

ECCLESIASTES 11 LAWFUL PLEASURES & SERVING OTHERS

The central lesson of the first verse of this chapter is that we ought to act with hopeful but unselfish generosity, and with thoughtful but unanxious beneficence. “Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days.” Some suppose that this is a reference to certain methods of Egyptian farming, in which the seed was sown shortly after the inundation of the Nile River – which would teach us to be assured that the reward of our labor is sure, even though the risk may seem to be very great. However, when the words are taken more literally, the “casting of bread upon the waters” is a proverbial expression for an apparently profitless sacrifice. After all, the Egyptian farmer would not waste seed-corn unless he had a fair prospect of personal advantage. Cast seed on fertile soil, and you may reasonably expect a harvest. But to “cast bread upon the waters” – what good can come of that? And yet there are many acts of beneficence which seem just as unlikely to ever bring any return to the benefactor. We are to be kind to others, even though we can see no grounds for hoping that we shall ever be recompensed by them. There are many cases in which the simple need of another human being ought to be our chief motive in well-doing. We may not be sure that the recipient will even be grateful to us. However, we must still be generous without calculating whether or not we shall profit by it. But we may also comfort ourselves with the thought that no well-doing is really unprofitable in the end. This must not be our motive, but it may be our consolation: “He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.”

Let us do good while we have the ability, and be generous while we have the means; for we can never tell how soon some calamity may rob us of this power of well-doing. There are many persons who are so oppressed with the burden of life’s uncertainties, that they hoard when they ought to be spending; and they are prevented from doing a great deal of good in their day of prosperity, by their anticipations of a possible day of adversity. It is all right to make wise provision for a “rainy day.” But for a person to hoard for a rainy day that may never come to him; and upon this account, to refuse to brighten for others the rainy days that actually *have* already come to them – this is not a wise prudence at all, but the foolishness of selfish and anxious calculation. Let us do good, then, while we can! The present is here, and the future is uncertain. Our present duties are not to be neglected through a fear of future contingencies.

Here, then, amidst the vanity of life, there is one good which the Preacher counsels his readers to pursue. Amidst so much that is unsatisfying in our earth-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *A pressing exhortation to works of charity and benevolence while we have the ability to do so, instead of hoarding up our wealth – verses 1-6*
- ❖ *An invitation to take delight in the joys and blessings which the Lord bestows upon us – verses 7-10*

ly experience, there is one thing which we will never regret – the good which we have done in the world. Too often, we have reason to regret the fact that we have *neglected* an opportunity of well-doing. But to have assisted our fellow-men in their struggles; to have comforted them in their sorrows; to have lifted them up out of their sins; to have done anything for the Kingdom of Christ, and the promotion of righteousness and love on the earth – this must always be a source of satisfaction. The chief good of life can never be found in selfishness. We find our truest and deepest blessedness in a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus, which leads us to serve God and man in the spirit of love. Therefore, “let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not!”

One of the great refrains of this book is the exhortation to a pious and cheerful enjoyment of the simple, ordinary blessings of life; and here we have it once more, in verse 7. Solomon says that people should delight in the sweet sunshine, while God gives it to them. The years of life that may yet lie before us – like the years which have already gone – will fail to satisfy our souls; but this is no reason why we should further darken the present, by turning away from those natural and innocent joys and pleasures with which the Lord seeks to lighten and brighten our existence.

And now, in verses 9 and 10, the royal Preacher turns to address his younger readers in particular. Youth is naturally a season of brightness, but it has its own unsatisfying and transitory elements. But this very transitoriness is a reason why the young should make the most and the best of their youth. We sometimes see young people, under a mistaken ideal of life, indulging a morbid melancholy which robs them of the buoyancy and happiness that is naturally characteristic of youth. It is a great mistake for a person to imagine that a holy life necessarily brings with it a depressing and cheerless outlook. Such persons are here exhorted to throw off gloomy discontentment, and to not be afraid to cheerfully enjoy all lawful, God-given pleasures. It is good and wise to exhort young people to thoughtful piety, and yet care should be taken that the enjoyment of innocent delights is not thrown away. When these things are properly balanced, such counsel to take pleasure in life’s joys will never lead anyone into a life of frivolity or vice. Indeed, a hearty enjoyment of God-given pleasure is rather a moral safeguard! Often, when a young person loses his delight in simple blessings and Godly pleasures, it is then that he devotes himself to sinful and lustful indulgences. But the child who lets his young heart be cheered by happily accepting and enjoying the blessings which the Lord has sent for him to lawfully enjoy – such a youth is likely to find his very cheerfulness helpful in raising him above the world’s temptations to vice, sensuality, and forbidden pleasures!

Lord, we pray for Your grace to be given to our children, so that the prime of their life may be spent in the sweet pleasures of Christ’s joyful service! Amen.

