

Risky Wisdom – Eccles 11:1-10

Introduction – Solomon continues to teach us to apply wisdom with wisdom. Godly wisdom is risky under the sun (remember 10:8-10). The risk and danger of following this wisdom causes us even greater dependence upon the One who controls the wind, who knits the bones of little ones in the womb, and who promised, “*give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom*” (Luke 6:38). This chapter is about the rich, risky, joy-filled, out-of-control wisdom of life in the mist.

Lavish and Risky Generosity (vv1-6) – Despite the inscrutableness of applied wisdom, Solomon encourages risky generosity, promising ultimate fulfillment when his people trust Him and venture to serve others. Far more than doing “random acts of kindness,” we are encouraged to give to others, knowing that our Father sees all that we do (Prov 19:17).

Give Now and Give More (v1-2) – How much should we give? How careful should we be? Solomon exhorts us to “*cast our bread upon the waters...*”, to *serve seven* (a fullness) and then even more (to *eight*). We might say, “be liberal and generous to *as many* as you can and then some.”

What Kind of Generosity? – “*In the morning, sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand*” (v6). With almost an “I dare you” mentality, God instructs us to be generous everywhere and in everything. Full of grace, we bring our tithes and offerings. Turning to those in need, we give up our time, talents, and treasures to help. Our homes were not given to us just *for us*, but to *share* with others (1 Tim 6:17-19). Mothers are generous as they give their days and nights away to their children in innumerable acts of sacrifice. Our commitment to education, our commitment to community, our commitment to outreach, all flow from this command – and the warnings of reality that are included.

You Don’t Know (vv3-6) – Our basis for charity is not simply love, but confidence in God (Phil 4:15-19). The reason we can be extravagant in our generosity is that we are imitating our Triune God, and because He is faithful and abundantly generous. However, the ability to control the outcome of our generosity and the return for our charity is never ours – that rests each and every time in the hand of God. This tempts us time and again to wait too long before we take the risk. Our circumstances never seem secure enough to really be lavish in our giving. But Jesus praised the widow who gave all she had (Luke 21:2). If you look to the wind, or the trees, or the stock market, you will not give yourself away. If you look to Jesus, you will follow Him in giving everything (Luke 9:23-25). Jim Elliot, who gave his life to bring the gospel to a tribal people in Ecuador, said, “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*”

Sow Your Seed – Jesus uses this idea from v6 when He speaks of the work of the kingdom of God (Mark 4:26-28, also 2 Cor 9:6). To summarize: lavish generosity is a mark of the kingdom of God, a people whose lives are filled with great joy and grace, giving themselves away because they have no idea what tomorrow may bring, but who know the faithfulness of the God who holds tomorrow in His hands.

And to the Youth (vv7-10) – All of sudden Solomon turns to the young people in the assembly and they are to realize that he was always addressing them as well. In many respects youthfulness lives out this ability to have a child-like faith. It is easier when you are young to cast your cares to the wind, live dangerously, and enjoy life today. Sometimes this bugs the older folks, but Solomon encourages the gusto of youth – go for it!

Pleasant Life (vv7-8) – The light of day and the vigor of youth is sweet. Enjoy it. You don’t know how long you will have that youthful strength so enjoy it while you can (v8). If we live many years and the Lord grants us to rejoice in them all, then we should.

Rejoice in Your Youth (vv9-10) – There it is again – the command to enjoy. The invitation is to do as your heart desires, to grab what you see with your eyes. And Solomon means it. But he has not abandoned all that he has discovered and taught to this point. To do this while abandoning the community of faith, the ways of the Lord, the vows of your baptism, is to court disaster. Therefore, young man (and lady), you are to pursue the deepest, most adventurous joy within the covenant of grace in fellowship with your Redeemer and His people. Life is to be lived with eternity in view, with the knowledge that God will judge every thought, word and deed. But what is being taught here is that in the midst of covenantal faithfulness there is much joy. Augustine once said something to the effect of “*Love God and do what you want.*” Get the first part right and the world is yours.

Living Young (v10) – Solomon ends teaching those who are young and those who would live with a godly childlikeness what they need to do. We must see the inscrutableness of the world and a God who is completely in control of it all. We must see the vanity-mist of it all and the God who gives enjoyment. And then, like a teenager, we need to go have some fun. We need to go out and waste our time, energy, and money by giving it away to others. We must remove our sorrow (also translated “worry,” “anxiety”), which is the bitterness provoked by a wrong response to the vanity of life. Jesus teaches these same things when he instructs those who appear to have forgotten such youthful, risky wisdom (Matt 6:25-34).