

Balanced Watchfulness  
Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

Richard Tow 7/19/15

We will begin this morning by reading 1 Thess. 5:1-6

*“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.”*<sup>1</sup>

The Amplified translates verse 6, “Accordingly then, let us not sleep, as the rest do, but let us keep wide awake (alert, watchful, cautious, and on our guard) and let us be sober (calm, collected, and circumspect.”

Paul is speaking to Christians who are concerned about the times in which they live. “*But concerning the times and the seasons...*” This is the subject of the passage. Paul uses two Greek words for time in verse one. First the Greek word, *chronos*, is translated “times.” That is like time on the calendar. We get words like *chronical* and *chronological* from that Greek word. It is time like we measure in minutes, hours, days, months, years, etc. When we talk about time in English, the concept in our mind is *chronos*. The other Greek word here is *kairos*, translated “seasons.” *Kairos* conceptualizes time in terms of quality rather than quantity. It refers to the kind of times we live in. A summer season is a different kind of time than a winter season. *Kairos* refers more to the suitability or opportunity inherent in the season.<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. 3:1 talks about “*perilous times*” (*kairos*). So these people were living in a certain kind of time—both the *chronos* and the *kairos* in which they lived, told them something about the prophetic calendar. You and I live in a certain kind of time that alerts us to where we are in God’s agenda.

Paul reminds them of how the end will come.

First, it will come “*as a thief in the night.*” The labor pains will hit unexpectedly, as far as the world is concerned. They will have their peace agreements. They will think they have everything under control. They will be talking “*Peace and safety! Then sudden destruction comes upon them.*” That’s the way it will happen for the world-- because they are children of darkness--they are blinded by Satan, the god of this world.<sup>3</sup>

Paul does make a contrast here between the way the Day of the Lord happens for Christians versus the way it happens for unbelievers. The ungodly are living in darkness. They don’t have a clue. The Coming of the Lord takes them completely by surprise. But God’s people are not in darkness. We are *sons of light and sons of the day*. We do not know the day nor the hour of the Lord’s return. But we can discern the (*kairos*) season that we’re in. We can look at the fig tree (Israel) and get some idea of what is shaping up. Jesus talks about this in Matt 24:36-44

*“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before*

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, 9<sup>th</sup> printing*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) p. 149-150.

<sup>3</sup> Col.1:13; Acts 26:18; 2Cor. 4:3-4; Rev. 12:9.

*the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour (hemera)—literally time span between dawn and dark)<sup>4</sup> your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

The one thing Jesus tells us to do is to “watch” and stay “ready.” Back in 1 Thes. 5:6, Paul says the same thing. We are to stay *sober* (not drunk with the cares of life or the pleasures of this world) and to “watch” (Be alert to the “*times and seasons*” in which we live).<sup>5</sup>

That’s what I’ve been trying to do. It’s alarming to just see what has happened in the last month. Israel is very concerned about the nuclear peace agreement being made with Iran.<sup>6</sup> The Supreme Court decision June 26<sup>th</sup> on Same-Sex marriage was a step into a moral abyss. There is a lot going on that we need to be aware of and then take wise action accordingly. We now have over 18 trillion dollars debt in America.<sup>7</sup> Social Security and Medicare liabilities are grossly underfunded<sup>8</sup>, and many state and local governments are in trouble.<sup>9</sup> Financially we are in much deeper water than people realize. Greece is supposed to reopen its banks on Monday. China has pulled every trick imaginable to prop up their markets.<sup>10</sup> Spiritually we have crossed a line. Financially we have crossed a line. It is hard to imagine anything but major problems ahead.

So Jesus tells us to watch. Paul tells us to watch. Solomon tells us to watch. Proverb 27:12 “A *prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; The simple pass on and are punished.*” Noah did that in his day. Joseph did that in his day.<sup>11</sup> I want to be both watchful and prudent in my own life.

With all that in mind, Jeanie and I were in prayer Wednesday morning and God gave us a word that helps put all that in balance. He spoke to us from Eccl 11:1-6

*“Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days. 2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth. 3 If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. 4 He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the*

<sup>4</sup> NT:2250 (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

<sup>5</sup> Jesus said in Matt. 26:41 “Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation....”

<sup>6</sup> Brett Logiurato and Associated Press, July 5, 2015 “Netanyahu unloads: the Iran deal is worse than North Korea,” <http://www.businessinsider.com/netanyahu-iran-deal-north-korea-2015-7> accessed 7-18-15.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Chantrill, compiler, “Debt Clock,” <http://www.usgovernmentdebt.us/> accessed 7/18/15.

<sup>8</sup> Ira L. Marks, “Opinion: underfunded Social Security, Medicare programs destined for insolvency,” Feb. 19, 2014, [http://www.nj.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/02/opinion\\_underfunded\\_social\\_security\\_medicare\\_programs\\_destined\\_f\\_or\\_insolvency.html](http://www.nj.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/02/opinion_underfunded_social_security_medicare_programs_destined_f_or_insolvency.html) accessed 7/18/15.

<sup>9</sup> Michelle Fox, “Detroit not alone, expect more bankrupt cities: expert,” CNBC May 22, 2014, <http://www.cnbc.com/2014/05/22/expect-more-city-bankruptcies-detroit-bankruptcy-advisor.html> accessed 7/18/15. Also Anita Balakrishnan, “States face shaky financial futures; pensions at risk,” USA TODAY July 7, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2015/07/06/state-fiscal-health-pension-funds-report/29763379/> accessed 7/18/15.

<sup>10</sup> Jesse Colombo, “Is China’s stock market crash over?” Forbes July 19, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jessecolombo/2015/07/19/is-chinas-stock-market-crash-over/> accessed 7/19/15.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 7:1; 41.

clouds will not reap. 5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything. 6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.”

Four times in that brief passage God says to us, “...you do not know.”

2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.  
5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.  
6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand;  
For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.”

We can see the events as they take shape in the world and more specifically in America. We can understand some of the perils that may be ahead for this nation. And we should be alert to those things. And we should be prudent about our personal affairs.

However, we should not be fearful; for God has not given us the spirit of fear.<sup>12</sup> We should not be anxious about the future.<sup>13</sup> We should not be paralyzed by indecision. Everything I have shared with you thus far is the truth as I see it. However, the revelation we have in Eccl. 11 is also truth. It is truth that helps us maintain a proper orientation and balance in the days ahead. Let’s look a little closer at this passage.

Verses 1-2 “Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days.

2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.”

“For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.” The Hebrew word translated “evil” is *ra`*. It can be translated adversity, affliction, calamity, distress, evil, mischief, sorrow, trouble, etc.<sup>14</sup> The point Solomon is making here is: “you do not know.” There may be a lot of things you know. 1Cor. 13:9 says “For we know in part and we prophesy in part.” We may get glimpses of what is ahead. But there are always plenty of things we don’t know.

“Without faith it is impossible to please God.” “The just shall live by faith.”<sup>15</sup> God has designed life in such a way that it calls for a large amount of trust in Him. He purposely does not tell us everything that is ahead.<sup>16</sup> He has designed your life and my life so that we live in dependence upon Him day by day, every day!

God gave me Eccl. 11 while I was praying and asking Him to fill me in on what’s ahead so that I could make some good personal, prudent decisions. And His answer to that request was yes and no. Yes, I will give you some insights that you need. No, I won’t give you the whole picture because you will take and run with it and make a big mess out of the whole thing!

When I look at our situation in America, I am tempted to pull the covers up over my head and hunker down. Anybody know what I’m talking about? Again, there is some prudence to be exercised. But Eccl. 11 is telling me to go ahead and live life—even though all my plans may not work out just like I

<sup>12</sup> 2 Tim. 1:7.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 6:24-34; Phil. 4:6.

<sup>14</sup> OT 7451(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

<sup>15</sup> Heb. 10:38-39; 11:6.

<sup>16</sup> Deut. 29:29

would want them to. Eccl. 11 is reminding me that God has designed life to have a certain element of uncertainty and adventure in it.

So the exhortation in verses 1-2 is this: Take a risk on being generous. You might stretch the passage a bit and apply it to investments; but that is not the primary message.<sup>17</sup> A good commentary on Eccl. 11:1-2 can be found in the words of Jesus in Luke 6:38 *“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”* I am very aware that the current wisdom is to hoard it so you’ll have enough for yourselves in the days ahead. The wisdom of Eccl. 11 is just the opposite. Put bread out there for those who are in need and it will come back to you when you need it. That can be a scary process because we are no longer in control of the resource. We have to trust God to make it work. Verse two takes the command a step further. Don’t just give portions to two or three, be extremely generous and *“Give a serving to seven, and also to eight ....”*

In one sense, the logic doesn’t seem right. I don’t know what adversities, calamities, or troubles may lay ahead. So wouldn’t that be a good argument to hoard it, keep it for myself; since I don’t know what’s coming, I can’t be sure that I’m not going to need it. Sometimes Kingdom logic is a little different than what we might think.<sup>18</sup> Since you don’t know what’s ahead, you need to be generous to those in need so God can be generous to you in your hour of need. Prov 11:24-26 *“There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty. 25 The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself. 26 The people will curse him who withholds grain, But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.”*

I don’t think the generosity being called for in any of these passages is limited to money. *“And he who waters will also be watered himself.”* In a broader sense, it is about giving yourself away. *“Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days.”* That includes sharing the gospel with others. I remember a lady I worked with years ago named Norma. I talked with Norma about giving her life to the Lord. She was nice about it; but her answer was no. A few years after I left that place of employment a mutual friend sought me out and said that Norma wanted to see me. At that time I had planted a church, had a lot going on, so I sent someone to check on Norma. The person came back and said, “Look, Norma wants to talk with you. She is in Northwest Texas Hospital. You need to go see her.” When I got to the hospital, I was surprised to find that Norma was dying. She only had days to live. Of course, I really felt bad that I hadn’t gone earlier; but there I was. I asked Norma if she would like me to pray for her. She reminded me of the talks we had about the Lord when we worked together and wanted to give her heart to the Lord today. We prayed together and Norma received Christ that day! Put your bread (put the word of Life) out there because God’s word will not return void. Who knows what God will do with it? You do not know—you don’t know how and you don’t know when, but that bread may come back some day.

Vs 3 *If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.”* There are quite simply a whole lot of things you and I cannot control. Nature is at work all around you. Trees fall in the direction they fall, and by the nature of things they will lay where they fall. If clouds are full of rain,

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<sup>17</sup> C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (NY: Doubleday, 1997) p. 335. While the general message of Eccl. 11:1-6 is an encouragement toward investment, Seow rightly points out the Hebrew text in Eccl. 11:1 “does not mean that one should send merchandise abroad, as it has been commonly suggested.”

<sup>18</sup> Isa. 55:8-9; Prov. 3:5-6.

they will empty themselves upon the earth. The problem is we cannot always predict exactly when and where that will happen.

Vs 4 *“He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap.”* If you are waiting for the perfect time to sow—watching the wind to make sure everything is just right, you’re never going to reap because you will never sow. And you will never sow because life is never perfect. If you let the winds of adversity stop you, you will be stopped.<sup>19</sup> If the farmer gets up during the sowing season and says to himself, “No, it’s just too windy out there, too much seed will be lost. I think I’ll hold off.” Then the next day, “Well, it looks like a storm is blowing in and I don’t want to get caught out there in the storm.” The day after the rain, “Well it’s too muddy now.” No, you get up saying, “Come hail or high water, I’m plowing that field!” There is always an excuse to not move forward.<sup>20</sup> In the parable of the feast, everybody had an excuse. They were good excuses too.<sup>21</sup> Problem is it’s hard for a farmer to reap a harvest from good excuses. He needs seed in the ground, not excuses.

5 *As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.*

6 *In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.”*

We do not know for sure whether an endeavor will be successful or not. There are too many factors beyond our control to guarantee the end result. Sow the seed anyhow. The rains may not come, and the harvest may fail. Sow the seed anyhow. The crop may be attacked by disease or pestilence. Sow the seed anyhow. What if I work the field and incremental whether keeps me from bringing in the harvest? Sow the seed anyhow. No human being knows for sure that the rains will come or whether they’re going to come at the right time or the wrong time. But one thing is for sure. No seed in the ground means no harvest!

There is a boat load of uncertainty in life. You can analyze it to death if you’re not careful. But life is not designed to be analyzed. It is designed to be lived. It is designed with uncertainty so that you will pray *“Give us this day or daily bread”* instead of *“Send a ten year supply and when we run out, we’re get back with You, God.”*

There is a balance between, on the one hand, discerning possible troubles ahead and exercising due diligence of preparing for it and, on the other hand, living largely in the present. A couple of times I watched a TV program called “Doomsday Preppers.” It was about people who are preparing for various calamities in the days ahead. Some were fairly reasonable about it; but some were absolutely consumed with the preparations for what might or might not be. Those people were living nonproductive lives in the present, because everything was invested in the possibility of a future event. The crazy thing was that most were only preparing for one or two things. But *“you do not know.”* How well does it work for me if I spend all my time and money preparing for famine and global warming, but instead I get hit with a nuclear bomb? The best preparation for what lies ahead is a close relationship with the One who holds the future. *“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God”* (Ps 20:7). *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths”* (Prov 3:5-6).

<sup>19</sup> Prov. 22:13 “The lazy man says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!’” Whether real or imagined, we cannot let obstacles stop us from fulfilling the mission God has given to us.

<sup>20</sup> Prov 22:13 “The lazy man says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!’”

<sup>21</sup> Luke 14:16-24.

Eccl. 11 is saying this about life.

(1) It is full of uncertainties. There are all kinds of things you do not know and there are all kinds of things you cannot control. James addresses people who speak with certainty about what they will and will not do. In chapter 4:14 he says, "...*you do not know what will happen tomorrow.*" This is not just an Old Testament concept; it's in the New Testament as well.

(2) Be generous (put some bread out there) and trust God to take care of you. I find that to be hard to do and there is a difference between generosity and irresponsibility. But this passage clearly condemns the old adage: "Get all you can, Can all you get, Then sit on the can!"<sup>22</sup>

Giving is not just about money. A war correspondent was watching a humble, compassionate nun swab the blood and bus out of a young soldier's leg. Gangrene had set in. The correspondent was repulsed by the sight. He almost gagged as he turned and mumbled under his breath, "I wouldn't do that for a million bucks." Overhearing his remarks, she looked up and responded, "Neither would I...neither would I."<sup>23</sup>

(3) Don't wait until everything is certain before you act. Don't allow the uncertainties to paralyze you or immobilize you. Check the weather; but don't observe the wind to the point that you never sow your field.

(4) Make reasonable preparations for the future, but live life now! Be about your Father's business.<sup>24</sup> Get on with the Great Commission<sup>25</sup> regardless of the direction of the political winds.<sup>26</sup>

Back in Thes. 5 Paul is talking to people who have gotten preoccupied with the times and the seasons. They have a lot of questions about the Coming of the Lord. And that's good and fine. But some had gotten so preoccupied with the possibility of Jesus' imminent return that they had quit their jobs and sat down waiting for the event. Paul said, No, we live "*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*"<sup>27</sup> But we also occupy till He comes. We work and take care of our responsibilities.<sup>28</sup> We go and we go some more and we keep going into all the world and preaching the gospel.

In church history, there have been many groups who have gotten focused on the Day of the Lord and gone off on a tangent. Some of the Christians at Thessalonica did. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century widespread plagues and famines caused a lot of people to think the end had come. Something similar happened during the Reformation. In the 1990's there were Korean Christians who quit their jobs, sold or gave away their property, ran up huge credit card debits, and generally withdrew from society to wait for an end to come at a predicted time. Unfortunately for them, it didn't happen.<sup>29</sup>

I live on Seminole Street. And just east of my home, the road has a deep ditch on each side. It's very important to stay on the ground between those two ditches. If I veer to the left I can go into a deep ditch or if I veer to the right I can find myself in trouble. In my life journey, I need to be prudent

<sup>22</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985) p. 319

<sup>23</sup> Charles Swindoll, p. 322.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 2:49; 19:13 ("Occupy till I come" KJV)

<sup>25</sup> We must not lose the focus of the Great Commission regardless of the times or seasons in which we live. Mark 16:15 "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Also Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>26</sup> Don't wait on the wind of public opinion either. Most New Testament leaders, including Jesus, were going against the tide and were not even trying to be "politically correct". Gal. 1:10.

<sup>27</sup> Titus 2:13

<sup>28</sup> 2 Thess. 3:10-12.

<sup>29</sup> Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) pp. 173-174.

about the future; but if I veer too heavily that direction there is a ditch. I need to be generous and take risks in the present; but if I become irresponsible and just expect everybody else to take care of me, there is a ditch in that direction to be avoided as well.

I know God is speaking something to me from Eccl. 11:1-6. I think He had me share this word today because someone else here might need that balance as well. Let the Holy Spirit apply His word to your life. God will not have you do exactly what He has me do; and He will not have me do exactly what He has you do. And any of us can get into trouble if we think that everybody else ought to do it the way we do it. What we have to do is allow the Holy Spirit to apply God's word to our own situation. There may be some here that God is saying<sup>30</sup>, "You need to do a little more planning and preparation for the future." Others may be veering too much in that direction and God may be saying to you, "Risk generosity and watch how I take care of you." May the Lord give wisdom to each and every one of us?

Pray!

#### Possible QUESTIONS to Ponder

- (1) Do you think the passages that tell us to prudently plan and those that tell us to generously risk are compatible? Is there a biblical balance between the two?  
Will it be the same for everyone? Why or why not?
- (2) Which direction are you prone to go toward? What is God saying to you on how to maintain a biblical balance? What specifically might you need to do?
- (3) Have you seen groups that have gotten out of balance either way?  
What dangers of imbalance do you see the church facing at this time in America?
- (4) As you have planned your personal strategies, have you felt any temptation to be paralyzed by the uncertainties? How have you overcome those temptations?

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<sup>30</sup> "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:2-3; Matt. 4:3-4).