

Hoist Your Sails

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Preacher: Dr. Daniel Heeringa

[0 : 00] I don't want to let you off easy. I want to begin this year with a challenge. Honestly, the very passage that I speak from today is a challenge in itself.

It's one that many have had a hard time understanding, but it also is one that throws the challenge out to us.

It's found in the book of Ecclesiastes, a challenge in itself. Ecclesiastes is an autobiographical book of advice from a man who experienced about all that you can and learned from it and talked about as an old man, wrote Ecclesiastes and talked about his exploits theologically.

And as we look at chapter 11, he begins his summation. Of what he's experienced in his life at the end of this book. And I believe there's value here as we stand here today on the first day of 2023. It's in Ecclesiastes chapter 11, beginning in verse 1. And it says, Cast your bread upon the water, for you will find it after many days.

[1 : 21] 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 the tree falls, there it will lie.

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

In the morning sow your seed, in an evening withhold your hand, for you do not know which will prosper this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

There are some things that just make sense in life. When clouds fill up, it's going to rain.

And when a tree falls on its own, it's going to lay there unless you move it. And if you get too worried about those things, you will become unproductive.

[2 : 31] Instead, you watch. And be wise. The way to sow in biblical days was a sling of a seed.

You don't sling seed on particular windy days. Because if you do, the seed won't fall where you want it to. And it may fall on a path where it don't work.

And Jesus spoke a whole parable about where the seed falls. And you don't go to the field to harvest if you know that you're going to get bogged down in the mud from the coming rain.

You use wisdom in those things. But you can't get caught in the paralysis of analysis. Because if you're not careful, you won't do anything.

If you wait on a perfect moment, it will never get done. You can't overthink.

[3 : 33] Because if you do, nothing will be done. Before we moved here, we lived on about a third of an acre on a little cul-de-sac. And when I moved there, we had 33 tall pine trees on that little lot.

Most of those trees were over 100 feet tall. A couple of them over 160 feet tall. And even if I were a skinnier man, two of me couldn't reach around the trunk of two of those trees.

Storms came through that area and they got our attention. So what do you do? You panic? No.

The bad news is that big storms take down big trees. And the good news is for trees to be that big, they've withstood a lot of storms.

So, we serve a big God. And we trust Him. And we cut trees as often as we possibly could. And the only tree that ever hit our house was one that was being done by a good Samaritan helping me out to make sure a tree didn't fall on my house.

[4 : 51] And that's the one that fell on the house. God worked those things out as well. That's the things that verse 3 and verse 4 talk about in this passage.

And then I want you to notice verse 5. verse 5. Which says, As you do not know the way the Spirit comes to the bones of the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

We know a lot more about the womb now than they did then, yet even with all that knowledge, the world is dying for the opportunity to kill a baby in a womb. Kind of fascinating.

Talk about people's rights. What about the rights of an unborn child? Has anybody ever thought about that? Solomon in all his wisdom when he wrote this did not have an ultrasound to see a child. Did not know all that we do about that process, yet even with all of our knowledge we still cannot grasp how God puts a soul into a child in the womb.

[5 : 56] It's amazing. Because God's amazing. He works in amazing ways. And that's what verse 5 is talking about. But all of that is just a follow-up to this beginning verse in Ecclesiastes 11.1 which can be a very confusing verse.

Cast your bread upon the waters. I'm just going to tell you if you try that it's not going to work. You're going to get soggy bread. Every time I read this passage I think about a very sweet man that my grandmother married in her latter years.

I don't know what that man had done in life to deserve my grandmother but he got her. They lived outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan and so we did not see them very much but when we did Nick wanted to make the most of it.

he had one of those Volkswagens that had been converted into a dune buggy and I was learning to drive and he wanted me to drive it. He's that kind of guy you know and so I got in that dune buggy and he put on his derby and I was riding down the road on that dune buggy and gas was dripping on my foot as I drove and I said this leaking gas he said go a little faster then.

So he just he was just that kind of guy you know he wanted it to be an experience and I think my grandmother thought it's best for children not to be seen or heard but not Nick.

[7 : 33] He wanted a fun experience and one of those experiences that he wanted was to go feed the ducks. He woke up one morning and said we need to go feed the ducks we got to go feed the ducks kept talking about feeding the ducks till finally we all jumped in I think the LTD the 76 LTD and took off to go buy supplies to feed the ducks we bought generic saltine crackers a sin against God only premium and and and and and Cheeto puffs of course not Cheetos cheese puffs you know and I mean we didn't buy a few of them we bought a bunch of them I would say we filled up the trunk of that LTD but you could lay several bodies in the trunk of an LTD so I I don't know about that but we had a bunch of stuff and we went to this little park in town and it had a little lake out there and ducks out there and we broke out the crackers and broke out the cheese puffs and started feeding the ducks and found out soon that ducks love saltine crackers and man they'll eat them up they don't like cheese puffs and at least for a good time cheese puffs float and we had huge not family but party sized bags of generic cheese puffs probably it's not set to expire until today even though this has been more than two decades ago and and we we threw those out and there were cheese puffs floating all over that lake families with their small children walking around strolling their children and wondering what are these orange aliens on the water what has happened and finally when we realized we were out of crackers and out of cheese puffs because we didn't let up we were kids man we just sheepishly got in the LTD and left you know for the cheese puffs

I feel sure that we left our carbon footprint that day so when I read this passage about cast your bread upon the water that's what I think about but that's not really what it's talking about it's often debated exactly what it's talking about and many times people talk about it meaning trade on the seas maritime trade was a a very risky matter in biblical days I mean there'd be ships that would leave and you just wouldn't see them again nobody really knew ever knew what happened to them they didn't have the coast guard to go search them down you know it was a very risky deal and to put all your grain on a boat and ship it out you know it's a good way to make money or to barter for something else but it was of high risk Solomon as a businessman could have been speaking of that so it could be saying to make a profit take a risk put it out and see it come back to you the problem is if you send out grain you don't want grain to come back to you that's what you were sending out you want something else to come back to you whatever you bartered for whatever you traded for when I look at this passage

I tend to think that it's something else some believe that it speaks of giving generously that what comes around goes around and you give to others and it'll come back to you as a matter of fact verse 2 even points to diversifying dividing portions and giving and just watch what comes back to you as you give I'd love to begin the year talking about that very thing but I really don't believe that's what this passage particularly is talking about I actually agree with the scholars that believe that this

is kind of a both and kind of passage that the point of it is more about risk than it is about how to trade and barter or than it is about how to give and that is cast it out throw it out there take a risk as Peter saw walk on the water venture out whatever it is that God would have you to do throw it out there do it now I must be honest

I don't have a clue what 2023 holds I'm excited about it I look forward to it but I don't have a clue I preached on the first Sunday of 2020 and preached a sermon that a lot of other preachers preach not the same sermon but the same title and that is Vision 2020 and we love the idea that 2020 was perfect vision or good vision or whatever and that it was we ought to have that kind of vision for what God would have us to do in the days ahead we had such a clear vision and we cut a ribbon on a new building two months later and ready to launch new ministries and three weeks after we did that we locked that building up and did everything online for several weeks due to COVID the brand new building wasn't even utilized until for much of that year because of COVID circumstances preaching on Vision 2020 and none of us had a vision for that nobody predicted that we had no clue what was coming in those days our world changed

I said at the time I felt like that it was as big as 9-11 now I say I believe it's a whole lot bigger at least spiritually the tentacles are still floating dangerously in the water from COVID and I don't know what 2023 holds but I know who holds 2023 and I challenge you to trust him I challenge you to serve him and to love him and to share him and commit yourself to him like you never have before and that is a pertinent matter in the day in which we live because something happened to commitment when COVID happened something changed in people and it was happening before COVID but it just got fast forward and made so much worse due to COVID people have become half committed to the Lord's work in the church compared to what they did before things have changed in that way every Sunday attendance for too often has turned into every other Sunday and every month has turned into once a quarter and those quarter comers have turned into

[14:45] Christers that's Christmas and Easter but let me ask you something what in the world should we be more committed to than Jesus Christ I mean who has done more for us than Christ has he is committed enough to us to die for us and to provide a way of salvation he spent the bulk of his earthly ministry training 12 men to found and establish the church to carry on his work in the world when he ascended into heaven for those who place Christ first in their life what is most important to you by your commitment to follow Christ you've said it is what's most important what is most important to give to what is most important to talk about if you're a child of God today who has had the biggest impact on your life not only now but for all eternity some of y'all may remember the old license tag that said let me tell you about my grandchildren

I saw a car the other day that was as old as that tag and I was thinking man just keep driving that was kind of another way of saying you better avoid me because I'm going to hold you up I think people actually put that that license tag on the front of their car to keep people away from them to leave them alone because people love to talk about their grandkids they love to talk about their grandkids grandkids are God's reward for you for not killing the kids you know they love to talk about their grandkids and they love to talk about their favorite sports teams and they love to talk about sometimes and they love to talk about their pets and they love to talk about their kids when they're young they grow strangely quiet when they're teenagers but anyway but let's begin 2023 talking about what is most important to us because nothing has made an eternal impact on us more than Christ and eternal is pretty big and I want you to understand when I say eternal

I'm not talking about just a quantity of life I'm talking about a quality of life Jesus said the thief comes but for to steal kill and destroy but I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly and he wasn't talking about just longer he was talking about better so I ask you today on this first day of a new year has there ever been a time in your life when you've acknowledged the sin and the wrong in your life and ask the Lord Jesus to forgive you to change you to save you if that's never happened to you there is not a better way to begin a new year by surrendering your life to Christ today Lord I know I'm not who I need to be

Lord I'll never be who I need to be outside of you God will you forgive me cleanse me save me and change me on the authority of scripture if you'll surrender your life to Christ today he'll save you it's not his will that any should perish but that all come to Christ what a great opportunity you have to begin the year committing your life to Christ if you've done that have you ever obeyed him by showing others through baptism what Christ has done to you inside baptism is just a physical picture of what God does on the inside when he cleanses us and changes us from the old self that

we are cleansed and made new again the old is gone the new has come so we're a new creation in Christ and baptism celebrates that it's a wonderful way of not only that first step of obedience when you come into a relationship with Christ man what a testimony it is to be a part of that we baptized four last week and I will tell you the fruit of that will come evident in the days ahead we even saw the morning they come that by two coming another came it comes it happens that way when we obey God when we just step out on the water and do what God tells us to do just cast it out just obey just trust verse six of Ecclesiastes 11 says in the morning in the evening withhold not your hand for you don't know which will prosper this or that whether both alike will be good in other words cast your bread upon the water throw it out there take a risk for the Lord he will help you and he will guide you I don't know what God's got in store for 2023 my question this morning and my challenge for you and for me as well is will we take a risk for the Lord will we simply obey him when he speaks to us will we commit our lives to follow him in whatever he'd have us to do an old preacher was preparing for a sermon and needed a good illustration for a sermon that he was entitling the wind blows where it wills he was a [21 : 24] Scottish pastor so he went down to St. Andrews and found a seasoned salt sailor mending his sails on a ship and he said oh sailor you sail the seven seas I want you to tell me how the wind blows and the old sailor said I don't know how the wind blows but you sail the seven seas old sailor you've seen it all just tell me how does the wind blow I don't know how the wind blows he was a desperate preacher on a Friday afternoon then tell me something and the old sailor looked at him and said I'll tell you what I do know and that is when the wind blows I have to hoist my sails I don't know how the winds of the Holy Spirit will move and work in our midst in 2023 I am excited about what I sense but whatever it is let's hoist our sails let's get ready to let God blow us anywhere and everywhere he would have us to go to cast it out to lay it out before him to commit our lives to follow him and watch him work and move in our midst what are you willing to do in 2023 because the winds of the Spirit of God are going to blow so I say we hoist our sails I say we sell strong for the Lord with every head bowed and every eye closed I want to ask you this morning what is it that God is speaking to you about what do you feel probing you in your heart could it be a personal relationship with Christ that opportunity that I spoke of of surrendering your life to Christ maybe it's making that private decision that you've already made public or maybe God's drawing you to be a part of this church you know this is where God would have you to join us along our journey I encourage you to simply be obedient about that more than available to talk to you about that in the coming days but if God's leading you today I encourage you come maybe it's just an individual thing for the most part that's what it'll be it'll be God speaking to you in your life about what he would have for you in 2023 and not so much a clear vision of all that's going to happen in this year because we're not going to get that we don't know that but the question is is our heart ready for whatever God would have for us are we ready to cast it out are we ready to take a risk are we ready to trust him to sense the power of the spirit of God blowing in our midst and to hoist our sails and go with what God would have that is my prayer and if there's a hindrance in your life today in that then get it right whether it's where you are at this altar or with a pastor praying for you get it right let's go into 2023 clean and ready for God to do a wonderful move in our individual lives and in the life of this church heavenly father thank you for your word and your wisdom I ask God that you'll help us to be diligent to follow your will and your way in whatever you would have for us to do God in Jesus precious name amen so you together assistance