know how this is gonna play out so I might as well just not try, right?

58:32

People just give up, throw their hands up, and say, well I don't know so who cares? But what verse 6 is telling us is the exact opposite of that, right? Ecclesiastes is telling us that the opposite response is actually the correct response to what we just said a second ago.

58:48

It may be true that you never know what tomorrow holds, but it's equally true that, like it talked about a couple of verses ago, that you're never going to reap if you never sow. So

even if you're not completely sure what's going to work out, what's going to happen tomorrow, I think he's telling us, try, right?

59:05

Just try. Even if you're not completely sure, work hard for the kingdom and then trust God with the results. As we talked about a few minutes ago, 2 Corinthians 9 provides a clear summary of what this looks like.

59:23

2 Corinthians 9:6, it tells us that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Galatians chapter 6 actually echoes the same point. It says in Galatians 6:9, let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

59:44

We don't know who God is going to choose to save or not save. We don't know what efforts God is going to choose to bless or not bless, but it's not up to us anyways, which is kind of reassuring, isn't it?

59:57

It's not up to me to be able to go and have a conversation with someone, and if I do a really good job, then you know, then something's going to change in their life. And if I do a really bad job, well then I failed and nothing changes in their life.

01:00:10

The Bible tells us that we're responsible to go and to share our faith, but that God is the one that brings the increase, that God is the one that breathes life into that person, that God is the one that saves.

01:00:21

All we do is, you know, be obedient to do the things that he's called us to do. How will they hear if someone doesn't go and share the good news with them without a preacher, right? How will your neighbor hear the gospel if you're not willing to go and to talk with them?

01:00:36

How will someone on the other side of the world be able to have an opportunity to know the story of who Jesus is if you won't go to Target and pick up a few little things and stick them in a shoebox and give that child an opportunity to take that blessing of a shoebox, which, you know, by the way, every single one of those shoeboxes comes with a gospel presentation that they share with those children.

01:00:59

How will that child hear if we're not willing to step out in faith and see what God wants to do with it? It's not up to us to know what the results are gonna be.

01:01:11

It's why we're called to faithfully share the good news with those who don't know Jesus. It's why we're called to faithfully serve even in the midst of uncertainty. It's why we're called to faithfully obey what God has told us to do even when the outcome is out of our control.

01:01:25

Philip Reichen described God as I was reading this week. He described God as the Lord of the surprising harvest. You know, it's surprising to us. We don't know what God's gonna choose to bless or not bless.

01:01:37

It's not surprising to him, but it's definitely surprising to us. We don't know what God's gonna do. So the best response for us is not to just sit around and go, eh, whatever. Yeah, it probably won't work.

01:01:50

So why would I try? I think what it's telling us here is just like the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. If God has given us opportunities, well, you know what we should do? We should use them. We should take those opportunities and see what God will do with our efforts, because we don't know what tomorrow holds.

01:02:08

We don't know how our efforts are gonna turn out, but I do know that if you don't ever do anything to try to serve God, if you don't ever plant, well, then you're not going to be able to harvest. You're not going to yield an increase.

01:02:22

You're not going to see any productivity. You're not going to yield any spiritual return on your investment if you don't actually invest anything. So I think our question for us today, as we finish up, is what is it that God wants you to do?

01:02:39

What is it that you have had buried away in the back of your mind? Oh, you know what I should, yeah, I should get involved in doing something. I should play some role in God's work in the world. I think it's awesome. We didn't intentionally line it up this way, but this week's passage just happened to, happened to, by the providence of God, happened to fall on the same weekend where Pastor Ron was gonna ask Cynthia to come up here and share, you know?

01:03:06

God just, I was just taking voice lessons and didn't know what was gonna come from that, but God started poking me in the ribs and saying, hey, you should use this gift that I've given you to serve in some way.

01:03:19

And now she's been up here for close to a year at this point leading our church in worship, and we've all benefited from that, right? We've all been blessed because she was obedient to go and to take her shot, right?

01:03:32

So what is it that God has put in your path? What is it that God has given you an opportunity to do? Where is it that God has placed you in your workplace where maybe there's something that he wants you to do to make an impact for his kingdom?

01:03:46

What is it, what resource has God given you that you might be able to use that resource to be a blessing to someone else? Maybe you have time that's available. during the afternoons, you can go serve somewhere.

01:03:56

Maybe you could go, you know, take some of the resources that you've been given. I was talking with somebody this week. They, you know, they have a fairly large home and it's just them and their spouse at this point.

01:04:07

And so they use that space that, you know, they have exchange students that come and stay with them. They have people who need a place to stay that are able to come and to stay with them. What resources is it that God has given to you?

01:04:19

What opportunity has God placed in front of you that God might want you to go and to do something? We don't know how it's gonna turn out. There's no guarantees about the way that it turns out. But there is a guarantee that if you don't do something, it's never going to yield fruit, right?

01:04:39

So what is it that God's putting in the back of your mind? As we finish up here in just a minute, our prayer team is gonna be down here at the front. They'd love to pray with you and ask and maybe even help you pray through. God, what is it that I need to be doing? They'd love to pray for whatever is going on in your life. I'm gonna be mowing around. Pastor Ron and Pastor Mike are gonna be running around back there in the hallway.

01:05:01

We'd love to talk with you and try to help you wrestle through that and figure out, God, how is it that I'm supposed to go do something for your kingdom? But as we've been sitting here, if I know the Holy Spirit that's the same one that lives in me, that's working in you, I think as we've been sitting here talking, my guess is that there's probably something that just popped up in the back of your mind a few minutes ago.

01:05:25

You're sitting here and I'm asking the question, what is it that God wants you to do? And you're sitting there and you're hearing, go talk to Sarah. Maybe not Sarah, maybe it's somebody else. Yeah, the Holy Spirit's, oh, maybe there's that person at your workplace, maybe there's that classmate in school, maybe there's that neighbor that just seems grumpy all the time and you need to just smile and try to be friendly with them.

01:05:48

Maybe there's a ministry that you wanna get involved in, that you've been scared to, well, you know, maybe I could do that, but I don't really know if I wanna commit, you know, I'm a little nerv... you know, whatever it is that God's bringing up that I know you, I know you're getting poked in the ribs right now that the Holy Spirit is doing his work going, do it, do it, do it.

01:06:08

Well, you know what I'm gonna stand up here and tell you? Do it, right? I promise you, we're not gonna yield any fruit if we don't go try, if we don't cast a little bit of seed and then see what God wants to do with it.

01:06:21

So I'd encourage you, it may not pan out, it may not work, it may not turn into this great, grand thing that we think, you know, oh, look at that awesome thing. Maybe that's not it, but I promise you, God can't use it to do anything if you don't actually do something.

01:06:40

So do it, would you guys pray with me? God, I'm thankful for your work in our lives, I'm thankful for the way that you have reached in. God, that you have called us to repentance, that you have come down and made a way for us to be adopted as your sons and your daughters.

01:06:58

God, that you paid the price on the cross in sending Jesus so that sinners like me, so that sinners like us could be redeemed, could be brought back, could be brought into a relationship with you. And God, as you have done that work in so many of us, God, I pray that we wouldn't just sit around and go, cool, thanks.

01:07:18

God, you have saved us, like Ephesians chapter two tells us, that you have saved us by your grace, but that you have saved us to do good works that you prepared for us to do. So God, as we talk about this opportunity to think through spiritual investing, as we talk through this idea of how you might be calling us to go and to make a difference in someone's life, whether it's through a conversation, whether it's through getting involved in some ministry outlet somewhere, whether it's giving of our resources to further your work and to further your kingdom.

01:07:49

God, whatever that may be, God, I pray that you would help us to just be obedient, to go and to take our shot and to do something. God, we wanna be obedient in whatever it is. God, whatever that thing is that the Holy Spirit is prompting in us, God, I pray that you would help us to, God, just to be obedient.

01:08:08

God, you don't call us to control the results, you call us to obey, to be faithful servants that do what you call us to do, and you promise that you're the one that controls the outcome. So God, we pray that we would be faithful servants to go and to do what you're calling us to do, and God, we put the outcome in your hands.

01:08:26

God, we wanna pray this morning, not only for faithfulness from the people that are listening to the sound of my voice, that they would go and that they would do it, but God, we also wanna pray that you would bless those efforts.

01:08:38

God, that you would call people to repentance, that we would see lives changed because we went and we shared the gospel and faith, that we gave somebody a book or a Bible that we had been encouraged to pass along.

01:08:52

God, that we, in going and serving in whatever way it is that you're encouraging us to do, God, we know that you're the one that's gonna bring that increase, and so we pray that you would work through our efforts that are to come.

01:09:05

God, we thank you for your work in our lives. We thank you for the work that you're going to do in the community and in the world through our efforts. And God, as we go, we pray that we would go, that we would make disciples of all the nations.

01:09:17

God, that we would teach people what it looks like to know you and to follow you and to serve you and to obey you. God, we pray that all of it would be for you, that it would bring you glory, and we pray all of it in Jesus's beautiful name, amen.