

Wisdom In Showing Mercy Part 1 (Ecclesiastes 11)

Episode 1

31:27

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SPEAKERS

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Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece 00:01

Contending for the faith one verse at a time. Thank you for downloading the Truth Matters Church podcast. Our mission is for men and women to encounter God's truth by teaching the Bible one verse at a time. We are committed to truth because truth is what sets you free. For the next few weeks we're highlighting several of pastor Alex Catarroja's, past sermons, and beginning soon pastor Alex will begin a detailed expository study through the book of Romans. You can find out more at truthmatterschurch.org that's truthmatterschurch.org or simply look for us on Facebook. In today's message, which is part one of two pastor Alex begins by recapping the overarching theme of the book of Ecclesiastes. We'll learn about the importance of wisely investing the resources God has given us. Yet the actual biblical application of this wisdom might surprise you. We encourage you to follow along in your Bible in Ecclesiastes chapter 11. Here is Pastor Alex

Pastor Alex Catarroja 01:01

So if you haven't already, if you can take your your Bible or your electronic device and turn with me to Ecclesiastes, Chapter 11. For me in the way I operate, I had to engross myself back in this book. So I had to go over it actually, a couple of times because I want to make sure that my mind is framed by where Solomon is coming from. And there were some there were several overarching themes that came away in you know, in engrossing myself in this book, and allow me to remind them to you and the reason why I'm bringing this to you, it's always good to frame our minds to really what Solomon has to say and not allow our minds to take it somewhere else where God never intended. And here are the overarching themes.

And this is throughout the book, and, you know, it's his vanity of vanities, all is vanity, and my favorite translation of that is "all is a delusion". I like that translation because that really captures the essence of where Solomon is coming from all his delusion, life is a delusion.

And he also says man cannot tell the future again, that's embedded throughout this whole book. And as was mentioned in our communion message today, life is unpredictable. And we're Solomon's coming from, he's saying God made life unpredictable, so that we would fear him and life.

I don't need to really break this to you. But life is upside down. Sometimes right? And the world operates is also upside down and it's full of evil, there's injustices, there's oppression, the wicked prosper, and the righteous are treated as though they were evil. And we're putting when Solomon is also opening up his mouth, he's saying, look, if we really were to take a step back and what is the most that we can get out of life, here's where he comes from. You know, really these are the principles to live a balanced life. He says do not be overly righteous. And he says, don't be overly wise. And also don't be overly wicked and this principle of balance in life, that's the best that we can do with the life that we have. And also the best we can do, if we were to put things in perspective is the best we can do is find enjoyment in our relationships and our labor. And if we do find enjoyment, he even says that too, is a gift of God.

And as we know, Solomon has achieved all life has to offer, he's achieved wisdom, he's achieved power, he's achieved prestige, he has all the wealth. And you see Solomon, he now sees life from a panoramic point of view. And what he sees is he sees that there's really nothing new under the sun. He sees that we pass through life, but life goes on and there is going to be no remembrance of us. Even the legacy that we have, and that we leave that to is temporal, whether our legacy is that of one being wise, or whether that legacy is that of being a fool, there will be no remembrance of us. He sees the sunrises, the sunsets, and he sees the wind continues to blow where it blows. And he says nothing in all creation can fully satisfy the longing of the human soul.

So Solomon, he made it his mission, to explore the meaning of life with the wisdom that was given to him by God. And he experienced all that this life could offer. He's worked hard, he's played, he's had the pleasure. He's had all the possessions, he's had slaves. He's entertained himself and God allowed Solomon to see all the works done under the sun. And this is what Solomon concluded He says all is vanity, and chasing after the wind. And it says if Solomon in his wisdom, it says if he kind of sees us as being a spectacle, mankind as a spectacle, we like beasts who share the same fate. We're trapped in this fallen world where evil and sin is in existence. And men and this is where he gets sad. He's like, you know, really? What's the heart of many, if not all of our pursuits is this is that all of life if you were to really take a step back and reflect upon this, that man is in competition with one another. And this is what Solomon has concluded, and there isn't anything in life that Solomon hasn't observed. There's nothing that he hasn't studied or reflected upon, or he didn't know the answer to. So you heard the phrase "Been there, done that." Well not only could Solomon truly say that, but Solomon can also say "Been there, done that Oh, and I knew that."

Thus if there is a man that we should give our full attention to for advice concerning life, its meaning and its purpose, and how are we to view life, we need to look no further than to Solomon, whom God has given both wisdom and wealth.

And that's what we're going to endeavor to do in our study today. We're going to take a seat at the feet as it were, and to listen to the mouth of Solomon and see what he has in store for us today. And here's

what we're going to find. We're going to find that when we read this verse, on the surface, it seems that he's saying one thing, and an example would be principles in investing, when in fact, he is saying something completely opposite of that. And this is what we're going to find. Solomon is going to tell us that there's great wisdom in showing mercy to one another and that's going to be the theme of this chapter. wisdom in showing mercy.

So without further ado, let's now hear what the preacher has to say in Ecclesiastes chapter 11, and I'll be reading from the New American Standard. Cast your bread on the surface of the waters for you will find it after many days. Divide your portion to seven or even to eight. For you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth. If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north. Wherever the tree falls, realize, he who watches the wind will not so and he who looks at the clouds will not reap just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the world. Have the pregnant woman. So you do not know the activity of God who makes all things. So your seat in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening. For you do not know whether morning or evening sewing will succeed or whether both of them alike will be good, the lightest pleasant and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. Indeed if a man should live many years, let them rejoice in the morn and let them remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility. Rejoice young man during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood and follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. So remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body because childhood and the prime of life is fleeting.

So there's our chapter. This is what we're going to endeavor to ponder upon. So let's relook at verse one one more time. Solomon says there "cast your bread on the surface of the waters you for you will find it after many days." And there are three common interpretations for this verse alone. Let me give you what these three common interpretations are.

One interpretation is that Solomon is promoting overseas trade or commerce. Another common interpretation is Solomon is giving us principles in biblical investing. And there's a third interpretation that says Solomon is speaking of giving generously to the poor.

So which of these three interpretations are correct enough, kind of tip my hand on this, but let's kind of go on that on that on that little excursion there. There's a couple of things on this verse. First of all, that phrase "cast your bread on the surface of the waters," there's actually a similar Egyptian proverb to this effect. And let me read that to you, quote, "do a good deed and throw it in the river. When it dries up, you shall find it." So that was the Egyptian proverb. So something to keep in mind on that. Solomon could be very well paralleling that proverb.

Another thing too, if you do a word search on bread, and, and you know, I know in our communion message Bob, shared with us that you know, bread is the word of God, and that is true, and we are to share the Word of God which is true. Now, as far as here, in this in this passage, and in the Old Testament, if you were to search that word bread, not once has it been synonymous with commerce, not once was bread synonymous with money, nor was bread synonymous with investing. Not once, bread means quite literally bread .

Also, I did a word search on you know, when is the surface in waters when is that used in Scripture and here's the best that I can deduce from that using scripture. "Surface of the waters" is another way to say man on earth. It's another way to say man on earth. So what I want to do to help us understand this verse, is I actually want to read a portion in the Old Testament in First Samuel chapter 25. And here's the setting really quick. So David is fleeing from the hand of Saul. Saul is seeking to kill David, and David is in the wilderness with his men. And while they were in the wilderness, there was this rich man who had many sheep and many cattle, and David's men, did good to them, and in fact, they acted as a protection to those men. So let's go read that. Let's go. Let's go read that passage. It's going to introduce to us an inquiry made by David. And then a response by this rich man named Abel. And we'll see what happens there. So let's read that passage First Samuel 25, we will actually begin in verse two.

Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel (now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite), that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, visit Nabal and greet him in my name; and thus you shall say, 'Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. Now I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days they were in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.'" When David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David's name; then they waited.

Now let's look at Nabal's response, But Nabal answered David's servants and said, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?"

So here let's kind of take a step back. So here's David in the wilderness. He's probably had at least 600 men from what we can tell, and their warriors, their valiant warriors. Here you hear is this rich man with you know, he has his shepherds with them and there's all these sheep and, and goats. Now David's men acted as a protection for that rich man in a sheep that none of them were harmed. Have you ever been somewhere where you're with someone or you're with a group and you feel kind of safe because you just have the company of people? Well, it's kind of in that sense. So in other words, so we're really what we're getting at is David ended up treating these men well, and was good to them. And then now in return, David's saying he's coming in peace. He's saying, hey, in return for the good that I've given you, do you know whatever your hand chooses to give you give to us for when it's a festive day for us? And then Nabal says Who's this David? Who is this guy? And at such a response, right, so David's man comes back and tells him David says to 400 of his men gird up your swords. We're gonna go we're

gonna go kill Nabal, for he repaid evil for good. He goes far be it if he were to live right? By this time tomorrow, something along those lines.

So David is coming with 400 valiant warriors on his way to kill Nabal for such a response and for how he decided to deal with David's goodness to him. Now word gets to Abigail, who was Nabal's wife that he's coming. So she quickly did what Nabal was supposed to do. So she got, she prepared a meal for them. She got bread grain, what have you. So she made this festive provision meal and was I was hurrying up to meet David. So now here we are. I want to read this next verse, verse 25. Where we get Abigail now approaching David on his way to kill Nabal, it says there in verse 25

Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.

So Abigail acted in wisdom, did what Nabal, was the right thing to do for repaying for what David and his men did for him. And David's anger ends up getting subsided. He says, you know, basically bless your heart for acting in wisdom, because there would have been bloodshed and Nabal. He probably would have went further than that would have been wiped out. But I will take your gift. I am not going to kill him. And I'm going to go back home or back to wherever they were camping out. Then what happens later is Nabal ends up hearing what's gonna happen. And he probably got a heart attack or something and he dies suddenly of fear. And then after that, David, being the gentleman he is, took Abigail, to be his wife.

But here in this account, it can be said this, why don't I go through all that this is what this account can be said. Nabal acted in folly by not casting his food upon the waters, that he did not provide any provision to David's men, although even though they were in need, and helped protect Nabal's livestock from thieves and robbers, so now let's go back to verse one. Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.

So here's the Catarroja Amplified translation of this verse: "Cast your food on the poor or needy inhabitants of the earth for in doing so, you will find reward after many days." And to support this translation, Deuteronomy 15, verses seven and eight, "if among you one of your brothers should become poor, if any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God has given you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand and lend him sufficient for his need."

Whatever it may be another cross reference in Matthew five, verse 42. So Jesus is saying here, he says, give to him, who is in need, who asks of you, and do not turn away from him. Again, who is in need? Who wants to borrow from you?

So which interpretation is correct? In verse one is he speaking of promoting overseas trade? I think not. Is it biblical principles and investing? Again, I think not or is it giving generously to the poor.

And I'll admit this, if I didn't engross myself back in this book, I would have found myself where I had a presupposition. And that was he was giving wisdom in biblical investing for that's what's often quoted here, if you go to, you know, any Christian financial service type of firm or company, and they were to give you some scripture verses on investing, this is one of the go to verses and that's what I've been exposed to. And that's what I at least initially came with that preconceived understanding of, but after further examination, it's the third interpretation of giving generously to the poor, who too was created in the image of God. I want to submit to you that that is the correct interpretation.

And here's another verse to support them. And Solomon wrote this there. Proverbs 22:9, He who is generous will be blessed. For he gives some of his food to the poor. And again, another confession when it was it was determined that I'm going to do chapter 1, and I reread it again, I thought it was on biblical principle of in investing. I started to psych my mind up, say, oh, wow, okay, I'm going to come here and kind of give a lecture on biblical principles and investing and how fitting is that because in my regular vocation, I work in the financial services. I've been there for 20 years I've been exposed to this stuff, is that okay? I can kind of tie that in.

So what the scripture is and, and kind of give it to you and, again, to have preconceived understanding when it comes to Scripture is not a good practice. You always want to test especially if I'm representing that what I'm bringing before you as the Word of God, then with great care, I want to be sure that I am actually giving to the Word of God and not the word of man. Amen?

So here's where Solomon's getting at, the phrase: goes around comes around, also known as the golden rule. You know, be good unto others or do unto others as you would have them do to you. And really, that's the overarching theme of where Solomon is getting at here. And I just used a few verses to bring this point.

So in the chapter early are actually a few over a few verses earlier, in Ecclesiastes 10, verse 20, he writes, there he says, "furthermore, in your bed chamber, do not curse a king, and your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known." So here's this principle that what you think in your heart, there's this operating principle that will play and manifest itself out that you know that this quote/unquote "karma", but it's really God's principles at work. So that's the overarching theme here, is that what goes around comes around.

Here's another verse proverbs 12:13 "He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor." So if you were that person, let's say there is a poor, someone needy and you're shutting your ears, he says, you will also cry, right will also cry himself and not be answered. When you are able to, you know, to help someone in need, and you say no, then when your time comes, and you're in need, the operating principle is going to come right back at you.

Let's look at first john chapter three, verse 17. "But whoever has the world's goods," Solomon definitely had his goods, world's goods, "and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him?"

So here's the application. If you have an abundance of riches, Solomon's saying, don't hoard it. He's saying that is foolish, and that's unwise. He says naked you come naked you go. He's saying be willing to share it, especially to those who are in need. And we it's the essence of John the Baptist preaching on repentance. He who has to tunics, when people are asking how do I repent? It's like he who has two tunics, and that's a clothing or a covering, give it to him who does have who doesn't have one. And if you have food to share, he says, share it with those who don't have one, is either saying the same thing here.

So let's look, this actually ties into verse two while we're only in verse two, divide your portion to seven or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth. And again, a common, common interpretation of this verse. It's speaking, you know, many will suggest that this is speaking on principles in investing. And there's this principle of diversification. You might have heard of it this way: Do not put all your eggs in one basket. Actually, Solomon didn't say that. Solomon didn't ever say don't put all your eggs in one basket. Where'd you get that from? But to support that thought they would take this verse and say that's what Solomon is saying.

Again, there's nothing wrong with diversifying investments. In fact, many would consider diversification wise or prudent. But if you were to keep the theme of this book, where Solomon is getting at is again, how do you handle your earthly riches. So here's what I want to leave with you on diversification. If you diversify, praise God, submit it to His will and plan on the outcome of that investment to be used for his purposes and glory. If you don't diversify and God's giving you, you know, something to invest with, and you don't necessarily diversify, praise God, submit it and pray it for His will. And whatever the outcome is of that investment. Be willing, ready to share it for God's use in his purposes, that's wisdom.

So let's look at the phrase divide your portion. And again, this will confirm that he's not talking about investing here, the Hebrew there for divide, it actually means to commit something or to consign, to sign something away. That's what divide means here; doesn't mean just necessarily dividing. It means to, again, commit or consign and then portion, it's also synonymous with an inheritance or a share or a reward. When he says the phrase seven or even to eight, and if you were to look at seven in Scripture seven is a number of completeness, perfect and fully mature. And the fact that he says or even eight, it's more than complete, it is more than enough. So divide in the Hebrew is actually the opposite of investing in waiting for a return. In fact, it's more of giving or signing something away.

So I'd like to also take us to another passage to help us kind of bring home the point that he's not talking about investing here. And this is in Isaiah 58. And here's the setting on this passage. God, through the prophet Isaiah, he's going to be pronouncing judgment upon Israel for their sin, namely, in their observance of fasts. So let's read the seven verses here.

“Cry loudly, do not hold back;
Raise your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins. “Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness, and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God. ‘Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?’ Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, and drive hard

all your workers. "Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing [b]one's head like a reed, and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord? "Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke?"

And here it is what I'm getting at verse seven. Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house when you see the naked to cover him? To hide yourself from your own flesh. So a couple of things we can glean from here. When you see the phrase in verse seven here, divide your bread with the hungry is another way of saying, to give away or to share if you were to have an extra meal provision, that you are to be willing and ready to share with the poor, those in poor or those who are poor, who are need. And there's actually something else we can glean from this passage. And when we think about fast fasting, why do we fast and now there are some health benefits in fasting, and in fact, there's a lot of good information in the health space where when your body goes into a fasting mode and in and you start getting into what's called ketosis. And ketones starts getting released in your body, and one of the benefits of ketosis is it uses fat for fuel and it also gives clarity of mind. Now there are some benefits in fasting, such as to pray so that we have a clear mind and pray.

But what we can also learn from Isaiah 58, is that another reason why to fast? Yes, it's to have a clear mind and to pray. But it's also so that the meal that you would have otherwise had, if necessary, you would have given it to someone else. And that's the heart that God is after.

So here's the truth in wisdom that we can get from verse two. If God has decided to give us riches, just as he decided to give Solomon riches, those riches are not to be used to get richer. And then we hear this from one of the parables of our Lord that there was a rich man whose crops were aplenty. And he said to himself, oh, look at me, I have all this food. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to tear down this barn house, and then I'm going to build a bigger barn house. And then I can have all room for my provisions. And then I'm gonna sit back, retire, and I'm gonna kick up my feet and eat and drink and be merry. And we know the outcome of that parable. God says, You fool. Today, your life is required of you. So Solomon is teaching us not to have riches to get richer. He's saying that if God were So to give you riches and provisions to not hoard it.

Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece 30:31

Thank you for joining us on the Truth Matters Church podcast, please be sure to download part two of this message for the conclusion of pastor Alex's sermon. As we learned today, careful exposition of the Scriptures is necessary to get the true meaning of the text. When we come across the text that's challenging or appears to mean one thing while the majority of Scripture is either silent on or doesn't support that meaning, it's very important to dive deeper and get to the root of what God is conveying. Scripture always validates scripture. It's our responsibility to prayerfully study it to ensure we're interpreting it correctly. Again, please download part two of this message for the conclusion. And if you enjoy today's study, please consider subscribing to this podcast and perhaps sharing it with a friend too. You can connect with us on Facebook at truth matters church or at our website. TruthMattersChurch.org. Contending for the faith one verse at a time. This is Truth Matters Church