

## The Bonfire of the Vanities "Decision Time" Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

### Introduction

- [Slide #1] Language changes so quickly. Let me introduce you to a few slang words recently introduced to the English language.
- PHONESIA. Phonesia is what happens when you dial a phone number and forget who you call just as they answer.
- How about this one. CARPERPETUATION. The act of running a vacuum cleaner over a string or a piece of lint at least a dozen times, reaching over and picking it up, examining it, then putting it back down to give the vacuum one more chance.
- TELECRASTINATION. If you telecrastinate you always let the phone ring at least twice before you pick it up, even when you're only six inches away.
- FRUST. The small line of debris that refuses to be swept into the dust pan and keeps backing a person across the room until, out of frustration, it's swept under the rug.
- DISCONFECT. A verb. To attempt to sterilize the piece of candy you dropped on the floor by blowing on it, assuming this will somehow remove all the germs. If you've ever done that you've *disconfected* something.
- And my favorite. LACTOMANGULATION. Manhandling the "open here" spout on a milk carton so badly that one has to resort to the 'illegal' side.<sup>1</sup> Use it in a sentence? *After lactomangulating the milk carton, I switched to the other side and cut the top off.*
- Let me expand your vocabulary by one more word this morning. This one's original to me. ECCLESIASTEED. As in *I've been Ecclesiasteed*. If through this study you've come to the realization that there is no meaning to be found in this life apart from the God of the Bible then you've been *Ecclesiasteed*. Life has meaning when you've been *Ecclesiasteed*.
- Too many things in this life lead us away from God down dead end streets toward the experience of meaninglessness, frustration and absurdity. We are blinded by the vanity of our pursuits to the God who made us and loves us and calls us into a relationship with Him. This book hopes to change that. The purpose of this book, what I've called *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, is that by the end of it, every single one of us has been *Ecclesiasteed*; there is nothing left to lean on, nothing left to put our trust in, nothing of value left worth pursuing except the one true living God.

### Transition

Turn to Ecclesiastes 11. Like a spinning top about to come to rest we are almost to the end of this head spinning book. Chapter 11 is the Teacher's final appeal before the conclusion of chapter 12. In chapter 11 the Teacher deals with one final thing that frequently keeps us from a meaningful life with God. Indecision. In **Ecclesiastes 11:1-10** the Teacher urges us, pleads with us, to...[Slide #2]

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com)

## Proposition

- **Take a chance on God and find a life full of meaning**
- This chapter is all about indecisiveness and how that indecisiveness keeps us in the dark and God out of our life. See, it's not enough for the Teacher to show us how this life under the sun is meaningless without God. It's not enough simply to agree with the Teacher that the pursuit of wealth or possessions or pleasure or knowledge or work or sex or whatever are all vanities, meaningless vapors, are things not worth pursuing. Just agreeing with him doesn't change anything.
- A lot of people in this world realize there is a God and that they might need him for something at some time. But that's way different than realizing there is a God, that life without him is meaningless and then decisively choosing to place your trust in this God and his words for how we should then live this life. Big difference. The Teacher wants to see us *Ecclesiastes*. He wants to see the latter.

## Transition

There are in this chapter...

## Organizational Sentence

- **Two reasons why now's the time to decide to follow God**

## Transition

Look at verses 1-6 of chapter 11. Reason #1? [Slide #3] **You will never have life or God figured out.**

## Main Points

- Listen. *Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. 2 Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. 3 If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. 4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. 5 As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. 6 Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.*
- First off, notice how many times the Teacher repeats the phrase *you do not know* in this section. Three times. Look at the text. **Verse 2**, *you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.* **Verse 5**, *as you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb.* **Verse 6**, *for you do not know which will succeed.*
- Even **verse 3**. Look at verse 3. *Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie.* "The point is not that the tree could not be moved, but that its fall could not have been anticipated."<sup>2</sup> Life is uncertain.
- If we've learned anything from this jaunt through Ecclesiastes we've learned what the Teacher says right here. Life is full of uncertainty. Nobody knows what will happen today,

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<sup>2</sup> Eaton, p. 141.

tomorrow, the next day. We have no clue why certain things happen, why things don't happen.

- Even more frustrating is the fact that, try as we might, we often times have no clue how God works in this world or even in our lives. **Verse 5**, *so you cannot understand the work of God*. As hard as we try, **we will never have life or God figured out**.
- The uncertainties about this life, about how God works in this world, these things are incredibly strong reasons for coming to faith now—today. To wait and put off coming to faith in God until you have life figured out, or have God figured out is to wait too long. You will never have things figured out exactly the way you want. You will never have all your questions answered, all the i's dotted and t's crossed. Deciding to follow God and put your faith in Christ is not like reading *Consumer Reports* about which microwave to buy. Believing requires faith and courage and trust. There is an element of mystery to it. Or as **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** put it, “A god who let's us prove his existence would be an idol.”
- The Teacher knows this. Which is why he says in **verse 1** to *cast your bread upon the waters*. In spite of these uncertainties or these mysteries about life and about God, take the plunge anyway. Go for it. *Cast your bread upon the waters*. This is a call for urgency and action. And this call is reinforced by an appeal to the unreliability of life.<sup>3</sup> Do something now. Quickly. Today. Because life is uncertain. **Take a chance on God and find a life full of meaning**.
- Let me say an additional word about verse 1. There are some questions about what the Teacher is referring to here. I like how the ESV Study Bible note on **verse 1** summarizes the questions about this verse. Listen to what it says. “To cast bread upon the waters is a metaphor without any contemporary parallels, so interpreters are uncertain about its meaning. Three suggestions are most common: 1) It refers to maritime commerce 2) It refers to taking steps to spread out one’s financial resources in multiple directions. 3) In older Jewish and Christian interpretation, it was taken to refer to giving to the poor.”
- Personally, I'm in favor of option number two, maritime commerce, with one difference. What the Teacher is trying to communicate here is more than just practical advice regarding adventuresome entrepreneurial business practices. Think big picture. Think whole book of Ecclesiastes. Think about where we are at within this book.
- What the Teacher seems to be saying is that in the same way the shipping business in the ancient world was a venture of trust, choosing to believe in God as the source of meaning in this life under the sun is a similar venture of trust.<sup>4</sup> The thing you've gotta do in either situation is go for it. *Cast your bread upon the waters*. Take that step of faith. Don't wait around. Don't put off God. Life is uncertain, yes. God's ways are inscrutable, yes. So just go for it. And know this. Even though we often times can't understand God or discern his workings, God made you. He's the Maker of all things as **verse 5** says. He made you and loves you and through the Teacher his invitation to you is to **take a chance on him and find a life full of meaning and purpose and fulfillment**.
- See, what happens too frequently is what **verse 4** describes. Look at verse 4. *Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap*. We never get

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<sup>3</sup> Eaton, p. 140.

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around to taking a chance on God. Even though we know what we need to do, that it's the right thing to do, we end up piddling our life away trying to read the skies, trying to figure things out, waiting for the perfect time to believe in God. And we never actually get around to believing. *Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.* The perfect time to come to God is not when conditions are perfect. They're never perfect. The perfect time to come to God is now.

- Author and theologian [R.C. Sproul](#), in an interview with *Christianity Today* tells about how he came to faith in Christ. In his own words...
- “I had actually gone to a church-related college, but I went on a football scholarship, not because of any interest in the church. At the end my first week, which was spent in freshman orientation, my roommate and I decided to hit some of the bars across the border. We get to the parking lot, and I realized that I was out of cigarettes. So I went back in the dorm and went to the cigarette machine. I got my Luckys and turned around and saw the captain of the football team sitting at a table. He spoke to me and my roommate and invited us to come over and chat, and we did. This was the first person I ever met in my life that talked about Christ as a reality. I'd never heard anything like it. I was just absorbed, sat there for two or three hours....
- He didn't give a traditional evangelism talk to me; he just kept talking to me about the wisdom of the word of God. He quoted Ecclesiastes 11:3: ‘Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie.’ I just feel certain I'm the only person in church history that was converted by that verse. God just took that verse and struck my soul with it. I saw myself as a log that was rotting in the woods. And I was going nowhere. When I left that guy's table, I went up to my room. And in my room by myself, in the dark, I got on my knees and cried out to God to forgive me.”<sup>5</sup>
- What are you waiting for? God made you. He loves you. And he is calling you into a relationship with Him through Christ. Today's the day. *For God says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*<sup>6</sup>

### Transition

Look at verses 7-10 and the [second reason](#) why now's the time to decide to follow God. [[Slide #4](#)] **God will hold us accountable for where we choose to find meaning**; whether that be in him through Christ or through some other thing in this life under the sun.

- Listen. *Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. 8 However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. 9 Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. 10 So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.*
- Sweet is the light, [verse 7](#), is a metaphor for life itself. Life, while we are alive, is meant to be sweet and pleasing. God wants us to enjoy all the days of our life. *Let him enjoy them all.*

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<sup>5</sup> Dick Staub, “R. C. Sproul's Testimony,” *ChristianityToday.com*, 12-30-02.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:2

But he also wants us to remember something. Look at [verse 8](#). *But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many.* Remember this. Death looms. Not once. But repeatedly. We will constantly, repeatedly be confronted with our own mortality. And our mortality will serve as a reminder of something. What's the reminder? That *everything to come is meaningless*. In other words, death reminds us that meaning is not to be found in this life under the sun. All experiences of this life meaningless in that sense. All we experience in this life is a vanity, a breath, a mist, a vapor that doesn't last.

- So what are we to do? How are we to live? Look at [verse 9](#). *Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.* We are to enjoy life. We are to suck the marrow out of life and get as much enjoyment out of it as we can. But we are to do so with one major proviso. **God will hold us accountable for where we choose to find meaning.** Again, look at the text. [Verse 9](#). *But know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.* In the New Testament [Romans 14:10](#) reminds us of this same truth, *for we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*
- We are meant to enjoy life but we are to find meaning and purpose and fulfillment in one place and one place only. God. And nowhere else. God tolerates no rivals. And he deserves nothing less than our absolute devotion, whole hearted commitment, total worship. **God will hold us accountable for where we choose to find meaning in this life.** Which, by the way, is why the Teacher so urgently calls for this decisive step of faith.
- See, it's not enough for the Teacher to show us how this life under the sun is meaningless without God. And it's not enough, on your part, to simply agree with what I'm saying to you right now. God doesn't want your agreement. He wants you. Just agreeing with him doesn't change anything about you. He made you. And because he made you, as [verse 5](#) says, he has a right to say something about how you live your life, he has a right to hold you accountable for where you choose to find meaning in this life, [verse 9](#).
- You weren't created to find meaning and purpose and fulfillment in any place except in relationship with Him. Doing so is a violation of our humanity in the deepest sense of the word. And by his grace, through the Teacher's words, God is trying to spare you from the dehumanizing effects, the meaninglessness of living for yourself and apart from him.

## Conclusion

- An [AP](#) news item out of Madeira Beach, Florida this past week reported the story of a commercial fisherman who reeled in a missile in the Gulf of Mexico and kept it on his boat for 10 days. Police said the boat's captain, [Rodney Soloman](#), hooked the air-to-air guided missile 50 miles off the coast of Panama City, an area the Air Force and Navy use for weapons training.
- Apparently Soloman had the missile aboard his boat for 10 days before returning Monday to port in Madeira Beach, near St. Petersburg. A bomb squad from MacDill Air Force Base was called in and dismantled the missile in an empty parking lot.

- Lieutenant Colonel Tadd Sholtis, in a prepared statement, tried to clarify to the press that the missile "had an inert, non-explosive telemetry warhead that was never in any real danger of exploding."<sup>7</sup>
- I don't know about you, but if that's me, if I'm the captain of that boat, I'm not waiting ten days to find that out. Are you?
- As captain of your own ship how long are you going to chance lugging around this much worse danger called *Meaninglessness*, a life without God? The danger of indecision is real. Come to faith now. Today.

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<sup>7</sup> © The Associated Press, "Catch of the day: Fla. angler hooks missile", June 9, 2009.